

# THE HARPER ANTHOLOGY

VOLUME XVI

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



# STUDENT WRITERS

Elisa Adorjan-Karbin

Teresa Behrends

Bob Brown

Kristin Cichowicz

Jaime Dahm

Katie Devitt

Moira Donovan

Kevin Doss

Jeff Eilrich

Kate Elkin

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Helen Johnson

Vanessa Koniecki

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Anna Leja

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Mirja Lorenz

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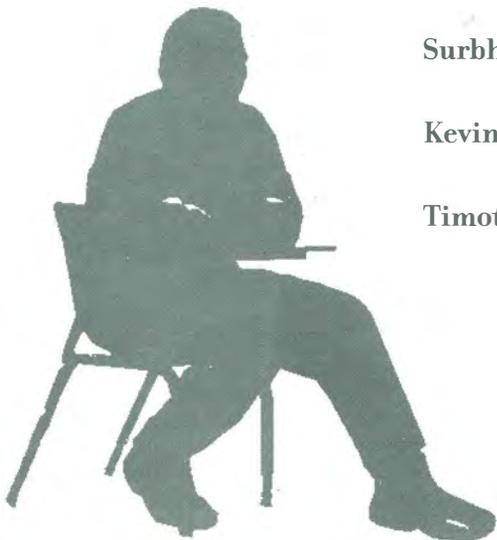
Brian Thomas

Matthew Thomas

Christine White

Nicole Wiwat

Valerie Zieske



# **The Harper Anthology of Academic Writing**

. . . an annual, faculty-judged collection  
honoring the best academic writing,  
campus-wide, by students at  
William Rainey Harper College. . .

**Issue XVI  
2004**

# Foreword

Dear readers,

On behalf of *The Harper Anthology* committee of the Harper College English department, I am pleased to present another excellent collection of students' academic writing produced in Harper classes, this time covering the year 2003. This volume featured a near-record number of submissions—over 170—and as far as I know, the high number of articles published—48—is also a record. A new diversity of types of writing is also represented in this volume. In addition to the many excellent papers from Liberal Arts, there are also exemplary works from Biology, Interior Design, Economics, Physics, ESL, Computer Information Systems, and Mathematics. The diversity of this publication is testimony, once again, to the far-reaching abilities of Harper students, but also to the quality and vitality of the academic and career programs at Harper College, and to the faculty's desire to honor all types of excellent student work through publication.

—*Kris Piepenburg, Chair, for The Harper Anthology committee:  
Charles Brown, Barbara Butler, Teresa Chung, Tony Hammer,  
Judy Kaplow, Catherine Restovich, Josh Sunderbruch, Andrew Wilson*

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## Submission Information

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### Deadlines

**Submission deadline, 2005 issue:**  
Thursday, December 16, 2004

**Submission deadline, 2006 issue:**  
Thursday, December 22, 2005

### To Submit a Student's Manuscript:

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

[www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept](http://www.harpercollege.edu/libarts/eng/dept).

Send manuscripts (hard copy and disk) along with submission forms by campus mail to Kris Piepenburg, English Department, Liberal Arts Division, or send materials by e-mail: [kpiepenb@harpercollege.edu](mailto:kpiepenb@harpercollege.edu).

### Manuscript Evaluation and Publication

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

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# Harper Students on Writing

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## Bob Brown

Writing is an opportunity to interact with literature. It is a chance to share the same joys and passions of creation that authors throughout history have experienced.

When I have an opportunity to write for a class, I begin it in a very informal way. I simply dwell on the subject material and theme of the paper for a long time. For days and perhaps even weeks, I spend time throughout my daily life reflecting on the source for my paper and on the approach that I am planning on taking. Occasionally, I will make a quick note of a particularly appealing phrase or idea that occurs to me, but usually I will just keep my thoughts in my head at this point. When the time is ripe, I sit down and begin letting my fingers translate the images and ideas that have been brewing in my head into words. I may later construct an outline to ensure that the structure of my paper is correct, but my first foray into its writing is very informal and just flows from my ideas.

I believe very strongly in revision and in comments from others. I am too close to my own work to see all of its flaws. Other people's comments are vital in enabling me to refine and focus my paper.

I consider writing to be a privilege. I sometimes look to an assignment with a certain apprehension, maybe even dread, but as I go through the process and come out the other side with a finished paper, I realize that I have prospered and grown along the journey.

—"Looking for the Good Man in Flannery O'Connor's  
"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (pp 6-10)

## Vanessa Koniecki

To me, writing is one of the few things that a person can create that is truly unique. When teachers assign their students essays, whether directed or undirected, they know that what they will receive back will be filled with creative ideas and responses that even the teachers, themselves, may not have thought of before. Writing allows students to share their personal thoughts and perceptions in a way that has meaning to them. Personally, if I am confronted with a topic that I find intriguing, I can sit down in front of my computer and write for hours and hours without ever taking a moment's rest. That is what writing does for me—it helps me bring out my creative side that would otherwise be forgotten.

—"Walter's Utilitarian Calculation" (pp 71-75)

## Wendy Lippert

Occasionally, I'll discover the writings of an author whose work so riddles me with glee, I find it necessary to leap from my seat and applaud the pages. Whether it's the intellectual integrity celebrated by such pro-science writers as Michael Shermer or James Randi, or the mesmerizing darkness depicted in the works of Jean Genet or Violette Leduc, great writing is easy to distinguish. The response we have to the work of others aids us on the promising and fruitful path to unleashing our own abilities as writers. Recently, I was fortunate to discover yet another path toward generating this skill—the guidance of a truly talented professor, Dr. Wilson. He presented my class with numerous, varied building points to begin our assignment and provided us with the necessary feedback to transform a short essay into our required research paper. His knowledge and sincerity was evident during each class, as he dazzled us with his syntax savvy and helped release us from the hell that is grammatical imprecision. As my first attempt at writing about literature, my essay surely would not have been selected for publication without Dr. Wilson's magnanimity.

—"The Metamorphosis" (pp 84-87)

## Mirja Lorenz

I want to fight the words;  
I want the words to fight me too.

I want to lead the words;  
I want the words to lead me too.

I want to sing the words;  
I want the words to sing me too.

I want to spin the words;  
I want the words to spin me too.

I want to dance the words;  
I want the words to dance me too.

—"My Dear Papi" (pp 88-89)

## Surbhi Malik

All literary writing is a part of an ongoing mammoth-scale conversation. I first started writing in order to understand and explore the possibilities arising out of human thought and action: How would things have been different had characters in a story chosen different courses of action

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than what they did? What are the opinions available to a man in a certain situation? To a woman?

They were moments of great truth and beauty when I discovered that the trajectory of each piece of writing is inherently dictated by an underlying, overarching logic that writers use to bring about the emotional effects, to make the argument, to drive home the point. I have etched outlines, drawn flowcharts, and constructed grids and found them as useful in advancing the plot and sharpening the conflict in a short story as in advancing the argument in an analytical research paper.

I believe that writing is the strongest instrument of personal growth. The issues faced by a writer, such as organization and achieving objectivity without losing subjectivity, are also the issues we often face in our daily lives. Writing provides a new perspective on the resolution of these issues. The process of writing and how it enables individual, scattered delicate pearls of thought to form a strong, priceless, perfect string intrigues me.

—“A Matrix of Morals: *Beowulf* as Didactic Poetry” (pp 90-93)

### **Kevin Merkelz**

I love the power of writing. No, not the type of power that allows you to beat someone over the head with a stick and get away with it, but the kind of power that lets you control another's emotions. That's power. When I write, I get to decide what happens. I can shock and offend, bore and irritate; I can even energize and inspire if I'm in the right mood. I can drive home a point with short sentences or drag out an idea with lengthy, wordy phrases. And for the short time that it takes for a person to leaf through my work, their emotions are mine. They might have been enjoying the best day of their life before picking up my writing, but in the space of five minutes, I can drag their consciousness down to the gutter of despair. Or, I can lead someone on their last leg to see a ray of hope. When someone reads my work, they have placed their consciousness within my care. They have entrusted me with their emotions. That is the power of writing.

Oh, and here—you can have your emotions back now.

—“A Good Man Is Nowhere to Be Found” (pp 94-97)

### **Richard Snowden**

I have been reading and writing for as long as I can remember, and I have found that I actually enjoy doing so even more with the passage of time. Writing, for me, is truly a never-ending adventure; there are literally myriad ways to express yourself in language, and it is a consistently stimulating and thought-provoking exercise for me.

I believe that the best writers are those who can communicate something much more compelling than cold, impersonal facts and ideas. If people can really get a sense of passion or inspiration from something they have read, that is when the writer has done his or her job exceptionally well. Plenty of

people can write well, but it is the unique ability to draw readers in and take them on a colorful and enlightening journey that sets great writers apart from good ones, and I hope I can become that sort of writer someday.

—“The Apology for Free Expression” (pp 138-141)

### **Brian Thomas**

Swimming uninhibitedly nude, tipsy and alone under Florida starlight...that is how good writing feels. Swim like no one will see you, and write like no one will read. Today I made sure I said what I should, and tomorrow I will do the same. Tonight, free of all things you...I will write for me.”

I do not expect that you will use this, but it is exactly why I write.

—“A Letter from John Stuart Mill to Willie Loman” (pp 143-144)

### **Matthew Thomas**

I have always been hesitant to call myself a good writer or even a writer at all. The very idea of writing itself is never very appealing, but I have always been told that I should pursue my writing further. I am never really satisfied with what I write, but I do believe that my initial drafts, the ones that come from my gut, and not a regurgitation of what is a required assignment, express my thoughts the most effectively. A profound statement on my writing, or writing at all, is not something I'm prepared for, but I can say that writing should be carefree, uninfluenced, innovative, and without bounds.

—“A Series of Correspondences between Nora and Torvald Helmer” (pp 145-146)

### **Nicole Wiwat**

They say that everyone is born with at least one gift. If this is true, then my gift is the ability to write. For me, writing is a paradox. Whenever I attempt to write, I am consumed with anxiety and frustration. Transforming my thoughts and ideas into words is challenging. Often, by the time the piece is finished, I have read it so many times that all its power has been lost to me. However, weeks later when I get it back from the teacher, I reread it and think to myself, “Wow, this is really good! Who wrote this? I don't even remember constructing most of this.” This is the true reward of writing—when the writer realizes he or she was able to create a powerful piece of written expression. The bonus is when the piece impacts others, and they recognize the work. When this happens, the writer feels an immeasurable amount of pride. Moreover, the publication of this piece has inspired me to explore a career in writing. I hope to use my ability as a vehicle to better society and touch people's lives in a positive, productive way.

—“Triumph over Tragedy” (pp 151e154)

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# Anita Endrezze's Blind Artistry

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Elisa Adorjan-Karbin  
Course: English 105 (Poetry)  
Instructor: Anne Davidovicz

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Assignment:  
*Write a literary analysis of a poem.*

As an avid poetry reader, I often find many poems that affect me personally, be it in the emotional weight they carry, or on a more critical and artistic level found in the poem's construction, through the use of imagery, syntax, themes, language, or other poetic elements. However, there are a very select group of poems that I've found to affect me on both the emotional and artistic level. Anita Endrezze's poem entitled "The Girl Who Loved the Sky" is one such poem. It is through her keen observation of human emotion and how to write about it effectively that her poem about a childhood friend without sight and her own struggle with loss becomes more than just a poem, but rather a tool to truly reach the reader on the two important levels. Any good poem may cause an arsenal of questions that the reader poses during a first reading then answers upon a second reading. Endrezze specifically utilizes her ability to express images through the written word to emphasize the theme of this poem, and in turn, she leaves the reader with a strong emotional connection, while allowing the poem to linger inside of the reader.

Upon reading this poem, I found myself questioning the importance of line and stanza breaks. For example,

I noticed that Endrezze often breaks lines in the middle of sentences, allowing the rest of the sentence to end on the same line in which another sentence is started. What is the significance of this mechanism in specific relation to this poem? Is it simply artistic license, or do the unusual breakages and enjambments actually lend themselves to the effectiveness of the poem? The most obvious way to understand why Endrezze uses such unusual line breaks is to simply read the poem aloud. In doing so, I found that the line breaks offer interesting pauses within the text so that the reader may "digest" what he or she has read. Breaking lines in such a way also allows extra emphasis to be put upon certain words, as in this phrase:

She loved the formless sky, defined  
only by sounds, or the cool umbrellas  
of clouds. On hot, still days  
we listened to the sky falling  
like chalk dust.

Another reason why Endrezze may have broken her lines as she did is to help induce the flow of the poem. For example, because of the odd line breaks, the reader cannot just stop reading at a certain line, but is forced to read through the entire poem because there isn't a "comfortable" place to stop reading.

Throughout the poem, many references are made to flowers, or more specifically, to jacaranda blossoms. Immediately, I wondered what their significance was to the poem and what role they played in helping to convey the poem's deeper meaning. Endrezze writes of how "...the jacaranda tree blossomed / into purple lanterns, the papery petals / drifted, darkening the windows...." She does an interesting thing by comparing the jacaranda blossoms to lanterns, and she uses the same analogy at the end of her poem:

...I sat under the jacaranda, catching  
the petals in my palm, enclosing them  
until my fist was another lantern  
hiding a small bitter flame.

In this image, we see that the role of the jacaranda blossom has changed, but what is its significance in the poem's beginning and end? In both instances, the jacaranda blossoms are compared to lanterns. To me, this is a very clever metaphor for control. In the first phrase, the jacaranda blossoms were compared to purple lanterns that darkened the windows; in other words, they

## Anita's Endrezze's Blind Artistry

were lanterns without flames, and as many know, a lantern is virtually useless unless it is lit up inside to be used as a tool for guidance. However, the blossoms that had blocked the sun in the beginning of the poem have turned into a fuel to light the lantern of her fist, which then hid a "small and bitter flame," but a flame nonetheless. To me, this turnaround suggests the speaker's personal growth from the beginning to the end of the poem. Whereas she was blinded due to a lack of light in the beginning of the poem, she was able to guide herself at the end with the flame that she had created.

As I read the poem, I also wondered why, when Endrezze describes the classroom, she does with such vivid imagery. In fact, Endezze makes it a point to describe to the reader what the setting looked like, using images that, upon the first read, may seem completely inconsequential. For example, Endrezze describes the wood color of the desks and what was on top of them, and she also describes the wall coverings. She even makes mention of a star-studded name chart. Why is it so important to the poem that the classroom is described so meticulously? The question of why such visual imagery is used is then answered by my next question: Why, once the speaker's blind friend is introduced, does all visual imagery cease? Instead, Endrezze relies on the other senses to provide the imagery and detail of the poem, such as how the speaker and the blind girl

...listened to the sky falling  
like chalk dust. We heard the noon  
whistle of the pig mash factory,  
smelled the sourness of home-bound men.

Nearly each line of this phrase illustrates the usage of a sense other than sight. In answering the question of the importance of visual imagery in the poem, the reader must look at most of the first stanza, wherein Endrezze describes such menial objects as desks' color, wall coverings, and some of the second grade lessons she learned at the time:

The desks were made of yellowed wood,  
the tops littered with eraser rubbings,  
rulers, and big fat pencils.  
Colored chalk meant special days  
the walls covered with precise  
bright tulips and charts with shiny stars  
by certain names. There I learned

to make butter by shaking a jar  
until the pale cream clotted  
into one sweet mass. There I learned  
that numbers were fractious beasts  
with dens like dim zeros...

To me, Endrezze takes time in her vivid imagery and description to play on the reader's sense of sight, which is then completely taken away in the next few lines by the introduction of the speaker's blind friend.

Then, the description shifts significantly away from visual imagery to detail and description through the other senses:

I met a blind girl who thought the sky  
tasted like cold metal when it rained  
and whose lids were always covered  
with the bruised petals of her lids.  
She loved the formless sky, defined  
only by sounds, or the cool umbrellas  
of clouds. On hot, still days  
we listened to the sky falling  
like chalk dust. We heard the noon  
whistle of the pig mash factory,  
smelled the sourness of home-bound men.  
I had no father; she had no eyes;

I believe this is Endrezze's way to illustrate not only the blind girl's predicament, but also the speaker's, by trying to give up her own sight in an effort to try to identify and cope with the loss of her father so that she may share the sense of loss with her friend.

In reading this poem, a very obvious question I had was in reference to the importance of the speaker's blind friend. What role does she play in helping the speaker to realize and deal with her own loss, and how does she do so? At the same time, what is the significance of the "other girls" in the poem? It is interesting here to note that the blind girl is introduced at the end of the first stanza, not from the very beginning. What is the reasoning behind her late introduction? In the middle of the second stanza, the speaker says "I had no father; she had no eyes; / we were best friends. ..." In my opinion, these two lines are extremely telling as to why the two became such good friends. Both had suffered losses beyond their control; the speaker found a sort of comfort in knowing that she wasn't alone in being without something most others had, and she actually felt safe with her friend because of the losses they shared. Also, the "other girls"

drew shaky hop-scotch squares  
on the dusty asphalt, talked about  
pajama parties, weekend cook-outs,  
and parents who bought sleek-finned cars.  
Alone, we sat on the canvas swings,  
our shoes digging into the sand, then pushing,  
until we flew high over their heads,  
our hands streaked with rust  
from the chains that kept us safe.

This is also a reason why the speaker tells of the “other girls” going about their fun and carefree second-grade activities, and it is through such illustration that the speaker and her blind friend’s loneliness is further underlined. This is not a matter of not knowing the other girls, but a matter of being “the blind girl” and “the girl without a father.” Whether their loss was self-imposed or placed upon them, the line in which the speaker tells of “our hands streaked with rust / from the chains that kept us safe” shows that the chains really just kept them safe from the fear of being more than their loss.

However, while the speaker couldn’t understand the loss of her father, she truly couldn’t fathom her friend’s comfort with her lack of sight, and she states this clearly in what I believe to be the most powerful and wrenching statements within the poem:

I was born blind, she said, an act of nature.  
Sure, I thought, like birds born  
Without wings, trees without roots,  
I didn’t understand. . .

The blind girl’s importance also extends itself to the end of the poem, wherein once the blind girl leaves, the speaker is able to see again, thus forfeiting the disability she took on in order to identify better with her friend. It is only after she is able to do this that she is able to understand her loss better and move on to cope with it.

...The day she moved  
I saw the world clearly; the sky  
backed away from me like a departing father.  
I sat under the jacaranda, catching  
the petals in my palm, enclosing them  
until my fist was another lantern  
hiding a small bitter flame.

The last few lines of the poems truly illustrate the importance of the blind girl, not so much in her presence, but in her lack thereof. It is here that the speaker

learns that we are all blinded by the awareness of sight, but one day are able to see clearly our problems and control them, just as the speaker did as she came out of her blindness, hiding in her fist a “small and bitter flame.”

Like any good poem, Anita Endrezze’s “The Girl Who Loved the Sky” forced me to pose many questions and seek their answers both literally and philosophically within its text. Endrezze has the expert ability to articulate beautiful images through the written word while also allowing them to carry such emotional weight, making the poem such a joy to read. Endrezze manages to turn a poem about a second grade friendship into a poignant lesson about people being more than what they lack and learning how to realize (or “see”) that in spite of everything else.

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Evaluation: *Elisa’s analysis of Endrezze’s poem is thorough, accurate, and well supported.*

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# Crossing the Charles Bridge

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*Teresa Behrends*  
Course: English 200  
(Professional Writing: Grammar & Style)  
Instructor: Trygve Thoreson

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Assignment:

*After reading White's "The World of Tomorrow," Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," and Selzer's "The Knife," compose your own narrative essay that uses rich and vivid details and culminates in a special revelation or insight.*

Anyone who has taken a train ride to an unfamiliar destination will remember the excitement and anticipation it evokes. In addition to the suspense of traveling to a new place, there is the romanticism of a train ride: the screeching sound of the wheels when the train starts; the landscape that is passing by the window, slowly at first and then faster and faster; the passport inspection at the border; and the feeling of being left up to your own thoughts, with nothing to do for the entire duration of the trip. Judging from my own experience, this time is usually spent imagining the place of destination, painting a colorful picture of it in one's head and making up scenarios of the upcoming trip.

I was a teenager when I went to Prague, and an enthusiastically depressed and introspective one, too. My American aunt had spontaneously invited me to take the trip just for the fun of seeing the city, and because of her stereotypical American way of thinking: having come all the way from the United States, she was not content to see only one country during her one-week stay. She wanted to see Prague out of the curiosity and honest interest of a travel fanatic. I hoped to find there the dreamy gloom that I couldn't find, or didn't want to find, in my hometown Berlin, a city that was more depressing than gloomy, with its harsh, working-class realism; its pathetic struggle to be the new European metropolis; and its rare and ugly mix of medieval, modern, socialistic, and Nazi architecture.

As I sat in the train, I imagined Prague. The city, being Kafka's birthplace, would be beautifully dreary in the most literary way, I thought. Solitary characters straight from Kafka's novels would be lurking behind every street lamp, the lamp itself being a masterpiece of Art Nouveau craftsmanship. Walking through the narrow, foggy streets one would be compelled to recite Rilke's poetry (this I assumed not knowing where Rilke was from), and in the majestic Gothic churches, one would hear the faint echo of Smetana's "Moldau." Each and every resident of Prague would be a philosopher lost in thought about the tragic destiny of humankind. In this city that would have neither television nor billboards, where everybody was a poet or a churchbell-ringer and nobody was a financial accountant or corporate lawyer, even I would be able to turn into the

character of a novel or the protagonist of an opera. The city's grim charm would be contagious; at least that was my secret hope that I wouldn't even admit to myself at that moment on the train as I was watching the Bohemian hills and villages glide past my window.

When we got out of the train, my aunt and I were laughing, giggly from anticipation, in the familiar manner that was a peculiar mark of our relationship. However, I wasn't completely willing to submit to the silliness her company invoked in me, although I enjoyed it, because I was expecting to be infected with tragic glamour at any time. Carrying our suitcases, we went down the stairs of the train station and walked through an underground tunnel to get to the subway. The subway smelled like urine, a mixture of different perfumes, and sweat. It was crowded because it was five o'clock and people were coming home from work. While my aunt was trying to guess what the Czech advertising said, I was staring into the people's faces, waiting for them to stand up and recount their tragically poetic life stories. I couldn't help feeling a little disappointed. When we were walking to the hotel, I tried hard not to look at the billboards that were advertising tonight's television soap opera in bright colors.

Immediately after checking in, we left the hotel to see the famous Charles Bridge with its statues, Prague's most popular attraction. The bridge was so crowded with tourists we were standing shoulder to shoulder with people looking at the indeed pretty sight of the historic buildings on the banks of the river. Although I didn't understand most of the people's conversation, I could somehow tell they were not talking about their intense philosophical studies or their lifelong passion for Alphonse Mucha paintings. In my head, my dreams of Prague shattered like the stained glass window of a Gothic church being torn down by a bulldozer. I was sad, even angry at the people around me who were hastily taking pictures as proof of their vacation for the relatives at home. They reminded me of my life at home and probably a little bit of myself.

For the rest of the day, I gave up trying to resist enjoying the light-heartedness of the conversation with my aunt, and my disappointed hopes receded into the background of my consciousness. We did a lot of things

that day, but it is not important what we did, because what was memorable about the night was the laughter, the shameless honesty in the conversation, and that particular feeling of closeness that is only possible among members of the same family. At the end of the day, I was tired but content, and at the thought of my earlier disappointment, I only smiled faintly, now unable to relive the serious emotions it had incited in me before. Late that night, as we were walking back through the city, we had to cross the Charles Bridge again to get back to the hotel. This time the bridge was empty except for a few sleeping beggars and street musicians. My aunt stopped to look at the city lights by night. Leaning against a statue of a saint, I looked at the garbage the day crowd had left behind. I looked at the glittering dark river, the facade of 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings lit up by orange light, and the tall church steeples behind it. Yes, the city was beautiful, but I was overcome by the feeling that the poetry was in me, not the city. That night, I enjoyed looking at Prague by night simply because it was my very own experience. The city seemed to be rewarding me with this astonishing beauty for finding in myself what I had earlier expected to find in her. That night all my adolescent desire for adventure, to conquer the world, to make it my own and find myself in it, turned into the certainty that I would find the world in myself.

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Evaluation: *Teresa uses an exceptionally articulate writing style to illuminate a "crossing" into a new perception.*

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# Looking for the Good Man in Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard To Find"

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*Bob Brown*

Course: English 102 (Composition)  
Instructor: Elizabeth Turner

Assignment:

*Please compose and revise an  
interpretation of a  
Flannery O'Connor story.  
You must include secondary sources.*

Christianity is the underlying theme in much of Flannery O'Connor's writing. As she explains, "I write the way I do because (not though) I am a Catholic" (O'Connor, "On Her Catholic Faith" 435). It is impossible to fully understand and interpret O'Connor's stories without keeping her Christian background in focus. O'Connor's major subjects, according to Frederick J. Hoffman, include the struggle for redemption, the search for Jesus and the meaning of "prophecy" (33). Of these subjects, the struggle for redemption and the search for Jesus are the major quests in a spiritually sensitive life. Dorothy Walters suggests that O'Connor's stories tell of people in need of salvation and the violence that wakes them up to that need (23). It often takes a personal crisis to awaken someone to spiritual matters. In the context of eternal spiritual realities, the crises in life, despite their ominous outward appearances, take on a lesser significance than the spiritual realities that these crises often uncover. These interpretations accurately describe the journey that the grandmother is experiencing in "A Good Man Is Hard To Find." It is critical to read this story in the light of O'Connor's Christian focus and to look for the faith message embodied by the characters and their experiences. In this story, the grandmother's journey from manipulative self-absorption to grace symbolizes a Christian's journey towards salvation.

To begin to look at the grandmother, it is important to note that she is nameless. The story opens, "The grandmother didn't want to go to Florida" (405). She is one of three main characters in this story who is not given names, the others being the children's mother and the Misfit. In the opening four paragraphs, the grandmother is referred to three times and always by her title rather than her name. Because the grandmother has no name and only a title, she is a generic example of the average person. She represents all, and her struggle with pride, manipulation, and self-importance is common to humankind.

Another aspect of the grandmother's personality is that she is self-centered. As the story opens, she is resisting the family's plans for a vacation to Florida. "She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Baily's mind" (405). The word "seizing" implies more than a casual attempt. It shows that the grandmother is

pulling out all the stops in a forceful, almost military action to manipulate the situation and get her own way. The primary reason that she brings up the newspaper article about the Misfit is that she attempts to change Baily's mind about the family's destination rather than feeling serious concern about the family's safety. This demonstrates the grandmother's selfish focus and her willingness to manipulate others to achieve her own ends. Preston Browning says it well when he observes that "The grandmother...displays a soul so empty that it seems to reverberate with the echoes of her own incessant chatter...[she is] smug, [and] self-willed" (54). The center of the grandmother's soul is not filled with God but with herself and her own interests. This is an ungodly, sinful condition.

A further aspect of her pride and self-focus is her obsession with her outward appearance. She takes great effort to look well dressed despite the casual attire of the rest of the family. The grandmother is wearing, "A navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print.... In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady" (406). The grandmother is dressed in her Sunday best as if she were going to the Lord's house. Ironically, before the day is out, she will meet Jesus and go to His real house. As Miles Orvell observes, "she is somewhat prescient in this regard, for if she is not precisely dressed to kill, this remnant of Southern gentility is, as it turns out, dressed to be killed" (131). Having a proper and ladylike appearance, even in death, is critical to the grandmother's sense of self-worth. Appearance matters to her above all else, even her life.

Despite her orderly external appearance, the grandmother has some important internal inconsistencies within her character. Through her references to the Bible, Jesus, and praying, she apparently views herself as a Christian lady, but she displays un-Christian values while in the car. She tells the children, "Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!...Wouldn't that make a picture, now?" (406). These are racist words coming from someone who believes in Jesus. She is also good at lying and being manipulative. When she is losing the battle about taking a side trip to visit the old plantation house, she has no hesitation in resorting to dishonesty. "There was a

secret panel in this house,' she said craftily, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, 'and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found...'" (409). The grandmother is choosing her words carefully, to have the most powerful effect on the children. As much as she may have wished for it to be the truth, it is a lie, and she knows it. She is again pulling out all the stops to manipulate those around her. The allure of hidden treasure is sure to get the children on her side. For a woman who views herself as a Christian, and who wants to project just the right appearance, it's clear that the grandmother is a hypocrite who is far from living life as Jesus. The grandmother is a picture of anyone who doesn't know Jesus and who goes through life giving the outward appearance of being good while the inside is full of inconsistencies. Something has to occur in a person's life to jolt them out of their self-absorbed world and enlighten them as to what's really important. For the grandmother, this is about to happen.

The self-pride of the grandmother needs to be dealt with before she can truly find salvation. She believes that her manipulation will be sufficient to save her from any situation. Even after the car accident, which is largely her own fault, she attempts to show herself as one to be pitied rather than blamed. She is quick to say, "I believe I have injured an organ" (411), hoping to elicit sympathy from her family. "The grandmother...[is] convinced of [her] inner capacity to deal with reality... until [she is] suddenly confronted with forces more powerful than [herself].... For Flannery O'Connor, the instruction of pride through the lessons of humility is...the means by which the soul is prepared for its necessary illumination by the Holy Spirit" (Walters 73). In this story, as in many of O'Connor's stories, violence is the linchpin of effecting change in the central character's life, beliefs, and fate.

Violence is a powerful jolt to someone's beliefs. The coming violence removes the grandmother from her world of self-absorption and gives her the opportunity to find true redemption and grace. The first hint of the violence to come is when the family catches sight of the Misfit's car. "The car continued to come on slowly...it was a black battered hearse-like automobile" (411). The Misfit, like the grandmother, goes by a title rather than a

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name. By being nameless, the Misfit represents not just one man but a personification of evil in this world. The title of *Misfit* accurately portrays evil's relationship to God. Evil isn't a part of God's plan for creation, therefore, it doesn't fit. The car that is used by the Misfit and his gang represents mortality. The incessant pounding of the destruction that evil creates gives the car its battered appearance. Evil brings death into this world just as the Misfit brings this symbol of death into the grandmother's presence. Like many people, the grandmother doesn't leave her world of hypocritical self-absorption until she is faced with her own mortality.

One by one, the Misfit's men escort the grandmother's family into the woods to be murdered. As the last of her family is killed, "There was a piercing scream from the woods, followed closely by a pistol report" (415) and when only she and the Misfit are left, the grandmother's confrontation with her own mortality and her crisis of the soul begins. Preston Browning observes that in the moment of crisis, faced with death, the grandmother resorts to the tools that have served her well in life: her external appearance of Christianity, and her beliefs in good breeding (Browning 56). The many ways that the grandmother attempts to deal with facing evil all stem from her own self-made fictions. Mary Jane Schenck argues, "In a desperate attempt to cope with the threat posed by the murderer, the grandmother runs through her litany of convenient fictions. She believes that there are class distinctions ('I know you're a good man at heart. I can just look at you and tell'), that redemption can be achieved through work ('You could be honest too if you'd only try...'), and finally, that prayer will change him ('Pray, pray, she commanded him')" (445). All of these attempts fail to deal with the evil of the world, represented by the Misfit, that is confronting the grandmother. As O'Connor states, "The heroine of this story, the grandmother, is in the most significant position life offers the Christian. She is facing death. And to all appearances she, like the rest of us, is not too well prepared for it. She would like to see the event postponed. Indefinitely" ("The Element of Suspense" 433). While Christianity teaches eternal Hope and salvation, the grandmother is acting out of desperation. She realizes that she isn't really a Christian and

therefore is unprepared to face eternity. Despite her desperate attempts to diffuse the situation and escape her confrontation with evil and her own mortality, the confrontation defies resolution.

It sometimes requires the removal of all external supports before a person is finally prepared to receive God into his or her life. The grandmother sees her family murdered. This removes her family from her life. She tries one last time to deal with this crisis by adjusting her outward appearance: "The grandmother reached up to adjust her hat brim...but it came off in her hand. She stood staring at it and after a second she let it fall on the ground" (412-413). This attempt fails as her hat breaks, and it becomes apparent that this crisis won't be solved by outward appearances.

As her outward attempts at resolving this crisis fail, the grandmother turns inward. She has intellectual knowledge of Jesus, and at this point, the grandmother and the Misfit enter into a thoughtful exploration of His life. As this conversation reaches its climax, the Misfit, the portrayal of evil incarnate, has started to become emotional. "'Listen lady,' he said in a high voice, 'if I had of been there I would of known and I wouldn't be like I am now.' His voice seemed about to crack" (415). This now ceases to be an intellectual conversation about the facts surrounding Jesus and instead reaches the true core of the Christian message.

Knowing facts about God doesn't save a person; it takes a personal relationship with Him. God must be let inside a life for that life to be saved. With everything external and internal stripped away from her life, the grandmother finally finds redemption and enters into a real relationship with Jesus. "The grandmother's head cleared for an instant. She saw the man's face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, 'Why you're one of my babies. You're one of my own children!' She reached out and touched him on the shoulder" (415). Paulson says that now the grandmother, realizing that all people, regardless of their deeds, are related to one another, experiences her epiphany (91). God created everyone; therefore, all people without regard to their actions or breeding, are His children. This is a Christian belief, which is very different from how the grandmother views people earlier in

this story. A further interpretation of this line comes from Margaret Whitt who writes, "The grandmother, to this point in the story, has not said anything that could be mistaken as seriously thoughtful. One reading of this moment is that the grandmother sees the charade that her own life has been in this split second before her existence is blown away" (47). The grandmother sees the fact that she and the Misfit are fellow creatures of God, and she finally sees that external appearances are meaningless. She has finally met the real Jesus. As even the Misfit says about Jesus, "If He did what He said, than it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can..." (415). Up until this point, the grandmother has been living the latter; she has been living life the best way that she could, which included manipulating others to achieve her own ends. It takes the extreme violence brought by the Misfit to wake her up from her self-absorption. Now that she has met Jesus, she, in her spirit, throws away everything else that has previously been important to her and follows Jesus. She has released her relentless attempts to manipulate and control and can finally express real love. She is facing an evil man who, with his gang, has brutally murdered her family, and she now shows him tenderness, love, and grace. Her ability to love her enemy is one of the truest signs that she has met Jesus.

Jesus repels evil, and the reaction of the Misfit to the grandmother's love and grace is another proof that she knows the Lord now. As soon as she shows Christian grace and love, "The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest" (415). Evil can't accept Christian love and therefore must escape from it. The Misfit escapes it by killing the grandmother.

There is symbolism in how the grandmother dies. The three bullets fired from the Misfit's gun represent the Holy Trinity. The three bullets were truly inside of her just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were now truly living inside of her. The grandmother is shot through the chest, which is where her heart is. God penetrates her heart as the bullets penetrate her chest, and God is having a life-changing impact on her soul as the bullets

have a life-ending impact on her body. When the Misfit says, "She would of been a good woman...if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life" (416), he explains that receiving Christ is not a one-time event, but a person must continually seek to have his or her heart filled with God every minute of every day. The posture of the Grandmother after her death is also symbolic. "Hiram and Bobby Lee (were)...looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child's and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky" (416). Her legs are crossed, referring to the cross of Jesus. She is lying in her own blood, symbolizing how her spirit is now resting in the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Now that her spirit has been freed from her body, she has gone to join her Lord in heaven. The comparison of her posture to a child's is significant because Jesus said that to be a follower of His, you have to have the faith of a child (Matthew 18:2-4). Now that all adult pretense and externalism is gone, the grandmother has finally gotten to the deep level of true faith. She has the faith of a child. The final symbolism of her death scene is that she is smiling up at the cloudless sky. As her spirit is ascending to God in heaven, her face can finally smile. The fact that she finds salvation and that there is no reference to her family being saved is also Biblical. The Gospel writer Matthew records that, "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). The grandmother is one of the few who responds to the pressure of crisis by receiving the Lord's salvation. Her family also dies, but apparently without finding God.

The grandmother has died, and now it is possible to identify the real focus of this story. What is the identity of the "Good Man" who is allegedly hard to find? The answer is found by following the path of the grandmother on her journey of faith. The exploration of the consequences of her prideful, selfish, manipulative, and empty life demonstrates that the good man is not anyone like the grandmother. The good man is certainly not like the Misfit, his men or any of the other people in this story. In the end, the grandmother discovers that the only real Good Man is Jesus. It is, indeed, possible to find Him, but it takes a journey of faith. The grandmother

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must abandon all of her manipulative self-absorption, her focus on class, and her external show of Christianity. In exchange for her sinfulness, she is given the Grace of God, forgiveness, and the hope of Paradise. In the end, she finally meets Jesus and is transformed by the Grace of God. This enables her to show love and grace toward the Misfit, who has just had her family brutally murdered. For the grandmother, it is hard to find the Good Man, but at the end of her journey, she finally finds Him and is now with Him in Paradise.

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Evaluation: Bob's essay is controlled by an effective thesis statement. Throughout, he integrates evidence from the primary and secondary sources while providing thoughtful interpretation.

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# A Modern-Day *Flying* *Dutchman*

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Kristin Cichowicz

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Course: History 212 (Recent American History)  
and Literature 222 (Recent American Literature)  
Instructors: Tom DePalma and Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write an essay on something we've studied;  
try to bring both courses together in the essay.*

All things have a beginning and an end: a song, a book, a life. However, Amiri Baraka, a black writer of the 1960's, feels that there is one thing that will never come to an end, one thing that is doomed to play itself out over and over again. This anomaly, Baraka says, is white society's destruction of the black man. Baraka feels that no matter what society as a whole does, blacks and whites are destined never to coexist peacefully; furthermore, it is the white society that dooms the chance of a peaceful coexistence by slowly killing the black man with abhorrence, bigotry, manipulation, and imposed conformities over and over again. Baraka diagrams this thesis of a doomed society in his play *Dutchman*. In this play, two main characters are presented: Clay, a twenty-year-old black man, and Lula, a thirty-year-old white woman. Baraka strategically illustrates these characters to represent each of their respective races. Both are complex individuals. Both at one time or another during the course of the play seem to want to get along with one another, but ultimately, at the end of the play, it is the black character who gets destroyed by the white character. This is an endless cycle, according to Baraka, doomed to play itself out

over and over again. He blames this endless cycle on the curse of slavery, which is thought to have begun with the passage of a Dutch ship, *The Dutchman*, which supposedly brought the first group of African slaves to the New World.

Before we can fully understand Baraka's view on this endless cycle, we must first examine each character individually. Let us begin with Lula. Lula represents Baraka's view on white society as a whole. Lula admits early on that she "always lies" (Baraka 19) so she can "control the world" (9). Furthermore, she portrays herself as the typical "blackface," a white person acting black or immersing himself or herself in black culture and typically black art forms; this includes listening to black music, and Lula hums "snatches of rhythm and blues" (12) periodically throughout the play. This also includes using black slang like "mammy" and "ol" (31). This furthermore includes doing traditionally black, tribal-like dances, as Lula does for the better part of Scene 2. Moreover, she tries to control the black man on many levels, including physically and mentally, throughout the course of the play. It is evident from the very beginning of the play that Lula is going to be both a goddess and a destroyer—both a seductress and a slayer—to our protagonist, Clay.

She initiates conversation with Clay at the very beginning of the play, and from there the conversation goes on to be mystifying, if nothing else, but sexually driven and racially charged nonetheless. In this conversation Lula has with Clay, we learn so much, yet so little, about her. We learn, eventually, her intentions for Clay—those become obvious. However, she is intentionally deceptive about so many aspects of her life, including her name. When Clay inquires as to what her name is, Lula responds by saying "Are you talking to my name?" And then, as if just to try and confuse him further, she says that her name is "Lena the Hyena" (14). She later reveals her true identity, or what we are supposed to believe is her true identity, Lula (15). Baraka is intentionally elusive about Lula's name to prove a point; he is trying to get across that this could be any white woman, in any city, and the ultimate outcome would still remain the same—she could be nameless and it would serve the same purpose.

Lula goes on to reveal herself as a very seductive, manipulative, and sinister character with murderous tendencies. Lula first starts by seducing Clay; this does not seem like a difficult task for Lula, for she has gone through this cycle with men an innumerable amount of times in the past. She alludes to this by complaining that her hair is turning gray—“A gray hair for each year and type I’ve come through” (13) is Lula’s explanation for her prematurely aged look. On the surface, Lula’s form of seduction is purely sexually driven. She starts off early on by “Putting her hand on Clay’s closest knee, drawing it from the knee up to the thigh’s hinge, then removing it, watching his face very closely” (10). She follows this up by asking “Am I exciting you now?” (10). Clay’s response is “Right. That’s not supposed to happen?” (10). From here Lula knows that her sexual prowess has gotten Clay’s attention, and she goes on to a more intangible form of seduction, the eating and then the offering of an apple. The apple is the timeless symbol of the fall from grace; it is the fruit that is offered by a temptress who will ultimately get one expelled from paradise. Lula is the apple-eating vixen who offers her fruit to Clay, not in a gesture of love or friendship, but in an offer saturated with the intent of manipulation. Lula explains, quite playfully, actually, to Clay, “Eating apples together is always the first step” (11). She then asks Clay, “Would you like to get involved with me, Mister Man?” (11). It is then that Clay takes his first bite of the apple, signifying his acceptance of Lula’s offer to be together, and falls helplessly into Lula’s world of seduction. Almost immediately after that, Lula imposes her physical and psychological will on Clay. Clay cannot help but let this go on; he has already taken a bite of the forbidden fruit, thus falling deep within the confines of Lula’s seductive ways. At one point she grabs his arm “roughly by the wrist, so he cannot eat the apple” (11). Later she begins psychologically to take over Clay’s mind, using him almost like a marionette who exists only to do what she tells him to do. Lula pleads with Clay for him to take her to this party he is going to, then later on downright demands it, not in a forceful, domineering way, but in a way that is more subtle, more twisting of the mind. She makes up a mock script for Clay; she says “Now you say to me, ‘Lula, Lula, why don’t you go to this party with me tonight?’ It’s your turn, and let those

be your lines” (16). When Clay does not deliver these lines satisfactory to Lula’s expectations, she critiques him and says, “Say my name twice before you ask, and no huh’s” (16). Clay complies, and with that, Lula has embedded herself within Clay’s mind. At this point, Clay would probably say anything Lula wanted him to say.

From here, the play and Lula’s intentions turn sinister. Now that Lula feels she has a firm grip on Clay’s consciousness, she attempts to lure him into a crazy, tribal-like dance in the middle of the subway. Filled with a “rhythmical shudder and twistlike wiggle” (30), she is “mocking” Clay in this “wild dance” (31). She on more than one occasion attempts to convince Clay into joining her in this foolish dance. It starts out with a simple “Dance with me, Clay” which he refuses—he is too rational of a man to do such a ridiculous dance (31). She asks Clay again to dance with her; he refuses again. This angers Lula; her puppet has cut his own strings—she no longer has the control over Clay that she thought she had. She retaliates the only way she knows how: with rude racial slurs and a mockery of black society. Lula’s dialogue escalates; she feels the only way to gain back control of the situation is through insults—“You middle-class black bastard....you liver-lipped white man. You would-be Christian. You ain’t no nigger, you’re just a dirty white man” (31). This statement angers Clay, but he remains contained and continues to refuse Lula’s advances, incessantly. It is uncertain what angers Lula more, Clay’s refusal of her offerings of the dance or Clay’s calmness and composure while she insults him and his people. Lula is frustrated. It is too late to get back the Clay that she had at the beginning of the subway ride (the western, button-down Clay), and she is unable to lure the tribal-like, native African black man out of him with her “blackface” dance. She resorts to all out hatred then and delivers the clubbing blow to Clay’s character when she proclaims, “Screw yourself, Uncle Tom.... You’re afraid of white people. And your father was. Uncle Tom Big Lip!” (32-33). This is what infuriates Clay; it ignites a fire within him, and he goes off. This is the side of Clay that Lula did not want to see. It is neither western nor African, neither expected nor tameable. It is pure rage, pure contempt for the white man. Clay slaps Lula for her insolent comments, but Lula does not go down for long. She lets him rant and rave for a cou-

ple of minutes before taking matters into her own hands and killing the black man that she never wanted to see exist: she “brings up a small knife and plunges it into Clay’s chest. Twice” (37). Lula acts upon her murderous urges, killing Clay when he reveals his disdain for the white man, just as Baraka sees white society is killing black society whenever it expresses its rage honestly and furiously.

Now, let us move on to Clay. Baraka’s view of the black male (or black society in general) is reflected in Clay. When we first meet Clay, he is the button-down, typically placid college student. He is black, but he is conforming to white society, not necessarily by choice, but merely to survive. Clay is a smart man. He knows that the only way for him to get an education, to live peacefully, and most importantly to stay alive in white society is to act “white.” This means speaking properly, not in slang or typically black jargon. This means dressing sophisticatedly with “a three-button suit and striped tie” (18). This means reading sophisticated literature like that of the French poet Baudelaire (19). This also means forgoing his black heritage: not listening to jazz music, not reading black literature, not practicing black –isms. Inside, this makes him sick, but it is what he has to do in order to live in a world that won’t accept him any other way. It is not until Lula really upsets Clay by trying to lure him into the ritualistic, tribal, sort of barbaric dance in the middle of the subway that we get to see how Clay truly feels about the world he is living in. Lula is representative of everything that Clay should, and does, hate about white society. Lula listens to blues and jazz music, and sits in her seat on the subway periodically “humming snatches of rhythm and blues” songs (12). She uses traditionally black slang and phrases like “rub bellies” (30), “mammy” (31), and something as simple as “ol” (31). While Clay is forced to avoid all association with black culture, Lula, a white woman, is embracing it. Clay sees this as hypocritical, and rightfully so.

Furthermore, Clay asserts that white people have no right to listen to blues and jazz music or read African literature because they do not even know what it is truly about. On the surface, Clay explains, jazz artist Charlie Parker’s music is a testimonial of an agonized black soul, a “tortured genius” (35). This is what the white people

hear when they listen to Parker. However, what the white people cannot hear is the hatred of white society Parker’s songs reveal when listened to on a deeper level, far beneath the surface. Clay says white people, in their naivete, “sit there talking about the tortured genius of Charlie Parker” while Charlie Parker is saying ““Up your ass feeble-minded ofay!”” (35). Clay says that Lula, and all white people who listen to Parker’s music, are stupid because they are too ignorant to see that the music they are listening to is a ballad to the downfall of the white man. Clay says this is true with literature as well. He believes that white people should not partake in these traditionally black art forms because they just do not understand what they are truly about.

Another, even more radical belief of Clay’s is that sanity equals murder. Clay goes into further detail about this. Clay explains that forgoing one’s black heritage and embracing a life of conformity, a life of button-down, Western living, is insane. The sane do not sit around conforming to white society; the sane act black, refusing to be conventional and bow down to the white man. Types of conformity, according to Clay, include wearing suits and ties, never saying anything negative about white society, and disguising one’s aggression for white society through art forms such as poetry and music, like Charlie Parker’s. He expands on his belief by saying that if a black musician, like Charlie Parker, decides to resort to murdering white people instead of writing a song, that is perfectly fine; as a matter of fact, it is healthy—it is the sane form of an outlet of aggression. He says this is true of literature and poetry as well. Clay concludes that there would be no black art, music, or literature if all black people took the sane approach to life and executed as many white people as they came across. Therefore, sanity equals murder. In the middle of a long monologue that is filled with many damnations of white society, Clay summarizes this point:

Bird [Charlie Parker] would’ve played not a note of music if he just walked up to East Sixty-seventh Street and killed the first ten white people he saw. Not a note! And I’m the great would-be poet. Yes. That’s right! Poet. Some kind of bastard literature...all it needs is a simple knife thrust. Just let me bleed you, you loud whore, and one poem van-

ished. A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane. And the only thing that would cure the neurosis would be your murder.... Crazy niggers turning their backs on sanity. When all it needs is a simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane. (35)

Despite all of his preaching, and his giant lecture about damning and killing white society, about how sanity equals murder, and about derogating conformity, Clay decides that he is not the one who can represent his people because he feels he needs to remain insane; he must conform to survive. He decides that although he hates white society infringing on black culture, although he is disgusted by the labels put upon him, black music and art, and although he feels insane for doing so, he must tighten his tie, button his suit, and conform to white society. He makes this decision but not before warning Lula of an upheaval of dissatisfied blacks that will destroy white society. This is too little, too late, however. When Clay's Black Nationalist side peaked through, Lula decided to continue the endless cycle of hate and destruction Baraka speaks of by killing this black man just trying to survive in white society. In the closing seconds of the play, Baraka alludes to the cycle of destruction continuing when Lula eyes another promising looking black man entering the subway.

After examining both characters thoroughly, one question remains. Why does this endless cycle of destruction and despair continue anyway? Why are these two characters, and races, doomed to never coexist peacefully? And what caused the cycle to begin in the first place? The answer: slavery. Baraka sees slavery as America's ultimate downfall, the beginning of the cycle of oppression, a cycle that, in Baraka's view, will never be broken. As critic Lloyd W. Brown puts it, "Slavery insured the loss of American innocence quite early in American history" (Brown 144). Because of this loss of innocence, America fell from grace (just as Adam and Eve did in the biblical myth) and therefore "contemporary Americans must cope with the consequences of a prior curse—in this instance the curse of slavery" (144). Although Baraka does not come right out and say that this endless cycle is due to the original sin of slavery, his

belief is subtly placed, interwoven into the title, *Dutchman*. This title can be linked to the legend of the *Flying Dutchman*. This is "the story of a ship doomed to sail the seas forever without hope of gaining land" because it was one of the first Dutch slave-trading ships with the New World (144). The ship is destined never to reach land because it is cursed with the original sin of slavery. America and its people are cursed in the same way. Just as the *Flying Dutchman* is doomed to sail and sail and never reach land, the races will get closer and closer only to end up destroying each other in the end thus solidifying a vicious coexistence due to the offense of slavery.

In *Dutchman*, Baraka's view of a doomed society with no chance of a peaceful coexistence between the races is grim at best. Although Clay and Lula try throughout the course of the play to get closer and closer to one another, they are fated to murderous compulsions by the end of the play. According to Baraka, the reality America faces lies in the title of the play; Clay and Lula cannot escape the past, and the dismal truth is that the past curses them with the sin of slavery. Because of this curse, Baraka feels America will "never reach land"—America is the modern-day Flying Dutchman—and its people are doomed to play out the same act of destruction and hopelessness day in and day out, year after year, continuing an endless cycle.

#### Works Cited

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- Brown, Lloyd W. *Amiri Baraka*. Boston: Twayne, 1980.

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Evaluation: *This, I think, is an excellent essay on Baraka's play. Kristin writes very well and incorporates the quotes nicely. She's fair to Baraka, but one does not get the sense here that she's altogether convinced by his pessimism.*

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# The Things Martha Carried

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Jamie Dahm

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

*An option for the first formal paper of the semester was to analyze the importance of a secondary character to a short story.*

Guns, explosions, death and fear are all part of the world that Lieutenant Jimmy Cross has to live in. Lieutenant Jimmy Cross, the main character in Tim O'Brien's short story "The Things They Carried," lives a life that contrasts the life of his love, Martha. Martha, his love from home, is a college student who spends time studying, playing sports, and going out with friends; she lives the life of a normal young adult. However, just because she lives a life opposite of Jimmy's does not mean that she isn't affected by his life. Lieutenant Jimmy Cross's life at war consists of carrying an immense amount of physical and emotional responsibilities. He has to carry everything from food to weapons to the lives of the men in his platoon. Martha, although only slightly aware of the magnitude of Jimmy's responsibilities, ultimately is affected by them, for the things *she* carries are Jimmy's life and his vulnerabilities. Jimmy makes himself Martha's heaviest burden. Thus, Martha plays an important role in the short story. It is possible to understand the important role Martha plays in Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" when looking at her representation of a normal life, the burdens she had to carry, and lastly, her effect on Lieutenant Jimmy Cross.

First, in "The Things They Carried," Martha is a representation of the normal life. Martha is a young college student at Mount Sebastian College in New Jersey. She writes letters to Jimmy "about her professors and roommates and midterm exams..." (852). These letters remind Jimmy of the life he wants to have. After Jimmy reads Martha's letters "he spends the last hour of light pretending" (852). He imagines camping trips, hikes in the mountains, and days at the beach. He imagines the life that he cannot have. Jimmy is living the life of a young man at war. His life involves fear, fighting, and death. In his life, he has to spend his time worrying about keeping himself and the soldiers of his platoon safe and alive; he has to "carry the responsibility for the lives of his men" (854). Jimmy's life is full of responsibilities that are not part of an average 22-year-old man's life. He recognizes the difference between his life and the unattainable life, Martha's life, in the following quote: "This was not Mount Sebastian, it was another world, where there were no pretty poems or midterm exams..." (862). He realizes the life that he *has* to live, and the responsibilities it

## The Things Martha Carried

brings; he recognizes how distant it is from a normal life. It is also possible to see the collision of Jimmy's life at war and his desire of a normal life in the following quote:

On occasion he would yell at his men to spread out the column, to keep their eyes open, but then he would slip away into daydreams, just pretending, walking barefoot along the Jersey shore, with Martha, carrying nothing. (855)

Jimmy has to take the responsibility of making sure his men are alert and watchful, but at the same time he yearns for a life away from war, where he has no worries. Lists of the things the soldiers have to carry immediately follow this quote and others dealing with Martha. This reinforces the idea that Martha is a representation of a normal, yet unattainable life. It is only through dreams and Martha's letters that Lieutenant Jimmy Cross can escape from his life at war. To Jimmy, Martha is his escape; she represents everything Jimmy can't have, which is a normal life.

Next, Martha has her own burden to carry. That burden is Jimmy Cross. Cross and his soldiers have a tremendous load to carry emotionally and physically. Martha, however, also has a great burden to carry. Martha may not be aware of everything Jimmy is responsible for, but she is aware of his vulnerabilities. She knows how he loves her, but holds herself back from loving him. She censors the letters she writes him so they consist only of her interests and recent events. Jimmy recognizes this when he describes the letters Martha writes him. The narrator says, "the letters were mostly chatty, elusive on the matter of love" (852). Martha tried to avoid the topic of love, because she knew the effect it would have on Jimmy. At one point Jimmy thinks back on a date he went on with Martha. While at the movies, Jimmy put his hand on Martha's knee. Martha turned to him and "looked at him in a sad, sober way that made him pull his hand back..." (853). She did not want him to touch her. She could not love him, and was saddened by his love for her. The most important thing, though, is that Martha is aware of Jimmy's feelings for her, and even though she can't love him back, she continues to write him and support him. She feels responsible for Jimmy's feelings and is burdened by them. Another example that shows how Jimmy is a burden is when Martha expresses the com-

plexity of her feelings towards Jimmy by sending him a good luck pebble. She writes a letter to Jimmy that contains a small pebble that she finds on the shore of the beach. Her attention was drawn to it because it was on the beach in the spot where the water meets the land, or as Martha explains it, it was found "where things came together, but also separated" (855). Her reasoning for sending it to Jimmy is further explained: "It was the separate-but-together quality that had inspired her to pick up the pebble...and then send it through the mail, by air, as a token of her truest feelings for him" (855). Martha cares for Jimmy similar to the way Jimmy cares for her. In that sense, they are together. But, they live in two different worlds; they cannot be together. This is the cause of the burden she ultimately carries. She has held back her feelings for Jimmy, but he has not done the same. Martha feels obligated to write him and care for him, so as to not hurt his feelings. She is burdened with the vulnerability of his life and what would happen if she were not there for him.

Lastly, it is important to look at the way Martha's burden affects Jimmy. As explained previously, Jimmy is Martha's burden. Through the course of the story, however, Jimmy does not realize this. All he wants is for "...Martha to love him as he loved her..." (852). He dreams about Martha and imagines dates with her, and he lets these dreams overtake his responsibilities. At one time, Jimmy is supposed to be supervising one of his soldiers crawling through a dark, small tunnel. However, he lets his mind wander, and he can't concentrate on anything else but Martha. His wandering thoughts are explained in the following quote: "And then suddenly, without willing it, he was thinking about Martha...He tried to concentrate on the war, all the dangers, but his love was too much for him" (857). His feelings toward Martha affect his responsibilities and even put the lives of his soldiers in danger. He cares for her so much, though, that he can't stop himself from thinking about her. Martha only feeds into this and unknowingly encourages it by continuing to write him, by taking care of her own burden. At the end of the story, Jimmy realizes that he is Martha's burden. He decides to burn the letters and photographs he has of Martha as a symbol for his determination to end his love and dreams of her. As he is

doing this, he fully understands the duties he has as a soldier and, more importantly, the burden Martha had to carry—the burden of him. This turning point for Jimmy is expressed in the following lines:

Lieutenant Cross saw Martha's gray eyes  
gazing back at him.  
He understood.  
It was very sad, he thought. The things  
men carried inside. The things men did  
or felt they had to do.  
He almost nodded at her, but didn't.  
(862-863)

He realizes that Martha only wrote to him because she felt she had to. Just as Jimmy had to carry the burdens of being a soldier, Martha had to carry the burden of having a soldier love her. It was her responsibility to attend to, which she did by continuing to write to Jimmy and show him that she cared. She “carried” Jimmy in the same fashion that he “carried” his responsibilities. After Jimmy realizes this, he forces himself to forget the normal world and focus only on the war. He makes himself believe that “his obligation was not to be loved but to lead” (863). He becomes a soldier unaffected by love and the hope it brings. His realization of Martha’s burden causes him to fully fall into his world of war, with no thoughts of the normal life he once wished to be a part of.

In conclusion, Martha has a very important role in Tim O’Brien’s story, “The Things They Carried.” She represents the world that the soldiers at war wish they could be a part of. She lives a life that involves no death or killing, a life that consists of “normal” things such as exams, poetry, and dates. Martha upholds the world that every soldier yearns for and cannot acquire. Martha also has her own things to carry, just as the soldiers do. She feels responsible for Jimmy Cross’s feelings. She writes him and supports him as a way to take care of him and his feelings. She knows he loves her, and since she cannot love him back, she has to be there for him in other ways. Lastly, Martha greatly affects Jimmy. Jimmy’s love for Martha overpowers his responsibilities as a soldier and puts his life and his soldier’s lives in danger. When he decides to put an end to his love so he can take care of the things he “carries,” he realizes that Martha has her own responsibilities to “carry” and that responsibili-

ty is him. This causes him to turn into a perfect soldier. He is devoted to his responsibilities and forgets about his dreams and hopes of living a normal life. At the first glance of the title and the story, one may think that “the things they carried” refers to the responsibilities of the soldiers, but it refers to more than that. It refers to the responsibility of *everyone*, including Martha

#### Works Cited

- O’Brien, Tim. “The Things They Carried.” *Short Fiction: Classic and Contemporary*. Ed. Charles W. Bohner. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice, 2002.

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Evaluation: *Jamie presents a thorough and perceptive analysis of this character's importance to "The Things They Carried," in a way that makes us see "the other side" of this story very clearly.*

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# Where Are the Parents, What about the Music?

*Katie Devitt*

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write a literary analysis.*

The media's profound influence on American society can be observed every moment of every day. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, store windows, clothing labels, and countless other mediums all pine for the attention of consumers, bombarding them with mixed messages about products, people, situations, and life in general. As one billboard advertises a brand of beer, a local television news station is simultaneously airing a segment about the dangers of alcoholism. While the Christian radio station plays a song praising God, the talk radio show on the previous channel is attacking the Pope. Because the media as a whole acts as an open forum, it offers both accurate and skewed information on every subject imaginable by every type of source.

In order to distinguish between the various messages being crammed down people's throats by the media, it is crucial to have already adopted a firm and truthful basis by which to view the world. If one does not have a valid notion about society and its workings, then he or she runs the risk of taking everything the media has to offer as truth. Traditionally, these notions are supplied by one's parents. Children look to their mothers and fathers to supply them with concrete perceptions about relationships, love, friendship, family, and the human condition. Without adequate knowledge of these things, kids are forced to look to other avenues to get their information, with the media being the most common because it is so prevalent in everyday life. However, given the very nature and structure of the media, some, if not most, of the information obtained is inaccurate.

Joyce Carol Oates addresses this danger, specifically

regarding popular music, in her short story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Within the piece, 15-year-old Connie, the main character, is lured out of her house and presumably raped and murdered by a stranger named Arnold Friend. Although Arnold's intentions are purely evil and his actions inexcusable, Oates demonstrates that it is a lack of parental guidance and a perpetual exposure to music that breaks Connie down and allows the boy to do what he does. By examining the negligence of the parents, the constant presence of music, and finally the events leading right up to the abduction—specifically the characteristics of Arnold—one can see how these factors ultimately contribute to the alleged death of Connie.

Connie's parents are continually absent from her life, a fact that plays a heavy role in the last events of the story. Her father is negligent, often spending long days at work and then coming home too tired to spend any time with his family. After work, "he wanted supper and he read the newspaper at supper and after supper he went to bed. He didn't bother talking much to them" (Oates 825). Connie's dad moves robotically from one task to another, leaving little room for human contact, let alone affection. Throughout the short story, the father does not speak one line of dialogue, nor does the reader get the slightest description of him, apart from his bent head as he reads the newspaper and hunched back as he pulls out of the driveway (825, 827). Oates writes the father as a static character, one who is apart from the story as he is apart from his daughter's life. He is not portrayed as being complicated or round whatsoever, thus adding to the imagery of an almost invisible father figure. He does not know what goes on in his daughters' lives, nor does he seem interested in finding out. He leaves all parenting responsibilities to his wife and seems content to remain in the background.

Connie's mother is more present than the father in Connie's life, although in an equally unhealthy manner. Her mother never has a kind word for her daughter, only criticism. In fact, the way the reader is introduced to her is by the line, "Her mother...always scolded Connie about it [looking at herself in the mirror]. 'Stop gawking at yourself, who are you? You think you're so pretty?' she would say" (825). Her mother's first statement demonstrates her general attitude towards her younger daughter: that Connie can't do much right. She is constantly being compared to her older sister, June, who is more plain than Connie but apparently a more favorable

daughter in the eyes of their mother. Whereas Connie is met with harsh criticism by her mother, she praises June by saying, "June did this, June did that, she saved money and helped clean the house and cooked and Connie couldn't do a thing..." (825). However, Connie claims that her mom does not dislike her and even has a sneaking suspicion that her mother prefers her to June because of her looks (827). Yet, it is Connie's beauty which annoys the mother in the first place, therefore creating a cycle of jealousy and hostility between them.

Although Connie's mother seems to fixate on criticizing her daughter at every opportunity, this same energy is not used when it comes to teaching her about good choices. Her mother makes the mistake of assuming that her daughters act the same way out in public. She looks at June and her friends and extends that same way of behavior to Connie. "June went places with girlfriends of hers, girls who were just as plain and steady as she, and so when Connie wanted to do that her mother had no objections" (825-26). However, June and Connie act very different when they are with friends. June goes to movies and out to dinner with hers, and although Connie will occasionally do the same thing, she also has sex with random boys whom she meets in a diner. Her mother never bothered to tell Connie about sex or love because she assumed that she knew as much as June, and if June was being responsible, then so was her other daughter. It is the lack of knowledge that sets her apart from June in that respect in the first place, however. If Connie had ever been taught about friendship and boys by her mother like June presumably was, then Connie would more than likely act like her sister. Yet her mother did not, so Connie does not. When her mom does ask about Connie's life and about promiscuous girls her age, Connie calls them stupid and draws "thick clear lines between herself and such girls" (827). Because her mother has no reason to believe otherwise, she takes Connie's statements as truth.

This lack of communication between parent and child is not limited in this piece to just Connie and her mother. This problem seems to appear between the girl's friends and their respective parents as well. Connie's friends engage in the same types of behavior as she does, yet their parents do not seem the wiser. In fact, it is Connie's best friend's father who picks them up from the mall and "never bother(s) to ask what they had done" (826). Oates also mentions other sexually active teenagers, such as Eddie or the Pettinger girl, throughout the story. Clearly, this lack of parental concern is not just

an isolated case but happens quite frequently throughout the entire town. This general attitude exposes something about the story's setting. It is a presumably safe, sleepy place where children are not taught how to make good choices because the parents reason that they already know how, or that their peers do an adequate job of that. Yet it seems that this mindset has corrupted some of the youths who reside in this area because in reality, they need to be guided by an adult, not anyone else.

Because Connie's parents did not teach her about love, she was forced to retrieve her information elsewhere. In her case, she turned to the popular music of the time, and it is this constant exposure that helps Arnold to succeed in kidnapping Connie at the end of the work. Music is everywhere in "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" Mention of it occurs at least once on every page. For Connie, music is more than entertainment. The lyrics mixed with the melody hypnotize her, transcending rational thought and causing her to feel joy while listening. Music becomes an escape for Connie, removing her from her present situation and comforting her. While she and her friends are at the diner, they listen "to the music that ma[kes] everything so good: the music was always in the background like music at a church service, it was something to depend upon" (827). Listening to music is like a religious experience for her and is essentially her substitute for a traditional spirituality. Since "none of them bothered with church" (827), for Connie, song lyrics take the place of prayers, and she gives them the same amount of reverence that one would show to the Word of God.

The reader is never specifically told what the lyrics of these popular songs describe. However, one can infer that the lyrics are where Connie is attaining her notions on love and sex. She stays in her house during the day, daydreaming about boys: not specific ones but a general feeling that she gets through songs. She thinks about "how nice he had been, how sweet it always was, not the way someone like June would suppose but sweet, gentle, the way it was in movies and promised in songs" (827). Song lyrics sugar-coat love, in which every partner is "the one" and every sexual experience is going to "last all night." Connie is relentlessly pumped these images and now believes that this is how love truly is. For Connie, love is when a boy "can't live without her and would cross the deepest oceans for her," which are images that are surely sentimental and sweet but lack any substance for a true, meaningful relationship. No

## Where Are the Parents, What about the Music?

popular song ever discusses how important things like companionship and trust are, so Connie has no choice but to believe her soul mate is the boy who “wants to hold her forever,” not the boy who loves her for her character and personality.

It is the exact mix of parental negligence and overexposure to popular music which at least in part cause Connie to be abducted. One Sunday, after her parents and sister leave for a barbeque, Arnold Friend and his sidekick Ellie pull into Connie’s driveway. She recognizes him from the diner parking lot, where he had “wagged a finger and laughed and said, ‘Gonna get you, baby’” (826). Arnold Friend wants to take her for a ride in his jalopy and at first, Connie is not completely opposed to the idea. However, as their conversation continues, it is clear that his intentions are evil ones and that he is not an ordinary boy.

First of all, Arnold knows Connie’s name without her telling him and seems to know all about her family and friends. After she questions him about knowing her name, he replies, “I know your name and all about you, lots of things. I took a special interest in you, such a pretty girl, and found out all about you like I know your parents and sister are gone somewheres and I know where and how long they’re going to be gone” (830). Even a stalker would not necessarily know everything that Arnold knows about Connie. He knows what June is wearing at the barbeque, what her friends’ names are, and he even knows that her father is not coming home soon like she claims.

Although this frightens her, the things he says to her disturb her the most. As the conversation continues, Arnold becomes more and more forceful and begins insisting that she get in the car. He tells her that he is her lover and reassures her that he is always very nice the first time (832). He says, “I’ll hold you so tight you won’t think you have to try to get away or pretend anything because you’ll know you can’t. And I’ll come inside you where it’s all secret and you’ll give in to me and you’ll love me—” (832). These lines resemble the lyrics to any number of popular love songs, the same songs Connie cherishes. However, hearing them come out of his mouth without a melody is disturbing. Connie “put her hands against her ears as if she’d heard something terrible, something not meant for her” (832). Ironically, she should have reacted this way to those songs all along. Yet they seemed so harmless and even more so truthful to her with a tune attached to them. It is

only after Arnold tries to seduce her using her songs that she understands how very misled she has been.

Yet, it is too late. She tries to escape, but Arnold has already successfully manipulated her. She thinks to call the police, but Arnold threatens to enter the house if she does. Connie is reduced to sobbing on the floor, calling for her parents and racking her brain for an escape, but her parents never taught her how to solve problems for herself. Normally, she would turn to her music for advice, but now Connie has no other resources to combat Arnold. Realizing that the personification of all those love songs is standing outside her screen door, waiting to give her everything the lyrics promised, Connie gets up off the ground by her own free will and leaves with Arnold. The songs she thought would never harm her now have. Therefore, there are no other options for her than to embrace the lyrics that she has sung along with for so long by resigning to Arnold’s will.

Negligent parents and songs that contain skewed messages on love work together to bring about the demise of Connie in Joyce Carol Oates’ “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” Because the 15-year-old was not taught about healthy and realistic relationships, she turned to popular music to teach her. However, Arnold shows her how wrong her songs really are, and it is ultimately these songs that allow him to kidnap, rape, and possibly kill her. Oates uses the story of Connie to criticize the media, demonstrating just how much of an influence it does have on society. The messages of the media, taken the wrong way, can cause disasters, as seen in this short story. However, by adopting an honest and accurate view of the world, the members of society gain the power to choose how they will allow themselves to be influenced.

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- Oates, Joyce Carol. “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?” *Short Fiction: Classic and Contemporary*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Charles Bohner. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice, 2002. 825-36.

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Evaluation: *This is probably the best, most succinct paper I’ve ever received on Oates’ story. This one is wise and worth reading. The writing is super sharp, and the writer is keenly aware of how serious and pertinent (to today) Oates’ warning is.*

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# Making a Difference

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Moira Donovan

Course: Biology 130 (Microbiology)

Instructor: Pam McLaughlin

Assignment:

*After reading "Infecting Ourselves: How Environmental and Social Disruptions Trigger Disease," write a personal response of how the relationship between emerging infectious diseases and the environment affects your future.*

Before reading "Infecting Ourselves: How Environmental and Social Disruptions Trigger Disease," I knew that global warming had had a negative effect on our environment, but I did not really understand the potential effects it could have on every living thing, from humans to microorganisms. When I finished reading the article, I was much more aware of the effects that our actions have on the environment.

Feeling a little overwhelmed by this new knowledge, I decided it was necessary to make changes in my lifestyle that would be less disturbing to the environment. At the time I was reading this handout, I was also in the process of looking for a new car, as my weekly trips to the mechanic were becoming quite a burden. I had been researching the cost and driver safety of different sport utility vehicles, but I never took into account how damaging this purchase would be to the environment.

After reading "Infecting Ourselves," I ended my search for a sport utility vehicle and began investigating cars with fewer emissions and less dependency on gasoline. The hybrid cars were the most obvious choice to achieve this goal, and after a few weeks of researching on the Internet and taking test-drives, I was sold on the Toyota Prius. The car is estimated to get 55 miles per gallon while producing near-zero emissions. Apparently the Prius is in high demand right now, and dealers do not even have them on the lots; they must be ordered. It was pleasing to know that so many others are also taking responsibility to help stabilize the atmosphere.

I have received different reactions from people when I tell them I have ordered a hybrid car. Some individuals have given me high-fives while others have commented, "You know you are only one person; you are not going to make a difference." According to the Massachusetts Climate Action Network, driving a 17-mile-per-gallon sport utility vehicle compared to a 26-mile-per-gallon car for just one year wastes more energy than leaving a refrigerator open for over six years ("High Fuel Efficiency..." 1).

Saving energy is not the only way that the environment benefits from the use of hybrid cars. Near-zero emissions are produced from hybrids, which means less pollutants and cleaner air for us to breathe. Pollutants

## Making a Difference

also contribute to acid rain, which damages the land and contaminates the water supply, another reason to drive cars with low emissions.

In addition, carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere are the highest they have been in 150,000 years, according to the author of the article, Anne Platt (8). These levels of carbon dioxide, along with other greenhouse gases, are causing global warming which can also affect the ecosystems, including those microorganisms that cause infection. According to Platt, "All ecological disruptions tip the balance between people and microbes in favor of the microbes" (33). I wonder if people who really don't care about the environment realize that damaging the environment will actually affect the health and even existence of humans.

As for me, I am glad to say I do realize the existing and potential damage that humans can cause to the environment, and I am proud that I have done something, however small, to help prevent these disturbances. When my Toyota Prius does arrive, I plan on keeping a small folder of reading materials in the glove compartment, including "Infecting Ourselves" and information from the Internet, concerning global warming and reasons to drive a hybrid car. Maybe on some road trip, a bored friend will take a look at the information and also decide to make a small difference.

### Works Cited

- "High Fuel Efficiency: National Security and a Safe Environment."  
Massachusetts Climate Action Network. 2001.  
<[www.massclimateaction.org/pdf/AutoshowHandout2001.pdf](http://www.massclimateaction.org/pdf/AutoshowHandout2001.pdf)>  
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Evaluation: *I was impressed that Moira was able to apply what she learned from this reading directly to her life. Also, she wants others to understand her decision and possibly to influence their views. Her writing was clear and direct. I feel that this illustrates the power of higher education to shape students' lives and our community.*

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# The Party and the People

Kevin Doss

Course: Literature 208 (non-Western Literature)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

*For the first formal paper of this course, students were to analyze a work of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese literature, and to write to a “Western” audience unfamiliar with the time or place of the work.*

In modern Chinese literature, the shortcomings of communist society are often brought to light. In creative and sometimes cryptic ways, Chinese writers tell their stories through the prism of an oppressed, often horrible existence. Many of these writers were forced to tell their stories from the shadows, poking at the heart of China’s assortment of political and social problems, all the while afraid of the repercussions of a government which was unpredictable at best. To achieve this “between the lines” type of writing, heavy symbolism and sometimes surrealism were required. If a writer was deemed anti-party, the backlash for a story criticizing the party could be lethal.

A common technique would involve avoiding mention of communist law and government in lieu of more individual, human stories. Rather than write about how a particular governmental program causes millions to starve, a story would cover the day to day struggle of a starving family, as in Can Xue’s “The Hut on the

Mountain.” Rather than write about the lack of passion, creativity, and love in a communist society, a writer would follow the life of a young party member and let their thoughts teach the lesson, as in Wang Meng’s “The Young Man Who Has Just Arrived at the Organization Department.” Often, the goal of such writing was twofold. In Zhang Jie’s “Remorse,” the criticisms of the government actually seem to play second fiddle to the more traditional values of the love of a father for his son. Zhang inadvertently exposes the precarious, fragile life of a party member through the trials of an exiled father and his cursed son. “Remorse” is a dark, heart-breaking story that applies the ancient lesson of love between a father and his son to the modern problem of love between a people and their country. Zhang tells this disturbing story with only passing mention of the political root of its cause. It is up to the reader to decide how important a role the Communist party plays in the lives of the characters.

The story opens with the cremation of the narrator’s son. He was only twenty seven years old at the time of his death, which was caused by a lethal urinary infection. The rest of the story is a brief recounting of the father’s memories of his son.

The father is an exiled party member whose reputation has ruined his son’s life. He is a remorseful man who lives in shame and humiliation. He is not to be hated, however. The readers will find themselves feeling pity for the father. His path in life was never clear or easy. His exile from the Communist party stems from a brave act of defiance. When his son asks his mother why his father is so hated, his mother explains that his father read “The Emperor’s New Clothes” to a party leader. In fact, the power of his conviction is his only original downfall. It is only through his unwavering belief in truth and justice that his, and consequently his son’s, life is shrouded in public shame. Here is a jab at the communist structure. Why should a man, whose only crime is speaking the truth and exposing fraud, be condemned, along with his innocent son, to a life of shame? Of course, here is where Zhang walks that fine line between writer and traitor. Through his portrayal of the father’s predicament, Zhang is teaching two lessons at once. One is to beware of government, especially when it prefers

propaganda to honesty. The second is simple: being a father isn't easy. The key is that the first lesson isn't stated plainly; it is to be drawn by the reader.

The son, Jianshe, is a pitiful character indeed. He is condemned from birth to pay for the sins of his father: the small but brave act of defiance. Jianshe is a solitary child whose youthful exuberance is whittled away at a very early age. None of the neighborhood children will play with him. They all wear strange red scarves (the adornment of the Red Army and supporters of Mao Zedong) and avoid him at every turn. It does not take him long to realize that he is different. It takes him only slightly longer to realize the source of his peers' hatred.

A poignant story from his early childhood is recounted in which he spends his days watching an anthill under a tree in his backyard. He is fascinated by the ants and the way they always work in harmony; so many friends and never even a scuffle between them. He asks his father longingly one day about the ants with "Father, why is it that ants always play with one another, and never desert each other?" (24). His father can't answer him, and his confusion grows. Zhang is referring to the idealistic communist society with this little story. Of course, the story is also vital to the development of Jianshe's character. Again, the double-edged moral of the story is maintained, and Zhang is cleverly teaching two lessons at once.

Of course, just like the idealistic society, the anthill is an illusion. A neighborhood boy comes by one day and stomps the hill out of existence. Here begins the truly futile condition the boy finds himself in. The rest of his young childhood, it can be presumed, is filled with similar rejection from his peers. And as the boy grows, his instincts about his father deepen, distancing him from his influence in an attempt to disassociate his reputation from his father's.

When Jianshe becomes old enough to work, he immediately gets assigned to a produce station selling meat. Here he at least finds some solace from his father's reputation. The people at the station know nothing of his past or family name. He actually becomes quite good at cutting meat, and the nickname his customers give him is "Just One Chop," referring to his ability to cut and weigh meat accurately with just one

chop. For the first time in his life, he gains a measurable amount of respect from others. His confidence ends with his customers, however, as his faith in his peers has been extinguished long ago. He has absolutely no luck making friends at his work station. Whenever he has free time to himself, he sits in the nearest corner and stares at his toes. "He always tries his best to hunch himself up, as if his innocently fearless, excessively broad shoulders occupied a bit too much of boundless space, and thus might offend someone" (26). Here, Zhang perfectly explains Jianshe's condition, demonstrating on one hand what a superstitious, judgmental communist society can do to a person's confidence, and the other, demonstrating just what a lack of fatherly advice and comfort can do to that same person's sense of worth.

There is one very important incident in the story in which the father has an opportunity to turn his son's life around. His son comes to him one day, after hearing about the Tiananmen Square incident of 1976, with the desire to take part. He has written a poem to read at the demonstration. For the first time in memory, Jianshe is showing genuine passion for something, or at least the possibility of passion. The father is fearful his son will make the same "mistake" he made and become an official exile himself. It's interesting that the father overlooks the obvious fact that his son is already cursed anyway, and that participating in this demonstration would at least lend him some dignity and confidence. Perhaps the father is holding onto the hope that one day his son's history will be forgotten. Whatever the reason, the father forbids his timid son from taking part. Confused and defeated, the son asks "Will people die?" (27). To which his father responds "No, the terrible thing is not death..." (27). Again Zhang has alluded to another terrible aspect of communist society while continuing to keep it on a human, family level.

There is a strong parallel between the love the son has for his father and the love his father has for his country. There is a story from the son's childhood which illustrates this relationship perfectly. When the son was very young, his father came home from work one evening to find a tray of water chestnuts waiting for him, from his son. Each nut had a tiny bite mark taken out of it, and he laughingly asked his wife about them.

His wife explains that Jianshe had tested each nut to find the good ones and had eaten the bad ones himself.

Here Zhang is demonstrating the endless, unselfish love Jianshe has for his father. At the same time it becomes obvious that his father has a similar kind of love for the Communist party. Why else would he endure such hardship and still want desperately to be reaccepted? His blind love for his government is child-like and naive. And, like his son, despite all his loyalty and faith, in the end he is left confused and defeated.

In this story, Zhang is trying to convey a cautionary message. By weaving the message into the emotional, relatable context of a father and son, he has succeeded in rebelling quietly and unassumingly. The reader has a feeling of looking into a two-way mirror. The reflection thrown back is relatively obvious and as familiar as one's own face. Upon closer inspection, however, the deeper, more dangerous message behind the words can just be made out.

#### **Works Cited**

Zhang Jie. "Remorse." *Mao's Harvest: Voices from China's New Generation*. Ed. Helen F. Siu and Zelda Stern. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.

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*Evaluation: Kevin's analysis of the twin stories within this short story is very convincing, and he provides just enough information about 20th-century China to provide a context for the work. His writing style engages the reader, through economical prose and interesting wording.*

# The Spirit of Summer

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*Jeff Eilrich*

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Greg Herriges

Assignment:

*Jeff was to write a 500-word description essay—either purely descriptive, or perhaps in a narrative mode.*

Summers were always the time to relax and explore the depths of imagination, allowing our spirits to soar through whatever adventures and mishaps our hearts desired. As our lives floated down the cool stream of time, we were oblivious to the responsibilities that were waiting to capture us. High school ensnared us all, giving tangible form to responsibility. It felt like an invisible prison was forming around us.

Although we became very aware of our new prisons as high school started, there still existed one glimmer of hope for us. There was still one thing that could set us free from all of that: summer.

It started with a gentle breeze in late April. I would be walking back to my house from the bus, and that breeze would dance lightly across my face. It wasn't the same bitter wind I had been feeling since winter. This breeze was warm and forgiving, like a mother's touch. It was the child that sprinted ahead of the crowd to bring us all the joyous news. That breeze carried me home, lifting my spirits up with it. It whispered to me, telling me to fly. It was waiting on the last day of school to blow open the doors and release us from our invisible prison.

As I rode my bike along on the first Saturday of summer, that smooth breeze watched as I approached the driveway of a house on the corner of a quiet street about a mile and a half from my own. I hopped off my shiny silver mountain bike and walked it up the long driveway around to the back of the house. After carefully leaning my bike up against the rotting old wooden garage, I paused for a moment to watch a bird perched on the lone tree in the backyard, and then proceeded up to the stoop.

It was already late afternoon on that day in June when I turned away from the early summer sun as it was leaving the sky for the day. Barely visible in the west, it waved goodbye to everyone, leaving behind a deep magenta and rusty orange that made the horizon glow so the world wouldn't forget it. I turned my back on the familiar warm glow of the sun and gave the thick glass window on the door a thorough knocking.

A few moments later, the door creaked open, and my friend's face beckoned me forth into the thick darkness inside. I stepped inside and was greeted by a cacophony

ny of the most unique sounds my ears had ever heard. That house was alive with music pulsating out from unseen parts within.

That night was a blur of colors, sounds, and a flood of emotions. Electrical wires ran throughout the house, coursing with the lifeblood that pumped out a melody of music, laughter, and the excited buzz of ideas being thrown about. The house throbbed, swelling with a purely artificial, unnatural voice of its own. The world inside this quiet house moved quickly, and dared me to keep up with it. I raced along with the night, struggling to adjust myself to the pace and vibe of the nighttime.

Eventually, I forced myself to stumble out of that world and into the cool summer night air. I wasn't used to the thick blanket of darkness that covered the world at this time of night. In my drained state, I was relatively oblivious to it as I walked over to hop on my bike and start my trek home. I didn't notice anything too different at first as I rolled down the driveway and on the gentle slope down the street towards the bumpy bike path that led home. The minute my bike hopped the curb and I glided onto the path, my whole body tingled as the night air crawled along it, one moment stretching into a brief foreverness as I crossed an invisible barrier. I'll never forget the rest of that journey home, that bumpy path curved through the forest and opened out onto the street. The street was empty; there was a very queer silence that had settled upon the world. No animals made noises, no cars or people filled the air with even the slightest hum. I was alone with only the soft noise my tires made as they whizzed across the damp street to let me know I was alive. The vastness of the world was open to me for the first time in my life. I was suddenly painfully aware of how much was out there, and I was filled with a desire to experience it all.

Ever since that night long ago, I have been a creature of the night, longing for that wonderful feeling of utter solitude in a vast world. As that summer went on, I learned to appreciate the unique quiet of night, and the feeling of light summer air rushing through my hair, filling me with a spirit for adventure and a desire to

soak it all up. Many years have passed since then, but I still make that ride at least once every summer to remind me of what the true spirit of summer is: an open road and an empty world waiting for someone to fill it.

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*Evaluation: Jeff captures here the joys and mysteries of youth—a summer night alive with delight.*

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# Discrimination in the Game

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*Kate Elkin*

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: M. Glenn Taylor

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Assignment:

*Write a persuasive essay.*

Every day, protests are taking place regarding sex and race. Businesses are sued for discrimination in either form. Talk show hosts are ripped apart and splattered on the covers of a magazine for discriminatory slips. The media must walk on eggshells to be politically correct. Why does this all go out the window when it comes to video games? Violence in video games has caught the public's eye as being potentially threatening to its players, but that is just a segment of the damage being done. Other implied ideas in video and computer games are putting society at risk. Racial and sexual stereotypes in electronic games are damaging the American values of individuality and equality.

Sony suggests its game players get in touch with their "gun-toting, testosterone-pumping, cold-blooded murdering side" in one of their ads. Similar games also get players in touch with porn stars, damsels in distress, black gang bangers, and Haitian voodoo characters. In the essay "When Life Imitates Video," John Leo suggests, "If we want to avoid more Littleton-style

massacres, we will begin taking the social effects of the killing games more seriously." This is an example of an extreme social effect of video games. Whether the message is violence or sexual and racial stereotyping, it's all going straight to the brain. If the brain can function well enough to play the games, then it is fully capable to take in the images and ideas playing on the screen. The violence is obvious. The racist and sexist acts are more subtle yet shocking. Is anyone taking a closer look at how the discrimination portrayed in these games is defeating the work that is being done to promote the unique value of a person despite his or her sex or race?

The role of women in current video games has become deceptive and degrading. If a woman is shown on the cover of a DVD, it is assumed that she plays a role in the movie. The same assumption cannot be as easily applied to women on the cover of a video game. In fact, the female body is commonly used for the game's advertisement, without a female character even present in the game. In the game *Virtual Pool*, a woman is shown leaning over the pool table, showing off her cleavage. Across the top of the cover, it says "Nice Rack!" This is probably not referring to anything that has to do with a game of pool. When there happens to be a female character in the game, she often plays the damsel in distress that is saved in the end. In *Duke Nukem: Planet of the Babes*, the lead character is responsible to save all the women in the world because he is the only man left on earth. The women are weak, unable to help themselves, and in need of a powerful man to rescue them. So much for the empowerment of women. But what about Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider*? Isn't she a symbol of an empowered woman? Lara Croft barely represents a woman, with her exaggerated body proportions. Prof. Nina Huntman, featured in the documentary film *Game Over*, states, "This body type does not even exist in the real world. We know this is true because the company that makes Lara Croft hires models to represent them at promotional events, and they have yet to find a model with these body proportions." Prof. Eugene Provenzo believes Lara Croft is sexually stimulating for young boys. This is only encouraged by the slogan, "Take her home and have her as your own." The game is then brought into real life

when sixteen-year-old models are hired to represent Lara Croft, and men put their arms around them to have their pictures taken at promotional events. *Game Over* informs us that the majority of female characters are Caucasian, and the majority of black women are portrayed as prostitutes, specifically in the game King Pin. In the world of the video game, women's fight for equality and respect is losing to the computer.

Racial discrimination is notorious in today's video games. Eight out of ten is the ratio given by Hunteman to be the prominence of Caucasian to other races as the main character in top selling action genre video games. Racial stereotypes are seen most often when the main character is not Caucasian. The game Turok is played by a Native American suited up in feathers and a bow and arrow. It is questionable as to why the majority of characters in the game King Pin are black. Could it possibly be that way because the scene is an inner city ghetto, packed with muggings, gang members, and black criminals? One might think the main character would be black as well, but once again the main character is Caucasian, striving to become the "king pin." If black skin isn't playing the inner city thugs, maybe it is on the Haitian characters in games such as Shadow Man and Akuji. Hunteman explains in these games "Haitian culture equates blackness with supernatural." The white skin seems to be reserved for the characters saving the day (or women). While America has come so far to erase these stereotypes, such video games want to bring us back to the start.

It is important to note who is playing these games. People of all ages are drawn into the world of electronic games, but the young are the most vulnerable. "Ninety percent of children buy or rent videogames," states Professor Andrea Hairston in *Game Over*. Video games are teaching our children negative values that don't even make it on television. If they can't get porn on TV, they can get it on a video game. John Leo quotes psychologist David Grossman on the effect of video games: "We have to start worrying about what we are putting in the minds of our young." The negative information is taken in while being masked by the so called fun of the game. When the game is being played, that is reality. All of one's senses are focused on the game.

The ideals of individuality and equality are at risk when one's entire mind is engaged in these destructive games that convey a negative perspective of gender and race. Unfortunately, the popularity of these games is on the rise. Without seeing a decline in the near future, the least we can do is make the players aware of the discrimination and stereotyping at hand. Ideally, parents should take action, but we know that does not always happen. The community should use its resources to publicize this information in newspapers, or use any possible way to reach the members of the community. Possibly, the antidote of awareness can decrease the perpetuation of negative racial and sexual ideas into society.

#### Works Cited

- Game Over: Gender, Race, and Violence in Video Games*. Dir. Nina Huntemann. Media Education Foundation, 2000.  
Leo, John. "When Life Imitates Video." *U.S. News and World Report* 3 May 1999: 14.

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Evaluation: *Kate takes a unique perspective on the gaming industry, showing off her critical thinking skills.*

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# Tom and Christian: A Study of Two Readers

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*Diane Ellis*

Course: Literature 219 (Children's Literature)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment:

*Interview a child about his or her reading habits  
and write an essay based on the interview.*

From the beginning of time, stories have been told as a means of communicating and passing down information from generation to generation. Reading books introduces us to new worlds and ideas and takes us to faraway places. Does reading to a child at a very early age foster a love of learning and a desire to learn to read? When asked if he likes to read, Tom replied: "Yes, because it is something you can do and no one can stop you from doing it." I spoke with Tom in the kitchen of his suburban home after school, at 4:30 p.m., on Monday, November 24, 2003. From talking to him about his passion for reading, it appears that nothing has ever gotten in his way or stopped him from reading and achieving. He is an extremely bright thirteen-year-old boy who is a straight A student—that is, with the exception of a C in physical education! Tom is the youngest of three children: he has two sisters, one a senior and the other a junior, both in high school. All three of them have been honor roll students from very early on in elementary school, and they have participated in a program called TDP, which stands for the talent development program. Their level of achievement has sparked my interest in whether the influence of being read to at an early age has an impact on a student's love of reading and learning.

I know another child, Christian, who is seven years old and is just on the brink of beginning elementary school. I also spent some time with him at his home, on Sunday evening, November 23, 2003, at 8:00 p.m., to talk with him about his reading habits. Christian is an only child and is in the second grade. His mother and I have been best friends since college. He is very precocious and, while he likes to read, he is obviously a child of the times, and he gives equal time to his computer programs and the Game Boy hand-held computer game. Both Tom and Christian are very bright and hold promising futures. As a child who grew up with a love of reading myself and having only sisters, I found myself wondering about how boys feel about reading. The thought of comparing the reading habits of a seven year old and a seventh grader intrigued me and led me to talk to both boys about their interests in reading.

I have been acquainted with Tom since he was in kindergarten, as he is the former neighbor of one of my relatives. I have seen him evolve from a boisterous,

rowdy youngster who enjoyed Power Rangers and superhero action figures into a reflective, serious student who says he would prefer to stay in and finish reading a really good book, instead of playing outside. He does state that he usually does not read as much in the summertime, but he has always participated in various reading incentive programs both at school and at the public library. He readily admits if it is something he is “forced to read, such as *The Old Man and the Sea*, I’d rather be outside!” This launched a conversation on his thoughts about how he feels Hemingway has been overrated as a “great American author” and how he prefers some of the Russian literature he recently has read, such as Dostoyevsky. I asked if he is reading Russian literature for a particular class, and he replied that he is reading it for his own pleasure. I was quite astounded—how many thirteen-year-old boys pick up Russian classic literature “just for fun”? Tom’s favorite thing to read is literature, especially historical fiction. He likes to read about different topics in his social studies book, a class which he said is his favorite subject in school. He said he likes historical fiction because it is a way of “linking the past to the present.” I asked Tom where he gets the books that he reads—does he go to the library either in town or at school? He does get books from the library, but, if he knows it is a book he will want to reread, he said, “If I like it, I buy it! I like going to Borders or Barnes and Noble.” I asked Tom how much time he spends on reading for school and doing homework each night. He said it depends on the assignment, and it can vary anywhere from twenty minutes per night to two hours or longer if he has a paper to write. When asked about math, he said he gets good grades but he does not like the subject.

Both of Tom’s older sisters, especially sixteen-year-old Kendall, are avid readers. Kendall, in fact, enjoys reading aloud to Tom, a ritual they started when she was only eight years old and he was five. They have enjoyed the Tolkien trilogy together as well as the last two Harry Potter books, although both have read them independently as well. Tom said he reads about one to two books each week, depending on what else he has to read for school. He estimates that he reads about three to four books per month and approximately 45 to 50 books per

year, although in the summer he spends more time outside than he does reading books. He also reads a few magazines, especially those that relate to computer games, another hobby he thoroughly enjoys. He said if it is not a required reading for school, he usually gets ideas from his sisters or his mom.

I asked Tom what is the best book he ever read and why. He paused and said he would have to think about that because “there have been so many good books that I have read!” He later came back and said he really liked a book called *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L’Engle. He said he read this book many times and when I asked why he enjoyed it so much he said, “I don’t know; it’s weird. It’s about the fifth dimension, you know, science fiction, and I just thought it was really good.”

Tom does not watch very much television. He states if he had to estimate how many hours per week he watches television, it would be only about three to four hours per week, maybe a little more on the weekends. He said on Friday nights, his family occasionally rents a movie that they watch together. His sisters are swimmers on the high school team and all three children are in the school band or orchestra, so some of their evenings and weekends are spent attending swim meets and concerts. Practice for these activities also takes precedence over watching television. When asked if he reads about people or programs he watches on television, Tom replied that he relies “more on his sources for reading from ‘word of mouth,’ either from my sisters or from my mom, not necessarily TV.” He doesn’t watch the news on television, but, when asked if he reads the newspaper, he said he likes to read the front and back pages of the *Chicago Tribune*. He also said he reads articles in more detail if “there is anything important happening, but I don’t read the weather and news like that.” On occasion, he will read the sports section, but again, “only if it is something big or good.” His parents just canceled their subscription to *The Daily Herald*, which has caused controversy in their house, because Tom and his sister liked to have their mother read “the ‘day in history’ section” to them. He said he hopes they will renew their subscription again so they can keep up this tradition.

Tom had some incredibly insightful comments to make when I asked him “How important do you think

reading is?" He said he believes it is "pretty important because it informs people and it is one of the main activities in the world—without it, we would be lost!" He went on to state that "you would not even be able to use a computer if you couldn't read." When asked how important reading is to him, he replied, "Very important because my life, school, is centered around it—it basically is my life right now. Without reading, I would not be able to do anything and it would be pretty boring." I found this response to be quite refreshing from a thirteen-year-old boy. Many other teenage boys that I know would probably say the exact opposite, that they would rather be doing anything other than reading because they find it "boring." I may not be too far off base with this thought because when asked if his friends like to read he said, "Some of them, but not most of them." He and his friends never talk about books "unless it is in class." I asked Tom if his friends have read the Harry Potter books, and he said no. He said he gets frustrated because his school has an AR (accelerated reader) program, and he knows some kids that "cheat" because they just watch the movie and do not read the books. He went a great deal into the AR program, stating there are lists of books in the library and students can read as many as they like each quarter, and they receive points after taking a test about the book. Points apparently can roll over from each quarter. Last year, they kept track by the number of pages that a student read; however, this year, they are focusing on comprehension instead of the number of pages read, and Tom prefers this current system.

Tom is somewhat modest when it comes to his abilities. I asked if he would like to be a better reader and he said, "Yes, I'd like to increase my vocabulary." I found him to be very well-spoken and articulate for his age, so this led to me to my next question: "When you are reading and come across a word you do not know, what do you do?" I also asked him how often he uses a dictionary. He said in school if he doesn't know a word, he will ask his teacher, but recently, he has felt embarrassed because he asked her about some words that he felt she herself could not define, such as "existentialism." He said he went to the library and found a book on the subject so he could learn more about it himself. He

said, while reading, if he does not know a word and does not have a dictionary, he tries to figure out what it means based on the context of the sentence. Tom said his language arts teacher told him, when she was young, she put a check mark next to all of the words she looked up in the dictionary. He found that to be quite amusing.

As Tom is such a well-read student, we spent quite a bit of time discussing books that we have read in common. I asked him if he knows much about common fairy or folk tales, and other classics of children's literature. The first thing that came to mind for him was *Cinderella*. His family has all of the Disney movies of the classic fairy tales and they have also read many of these stories. He said he enjoys folk tales of the North American Native Indians, especially things like "the explanation for rain and how things came to be." He also named among his favorite classics *Tom Sawyer*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and *The Scarlet Letter*. He said he really enjoys reading plays, but he prefers when they read them aloud in class. Each student is assigned a role, and he feels it is much more enjoyable to read plays in that manner. Tom also had read a great deal of mythology for the accelerated reader program, as well as from recommendations from his sister. Of interest, he said that many times in his classes, when a book is assigned as required reading, it turns out to be one he has already read! As he is such a voracious reader, this certainly was not surprising to me.

Although I interviewed my "younger" reader first, it is interesting to look back over his answers after having spent time with a more advanced student to see if perhaps Christian is on the same path that led Tom to his love of reading. Christian told me he likes to read books or magazines. He and his mom make at least one weekly trip to the public library to get new books. He also likes to play computer games at the library. He has a series of chapter books at home called the Magic Tree Books that they read together daily as well. He subscribes to *Highlights* magazine and likes to do the "search and finds."

Christian states he likes to read, but his favorite subject in school is math. Of interest, his mother, who was present during our interview, states she was not a very good student when it came to math; however, this

was his father's best subject, and she feels Christian gets his excellent math skills from him. His math abilities were quite evident when I asked him how much he reads for school and he asked me, "in percentage?" I thought this was quite perceptive for a seven-year-old to be asking about percentages. I do not recall learning about that in math myself until the sixth grade! He also was able to calculate in his head when I asked him about how many books he reads in a week, month, and year. He reads about two to three books per week, about ten per month, and about 120 per year. He said he does silent reading and guided reading at school. Each day, his teacher reads aloud to the class, and then about one hour later, the students read "independently." I thought it was fairly impressive that he was able to effectively use an adverb at such a young age instead of making a statement such as "reading on our own."

When asked if he enjoys reading and if yes, why, Christian replied, "Yes, because it is fun. I like reading the words and looking at the pictures. It's better if you can read the words because then you can imagine the pictures." He did readily admit, however, that if he were given a choice, he would rather play outside than read, stating, "I don't know why, I just would!" Christian and his family moved from a large condominium building about two years ago that mainly consisted of older residents. He was the only child living in the entire building. They moved to a home in a cul-de-sac where there are many children his age, and he enjoys his newfound freedom to play outdoors with his friends. Therefore, I can clearly understand why he may prefer to play outdoors instead of reading, especially at the age of seven.

Every night before he goes to bed, Christian's parents read to him, especially his mother, but on occasion, his father will also share some time with him and read him a story. When he was very young, they also had a tape player with nursery rhymes and stories meant to lull a baby to sleep. When asked what is the best book he ever read, Christian, much like Tom, could not come up with an answer right away, claiming he has read many good books. He later came back to this and told me what he really likes best is when his dad has read *101 Dalmatians* to him as that was his favorite story when he was a child. He said his dad even named all of his dogs

Queenie after the dog in the movie, and that he had three dogs all named Queenie because he liked the story so much! Christian said he and his dad want to get a dog and name it Queenie IV, but his mom wants to wait until he is older and will be able to take care of the dog. He said they are working on her to change her mind!

Just as he would usually prefer to play outside, if given a choice between reading and watching television, Christian would prefer to watch TV. He said he probably watches a total of sixteen to seventeen hours per week, more on the weekends than on school nights. He also has many videos and DVDs that he enjoys watching. He does sometimes seek out books and especially magazines about characters he sees in movies or on television, such as Harry Potter, Arthur, and the Power Rangers. He has never read the newspaper, stating, "I'm just a kid!"

When asked how important he believes reading to be, Christian replied, "It's really important to me because from reading, you get smarter. You learn about new things." He said some of his friends like to read, and he does talk to his friends about books, especially his neighbors, twins Rocco and Valentina. On occasion, the three will go to the library together, and, if it is cold or rainy outside, they will sit down and read a book together. Christian does admit, however, that when the three of them go to the library, they like to play on the computer because his friends do not have a computer at home. He did point out that it is important to be able to read because "for some of the computer games, you have to be able to read." I asked him if his baby-sitters ever read to him. I was curious in making a comparison to Tom's life, as he has always had his sisters there to watch him when his parents are out, and they enjoy reading to him. Christian states that his two main baby-sitters, Beth and Kate, bring books from home that they read to him, and their parents own a boat together. In the summer, the girls also bring books that they read to Christian while on the boat. He said he really likes that when he gets tired after swimming or being in the sun for too long.

When asked, Christian said he would like to be a better reader. He said he started to read in first grade, but in kindergarten, they did read some sight words and books with pictures where they had to "make up a story." He wants to be a better reader because he knows people

who are “really good and they are better readers. I want to be like them, I guess.” I asked if he likes fairy tales and he said he remembers *Little Red Riding Hood* and *The Three Little Pigs*. As far as folk tales are concerned, he told me that in school that week, they read about how Thanksgiving started, and he thinks that probably could be a folk tale. As far as children’s classics are concerned, he was given *Charlotte’s Web* for his birthday and his dad has been reading it to him. He also really likes Dr. Seuss books, especially *Yertle the Turtle*, which was his mother’s favorite book. He also said he just saw the movie *The Cat in the Hat* the day that we talked and he “really, really liked it!”

As Christian is an only child, I am curious if anyone reads to him, other than his parents, teachers, and baby-sitters. Tom is such a voracious reader and I wonder if it is the influence of his older sisters, who are such excellent readers and students, and what impact or difference not having siblings could make on a student such as Christian. He said he goes to a park district “camp” program after school for forty-five minutes to an hour each day, until his mom picks him up after work. The counselors read at least one story to the kids every day. He also said there are many books at camp that the kids can read at any time, but “no one usually does—we just play.” His mother pointed out that he has not yet spent a winter at this camp program and perhaps when it gets colder outside, kids will want to stay in and read. He said he would “think about it.” I asked him if his Grandma and Grandpa like to read to him. He said sometimes, but he really likes to read to them to show them how much he has learned in school.

Many parallels can be found in Tom’s and Christian’s reading habits. Both boys are exceptionally bright and perceptive. They both feel that reading is fun and important. Their parents have stressed the importance of reading and started to read to them at a very early age. The influence and input of others, from either parents, siblings, teachers, or baby-sitters, is vital for a student to develop a love of reading. Tom may be at a slight advantage over Christian in that he has older sisters who act as mentors and recommend many of the books that he reads. Christian, however, clearly has formed a solid foundation in that reading is an established part of his

daily routine. His parents and friends, as well as teachers and librarians, can help guide him in making reading selections. It has been interesting to learn from Tom about his reading history and habits in elementary school and to compare his experience with that which Christian is currently undergoing in school. Both boys are articulate, and reading certainly has contributed to their vocabulary and learning. I am sure their love of reading will continue to grow as they press onward in their education and become critical thinkers and productive members of our society. Perhaps both of these boys will be mentors and examples for their peers and spread their love of reading and learning!

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Evaluation: *Diane carved out twice the work for herself by interviewing Tom as well as Christian, but her dedication resulted in a doubly insightful essay about the boys’ reading habits.*

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# The Hodag Country Festival

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Jocelyn Engle

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Trygve Thoreson

Assignment:

Compose a narrative essay in response to  
E.B. White's "Once More to the Lake."

E.B. White wrote a vivid essay "Once More to the Lake" in which he seemed to be living a dual existence as a father in the present and as a son in the remembered life of the past. He takes his son back to a place he visited often as a child, and years had gone by before he returned. Many things about the ageless lake and its surroundings had not changed. But then he starts noticing the differences and becomes quite disappointed, even annoyed. There were no shouts and cries of the other campers when he arrived in his car and parked under the tree. The nervous sound of the outboard motors replaced the quiet purring of the inboard motors. There was a little more Coca-Cola in the store and a little less Moxie and sarsaparilla. In the end, while he is apathetically watching his son put on his icy cold trunks to go swim in the lake, he realizes he has no desire to join him. At that moment, when he says, "As he buckled the swollen belt suddenly my groin felt the chill of death," he consciously acknowledges that he can never go back in time (84). Time marches on, and our memory is the only bridge that links us to yesterday.

There is a saying in Spanish that says it best: "Platano maduro no vuelve o verde – El tiempo que se va, no vuelve." This doesn't translate well to English but it basically means that a ripe banana cannot turn back to green, and time that is gone does not return.

When I was thirteen, my mom and dad and my very best friend, Devon, went on our first of many trips to the Hodag Country Festival. It wasn't our first trip to Rhinelander, Wisconsin, because I had cousins there and we visited on occasion; but this was our first time experiencing the festival. The Hodag is a legendary lizard-like beast that different townspeople had claimed they had seen over the years; hence, the name of the festival. My dad had made the Hodag seem so real, describing the beast as a 185-pound lizard that had a head too large for its body. He said it had large fangs, green eyes, and horns growing from its temples. He told us that the back of the beast was covered with spikes that led to a powerful tail. As my dad drove down the highway telling his stories, Devon and I would stare out the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of the Hodag. We never did. But that did not ruin our trip in the least bit. We were thirteen and care-free. We had no bills to pay, no job to go to, no homework to finish, and a weather report that promised three days of sunshine.

The first day of the festival, many people would try and get out to the campgrounds as early as possible to get a good seat. My mother, Old Reliable, rarely left our designated area, where we set up our lawn chairs, blankets, and coolers. We could shed whatever clothing and/or belongings there by her side and take comfort knowing they would be there when we returned. Our shoes were usually the first to go; by the third day, when the ground was a blanket of debris, we kept our shoes on. Our biggest dilemma at the festival was which food stand to visit first. People would walk by with an ear of corn, butter smeared around their lips and on their cheeks. But then on our way to get sweet buttery corn, someone would walk by with sugar-coated funnel cake, and we would search for that stand instead. All the while, country music filled the air, prompting the people to dance a little as they walked through the crowd. Conway Twitty was still alive, and Reba McEntyre was just getting started in her music career. Local bands would play in the early afternoon, and the higher paid performers would play in the evening. I always thought the better performances should be in the daytime while people were still sober enough to enjoy them. As intoxicated as the some of the people became, I never once, in all the years I attended the festival, witnessed a fight. People entertained each other by dancing in the pathways, or even on

## The Hodag Country Festival

their coolers. It was interesting to see the clothing (or lack thereof) people would wear: feathered hats and bathing suit tops, cut-off shorts, and cowboy boots. Even when it rained, which it often did, in spite of the weatherman's report, the show would go on. People would simply cover themselves with a garbage bag. Groups of people had sheets of plastic; others welcomed the rain and splashed through the puddles. Once, I even saw a man being pulled through the mud in a rocking lawn chair. I think he made one too many trips to the Budweiser stand, but maybe not. People can have fun without drinking. Anyway, the sun would eventually shine again and dry us all off.

Through the years, there were certain people that always went back to the festival; more than just your immediate family spending the weekend together, it was revisiting friends year after year. Dave, who had a motorboat, invited us to go water-skiing. We went. Ben was Dave's cousin who went with us, and he was quite funny. There was Don and Karen, the couple from Kenosha, Wisconsin, who parked their camper on the campgrounds and would always welcome us in. John, the guy that mastered riding the mechanical bull, would return faithfully year after year.

For whatever reason, there developed a void in our Hodag Country Festival tradition. Devon went to college; I got married and started my family. My mom and dad were busy traveling to other countries and areas of our own country. Basically, life took us all down separate paths.

A degree in marketing and a few kids later, Devon and I had a crazy idea to take our husbands up to Rhinelander and share with them our childhood memory of the Hodag Country Festival. We decided to take our car and split the cost of the gasoline. Devon and I were used to being together for long periods of time without annoying one another, but we forgot to take into consideration there were two other people involved. Jay, Devon's husband, asked me to not polish my nails in the car because the smell was making him ill. I figured that it was my car, and I was going to finish the job I had started. Jay figured he would turn off the air conditioning and roll down the window to let out the fumes. Nail polish does not apply very well with the wind blowing

on it, nor could I see what I was doing with my hair whipping wildly in my face. This beginning was not a good one. I missed my dad's stories about the Hodag and comments and corny jokes he made as we traveled along. Every time we would come to the town of Oshkosh, it never failed, he would say, "We're in Oshkosh, b'gosh, Josh."

When we arrived at the festival, everything appeared to be the same except the crowd had doubled, maybe even tripled, making it more difficult to get a good seat. The food stands were set up the same, but the prices of the food were higher and the quantity was less. The mechanical bull was no longer there; someone was hurt, and they had to remove it. Alan, my husband, did not care for my old friend Dave, and didn't think Ben was funny at all. Jay informed us that he hated country music and listened to his Walkman. I asked Devon if she told him previously that it was a "country" festival. Yes, she had. It wasn't as easy asking Jay and Alan, as it was my mother, to watch our belongings while we skipped off to the food and beer stands. Maybe our things would be there when we got back, maybe they wouldn't; most likely, Jay and Alan would not. I longed for my mother, Old Reliable, who didn't care how long we were gone or how many boys that we smiled at. My mother, the lady with the purse that always seemed to have a dollar or two in it, and her existence at the festival, meant much more to me than I had ever realized. I didn't care what big star was performing that night; I wanted to go home!

We made it through the weekend and everyone survived, but the days of the Hodag Country Festival, as Devon and I had experienced them and once cherished them, were over and never to return. Ah, yes, the chill of death.

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Ed. Arthur Eastman, et al. 7th ed. New York: Norton, 1998.  
79-84

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Evaluation: *Jocelyn selects details deftly in this heartfelt but understated tribute to her mother.*

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## Two Views of Charles Manson and The Family: Oo-ee-oo

Malinda V. Fields

Course: Literature 217 (Crime Fiction)

Instructor: Kurt Hemmer

### Assignment:

Write an essay arguing whether you feel John Gilmore's *Manson: The Unholy Trail of Charlie and the Family* or Ed Sanders' *The Family does a better job of revealing Manson and the family.*

Both John Gilmore's book *Manson: The Unholy Trail of Charlie and the Family* and Ed Sanders' book *The Family* have one thing in common: they both portray a world far deeper and more bizarre than what was shown in Vincent Bugliosi's *Helter Skelter*. Bugliosi's book does not do justice to the true complexity of Charles Manson and the Family. Although all these authors interviewed Manson face to face, each tells a different story in a different light. Where Gilmore writes with a dark seriousness to impress the situation on the reader, Sanders tells his story almost in a documentary style, but with added flippancy and contempt for his criminal subjects that is a refreshing change. Sanders' book also has a large wealth of Family facts and trivia that may make it seem to be the superior of the two Family histories, but this very plethora of connections and coincidences can confuse and befuddle the reader, thus making it the inferior. I believe that Gilmore's book gives the reader a better understanding of who Manson and his Family were, despite having fewer facts as compared to Sanders' book.

As Graham Greene said, "One's file, you know, is

never quite complete; a case is never really closed, even after a century, when all the participants are dead" (qtd. in Sanders xi), and so it is with Manson and his Family. Only a crime fiction author could write a completely detailed story about a crime: not so with a true crime author. Gilmore appears to have had taken this into account when he wrote his book. He incorporated only verifiable facts and tended to leave out rumors. Sanders, on the other hand, made use of the rumors, coincidences, and his hunches to weave his own version. Unfortunately, his hunches and theories lead to the degradation of the authoritative status his book has been given. For example, Sanders theorizes about William Garretson's role in the murders on Cielo Drive:

In spite of inconsistencies, his answers regarding his innocence were shown on the polygraph to be truthful, so Garretson was eliminated as a suspect. The matter of William Garretson is far from cleared up, however. There remains the possibility that he was hypnotized, drugged and left at the murder site as a fall guy. (Sanders 245-46)

While the possibility exists that Garretson was left as a fall guy, it is unlikely this theory is reality due to the fact that no one in the Family tried to shift blame onto the hapless Garretson.

Another strike against Sanders is his seemingly incessant conspiracy theories, involving the likes of "The Toy Man," pornography rings, Satanism, and cover-ups by relatives of the victims, and, disappointingly, yet predictably, the government. While these theories and conjectures can open the reader's mind to a world of "what-ifs," they are a big distraction and seem to not add to the total picture. Gilmore does not ignore the Satanist angle, but incorporates what he learned through various interviews to explain, for example, why Bobby Beausoleil thought he was Satan:

Experimental filmmaker and writer Kenneth Anger, proclaimed a "warlock" by his peers, was presenting a Winter Solstice at a rented theater on Haight....Astrologer Robert Aiken recalls, "Kenneth was planning a new film which he was calling *Lucifer Rising*, and in a room that contained close to a thousand people milling around, he went straight through the gathering and stood in front of

Bobby Beausoleil. He picked him out “as though by sight (or) by destiny,” Anger would later claim, and stared at Bobby and said very loudly, “You are *Lucifer!*” (Gilmore 41)

Another striking difference between the books is the areas of concentration paid by the authors on the Family timeline. Sanders, for example, concentrates on the aftermath of the trial, a sort of macabre “Where Are They Now?” exposé on the Family remnants. While interesting, I feel that this perpetuates the Family’s infamous stardom, and further lodges them into our society’s cultural fabric. Gilmore mentions a brief synopsis of post-trial Family, and ends his book with Manson stating his opinion to people whose waning attention spans reflect the waning sensationalism around his case:

“I’ll be out of here,” Charlie says with a twisted grin, “one way or another. It’s just time. Time. That’s all it is, and I have all the time in the world. They can’t kill me, you see. They’ve never been able to kill me. Oh, they try – Bugliosi tried – they *try* to gas me or stick a knife in me and they try to light me on fire, but I’m not gonna die because *they* want me to die....” (Gilmore 177)

Gilmore, however, concentrated more on the events leading up to the murders, such as the aforementioned, more in-depth look at Beausoleil’s past. Gilmore also delves into Manson’s past and shines an unlikely sympathetic light on his institutional upbringing, and gives the reader some insight to the possible causes of Manson’s derangement:

His mother was as much a stranger as the different foster parents, administrators, street-walkers, policemen and sleeping tramps in all-night movie houses. In most of the rooms where his mother took him to live, the boy was the brunt of aggravations, and an eyesore to his mother’s visitors – “the johns and tramps she’d drag in off the street,” (Manson) says... “He just didn’t fit in anywhere,” a relative says. “Going back and forth like that he didn’t have any practical sense of where he belonged...” (Gilmore 8-9)

Surrounding the Family case is the feeling that there were many not-so-famous people who fell victim to the Family’s twisted whims. Gilmore tended to focus on the

Hinman, Tate and Labianca murders. Given the savagery and carelessness for human life exhibited by the Family, I find it hard to believe that these were their only murders. Additionally, during the trial, the claim was made that there were many more murders that the Family was responsible for. Because of this, I tend to see the theories presented by Sanders as valid. Various instances were presented of runaways and drifters turning up dead around the Family’s vicinity. Also presented were former Family associates who had suspiciously untimely deaths, such as that of Joel Pugh, Sandra Good’s husband, and Christopher Zero, who “committed suicide” playing Russian roulette with a fully loaded gun while in the arms of another Family member. These murders were perhaps a little too convenient for the Family to be summarily dismissed as coincidence.

Coincidence or not, either Sanders’ book or Gilmore’s, one is left with a dreadful “oo-ee-oo” feeling that can only be inspired by the Family. Because of the shock value, the perpetuation of their deeds by authors such as Sanders, or perhaps by those who do not truly know who they adulate, Manson and his Family have wormed their way into pop culture references, as seen in various television shows and literary works. Albeit infamously, they have achieved what most of us desire: to not be insignificant, to not be forgotten with the passage of time. Because of this, I feel the best punishment for Manson and the Family is simply to be forgotten. Sanders, in my opinion, keeps the myth of Manson alive with new information and new conspiracy theories with each additional edition of his book. Gilmore, on the other hand, states the facts, and lets the Family go, as poet Dylan Thomas once wrote, “gently into that good night.”

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Evaluation: *Malinda’s paper is an insightful analysis of two works that ostensibly cover the same material but come from very different perspectives.*

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# Sick Building Syndrome

MaryJo Franciskovich

Course: Interior Design 100 (Interior Design Theory)

Instructor: Dianne Batzkall

Assignment:

*Research, define, and explain sick building syndrome. Identify why interior designers should be concerned about this topic*

Every product we use begins as a piece of the earth, whether it is considered plant, mineral, or animal. It is our individual personal responsibility to look at the methods by which these products are processed, distributed, and put into use. The impact of certain manufacturing, processing, and distribution practices can be harmful to all of us, individually and as a collective society. Once we receive these products and put them to use, what impacts they will have on us rarely crosses our minds, and once we discard these same products, we again rarely take the time to consider the impact on our earth.

My focus in writing this paper is to provide information about possible toxic exposures that we may receive when we install and use the products we put into our homes and other buildings, and what can be done to minimize or remove the negative environmental results. Interior design is, without question, involved with this subject, as many of the processes, installations, materials, and furnishings chosen for a client may pose a threat to them, rather than solve a problem.

Sick building syndrome and building related illness were the environmental buzzwords of the 1990's. For a chemically sensitive segment of the society, education and research on these subjects can hold possible explanations for the chronic discomfort that has been plaguing them. Since Americans spend an average of 90 percent of their time indoors, whether at home, in the

workplace, or at an entertainment spot, perhaps even the less chemically sensitive are affected by this syndrome.

"Sick building syndrome" is a term used to describe situations in which the occupants of a building experience acute health and comfort effects that appear to be linked to time spent in a particular building or room, but with which no specific illness or cause can be identified. In the 1970's, health care providers were faced with a growing number of people coming to them with complaints such as headaches, allergies or allergic-like reactions, dizziness, nausea, irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, chest tightness, difficulty concentrating, and sensitivity to odors. Interest grew as these people discovered that their symptoms improved when they were removed from the room or building that seemed to cause their physical reactions. This is the determining factor. When one or more persons become "sick" when inside the room, but have symptoms that disappear with reduced exposure to the room, it can be determined that there is some form of contaminant or pollutant in the room. Something in that particular building or room has affected the indoor air quality.

World Health Organization (WHO) research suggests that 30% of new and remodeled office blocks in developed countries showed signs of sick building syndrome and that 10%-30% of occupants are affected. Numerous studies conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency over the past 25 years have shown measurable levels of over 107 known carcinogens in modern offices and homes, resulting from the energy-efficient, closed-design window and building structures that have been made necessary by the developing energy crisis atmosphere. The fact that concerns most doctors and scientists today is the unknown effects that could occur in humans over long periods of time, through contact with low dosages of these cancer-causing compounds that are found in modern offices and homes.

The syndrome affects individuals in different ways. We all differ in our sensitivities to foods, medicines, and outdoor air pollutants, and our immune systems each function differently, so not everyone entering a polluted space and breathing its air will feel sick, yet others breathing in that same space may have a severe reaction.

### Common Contaminants

Some main sources of chemical indoor pollutants are emissions from building materials, outdoor air, the human body and human activities, furnishings, appliances, and use of consumer products. There may be "hot spots" in a building, most likely in a home, such as one room that particularly affects people because of its pollution, and the list of contaminants is long and getting longer. The number one concern for homeowners today is a natural gas called radon. There is currently a test available to measure for radon in the home. Malfunction or inappropriate use of heating devices also can produce pollution such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and sulfur dioxide. These can come from unvented kerosene and gas space heaters, wood stoves, fireplaces, and gas stoves. Easy-to-use tests to measure carbon monoxide levels in the home are also available.

*Biological Contaminants*—Dander, dust mites, and molds are carried by animals and people into and throughout homes and buildings. High humidity; flooding; and inadequate ventilation and exhaust in heating and air conditioning systems, humidifiers, and dehumidifiers are all sources of biological air pollution. Bacteria, pollen, and viruses are also included in this category. They may breed in stagnant water that has accumulated in ducts, humidifiers and drain pans, or where water has collected on ceiling tiles, carpeting, or insulation. Molds and fungi occur on walls, flooring, and ceilings in warm, humid climates. Condensation builds as the surface temperatures are cooled by air conditioning in the surrounding air. If warm, moist, outdoor air infiltrates into the room, condensation and dampness occur, developing fungi and molds, and they begin to colonize. In the past few years, there has been growing attention from the media about the subject of toxic mold growth in the home. Because mold is virtually everywhere, it has become an issue of great debate among homeowners, contractors, and insurance companies.

*Volatile Organic Compounds*—Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted as gasses at room temperature and at extreme temperatures from certain solids and liquids. Some of these include formaldehyde, methylene chloride, pesticides, solvents, cleaning chem-

icals, benzene, and perchloroethylene. Some indoor concentrations of VOCs can be ten times greater than those found outdoors.

Some buildings that had foam insulation installed in the 1970's contained urea-formaldehyde, which is no longer used. It has also been banned in most areas as a chemical ingredient for wood floor finishes. Formaldehyde can also be found in plywood, particle board, finishes, paneling, fiberboard, and some backings and adhesives for carpeting and treating of textiles. It is classified as a human carcinogen, and even short-term exposure can be fatal. Methylene chloride is in household products such as paint strippers and can be metabolized to carbon monoxide. VOCs can also be emitted through carpeting, adhesives, upholstery, manufactured wood products, and copy machines. Even low to moderate levels of exposure to multiple VOCs may produce acute reactions.

*Heavy Metals*—Lead has been removed as an ingredient in paint since the 1940s and was banned as an ingredient in 1978. Mercury was removed from indoor latex paint in 1990 and from outdoor latex paint in 1991. These should be considered mostly when remodeling or rehabbing an older home or building.

### Solutions

Increasing the ventilation rates and air distribution in existing residential areas is often a cost-effective way to reduce indoor pollutant levels. At the very least, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems should be designed to meet ventilation standards in local building codes. If there are strong pollutant sources, air may need to be vented directly to the outside.

To keep an existing building healthy, homeowners can make sure the heating and air conditioning system is maintained and operating properly. Filters should be cleaned, and the system should be inspected on a regular basis. Regular professional cleaning of the duct work is recommended, especially if the home is older, or if there has been new construction in the area.

The removal or modification of the pollutant or its source is the most effective approach for solving a known indoor air problem, when this solution is practicable. This can be accomplished through replacing water-stained ceiling tiles and carpets, banning smoking

or providing a separately ventilated room, venting contaminants to the outside, storing paints, solvents, pesticides, and adhesives in closed containers and using them in well-ventilated areas or low- or no-occupancy situations, and allowing time for new building materials or newly remodeled areas to gas-off before occupancy.

Also, air cleaning can be a useful addition to source control and ventilation. Air filters are effective at removing some, but not all, of the pollution. Furthermore, with humidity regulated between 30 and 50 percent, molds cannot grow.

New construction areas and remodeled areas can be kept healthy through the following:

- Dry any construction materials that are wet or moist before sealing the building's structural components.
- Use permeable wall coverings (permanence greater than 5 perms), and seal surfaces of envelope and interior walls that may be subject to water or moisture damage.
- Avoid cooling the interior space below the mean monthly outdoor temperature. This reduces the likelihood of condensation on interior surfaces.
- Before purchasing or occupying a new residence or building, inspect the structural components for water damage and fungal growth.
- Maintain a constant air flow in the case of new carpet, draperies, or furniture; off-gasses from a new carpet will often dissipate over a three- to twelve-month period.

## Conclusion

There are very few tests to evaluate the possible synergistic effects that occur when we combine chemicals in our food and water and when we allow them to be emitted into the air we breathe. The few studies that have been done show that such effects dramatically increase the risks to us of sickness and disease. Scientists do not yet understand enough to recommend solutions so that regulations can be formed to guide us. We are, at the present time, still involved in finding ways to measure, test, and supply by trial and error some possible solutions to correct the problems with the air that surrounds us, in any space we occupy. When professionals use and test chemicals in industrial settings, they are

subject to strict health and safety codes, yet we use these same chemicals at home without guidance or restriction. As further research is done, we are learning that many of the household products we use and believed were safe are actually considered toxic. At this time in our lives, it is necessary to research for ourselves and continue to learn all that we can as we decide to build, remodel, or refurnish our living spaces.

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Evaluation: *The paper gives a good overview of an important topic.*

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# George Willard's Development

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*Stephanie Gan*  
Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)  
Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:  
*Write a literary analysis.*

George Willard is the main dynamic character in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. He is the primary recurring character who matures from a haughty boy to a more humble adolescent on the verge of manhood. Through the experiences in his earlier stages of development by vicariously learning and assimilating others' advice in "Hands," "The Philosopher," "Mother," and "Nobody Knows," immaturely and insecurely dealing with women and love in "The Thinker," "Awakening," and "The Teacher," and finally, showing signs of mature development in "Death" and "Sophistication," he aptly handles his conflicting emotions.

In his early development, he passively listens to others' advice and learns through their experiences. In "Hands," he learns about the round and dynamic character of Wing Biddlebaum, who suffers emotional and physical trauma at the mercy of societal conventions for touching his younger students. From perceiving Wing's solitary life, George learns the detrimental psychological effects that isolation has on a person. Wing's round and dynamic nature emphasizes his pitiful state.

His round character is depicted in his kind and gentle nature. Ironically, it is this tender nature which makes society persecute and ridicule him. His complex nature is depicted in his shy, repressed, nervous, and neurotic behavior. He illustrates very human emotions and shows that he is multifaceted. He wrongly blames himself and holds himself accountable for his accusations, when in fact, the town from which he escaped misinterpreted his actions. His isolation not only takes place emotionally, but also physically, as depicted by his life spent in a dilapidated house on the outskirts of town. He sagaciously chides George, "You are destroying yourself...you are afraid of dreams. You want to be like others in town" (Anderson 11). Wing chastises George for being a conformist and implies that he should pursue his dreams without concern for others' opinions.

In addition, George further witnesses the detrimental effects of isolation through Doctor Parcival's cynical views in "The Philosopher." Doctor Parcival expresses himself in such a way as to develop the seed of cynicism that Wing planted in George. The doctor expresses his deep fear of anonymity through his self-aggrandizement. He fabricates his notoriety in Chicago as if he were a murderer in order to draw attention to himself. In many situations, he craves acknowledgement in order to be recognized as a palpable and tangible being. He boasts to George that he intentionally did not save a child's life because he wants "men [to] get together in groups and talk of it...Everyone will get excited" (26). Obviously, he wants the townspeople to remember and notice him. George learns from Dr. Parcival's example that isolation can make an individual fanatical about receiving attention. In another instance, Doctor Parcival states, "You must pay attention to me" (26-7). His imploring words illustrate the need for social contact from any stranger, including George. Being a youthful member of society, George is an especially important person to whom Dr. Parcival can pass on his life experiences and attain a sense of usefulness in life. Furthermore, Doctor Parcival's round character culminates in his martyr complex at the end of the chapter. He philosophically states that "everyone in the world is Christ and they are all crucified....Don't you forget that" (27). Again, he is pleading with George to recognize his opinions and

essentially, his existence. More importantly, even though this declaration appears to be highly significant, Parcival's intentions are not genuine and sincere. Through his words, the narrator illustrates Parcival's narcissism. Because he lacks sufficient attention, he offers an ostentatious phrase which casts everyone as Christ-like. At least in his own perception, he believes that he suffers profoundly, like Christ, and in this moment, he seems to project his self-image upon all human life. Finally, Parcival's cynical attitude exerts a later influence on George's emotional being. The apathy that George feels toward women exemplifies this phenomenon.

In "Mother," George's budding independent nature is shown when he tells his mother that he plans to leave Winesburg. This scene is pivotal for George's development, because if he were to stay, his life would stagnate like the lives of the townspeople. She has ambivalent feelings toward her son. On the one hand, she wants to protect her son, yet she still wants to "see something...that had once been a part of herself recreated," and she does not want him to "become smart and successful either" (17). She does not have whole-hearted love for her son, because she has a morbid desire to see a neurosis develop in him, like that in her. Though she does not object to his leaving town and bettering himself, she still has the selfish and jealous desire to keep him at home and not nurture his inner aspirations. Her conflicting and paradoxical emotions illustrate her complex personality. Moreover, George learns from her example, like those of Wing Biddlebaum and Dr. Parcival, the emotionally debilitating effects of isolation and a lack of attention. During her youth, she wanted to become an actress; she had the flair to be dramatic. She intentionally chose an occupation that would automatically attract attention from others. Because she tries, but ultimately fails, to make others notice her through eccentric ways, she lives a lonely and destitute life. She is one example which George hopes not to follow, thus justifying his desire to leave Winesburg and pursue his individual development.

In "Nobody Knows," George experiences his own callous, immature outlook toward love. He has sex with Louise Trunnion, an "easy" girl, yet does not feel regret-

ful that he took advantage of her sexuality. He is not even concerned about the fact that he may have impregnated her. Feeling no sense of guilt, he takes comfort in the fact that "She hasn't got anything on me. Nobody knows..." (29). He does not take responsibility for his actions and rationalizes that if she were to try to trap him in a claim of paternity, he could easily dilute that claim by pointing to the other men with whom she has had sex. His feelings are illustrated not only overtly through his dialogue, but also through his physical action. Because Anderson ends the chapter with George walking away, George's feelings manifest themselves as if he is walking away from his problems and responsibilities. He regards Louise simply as a vehicle for his own gratification. His childish behavior allows himself to be ruled by lust rather than love.

In the middle stage of development, while George still exhibits immature behavior, he takes an active role in experiences that help him learn that love and life, in general, are very complicated. In "The Thinker," he regards love as a casual object that he can automatically and easily acquire. He acts pretentiously mature by smoking a pipe and boasts to his friend Seth Richmond, "I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to fall in love" (73). However, because of his immaturity, he thinks that a person can fall in love at will because love is rational. Contrary to his belief, love is irrational. If he were at this point to write a love story, as he is hoping to do, he would surely write a formulaic, overly sentimental, melodramatic love story.

In "Awakening," he wants to show his older lover, Belle Carpenter, that he has matured, though he still acts like a boy. Before he sees her, he "imagined himself a soldier clad in shining boots" (101). Like the love story he would write, he envisions a melodramatic image of himself that reflects his childish nature. When he meets Belle, he has a false and inflated feeling of self-importance and expects to impress her with his "maturity." He tells her that "'You'll find me different... You've got to take me for a man or let me alone'" (103). He is naïve in thinking that by simply verbalizing his sentiment, he has truly changed. In fact, he has not yet matured, as he professed, as Anderson highlights when "up and down the streets went the woman and the boy"

(103). Anderson emphasizes the disparity between the emotional states of the two people—mature and immature. As the older and more savvy person, Belle takes advantage of George in order to spite her boyfriend, Ed Handby. George has a man versus man conflict with Ed Handby. They get into a physical argument. Before George escorts Belle too far, Ed forcefully pushes George away and takes Belle from George. George feels humiliated and embarrassed, thinking that being “beaten seemed to be infinitely better than to be thus hurled ignominiously aside” (104). Through his experience with Belle, he “awakens” to the fact that women can be manipulative and that love is not always ideal. This second encounter with a woman allows him to experience pain as the recipient of deceitful love. Earlier, he used Louise Trunnion for his selfish lusts, but now, he is being used. Because of this turn of events, he begins to realize, on perhaps a semiconscious level, that it’s wrong and hurtful to take advantage of others. In effect, he needs to become part of the natural order of life in which one does not date older women. From this encounter, the culmination of his self-importance disintegrates, and he becomes humbled. Because he has gained humility from this experience, he will become a better, more realistic writer about love.

This value of humility is reinforced in “the Teacher.” In another man versus man conflict, George faces a third interaction with woman when he encounters his teacher, Kate Swift. Kate has romantic feelings for George, and, like him, is also confused and frustrated with her emotions. However, she cannot resist seeking George and giving into her desires. In the climactic scene, Ms. Swift deliberately approaches and seduces George with her sexuality. Unexpectedly, her “two sharp little fists began to beat on his face” and then “the school teacher had run away and left him alone” (91). This emotionally wrenching scene serves only to heighten George’s confusion: she appears to desire him, yet, at the same time, seems not to desire him. Once again, his inexperience with women leads to a sorely wounded ego and pride. He suffers from the internal conflict of wanting the woman but facing rejection. From this experience, he becomes more disillusioned with love and its many facets. “The Teacher” refers to

Kate not only as his normal school teacher but also as a bearer of vital life lessons. Her rejection teaches George that love, being ambiguous and complicated, is difficult to fathom. He discovers that love is no longer one-dimensional and straightforward, as he thought earlier in the novel. Through his own pain, George not only learns that it is not appropriate to take advantage of people, but he also feels more holy and empowered with the life lessons he gains through his experiences with Belle and Kate. These two characters greatly develop George as a dynamic character.

His emotional development culminates in the stories “Death” and “Sophistication.” In “Death,” George faces the internal conflict when he must deal with the conflicting feelings of his mother’s death. At first, he feels resentment toward her for causing him inconvenience in his daily life: “He was half angry at the turn of events [his mother’s death] that had prevented his going to [Helen]” (129). However, after seeing his mother, he regrets these selfish feelings. He feels denial, grief, and even slight resolution as he sees his mother’s body. After she has died, George definitely plans to leave Winesburg. From her example, George sees the ill effects of a person whose personal ambitions are not allowed to develop. His mother has stagnated and become unproductive as a result. Possibly in an effort to avoid this outcome, George resolves to leave Winesburg and fulfill his ambitions, and yet George seems not to be thinking only of himself here; instead, he appears heartbroken over another decent human being’s wasted potential and untapped life. Seeing her beautiful body and internally reflecting on her pitiful life, he evokes lament for his mother when he mutters to himself, ““The dear, the dear, oh the lovely dear”” (129). All his conflicting emotions between the joys with Helen and the extreme sadness from his mother’s death make him a stronger and more mature person.

In “Sophistication,” he is able to maturely handle his emotional feelings of lust and love for Helen. This chapter is crucial in George’s development. Because he can successfully control his lust for women and find respect for them, he does not sexually violate her or become physically intimate. Unlike his experiences with the previous women in his life, with Helen, “mutual

respect grew big" (136). He realizes that physical intimacy, in and of itself, is not indicative of disrespect; however, since he is leaving Winesburg, he understands that intimacy with Helen could only complicate his departure. As a result, he is able to understand Helen as a person, and not simply as a sexual object, because he has attained a balance between the two conflicting emotions of lust and love. Because of these experiences with his mother and with Helen, he demonstrates that he has matured. Nonetheless, simply because he has become wiser does not necessarily mean that he is more morally priest-like. He still has sexual feelings for women, but he is able to exert greater control over these emotions. By the end of the novel, he is capable of maturely handling life and his manhood, thus setting the stage for him to become an active and productive member of society.

When George leaves Winesburg, he does so with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he feels attached to the town, as he is an integral member of the community. On the other hand, he knows that he can only realize his goals if he leaves the town. In the final chapter entitled "Departure," George recollects fond memories of his youth in Winesburg. He remembers "Turk Smollet wheeling boards...Butch Wheeler the lamp lighter hurrying through the streets and holding a torch in his hand, and...Helen White standing by the window in the post office putting a stamp on an envelope" (138). He leaves the town with these small, yet significant events that reflect the depth with which he loves the town. He has no resentment or spite toward his hometown and its townpeople, as a child might feel. He feels conflicting emotions of happiness and sadness, a fact that reflects his maturation and development. Anderson's final commentary regarding George in this closing sentence of the novel serves only to reinforce his mixed feelings. As the train he is on leaves the station, "the town of Winesburg had disappeared and his life there had become but a background on which to paint the dreams of his manhood" (138). Anderson evokes a feeling of resolution and calmness in George's emotionally turbulent life. Thus, George's childhood and the lessons he learned will never fade or disappear from his life; rather, they will further enhance the experiences and challenges that he will face as he enters adulthood.

Overall, through the course of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, George Willard definitely exhibits his round and dynamic nature as he develops and matures as an individual. He has progressed from a naïve boy in "Hands," "the Philosopher," "Mother," and "Nobody Knows," to learning hardships of love in "The Thinker," "Awakening," and "The Teacher," and ultimately he gains insight into the complexities of life and love in "Death" and "Sophistication." His development is so revolutionary that he must leave his hometown in order to successfully progress into manhood. Though he leaves Winesburg with a bittersweet feeling, that part of his life will always remain with him.

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Evaluation: *This paper is outstanding, a virtual chronicle of the steady growth of Sherwood Anderson's hero in Winesburg, Ohio. Stephanie is painstaking, meticulous, ever-worried, and incredibly thorough. I love her for it.*

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# A Letter to Gabriel Conroy

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Laura Gross

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

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Assignment:

*I asked the students to write a letter to one of the characters in one of the works we'd read.*

*Laura wrote her letter to Gabriel Conroy, the protagonist (sort of) of James Joyce's "The Dead."*

Dearest Gabriel,

You mustn't worry over Gretta's feelings for Michael Furey. She was seventeen years old when he courted her—just a child, really. And how can children know what love is? Do you think, Gabriel, that dying for someone is love? Do you believe Gretta could have built a life with someone who lived as turbulently as Michael Furey? Men who have a whim to stand out in the rain all night do not make good husbands.

Besides, I know it's you Gretta loves. You don't believe me? Well, look at the way she teases you. She loves your quirks. And you love hers. You love that it takes Gretta "three mortal hours to dress herself." And even with Gretta's quirks—or perhaps because of them—she has a strong physical power over you, and if you would but yield to her power the way Michael did, you could save your marriage and help her to bury her past with her poor dead lover. Instead, you insist on battling a dead boy for her love, insist on trying to

master her moods. Allow her to master you for once, Gabriel. Allow yourself to give in to your lust for her the way you longed to on the Feast of the Epiphany.

Perhaps you still don't believe me. Perhaps you don't believe what you and Gretta feel for each other is love, that it's only a shadow of the emotion. No, my dear Gabriel, it is love. And it is possible for people to have been haunted by a past lover and still love another.

My husband knows of a college senior I knew when I was nineteen. Sam worked at a record store. He had eyes as green as your country and chin-length ringlets the color of honey. I fell under the spell of his emerald eyes and his smooth voice that rarely rose above a whisper. I had to lean toward him to hear him speak, and there I was leaning into his soft flannel shirt that smelled of cigarettes and pine needles. After his boss left for the night, we slow-danced to folk songs, most with lyrics about lost love or getting left behind.

Sam didn't die, but I made him fall for me simply by making him think I never fell for him. I played with his mind, Gabriel. I told him I'd meet him someplace and I never showed up. I wanted to hurt this beautiful creature simply because I had already fallen for him. I wanted to punish him because he was so beautiful. This is the sort of immature love Michael had for Gretta; he wanted to punish her for leaving him for the convent school, and he wanted to punish her for as long as she had a life to live.

The last time I held Sam, his body was as rigid as a marble statue. I left the store and watched from the street as his face crumpled into a wrinkled peach. His hands flew to his ears as if drowning the lyrics of lost love that had become the scripts of our lives.

Now Gabriel, do you really think, even with the depth of the feelings I had for Sam, that we could have built a life together based on what we felt? What do we know about love at the age of nineteen or seventeen? It's not love. It's desire. Burning passionate desire to be desired by someone. Do you think Sam and I knew each other? Do you think Michael knew Gretta in the way you do? Of course not. And you already know you can't love a woman without knowing her. Michael was a tortured, sad boy, and I believe Gretta feels guilt over what happened to him. She feels guilty for being alive

when he died for her. But you are alive inside, Gabriel. You can help Gretta to live again.

Yes, I get nostalgic when I smell cigarettes and pine needles, just as Gretta feels an intense sadness whenever she hears "The Lass of Aughrim." My guilt survives the biting winds of Lake Michigan just as Gretta's guilt survives the snow of Ireland. But Gretta and I have both moved on with our lives. You must believe that it's possible to build a life with another person even while you mourn someone else. Perhaps you never experienced such a feeling before as what Michael felt for Gretta, but don't call that love. Gretta feels intense guilt, but that's not the same emotion. You must remember, she still went to the convent school. She was ready to leave Michael Furey, and she did. She chose to be with you. I implore you, take her to Galway. Embrace her Irish roots. Then your wife will not seem such a mystery to you. Go see where she came from, Gabriel, and stop fighting the dead.

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Evaluation: *Maybe it's just me, but I feel this letter is (to risk sentimentality) beautiful: tender, instructive, deeply in touch with the insecurities plaguing the decent but emotionally awkward Gabriel. Most readers dismiss Gabriel as cold, unfeeling. Laura has a keener eye here, and a warmer heart. (It's too bad the character never received this letter.)*

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# Sitting on Fences

Kate Hendrickson

Courses: History 212 (Recent American History)  
and Literature 222 (Recent American Literature)  
Instructors: Tom DePalma and Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write a perspective paper from the vantage point  
of any person who lived in the United States  
in the era 1945-1974.*

Years and months had become weak, and  
people could push against them and wander  
back and forth in time.

—Leslie Marmon Silko, Ceremony

Hi, Mom. We *really* need to talk, but first let me explain. You know I've finally gotten around to going to college, and Mom, the experience has been exhilarating. Each new class has expanded my intellectual horizon and given me a sense of both fulfillment and expectation. This semester, I thought it would be interesting to take a linked course covering recent (post-World War II) history and literature—I even joked that it might be fun to learn what I might have missed while I was busy growing up and doing “my thing.” What I've learned has left me more than a little unsettled. You see, each week, after class, I felt as though the history I was learning about had no real relation to me in spite of having lived it, and the literature from the fifties and sixties might as well have been written by people from another planet, where their experiences produced a pain and anger unknown in my world. So, each week, after class,

I felt the need to investigate, to ask questions of family and of old friends who also grew up at exactly the same time and under the same circumstances. Eventually I realized that some old habits never die, like the one about examining my own conscience and then going to confession. And here's where you come in. You've never stopped being my friend, my guide, my moral compass, so I think you, more than anyone, can help me make some sense of my bewilderment—can help me make those years and months stronger so that the people and events within them can be stabilized and clarified in my mind.

Americans, in the summer of 1945, faced the future with mixed feelings: feelings of pride, confidence, and hope, but also feelings of fear—of the return of depression, of expanding Soviet power, and of a nuclear catastrophe.

—George Donelson Moss, *Moving On*

It seems that the only way to begin is at the beginning, which would have been after the so-called good war had ended. Historians have determined that while it was a time of great joy, hope and prosperity, it was also the beginning of tremendous political and social changes in America that were a direct result of the war experience. Okay. For me, that hindsight is brilliant, but I'll bet that those issues weren't even on a back burner in your life. You had married, survived the misery of both the Great Depression and the war, and were busy caring for seven of what would be your eight children. When the war ended, I was little more than a baby, but I remember being sick a lot, and you were always there and you always found a way to make me better, without antibiotics. And I so clearly remember the Christmas when Dad bought you your first automatic washer and dryer. The washer was front loading and had a window on the door. You brought your rocker downstairs and held me while we watched the clothes tumble. Of course, there was no way for me to know what it must have meant to you to sit down and hold your child while one machine washed and another dried the laundry. No more wringers and washboards. No more clotheslines in the basement in the winter. Come to think of it, you never did give up hanging the clothes out in the summer. Hmmm.

My memories are mostly quiet, happy ones about a simpler, happier time (or am I sporting the rose-colored glasses people often wear to look back at the good old days?). But Mom, even then, there were undercurrents that all was not perfect. Although we never heard you talk about the Cold War and the Russians and the Communists, I must have been in fourth or fifth grade when we started doing bomb drills in school. We were supposed to get under our desks with our backs to the windows and arms over our heads if we heard the civil defense sirens. It was scary to think about bombs and bomb shelters and how would we live after. The only thing I knew for sure was if I heard those sirens, I needed to get home to you—forget bomb drills! When I finally told you how worried I was, you immediately gave me your plan: We were to stay at school because you would come and get us and take us straight home and to the cellar which, by the way, would do very nicely for a bomb shelter, since it was already stocked. You must have been thinking about it, but you never said anything, at least to us. Did you and Dad wait until we went to bed to talk about it? In later years I remember you saying that there was no sense worrying about things we couldn't control. Was that your practical approach to problems, or was it your way of protecting us, making us feel safe?

And we did feel so safe. We were a working-class family cocooned within one of Chicago's Catholic parishes, with nuns for teachers and priests in charge of it all. Beyond our parish boundaries, we had a Catholic mayor and in a few short years, we would have a Catholic President. Were you living your version of the American Dream? At that time, and for most families we knew, it was a bit of a struggle to pay tuition for Catholic high schools, but you did it. All we kids had to do was work hard and do the best we could (straight A's were preferred), all we had to learn was the seven R's: reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, religion, responsibility, respect, and restraint, and the world as you foresaw it would be ours for the taking. Your children would be successful, and if everything went well, our generation would continue the tradition of having more than yours.

Meanwhile, we lived within our means. We traveled to neighboring states, not countries, for our vacations. On the Fourth of July, everybody had their own fire-

works, and we kids would sit on the porch with our sparklers while the whole block lit up. Sometimes the pops, bangs, squeals and whooshes were deafening, but we loved it. And on New Year's Eve, everyone, including the kids who could manage to stay awake, would go out on their porches at midnight with whatever horns, tooters, and whistles they had, shouting Happy New Year to the neighbors. On our block, we were one of the first to own a television, and sometimes you would let us stay up until the test patterns came on. We were a one-car family and, since Dad needed it for work, we walked everywhere. By today's standards, Mom, we were a lower middle-class family, but somehow we didn't seem to know that, or care. We never felt deprived. Did you?

Historian/Author Elaine Tyler May believed that the fifties was a period of "quiet revolution."  
—Prof. Tom DePalma

Mom, our kind really did live in a closed society, a small world. Historians have documented the fact that outside our little domain, the world was changing. There were a lot of restless, unhappy people, and eventually we would have to acknowledge them. But in the mid-fifties, it seems that those people were filed under the term "others," and we were not really affected by them, or at least we tried not to be. We stayed within our circle of familiarity and let the rest of the world come to us. And come to me it did, fantastically, dramatically, in the forms of Marlon Brando and Elvis Presley. It wasn't just that they were so different; it was much more that they were *dangerously* different. We girls truly didn't know that guys could look, sound, *be* like that. In today's world, we would be considered pretty geeky, and so would most of the guys we knew. But Brando and Presley and, of course, James Dean, changed all that. *Blackboard Jungle* and "Rock Around the Clock" changed all that. "Heartbreak Hotel" and "Blue Suede Shoes" changed all that. We couldn't seem to sit still. The music made us want to move, to dance, to do *something*. Mom, you must have seen those changes and you must have sensed what they foreshadowed and you must have hated it. Now don't try to deny it—I saw you rolling your eyes to heaven as we watched Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show. But when Mary threw a fit after I plastered Elvis' picture all over the walls, and ceiling,

## Sitting on Fences

on *my* side of the room, and demanded that I take them down before she got terminally ill, you took my side and said they could stay. You, who were a teenager during the “Roaring Twenties,” understood.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,  
filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves,  
closets, silks, innumerable goods;  
fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:  
whining, rearranging the disaligned.  
A woman like that is misunderstood.  
I have been her kind.

—Anne Sexton, “Her Kind”

Mom, you always worked so hard, you were always so busy, but you always had time for the problems and nonsense that your kids presented to you—and you always had time to laugh. That’s the way I remember it—that you really enjoyed your life. I believe that you were meeting your own expectations, ergo, so were we. I’m guessing that if you could have, you might have made some alterations, but you wouldn’t have changed being our kind of woman. One of my most vivid memories of you was when I was eight years old and you let me hold Mary Beth, your first grandchild, my first niece. I told you that when I grew up I wanted to have a baby just like her, and you told me that she surely was one of God’s little miracles. As I look back now, though, I think that it was a defining moment for me, and I think you were happy that I wanted to follow in your footsteps.

Stick to your own kind—Anita to Maria, *West Side Story*

Mom, it seemed that everything my generation did was traditional, because tradition was tried and true, and it was less complicated. Whether we went to college or not, we women met and married men with the same backgrounds as ours—certainly within the same race and preferably within the same religion. For so many of us, our kind’s expectations were to continue along the same line as yours, differing only in our ability to make more money and acquire more “stuff.” We admired your generation and completely accepted your beliefs and values, steeped as they were in the old pioneer spirit of hard work and perseverance paying tremendous divi-

dends to those who adhered to them. Oh, Mom, there were so many people outside our boundaries who were critical of our world, of our kind, saying that we were complacent, conformist. But the truth, as I remember it, is that we were content. Within the fences, which your generation so carefully and thoughtfully constructed, for our own good, many in my generation lived quite happily, never realizing (or perhaps never wanting to realize), that those “others” were not so content.

You say that we can keep our love alive,  
Babe, all I know is what I see—  
The couples cling and claw  
And drown in love’s debris  
You say we’ll soar like two birds  
Through the clouds,  
But soon you’ll cage me on your shelf—  
I’ll never learn to be just me first  
By myself.  
—Carly Simon and Jacob Brackman,  
“That’s The Way I’ve Always Heard It Should Be”

So many women, of all colors and creeds, didn’t feel what we did. While we were happily focused on home and hearth, husband and healthy children, with outside jobs merely an adjunct to our real careers, other women felt stifled, repressed, unfulfilled, and (believe it or not, Mom) even bored by the homemaker role. Many women seriously resented the fact that, as they saw it, society devalued their needs and abilities, both at home and in the working world. Eventually, for these women, the seeds of discontent, planted both during and after the war, would come to fruition in the early sixties, and with the publication of Betty Friedan’s book, *The Feminine Mystique*, the feminist movement would be born and much would occur that would be, to say the least, difficult for our kind to understand.

There comes a time when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired—tired of being segregated and humiliated, tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression...and we come here tonight to be saved from the patience that makes us patient with anything less than freedom and justice.  
—Martin Luther King, Montgomery, Alabama 1955.

I wish you could tell me, though, just how much you understood about what was happening all around us during those years. Remember when, as a teenager, I read Leon Uris' *Exodus*, and I became physically ill at the description of some of the unspeakable horrors the Jews endured in concentration camps during World War II? Safe in our little world, I never knew just how inhumane man could be to man. When we talked about it you knew, of course, about the Holocaust, but it had happened long ago and far away and would never happen again. We Americans would see to that! But Mom, wasn't a mini-Holocaust happening right here, in this country, in the South? Black people were being killed because, like the Jews to the Nazis, blacks were somehow undesirable, somehow lesser, and completely at the mercy of whites. Mom, did you and your friends and neighbors realize that when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white man, the civil rights movement, which until that point was in the gestation period, was finally born?

The fun was disturbed, then all but nullified  
When the Dark Villain was a blackish child  
Of fourteen, with eyes still too young to be dirty,  
And a mouth too young to have lost every reminder  
Of its infant softness.

—Gwendolyn Brooks, "A Bronzeville Mother  
Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi  
Mother Burns Bacon"

I was even younger than Emmett Till when he was murdered, so I understand why you wouldn't have shown me his picture or talked to me about it at the time, but knowing you, you must have been horrified. Everything you ever taught us shouted "the Golden Rule rules!" Did you shudder and think, "What if he were one of mine?" Did you believe that such things could never happen to you or yours because you would protect us within the circle of "us," fencing out all "others?" Were you comfortable with equal but separate rights? Were you afraid of the changes that were taking place as blacks began to fight for their right to be treated as equals? Or were you content to let the "government" figure out how to deal with it all because, in the aftermath of the war, it had done a pretty good job with world problems? I suspect that, for you and Dad and all the other parents I knew, anything outside our

parish or our workplace belonged under the category "world problems."

Recently, my friend Emily and I were talking about the fifties and sixties, reminiscing and trying to establish just who we were then and how we felt about feminism, civil rights, and Viet Nam. It's kind of interesting to realize that she, an English Lutheran who grew up on Chicago's North Side, and I, an Irish Catholic who grew up on Chicago's South Side, but during the same time period, could so readily agree that we could have been sisters, because our beliefs and behavior, our parents, were so similar. When we first met twenty-five years ago, each married with children, we became friends immediately. We laugh now about the fact that our children are so alike because our individual parenting values were so alike. No debates; it just was.

I thought that dragging the angel down that night  
would save me, but I carried the crucifix in my  
pocket and rubbed it on my face and lips  
nights the rockets roared in.  
People die sometimes so near you,  
you feel them struggling to cross over,  
the deep untangling, of one body from another.  
—Bruce Weigl, "What Saves Us"

But over a decade before that, when she first met Jake, he had just returned from his tour of duty in Viet Nam, and when I met Ed, he was just beginning his military service. None of us questioned the men's obligation to serve their country. So, after Ed and I married and while he was still in the service, it was with absolute outrage that I sat on the Evanston el and listened to the woman behind me gleefully tell her companion that her nephew was safely in Canada and couldn't be drafted. Not long after that, early in 1968, while sitting on the same train, I watched the fires blazing on Chicago's West Side, where blacks, absolutely outraged by the murder of Martin Luther King, were burning the homes and businesses in their own neighborhoods. And not long after that, in August of 1968, I was absolutely terrified by the gangs of anti-war protesters, some of them with Charles Manson eyes, screaming epithets, pounding on and trying to overturn the cars of those of us unlucky enough to be wending our way home from work through Grant Park. It wasn't until we were safely home that I became absolutely outraged. See,

Mom, I had just discovered I was pregnant with our first baby, and if anything had happened....

Alright...Mr. Death. See now...I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna take and build me a fence around this yard. See? I'm gonna build me a fence around what belongs to me. And then I want you to stay on the other side. See?

—August Wilson, “Fences”

Mom, our country was in the middle of an ideological earthquake, and firmly entrenched in my safe little world, ideologically a part of what was then called the “establishment.” I guess I spent a lot of time being “outraged.” But one day, during the summer following the Democratic convention, I sat down on the couch to watch the news at noon. Jon was safely born and lying on the couch next to me, doing what infants do, making noise and being...perfect. The program turned to the Viet Nam war, and there was a shot of flag-draped caskets on an airfield—soldiers returning home from war. I looked at my wonderful son, so full of life and potential and—Mom, at that precise moment, the ground shifted for me, Jon had changed everything! I had one of God’s little miracles of my own, and my need to protect was palpable! It was an epiphany for me; it wasn’t a Holy Day of Obligation, but it was a moment wherein my obligation to him was clearly defined. For the first time I *began* to understand why someone would want to send a son to Canada; why people would riot and burn in outrage at the murder of someone whose only crime was to fight for a better life for them, why people would protest a war they couldn’t believe in. I knew I could never approve their methods, much less use them; but I thought I understood why. I surely understood that I was now sitting *on* the fence you had so lovingly constructed for me—I was no longer *within* it. The experience frightened me. I knew that, for our children’s sake, in this turbulent new world forming around us in spite of me, I had to do something that might have been so difficult for you: I had to change.

No, Mom. I didn’t start burning my bras (ladies didn’t do things like that); I didn’t join in any marches (my family needed me at home); and I certainly didn’t travel to Viet Nam like Hanoi Jane Fonda and her cohorts (their actions demeaned the lives of every

soldier who ever fought for this country). But I knew that I could no longer let what realistically amounted to ignorance and fear of the unknown keep me in a state of euphoric contentment when so many others were so unhappy. My children would have to grow up in the world that was changing so rapidly, becoming so global, that I would have to adjust my thinking in order for them to thrive, not just survive. The fences I put up to protect them would have to be made from a series of gates, allowing them to go beyond my realm of comfort and protection while allowing others in to explore that realm.

Upon reflection and after a lot of investigation, Mom, I believe that my generation, those of us who were born in the forties, became teenagers in the fifties, and young adults in the sixties, was somewhat unique. We were caught between your generation whose values were so “established” as to be all but set in stone, and the newer, slightly younger generation of baby boomers who challenged every one of those values and set out to “establish” a whole new set of norms. So we sat on our fences, leaping off as new ideas (or old ideas with a new twist) that we could adapt to and adopt presented themselves, and leaping back on when new ideas truly offended us. Those usually occurred in areas where we perceived lack of responsibility, respect and restraint, or where we could perceive no moral compass at all. And guess what? After all these years, we’re still sitting there, still somewhat uncertain as to who was more right, you or the next generation, and wondering if we successfully bridged that ideological gap.

And that brings me back to the beginning of this very contemplative, very one-sided dialogue. When you died so suddenly shortly before my wedding, I felt your loss as a void which could never be filled. But I was so wrong! As the years went by, I discovered that you really never left me at all. Whenever I was confused or troubled, I would use you as my sounding board, and more often than not, your love and common sense would come to my rescue. And once again, they have. You see, as these classes progressed, I began to think that I really was raised in a closet, as Ed used to joke, and that my innocence (ignorance?) was somehow hurtful and required an apology to somebody for something or another. Yet I could never apologize for

you, or for any of the other parents, of whatever color or creed, who inhabited all the fenced-in little ethnic villages which constituted cities like Chicago and New York back then. As I've thought about you, and talked about you to the rest of the family, and talked to friends about their parents, and remembered, my doubts began to fade. All of you did the best you could within the framework of your experiences, and all of you expected at least as much from your children. And I can't apologize for us because we've done our best, Mom, we've done our best.

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Evaluation: *This is one of the most amazing student papers we have ever read. Kate provides a poignant and moving journey through the era of our course. Her synthesis of history and literature is especially incisive.*

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# Things Fall Apart

Carrie Jackson

Courses: History 212 (Recent American History) and Literature 222 (Recent American Literature)  
Instructors: Tom DePalma and Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write a perspective paper from the vantage point of any person who lived in the United States in the era 1945-1974.*

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The following is a collection of fictional letters and notes exchanged between Senator Joseph McCarthy and his older sister, Anna Stanton. The letters span the years from McCarthy's election to the U.S. Senate to just after his condemnation in December 1954.

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1946

Joe,

First and foremost, congratulations on your victory—and I'm sorry I haven't written before now! We're all so proud of you, as always!

John and Michael are doing well. I cannot believe they're finished with college already. It seems only yesterday we blessed their births and now they're gone. Have they written?

I realize you're going to be busy in the coming years—even more so than before!—but I hope to spend some time with you at some point. Do you think you might get some time during the coming holiday to visit your family?

With love,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

March 1947

My dear Anna,

My how time flies! I do apologize for not getting a chance to see you and the family during the holidays. Here it is, already 4 months have passed!! I trust John and Michael are continuing their studies beyond their current degrees—we'll make lawyers of them yet!

I hope to see you soon, but things are...not quite right for me. You see, I'm having troubles with some information that has been presented to me. I'm not sure I should discuss it here, but I would so like to have your wisdom to guide me.

Maybe it's nothing. I shouldn't get so worked up, I suppose.

We shall see what transpires. I will try to make my letters more frequent. You understand, I hope.

Love always,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

April 1947

Dear Joe,

I was overjoyed to receive your letter at first—it's been so long since I've heard from you! I was, however, troubled after reading it. Of course I understand there are things regarding your job that you cannot discuss with me—I do not take it personally. However, you are still my little brother, and if there is anything I can do to help or if I can be an attentive ear, please let me know.

One more thing, dear Joe...you will be in the public eye now more than ever. Mind your actions, and try to keep control of your, shall I say, imbibing habits?

Lots of love,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

May 1947

Dear sister,

I would venture to say you were surprised to get another letter from me so soon! I have been busy, of course, but I have resolved to write to you more often, and to keep in touch with the family in general.

I spent some time in Madison last month. I was talked into giving an interview to the *Madison Capital Times*, but I laid it out on the line for them. My top priority while holding this office is to stop the spread of communism, Anna, and I made sure they knew that (though I'm sure they'll misquote me or take something out of context). Communists are a vile bunch, and they're probably running that rag of a newspaper. They're not just in Madison, either. I've heard some rumors that make me think.

I really shouldn't discuss that, I suppose. Get rid of this, Anna, lest people think me a conspiracy theorist.

All my love,

Joe

P.S. Please do not mention my, as you say, "imbibing habits" again. I am a grown man, Anna. You may be the elder sister, but I can take care of myself. What grown man doesn't like a drink at the end of the day?

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1947

My dear Joe,

I finally got a hold of the *Capital Times* article of which you wrote. I hope they misquoted you, dear brother! I've seen some other not so favorable mentions of you in there, but oh well—that comes with the territory of being a U.S. Senator, right? Not everyone will like you, but you definitely have support.

I'm troubled by this talk of communists, Joe. There was even this committee here (I'm sure you were aware) in the area in October, investigating directors and actors and screenwriters and the like. I don't understand the big deal. I despise communists as much as the

next American, but they're not everywhere, dear! If I were to humor you and say that communists ran the MCT (or humor HUAC and say they ran Hollywood), I have to ask – does it really matter? Those in power are the ones that matter. I'm no fan of President Truman, but the man isn't a communist, and neither (I believe) are those within his administration. They're the ones that matter. You made an issue of this while campaigning, and now you told the MCT you're most concerned with fighting communism. It's a noble cause, dear, but don't forget to represent the people of Wisconsin while you're at it.

As always, we hope to see you for the holiday, but I realize California is a long way from both Washington and Wisconsin. John and Michael are nearly finished with their second year of law school. Time does fly.

Your loving sister,

Anna

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April 1948

Dear Anna,

Things are going well for me. Everything is normal—at least as normal as they can be for a man in my position. We're looking forward to the election this November—we're pretty confident Dewey will do it! Ol' Harry isn't the worst we could have, but I don't like that man.

As for the content of your last letter—all I will say is that this is bigger than you could ever know, and you will soon see the extent to which communists are rampant within our government.

Regards,

Joe

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May 1948

Joe,

Regards? Regards?! What the devil is going on with you?! Since when do you close a letter to your sister with such a formal expression?

Things Fall Apart

Joe, your theories of infiltration are beginning to frighten me. Please, take some time for personal reflection and prayer, my dear brother, and when you are ready to speak to me as a sister again, rather than one of your aides, please write.

God bless,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

August 1948

My dear sister,

I do apologize for the cold tenor of my last letter. I was angry when I wrote it, though not at you per se.

I'm sure you've heard the news of a Mr. Alger Hiss by now. It's been all over the papers since the beginning of the month. I do believe he'll be on trial before long. Not to mention the proclamations of the Bentley woman!

My only problem is that I am so committed to fighting these communists, but I can (obviously) have no place on the House committee. Oh, but wouldn't you love to be a fly on the wall in the closed hearings there? I'm hearing some great things from colleagues about Nixon—I'd look for him in my aisle in two years, mark my words. The lucky bastard, he's on the House committee!

I hope to hear from you soon, and let me apologize again for coming across so coldly in my last letter. There's big things going on now, so it may be some time before I get a chance to write again. Give John and Michael my love.

With love,

Joe

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November 1948

Dear Joe,

Just a quick note to say I'm sorry about the election. We'll get them next time!

Love always,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

June 1949

Anna,

As I'm sure you're aware, the Hiss trial has begun. It is my opinion that the infiltration is widespread, and I intend to do something about it.

I sent my congratulations to John and Michael. Princeton and Harvard graduates, my twin nephews! I couldn't be more proud. I'm sure they'll make fine lawyers—it runs in the family, you know!

Much love,

Joe

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January 1950

Dear Joe,

I hope you had a glorious holiday season. I can't believe it has been years since I've seen you, my dear brother. I was reminiscing over Christmas about times past, and wishing you could be with us. I trust you received my card and gift, and I thank you for the fine gifts you sent to us. You have a good heart, Joe.

I've been getting involved with the local Women's Republican group. I'm having a gay time, and the ladies are wonderful. We're planning a tea for sometime next month, and we're all looking forward to it. They're all impressed with my famous brother!

Speaking of the group, I have a meeting in a short while, and must do some work about the house before I go.

Take care,

Anna

P.S. I would appreciate it if you could refrain from using such colorful language in your letters. I may be your sister, but I am still a lady.

\*\*\*\*\*

February 1950

Dear Anna,

I am proud of you for getting involved in politics! It is important for everyone to do so at some level, I believe.

A week ago I gave a speech for the Ohio County Ladies' Republican Club in Wheeling, West Virginia. Anna, it's starting to rain and I believe a full hurricane will be blowing before it is finished. I let the ladies there know about what's going on in our government—full-blown permeation by communists. I'm due to speak before the Senate regarding this matter on the 20th, and who knows what will transpire after that. After the findings of the House committee, the arrests of Hiss and Coplon, Fuchs's confession (more will come of that, just wait), and the hundreds of people who've been discharged from government positions due to questions of loyalty—well, this is big. I do believe I'll be getting my recompense for sitting on the sidelines while the House committee found all these lowlifes. There are more of them out there, and I'm going to seek them out.

I hear John is going to be a father. My sincerest congratulations, future grandmother!

Much love,

Joe

P.S. My sincerest apologies for my use of language in my earlier letter.

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July 1950

Anna,

I know you have asked that I refrain from using "colorful" language, so let me apologize in advance for what might be ahead in this letter. I am angry beyond belief right now, and I need to let it out to a trusted and loving source.

I don't know if you've heard of the Tydings Committee, but the sons of bitches are trying to ruin me! Has it not been proven that the government is crawling with Soviet spies?! They didn't even do what they were

supposed to do, and they come out and call me a fraud! In the first two days of the hearings, I was allowed only slightly more than seventeen minutes in which to speak! Seventeen minutes in two days, Anna! I wasn't allowed to cross-examine Jessup. They deleted thirty-five pages of testimony. And THEY call ME a fraud?

That bastard Lattimore is guilty, and time will prove that—mark my words, Anna! It took ten years to get rid of Hiss, and time will tell on Lattimore, too. I've got the backing of my colleagues in the Senate—at least those on the right side of the aisle, mine!

The speech in front of the Senate in February was brutal. Lucas asked me four times—FOUR TIMES—to give him names of these communists. While I think the infiltration is widespread, I don't believe the names should be made public until they're investigated. I wouldn't even give you the names, and I trust you more than just about anyone in the world. Lucas wasn't the only bastard on the Hill that day, either. I was also interrupted numerous times by McMahon, Withers, and Lehman. All told, the speech took six hours! I told them that I DO believe that most of the guys in the State Department are loyal to the interests of this country. However, if there's just one communist in there, we must find him and get rid of him. As it goes, I believe there's a lot more than one.

Wow. I just re-read my rant, and I apologize for the language, but I feel it's necessary here. I am furious, but they can't break me, Anna.

With love,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1950

Joe,

Regarding your use of language in your last letter—you're forgiven. I want you to know that we are behind you completely. This IS bigger than any of us thought, and what you're doing is noble. Just don't let it get out of hand.

Happy Holidays, my dear brother.

Love always,

Anna

Things Fall Apart

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February 1951

Anna,

This may be my last letter for a while. I'm consumed with my work right now. I trust you'll understand. Keep in touch with Jean—she loves hearing from you.

I'm also beginning to plan a book. I'm starting to think that history may not remember me fondly, and I want to make sure I get my side out there. People care ever so much more what Hollywood losers have to say than their elected officials, and I have to assume it will always be such.

All my love,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

March 1952

Dear brother,

I haven't heard from you personally in quite some time, but I have to say I see your name all the time.

I've left the local Women's Republican group. I thought it might be for the best, seeing as how I'm your sister. There are some ladies in the group that kept pressing me for information...some want to know about you as a person, which is fine, but some were beginning to get hostile. I worry about you daily, Joe. Your cause is just, and I stand behind you, but mind your methods.

Love,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

August 1952

Dearest Anna,

Referring to my methods, I'll quote my book (told you I was going to write a book!):

"When you hear a politician assuring you that 'I am against Communism, but do not like McCarthy's methods,' you might ask yourself this question: 'Is this politician willing and eager to be against Communism

on the speaker's stand but afraid to pay the high price in smear and abuse which is heaped upon anyone who really starts to draw blood from the Communist conspiracy?' During this fall's campaign, timid, cautious politicians who want to stay at the public trough regardless of the cost to the nation and those who would protect Communism and corruption in government will parrot over and over the same stock excuse. They will tell you how 'vigorously' they 'condemn' Communism. With equal vigor they will tell you that they condemn McCarthy for taking off his gloves and painfully digging out, one by one, Administration-protected Communists."

Don't fret, my dear. This will all work itself out, and justice will be meted out to those who deserve it. I'll send you a copy of the finished book before release.

Much love,

Joe

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December 1952

Anna,

Lately I'm reminded of Yeats: "Things fall apart. The center does not hold." It will be some time before I'm able to write again. Destroy this letter and never speak of it, I beg of you.

With all my love,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

November 1953

My dear Joe,

It has been nearly a year since our last personal correspondence. I hear of you so often, yet I rarely hear from you. John and Michael say they, too, have heard nothing from you in the longest time. Your last letter still bothers me daily. So terse, so defeatist—that's not the Joe I know, nor is it the one I see in the news! You're putting on quite a show, aren't you?

Please write, dear brother. I'm sick with worry for you these days.

Love always,

Anna

\*\*\*\*\*

May 1954

Anna,

I'm taking my last chance here. I believe I've found evidence of infiltration within the U.S. Military. If this goes badly, well....

I never meant for things to go this far, Anna. I do believe communism is a great evil in this world, and it must be stopped, and we can't have that in our government. It goes against everything for which our founders stood. But, I never wanted this circus. Sure, it helped me get re-elected, but at what cost?

Again hearing Yeats in the air,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1954

Anna,

I trust your longstanding invitation for the holidays is still good. I am planning a trip to California to see you. It's been too long. I'm sorry things had to come to this before I could find time to see you.

As you know, I'm through. I've brought shame upon our family, and I'm sorry. I do not apologize for my stand on this issue, though, and I never will. I stand firm in my belief that time will tell on this. Someday, whether it's 25, 50, or even 100 years from now, those persons named will be shown to be at least communist sympathizers, if not spies.

I'm looking forward to seeing you this Christmas, and to meeting my grandniece for the first time. I cherish the photos of her you've sent every year. She has her grandmother's beauty. I'm sure she'll get her grandmother's wisdom and good heart as well. Jean looks forward to the visit as well.

With love,

Joe

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1954

My dear brother,

You are always welcome in our home. We look forward to seeing you.

Your loving sister,

Anna

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Evaluation: Any teacher who has had Carrie in class knows that her papers are special. The task of bringing Senator Joseph McCarthy to "three-dimensional life" is a daunting one, but Carrie succeeds with keen insight and intellectual depth.

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# Painting Room Dividers: Moving a Planar Robotic Arm

Teresa Jimenez

Course: Mathematics 200 (Calculus I)

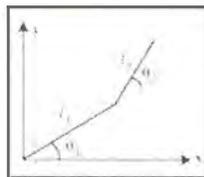
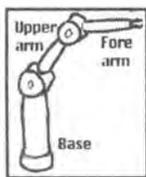
Instructor: Sunil Koswatta

Assignment:

*This is a calculus project about painting room dividers using a planar robotic arm. This project describes the calculus of moving the robotic arm.*

There has been an increase in the demand for room dividers, making it a challenge for production to meet that demand. To address this problem, a plan to mechanize the painting process for the room dividers was initiated. However, mechanizing the painting process presents its own challenges. A planar robotic arm (as opposed to a three-dimensional robotic arm) could aid this objective, while simplifying the mathematics required. This report examines the dimensions of the robotic arm and some of the equations necessary for the computer to control the arm's position and motion.

The room dividers are comprised of panel sections 3 feet wide by 5 feet high, and the goal is for the robotic arm to be capable of painting the entire section. For simplicity, the robotic arm is stationed within the  $xy$ -plane and will have a base and two links. The base is



Figures 1 and 2 from "Robotics" module by Mary Ann Connors and Howard Anton. Rpt. in Anton, Howard, Irl Bivens and Stephen Davis. *Calculus: Early Transcendentals*. New York: John Wiley, 2002. 237.

stationary. Link 1 is analogous to a human's upper arm, as is link 2 to the forearm. The links move independent of one another about "joints," or pivot points. At the end of link 2 will be the paint sprayer (See Figure 1.).

As featured in Figure 2, the length of link 1 is  $l_1$ , the length of link 2 is  $l_2$ , the angle between the base and link 1 is denoted as  $\theta_1$ , and the angle between link 1 and link 2 is denoted as  $\theta_2$ .

Stationing the robotic arm within the  $xy$ -plane, with the base at the origin, allows the coordinates of the paint sprayer to be denoted  $(x,y)$ . The positions desired for the point  $(x,y)$  (the paint sprayer) will be known; however, it is the angles of the links and the link's lengths that are variable and controllable; therefore,  $x$  and  $y$  need to be expressed in terms of the angles and the link's lengths.

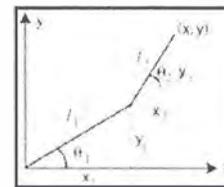


Figure 3

Referring to Figure 3, consider the two links part of the vertex of two triangles, with the following respective relationships:

- $x_1$  is adjacent to  $\theta_1$
- $x_2$  is adjacent to  $\theta_1 + \theta_2$
- $y_1$  is opposite of  $\theta_1$
- $y_2$  is opposite of  $\theta_1 + \theta_2$
- $l_1$  and  $l_2$  are the hypotenuses.

Also observe that  $x$  is equal to  $(x_1 + x_2)$ , and  $y$  is equal to  $(y_1 + y_2)$ . Algebra and trigonometry may then be used to construct equations for  $x$  and  $y$ .

Using the definition of the cosine function, we get

$$\cos(\theta_1) = \frac{x_1}{l_1} \quad \cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) = \frac{x_2}{l_2}$$

Using cross-multiplication, you can write these as

$$x_1 = l_1 \cos(\theta_1) \quad x_2 = l_2 \cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

Since  $x = (x_1 + x_2)$ ,

$$(1) \quad x = l_1 \cos(\theta_1) + l_2 \cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2).$$

Using the definition of the sine function, we get

$$\sin(\theta_1) = \frac{y_1}{l_1} \quad \sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) = \frac{y_2}{l_1}$$

That is

$$y_1 = l_1 \sin(\theta_1) \quad y_2 = l_2 \sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

Since  $y = (y_1 + y_2)$ ,

$$(2) \quad y = l_1 \sin(\theta_1) + l_2 \sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

The equation (1) and (2) are known as the "forward kinematic equations" of the end effector. Note that the angles  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  are called "control angles." The point  $(x,y)$ , where the paint sprayer is located, is the "end effector" (Connors and Anton 237).

The values of the angles and lengths of the links are important in exploring the potential motion of the robotic arm and the area that can be reached by the end effector. The angles,  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  can take on values from 0 to  $2\pi$  radians. Any angle greater than  $2\pi$  is a multiple of some angle between 0 and  $2\pi$ . If  $\theta_2 = 0$ , then the 2 links form a straight line. If  $\theta_2$  is equal to  $\pi$  and  $\theta_1$  takes on values from 0 to  $2\pi$ , then the end effector moves in a complete circle. The farthest from the base that the end effector can reach is the sum of lengths of the two links. That is, the sum of lengths of the two links is the radius of the circle discussed above ( $r_1 = l_1 + l_2$ ). The equation of a circle is  $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$ , but because  $r^1 = l_1 + l_2$ , the equation of the circle for the robotic arm is  $x^2 + y^2 = (l_1 + l_2)^2$ .

The equation for this circle with the forward kinematic equations can be used to explore how the link's lengths affect the region the end effector may reach.

Square both sides of the forward kinematic equations to obtain

$$x^2 = l_1^2 \cos^2 \theta_1 + l_1 \cos \theta_1 l_2 \cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) + l_2^2 \cos^2(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

$$y^2 = l_1^2 \sin^2 \theta_1 + l_1 \sin \theta_1 l_2 \sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) + l_2^2 \sin^2(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

Add the above equations:

$$x^2 + y^2 = l_1^2 [\cos^2 \theta_1 + \sin^2 \theta_1] + l_1 l_2 [\cos \theta_1 \cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) + \sin \theta_1 \sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)] + l_2^2 [\cos^2(\theta_1 + \theta_2) + \sin^2(\theta_1 + \theta_2)]$$

Use the Pythagorean identity, as well as the difference formula for cosine, to simplify.

$$x^2 + y^2 = l_1^2 + l_1 l_2 [\cos(-\theta_2)] + l_2^2$$

Because cosine is an even function,

$$x^2 + y^2 = l_1^2 + l_1 l_2 \cos(\theta_2) + l_2^2$$

The maximum value of  $x^2 + y^2$  occurs when  $\cos \theta_2$  is at its maximum. The minimum value for  $x^2 + y^2$  occurs when  $\cos \theta_2$  is at its minimum. Because the maximum value for  $\cos \theta_2$  is 1 and its minimum value is -1,

$$(l_1^2 - l_1 l_2 + l_2^2) \leq x^2 + y^2 \leq (l_1^2 + l_1 l_2 + l_2^2).$$

This is equivalent to

$$(l_1 - l_2)^2 \leq x^2 + y^2 \leq (l_1 + l_2)^2$$

Since  $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$ , this implies

$$(l_1 - l_2)^2 \leq r^2 \leq (l_1 + l_2)^2$$

When  $l_1 = l_2$ ,

$$0 \leq r \leq 2l_1.$$

That is, when  $l_1 = l_2$ , the minimum value for  $r$  is 0 so the end effector can reach all the way to the origin. The region of the plane the end effector can reach is the

area,  $A = \pi(2l_1)^2$ . This is the area of the circle in which the radius is equal to  $2l_1t$ . See Figure 4.

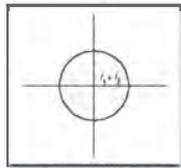


Figure 4

If  $l_1 > l_2$  then  $|l_1 - l_2| \leq r \leq (l_1 + l_2)$ . The end effector is closest to the origin when the distance between the end effector and the origin is  $|l_1 - l_2|$ . The region that can be reached is the area  $A_t = \pi[(l_1 + l_2)^2 - (l_1 - l_2)^2]$ . This is the area between a larger circle of radius  $l_1 + l_2$ , and a smaller circle of radius  $l_1 - l_2$ . See Figure 5.

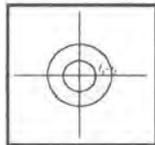


Figure 5

When  $l_1 < l_2$ , again we get  $|l_1 - l_2| \leq r \leq (l_1 + l_2)$ . That is, when the end effector is closest to the origin, the distance between the end effector and the origin is  $|l_1 - l_2|$ . The region that can be reached is the area  $A_t = \pi[(l_1 + l_2)^2 - (l_2 - l_1)^2]$ . This is the area between a larger circle of radius  $l_1 + l_2$ , and a smaller circle of radius  $l_2 - l_1$ . See Figure 6.

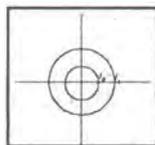


Figure 6

This exploration of the link's lengths makes apparent that the optimum relationship for this project is to have the links of equal lengths. Provided the links are of proper length, links having equal length will enable the end effector to reach everywhere within the circle of its maximum radius.

Therefore, we assume that  $l_1 = l_2 = 1$  for convenience.

The angles  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  vary with time. Therefore, they are functions of time. If  $\omega_1$  and  $\omega_2$  are the rates at which  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$  rotate, in radians per second, then  $\theta_1(t) = \omega_1 t$  and  $\theta_2(t) = \omega_2 t$ . Now the forward kinetic equations for the motion of the end effector can be expressed as parametric equations of motion with time,  $t$ , as the parameter (Connors and Anton 237)

$$(3) \quad x = \cos \omega_1 t + \cos(\omega_1 t + \omega_2 t)$$

$$(4) \quad y = \sin \omega_1 t + \sin(\omega_1 t + \omega_2 t)$$

For example, if  $\omega_1 = 2$  rad/s (radians per second) and  $\omega_2 = 3$  rad/s, then the parametric equations of motion are

$$x = \cos 2t + \cos(2t + 3t)$$

$$y = \sin 2t + \sin(2t + 3t)$$

These two equations can be graphed using a graphing utility such as Graphing Advantage Plus 4.0. Figure 7 displays the curve that would be traced by the end effector, over the time interval  $0 \leq t \leq 2\pi$ .

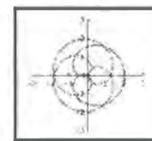


Figure 7

A graphing utility can be utilized to explore how the rotation rates affect the spray patterns for various speeds. The time interval will be held constant for all of the graphs, at  $0 \leq t \leq 2\pi$ . The graphs on the following pages will display examples of the following conditions:  $\omega_1 = 0$  (fixed) and  $\omega_2$  varies,  $\omega_2 = 0$  (fixed) and  $\omega_1$  varies,  $\omega_1 = \omega_2$ ,  $\omega_1 > \omega_2$  and  $\omega_1 < \omega_2$ .

In general, while viewing the graphs, one can observe that all the patterns will be within a radius of 2, because  $l_1 + l_2 = 2$ . Also, one expects, the higher the values are for  $\omega_1$  and  $\omega_2$ , the "more ground" the end effector covers in the same time interval.

For graphs in figure 8,  $\omega_1 = 0$  and  $\omega_2$  is varied. Because the first angle is constant at 0, only  $\theta_2$  is

changing. That is, only the second link is rotating in a circular path of radius is 1 with center at (0,1).

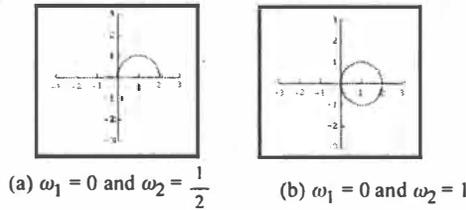


Figure 8

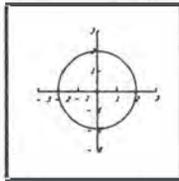


Figure 9:  $\omega_2 = 0$  and  $\omega_2$  is 1. The forward kinetic equations for this motion are  $x = 2\cos t$  and  $y = 2\sin t$ . These are equations of a circle with radius 2 and center at the origin.

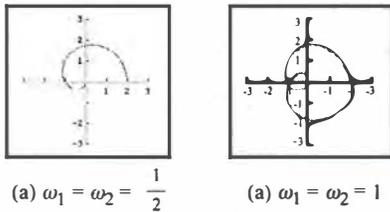


Figure 10:  $\omega_1 = \omega_2$ .

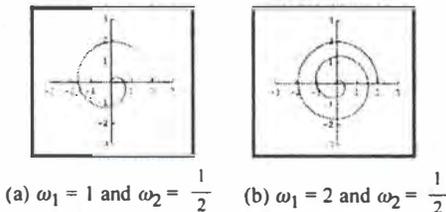


Figure 11:  $\omega_1 > \omega_2$ .

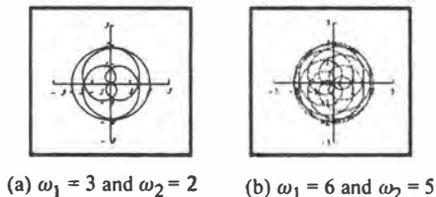
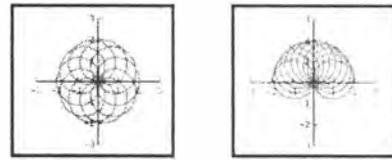


Figure 12:  $\omega_1 > \omega_2$ .



(a)  $\omega_1 = 1$  and  $\omega_2 = 10$       (b)  $\omega_1 = \frac{1}{2}$  and  $\omega_2 = 10$

Figure 13:  $\omega_1 \leq \omega_2$ .

One can make a conjecture about the path of the end effector if a malfunction occurs, causing the second link to lock at  $\theta_2 = 0$ . Assume that the first link rotates at a constant rate of 1 rad/s. With only  $\theta_1$  varying, the path of the end effector would be circular, with a radius of 2 as seen in Figure 9.

As we understand the kinematics better, now we want to formulate a plan to paint the dividers in vertical strips. The robot should start at the bottom and sweep upward in a straight line. After the strip is painted, the arm should return to the bottom of the divider and then move horizontally to position itself for the next upward sweep. We will position the base in the lower left corner of the divider section. Suppose we want to paint the dividers in 3 feet wide by 5 feet high sections. The upper right corner of the divider is approximately 5.83 feet away from the "origin," or base of the robotic arm. Therefore, we will choose  $l_1 = l_2 = 3$  so that the reachable region is the area of the circle with radius 6 feet. Since 5.83 is within the 6-foot radius, links of length 3 feet each are sufficient.

The next steps involve calculations for controlling the position of the end effector. One can start with the forward kinematic equations for the far right edge, from (3, 0) up to (3, 5). See the sketches in Figure 14. The control angles for (3, 0) can be found quickly because, as can be seen in Figure 14, the links form an equilateral triangle at that point.  $\theta_1$  is equal to  $\frac{\pi}{3}$  because the measure of each angle of an equilateral triangle is  $\frac{\pi}{3}$ , or 60 degrees.  $\theta_2$  is equal to  $-\frac{2\pi}{3}$  or -120 degrees as seen in the figure 14.

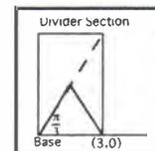


Figure 14: (Connors and Anton 238).

## Painting Room Dividers: Moving a Planar Robotic Arm

Determining the control angles for the point (3, 5) is more difficult, but can be started by substituting  $l_1 = l_2 = 3$  into the forward kinematic equations (1) and (2) to obtain

$$(5) \quad 3 = 3\cos(\theta_1) + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

$$(6) \quad 5 = 3\sin(\theta_1) + 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$$

The strategy here is to solve the above equations for  $\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$  and  $\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)$  and then to use the Pythagorean identity.

Equation (5) yields

$$\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) = 1 - \cos(\theta_1)$$

and equation (6) yields

$$\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) = \frac{5 - 3\sin(\theta_1)}{3}$$

Square both sides of the two equations above and add.

$$1 = (1 - \cos(\theta_1))^2 + \left(\frac{5 - 3\sin(\theta_1)}{3}\right)^2$$

After expanding, we get

$$1 = 1 - 2\cos(\theta_1) + \cos^2(\theta_1) + \frac{25}{9} - \frac{10}{3}\sin(\theta_1) + \sin^2(\theta_1)$$

Since  $1 = \cos^2(\theta_1) + \sin^2(\theta_1)$ , we can simplify further.

$$1 = 2t - 2\cos(\theta_1) + \frac{25}{9} - \frac{10}{3}\sin(\theta_1)$$

This is equivalent to

$$2\cos(\theta_1) + \frac{10}{3}\sin(\theta_1) = \frac{34}{9}$$

Now, multiply both sides of this equation by  $\frac{9}{2}$  to get

$$9\cos(\theta_1) + 15\sin(\theta_1) = 17$$

Solve for  $\sin(\theta_1)$ .

$$\sin(\theta_1) = \frac{17 - 9\cos(\theta_1)}{15}$$

Square both sides of this equation and use the Pythagorean identity  $\sin^2(\theta_1) = 1 - \cos^2(\theta_1)$  to get

$$1 - \cos^2(\theta_1) = \left(\frac{17 - 9\cos(\theta_1)}{15}\right)^2$$

This is a quadratic equation in  $\cos(\theta_1)$ .

$$153\cos^2(\theta_1) - 153\cos(\theta_1) + 32 = 0$$

Use quadratic formula and simplify:

$$\cos(\theta_1) = \frac{51 \pm 5\sqrt{17}}{102}$$

That is,

$$\theta_1 = \cos^{-1}\left(\frac{51 \pm 5\sqrt{17}}{102}\right)$$

With the aid of a calculator, we can find approximate values of  $\theta_1$ :  $\theta_1 \approx 0.792436$  or  $1.26832$  radians.

These angles are approximately  $45.4032$  or  $72.6693$  in degrees. Now, substitute the values of  $\theta_1$  back into one of the equations (5) or (6) to find the corresponding values of  $\theta_2$ . Substitute  $\theta_1 = 0.792436$  into equation (5):

$$1 \approx \cos(0.792436) + \cos(0.792436 + \theta_2)$$

$$\theta_2 \approx \cos^{-1}(1 - \cos(0.792436)) - 0.792436$$

Which is

$$\theta_2 \approx 0.475884 \text{ radians.}$$

Similarly, when  $\theta_1 = 1.26832$  we get

$$\theta_2 \approx -0.56621 \text{ radians.}$$

These angles are approximately  $27.2661$  and  $-32.4414$  degrees. This analysis suggests that there will be two ways of positioning the links so that the end effector is at a specific position.

As stated earlier, the plan is to have the robot paint the divider sections vertically, sweeping upward. That is, there should be no horizontal movement, or  $dx/dt = 0$ . It is clear that if the velocity of the paint sprayer is con-

stant, then the paint will be applied evenly. Therefore, we will choose the velocity of the sprayer as 1 ft per second. That is,  $dy/dt = 1$  ft per second. Now, differentiate equations (1) and (2) with respect to time and use the above assumptions to get the equations of motions.

Differentiate (1) with respect to  $t$  ( $l_1 = l_2 = 3$ ).

$$\frac{dx}{dt} = -3\sin(\theta_1) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} - 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \left( \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + \frac{d\theta_2}{dt} \right)$$

Differentiate (2) with respect to  $t$  ( $l_1 = l_2 = 3$ ).

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = 3\cos(\theta_1) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \left( \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + \frac{d\theta_2}{dt} \right)$$

With  $dx/dt = 0$  and  $dy/dt = 1$ , two previous equations become

$$0 = -3\sin(\theta_1) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} - 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \left( \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + \frac{d\theta_2}{dt} \right)$$

$$1 = 3\cos(\theta_1) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \left( \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + \frac{d\theta_2}{dt} \right)$$

Distribute and collect like terms in each equation:

$$0 = (-3\sin(\theta_1) - 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2)) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} - 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

$$1 = (3\cos(\theta_1) + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2)) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

Using equation (1) and (2) with  $l_1 = l_2 = 3$ , the above equations can be written as

$$(7) \quad 0 = -y \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} - 3\sin(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

$$(8) \quad 1 = x \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + 3\cos(\theta_1 + \theta_2) \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

The two equations (7) and (8) will be used to determine  $d\theta_1/dt$  and  $d\theta_2/dt$ .

An attached computing device can be used to program the needed calculations as shown above at a given time  $t$ . The computer will repeatedly calculate the position of the end effector, as time changes, to control the upward sweep. At time  $t$  the robot, first, will report the control angles of its links,  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$ , to the computer. Second, the computer will use the forward kinematic equations to calculate the  $x$ - and  $y$ -coordinates of the end effector. Third, the values of  $\theta_1$ ,  $\theta_2$ ,  $x$  and  $y$  will be substituted into the equations (7) and (8), which will produce a system of two equations and two unknowns,  $d\theta_1/dt$  and  $d\theta_2/dt$ .

Fourth, the computer will solve this system of equations to determine the required rotation rate for the links (Connors and Anton 240). Once the links move, the steps repeat.

The process for determining  $d\theta_1/dt$  and  $d\theta_2/dt$  can be demonstrated by choosing values for  $\theta_1$  and  $\theta_2$ , in time  $t$ . Suppose  $\theta_1 = \pi/3$  and  $\theta_2 = -2\pi/3$ .

Substitute  $\theta_1 = \pi/3$  and  $\theta_2 = -2\pi/3$  into the forward kinematic equations (1) and (2) to calculate the  $x$ - and  $y$ -coordinates of the end effector.

$$x = 3\cos \frac{\pi}{3} + 3\cos \left[ \frac{\pi}{3} - \frac{2\pi}{3} \right] = \frac{3}{2} + \frac{3}{2} = 3$$

$$y = 3\sin \frac{\pi}{3} + 3\sin \left[ \frac{\pi}{3} - \frac{2\pi}{3} \right] = \frac{3\sqrt{3}}{2} - \frac{3\sqrt{3}}{2} = 0$$

Substitute  $\theta_1, \theta_2, x$  and  $y$  into equations (7) and (8).

$$0 = -(0) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} - 3\sin \left[ \frac{\pi}{3} - \frac{2\pi}{3} \right] \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

$$1 = (3) \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + 3\cos \left[ \frac{\pi}{3} - \frac{2\pi}{3} \right] \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

Simplify these equations

$$0 = \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

$$1 = 3 \frac{d\theta_1}{dt} + \frac{3}{2} \frac{d\theta_2}{dt}$$

## Painting Room Dividers: Moving a Planar Robotic Arm

Solve these equations for  $d\theta_1/dt$  and  $d\theta_2/dt$ :

$$\frac{d\theta_1}{dt} = \frac{1}{3} \text{ and } \frac{d\theta_2}{dt} = 0$$

To summarize these results, when  $\theta_1 = \pi/3$  and  $\theta_2 = -2\pi/3$ , then,  $x = 3$ ,  $y = 0$ ,  $d\theta_1/dt = 1/3$ , and  $d\theta_2/dt = 0$ . In other words, when the end effector is at this point,  $\theta_1$  is increasing at  $1/3$  radians per second,  $\theta_2$  is not changing, and the end effector will move upward with the desired velocity of 1 ft/s.

In conclusion, a two-link planar robotic arm can be moved in numerous ways to paint the room dividers. The equations needed to control the robotic arm can be constructed when the position of the base, lengths of the links, spray pattern, and velocity of the sprayer over the dividers are given. Two critical sets of equations the computer program needs to control the position and motion of the sprayer are equations (1), (2), (7), and (8).

### Works Cited

Connors, Mary Ann and Howard Anton. "Robotics." Rpt. in Anton, Howard, Irl Bivens, and Stephen Davis. *Calculus: Early Transcendentals*. New York: John Wiley, 2002. 236e-240.

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Evaluation: *This student has done a marvelous job far and beyond what's been asked for this project.*

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# Masculinity and Money: *Glengarry Glen Ross*

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Helen Johnson

Course: Literature 112 (Literature and Film)

Instructor: Kurt Hemmer

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Assignment:

*How do the scenes added or altered in the film version of Glengarry Glen Ross reinforce the concept of masculinity found in the screenplay?*

“Always be closing.” David Mamet uses this phrase in his play *Glengarry Glen Ross* as the basic building block for a definition of masculinity. Masculinity, according to the characters’ dialogue, stands as the most important characteristic for any salesman, and it is only achievable by proficient ones; in both the play and the film, the audience hears that a salesman’s masculinity is based, almost exclusively, on his ability to sell products to his customers. However, the characters compromise their masculinity many times in their quests to “be men.” Every character, from the down-on-his-luck Shelly Levene to the top seller Ricky Roma, is included in an emasculating occurrence. Even Baker, the added film character played by Alec Baldwin, alludes to effeminate actions. The audience draws several conclusions about Mamet’s concept of masculinity, all stemming from the realization that the writer does not agree with his characters’ beliefs on the matter. The added and altered scenes in the movie reinforce the notion that masculinity is not and cannot be achieved through the methods and theories of the characters.

George Aaronow’s character in both the play and movie embodies exactly what all of the others are afraid of becoming: perpetually unsuccessful. Aaronow is not “always closing.” In fact, for the past few months, at least, he is never closing; therefore, he and his colleagues are unable to consider him masculine. In the film, Aaronow is more than an ineffective salesman; he is hopelessly and helplessly effeminate. While the play does not show Aaronow even attempting a sale, the movie reveals his severe incompetence at his trade despite his best efforts. Several times in the film, Aaronow places phone calls to his “leads” in attempts to find a willing party, but his efforts are exhausted, and he resorts to accompanying Moss on a “sit.” While the characters’ dialogue remains mostly unaltered from the play, except for his added phone conversations, ride with Moss, and participation in the meeting with Barker, the portrayal of Aaronow in the film stresses the concept that if a salesman cannot close a deal, then he is incapable of being a man. In the play, Aaronow stutters and roughs his way through conversations, which implies a less masculine character, and even more so in the film. The audience’s impression of him, however, is challenged by his

choice not to burglarize the office. While Moss tries desperately to convince him that this is Aaronow's last chance at manhood, Aaronow chooses morality. He is not hailed as masculine by the characters in the story, but in the world outside of the film, morality is widely perceived as the better, if not more masculine, choice.

Aaronow's character most often directly contrasts that of David Moss. The two characters share a lengthy exchange in the play, and two in the film. Moss acts like a man: he uses profanity, he yells, and he imposes his physical and mental power over anyone who shows him a weakness. However, Moss sells far less land than his demeanor implies. In fact, Roma even comments on his lack of any "good" sales in the recent past. In the added scene with Barker, Moss endures a berating that shakes his confidence to a point where the viewer can see his masculine façade cracking. This addition to the storyline provides a motivation for Moss' conversation with Aaronow in his car—also an added scene—and for his plan to burglarize the office. After being rejected by yet another potential buyer, Moss and Aaronow discuss Mitch and Murray's business philosophy. The two distraught salesmen conclude that the blame for their inability belongs to the policymakers because they created a slave mentality and destroyed the confidence of their employees. Moss uses this blame to escape his own culpability and continue to garner what little masculinity his delusions allow. However, his inability to amass sufficient confidence drives him to find an accomplice to robbery. The audience recognizes that if Moss were truly the "man" he attempted to be, he would break into the office, steal the leads, and disappear without any help. Yet, terrified of the consequences of such actions, Moss seeks help from his coworkers. While he utilizes Aaronow's and later, Levene's, perception of his masculinity to undermine their better judgment, Moss' real motivation—fear—fails to fulfill the prevalent concept of masculinity.

Much like Moss, Shelly Levene uses most of his energy attempting to maintain his masculinity. More in the film than in the play, the audience sees his artifice vacillate between varying degrees of strength and plausibility. Viewers are privy to a side of Levene hidden in the play: while his reactions to Barker are strong and

forceful—he is easily perceived as a man standing up for himself and his peers—the film opens with Levene talking on the phone about his hospital-bound daughter. In this conversation, and in the others added in the film about his daughter, Levene embodies many of the traits excluded from the rampant definition of masculinity in both the film and play. Out of desperation, Levene begs Williamson for "the premium leads." Instead of conversing in the restaurant, as originally set in the screenplay, in the film, Levene chases Williamson outside in the rain and then into his car, imploring him to make a deal for more promising sales contacts. Levene lives in his past successes and uses them as an unspoken promise to Williamson that he is capable of "closing a deal," and therefore believes he is capable of being a man. However, in his film visit to the Spano residence, Levene's failure is only perpetuated as he attempts to assert his contrived, masculine power and is forcefully rejected yet again. Levene's reaction to incessant failure slowly appears on his face as a once feigned confidence gives way to a distraught and desperate person; according to the standards of the play, he cannot even be considered a man due to his inability to close.

Act two, the day after the robbery in the film, reveals a completely changed Levene. He brings an \$82,000 signed contract into the office, along with renewed self-confidence. His "manhood" affirmed by the check in his pocket, Levene no longer begs or attempts to ingratiate Williamson. Instead, he is belligerent and openly shares his thoughts on the malevolent office manager. While these scenes are relatively unaltered from the original script, Jack Lemmon's characterization of Levene in the midst of a tremendous inflation of his ego and confidence reveals in words, in tone, and in action exactly what masculinity is to the employees at Premiere Properties. Shelly Levene made a sale and he brought in money; therefore, he must be a man. Then, when he realizes that his contract means nothing, he almost immediately admits to his own guilt.

Money creating masculinity appears as a common theme in *Glengarry Glen Ross*; Richard (Ricky) Roma sells the most land for the never seen Mitch and Murray. His character epitomizes masculinity as defined by this play. In fact, his character is excused from the calum-

nious meeting with Barker in the film. His abilities exceed those of his peers exponentially, and the added scenes in the film only confirm his “manhood.” However, during his conversation with Lingk, Roma’s position slowly changes from one of power to one that appears submissive. In fact, when Roma opens the brochure for land in Florida, he slides underneath Lingk’s resting arm before making any detectable sales pitch. With this subtle action, Roma instantly puts himself in a typically docile, or feminine, position. His tactic, while carefully planned to give Lingk the illusion of power, highlights the irony present in the entire film. This minute piece of visual information increases the viewer’s skepticism towards the concept of masculinity presented by the characters.

The exclusion from the film of a different brief exchange detracts from the viewer’s ability to draw a clear connection between money and masculinity. In the play, Roma pulls Williamson aside and attempts to negotiate a deal, while Levene is facing his culpability and inevitable prison-time, wherein Roma would receive a portion of all Levene’s future sales. By removing this portion of dialogue from the film, the audience is denied the idea that Roma has been overcome by his desire for money—thereby masculinity—and has quite possibly been achieving success by taking money from the other salesmen’s accomplishments. This scene also shows the reader that Roma lost any sense of morality or ethics; he succumbs completely to this idea that selling land is the only means of achieving manhood. Roma’s belief that money creates a man is enforced by the film as Levene enters the office while Roma chastises the detective and proclaims Levene as a hero, as “The Machine.” This action creates a possibility for the audience to believe that Roma in fact may be a man by standards outside of the world of his office. However, his immediate action reminds the viewer that his only true concern is for making money. In the film, it is not the detective who refuses Levene’s request for Roma as it is written in the play; instead, before Levene utters one last request of his co-worker, Roma is already on the phone with his next client. Roma’s commitment to his job, to making money, and subsequently to being “a

man,” serves as the culmination of the definition of masculinity presented in the play.

Roma’s masculine counterpart in the film does not appear in the play, and is named by the movie’s credits as “Barker” and nothing more. Played by Alec Baldwin, this egomaniacal salesman encompasses Mamet’s intended concept of masculinity more clearly than any other character. He berates Moss, Aaronow, and Levene as incompetent and therefore not worthy of their occupation and not fit to be considered men. Weak leads do not exist in his mind, only weak salesmen. A salesman who cannot close a sale, he explains, is worthless and capable of as much masculinity as a homosexual. Masculinity as defined by the employees of Premiere Properties is summed up in Barker’s speech: “You’re name is ‘You’re Wanting,’ you can’t play in a man’s game, you can’t close them, then go home and tell your wife your troubles.... They’re sitting out there, wanting to give you their money. Are you going to take it? Are you man enough to take it?” According to Barker, it is impossible to be successful in the real estate business as anything less than a powerful, assertive, and fearless man—“it takes brass balls to sell real estate.” When met with opposition, Barker shares his masculinity with Moss by enumerating his monetary accomplishments: “You drove here in a Hyundai and I drove here in an \$80,000 BMW;” “You see that watch? That watch cost more than your car;” “I made \$970,000 last year, how much did you make?” His statements all clarify the concept that masculinity is created by one’s ability to make money and by his ability to manipulate the consumer in order to make more money.

Barker clearly believes that his victims in the office are incapable of fulfilling his challenge and will all lose their jobs; still, he attacks their pride and their confidence with unrelenting ferocity. However, a crack in his own façade appears with one question from Moss: “So, why are you here?” Beneath the profanity and sheer force of speech, the audience can see that Barker, too, must submit to someone. He came “as a favor” to Mitch and Murray. Truly, though, if Barker were as confident and capable as he portrayed, he would not be working for them, nor would he be indebted to them or even

obliged to do them any favors. The only logical reason he traveled to the run-down office to castigate a group of men whom he deemed “worthless,” is that in order to maintain confidence in his own masculinity, he needed to exert power over someone else. This classic insecurity elucidates the clash that Mamet intends.

Throughout the play and the film, masculinity is portrayed as a result of the use of power to facilitate the deprecation and exploitation of others, most commonly manifested as the purchase of land and the consequent post-sale gloating in the office. However, as events unfold in the story, the audience notices that the masculinity of the characters is only a guise used to mask dwindling confidence and overwhelming fear. The added and altered scenes in the movie reinforce Mamet’s message that in this office—a microcosm of a capitalistic culture—everything is lost, including masculinity, as each person allows greed and hunger for power to control his entire life. We find from the portrayal of these salesmen, that the masculinity they seek is not truly manhood; instead, it is the strength and moneymaking power necessary to hide their dishonesty, weakness, and fear.

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Evaluation: *Helen does an extraordinary job of relating the theme of the screenplay to the scene changes of the film.*

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# Walter's Utilitarian Calculation

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Vanessa Koniecki

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

Instructors: Andrew Wilson and Barbara Solheim

Assignment:

*Write a literary research paper  
that blends the content of both courses.*

“Walter Lee! . . . It’s after seven thirty! Lemme see you do some waking up in there now!” (Hansberry 1629). I hear my wife Ruth Younger yell this, muffled through the pillow on top of my head. You see, I don’t bother getting out of bed until Travis, my ten-year-old son, is out of the bathroom. On the other hand, if I wait too long, the Johnsons will be in the bathroom. We live in a small apartment on Chicago’s South Side along with my sister, Beneatha Younger, and my mother, Lena Younger. It’s too small of a place to have the five us sleep, eat, and live comfortably. For Pete’s sake, we have to share our bathroom with another family, and poor little Travis has to sleep in a makeshift bed in the living room! I want to move our small family to a bigger place that Mama put a down payment on. The only problem that I can foresee with that is that the house is located in Clybourne Park and there are no colored people living in that neighborhood. This decision—whether or not to usher my family into a hostile white neighborhood—gnaws at my bones; I cannot let it rest until I have made up my mind. But for now, I have to go to work (by the way, while I’ve been explaining my life to you, I was getting ready for work—hope that doesn’t offend you).

It’s time to eat some breakfast. Let’s see what we

have today. Eggs! I’m sick of eggs—I eat them every-day! Why can’t we ever have bacon or French toast? I say goodbye to Mama, Beneatha, and Ruth, and I leave for work. Usually, I take a subway car to work, but today is a nice day, so I don’t mind sitting outside and waiting for the bus. I start to read an old newspaper that someone had left on the bench when I hear this man mumbling to himself. “Is there a problem sir?” He’s an old man, whose age I couldn’t even begin to guess, with a pasty white, almost eerie complexion, and he’s sitting on the bench writing in a red notebook. The large title on his paper is “Utilitarianism”—a word for which I could give no definition. Because I have no idea what the word means, I politely ask him if he could explain it to me. He tells me that utilitarianism is a consequentialistic ethical theory that deals with the Greatest Happiness Principle. He goes on to say that when something is consequentialist, it focuses on the results of an action to determine whether the action is morally right or wrong. Mr. Mill tells me “the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, [and] wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness” (Mill 34). He stresses that the Greatest Happiness Principle should be the customary way in which people judge their own actions. The Greatest Happiness Principle, as I understand it, means that at all times, everyone should try to achieve the greatest happiness for all of mankind. I sit there for a moment and try to absorb all the information, and then I ask him how I might work toward achieving the Greatest Happiness Principle. He responds by giving me a detailed method called a utilitarian calculation, which allows one to choose whether or not the action in question will have good or bad utility results. Mr. Mill also tells me that he can fluidly move through time periods—past, present, and future—and has spoken with people regarding my future. We talk for a while about what he has heard about my life in the future. I am very interested in hearing more of this man’s thoughts, but my bus has arrived and I need to get to work. I almost rudely leave without introducing myself and so I quickly say, “Thank you for taking time to talk with me. I enjoyed our discussion. By the way, my name is Walter Lee Younger, pleasure meeting you. And you are?” He replies, “John Stuart Mill and the pleasure is mine.” We smile and I begin to board my bus only to look back

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once more and find that the man has vanished. It's one of the stranger things that I have encountered in my life, but nonetheless I learned from the experience. When I return home tonight, I'm going to give Mr. Mill's ideas some more thought.

I have an important decision to make as to whether I should move my family to the new house in Clybourne Park. Don't get me wrong, I want my family to live more comfortably, but I don't know if moving to an all-white neighborhood is good for them. I believe that Mr. Mill is an intelligent man, and I'm going to use his utilitarian calculation to make my decision. I just hope I can work through the calculation before morning when Ruth wakes—she will think I've lost my marbles! Using some calculation to make a major decision is not something that the Younger family does on a consistent basis...or on any basis!

First, I must make a list of all the people who will be affected by my decision, including myself. Mr. Mill said that my happiness matters just as much as everyone else's happiness, but it does not weigh any more heavily. Then, I have to assign utility (happiness) points to all the people who are affected by my decision. Next, I shall go through my list, person/group by person/group, and assign points, whether negative or positive, as to what my best judgment of the situation would be if I go ahead and follow through with the action in question. I am going to base my scale of utility from -100 points of disutility to +100 points of utility. Every person/group will start out at the same place on the scale: 0. After I finish assigning values to all the people on my list, I will add up the results, and based on the net total, I will make my decision. It is important to note that if a group gains or loses utility points, the number of people in the group is multiplied by that figure. For example, if a group of fifteen people gained 10 points, each person in the group gains 10 points (thereby bringing the total points gained for the group to 150 points). If the net total is positive, a greater utility will occur as a result of the decision—in the long term—and so I will follow through with the action in question. On the other hand, if the net total is negative, that means a greater disutility will result and therefore, I should not follow through with the action. If by some chance there is no change, I will have to base my decision on other things.

Before I begin, I do have one objection to Mr. Mill's

theory in that I find his decision to have all results based on the long term unfair at times. For example, if a person were deciding whether or not he or she should give up eating fatty foods, the most probable long-term based answer would be yes. In following the calculation, he or she would assign himself or herself positive utility points; however, the short-term effects could be far different. The man or woman could become emotionally distressed and have a hard time finding other foods that he or she enjoys. Also, it may cause this person to eat at home more often, thereby losing contact with the friends he or she used to dine out with. I know that this may seem like a minor decision to most, but it illustrates my point—why should a person have to suffer in the short term in order to achieve a good long-term result? I'm trying to imagine what Mr. Mill might think, and I believe I've found the answer to my objection! If the values that are assigned to people in the utilitarian calculation were based on short-term effects, a chaotic situation could arise. If people based their decisions on short-term results, they may be happy for a while, but a few months later, they may be miserable with their decision. This would cause a "ping-pong ball" effect (people shifting from unhappiness to happiness and back, finally, to unhappiness). Using my previous example, if this person would continue to eat fatty foods, he or she may suffer a heart attack a few months later as a result of the build up of fat in the arteries. It seems as though my objection is not fitting (now that I have examined it in more detail), and I am now content with using Mr. Mill's calculation.

Let me reiterate once more, the question in mind is "Should I, Walter Lee Younger, move my family into the new home in Clybourne Park?" There's something I haven't mentioned yet that is a big factor in the decision to move. About a day or two ago, a white man named Karl Lindner from the welcoming committee in Clybourne Park came over to the apartment and told us the community had pooled together a sum of money to offer to our family, and in exchange we would agree not to move into "their" neighborhood. Mr. Lindner told me, "we also have the category of what the association calls—uh—special community problems..." (1674). I was furious with him at this point! How can he refer to my family as a community problem? I am tempted to ask him what it is exactly that qualifies my family as a

community problem, but instead I reject his offer and ask the man to leave my house immediately. The rest of my family was appalled at the very existence of a man like Lindner, but lately I've thought of changing my mind. I'll tell you about that later. This calculation will help me decide what is best for everyone. Now, I will make my list of people affected by the decision. I believe that Mama, Ruth, Travis, myself, Beneatha, the white population of Clybourne Park, and the colored population of America will be affected (long term) by this decision.

To begin, I believe that Mama would have an increase of +10 utility points. Currently, she is unhappy in our small apartment and has always dreamed of a bigger place, especially for young Travis, and of having a garden to work in. In the present situation, as I mentioned before, Travis sleeps on a makeshift bed in the so-called living room, and the closest thing that Mama has to a garden is her pathetic plant on the window sill. Mr. Mill told me that critic Philip Brantingham noted "The poor, fragile houseplant is Mama's symbol of the future, of her house-to-be, where she will have a garden of her own" (n. pag.). Also, Mama does not want to live in the apartment anymore because it's literally falling apart. The walls are cracked, and the furniture is old. Let us not forget to add the infestation of roaches and the closet that we've called a kitchen (1663)! When Lindner came over to our apartment with his idea of a "deal," Mama wouldn't hear of it. When I asked Lindner to come over again to talk, Mama made Travis stay in the room so that he could see what I was doing to his future (if I decided to make the decision). Even though it will be hard to live amongst whites while they (and us, too) adjust to the integrated living situation, I think in the long term, Mama will be happier because her dreams of a better place to live for her family will have come true and she will have the garden she's always dreamed of! With the new garden tools and hat that we gave her, she will be delighted!

Ruth, my wife, is pregnant and a hard-working woman. She works all day and then comes home to clean the house, cook, and help raise Travis. Some-times I honestly don't know how she does what she does—even though I won't admit it. Ruth is excited at the idea of moving to a new house. She was ecstatic when Mama first told us, and she's even bought curtains for the place

(1671)! Ruth would like her own bathroom, too. Who in this family wouldn't? I overheard her talking to Beneatha about taking a nice warm bath once we move in. She's determined to move into that new house. She told Mama that she would "work twenty hours a day and wash all the sheets in America" (1686) if she had to—as long as they moved. With a move, I think she would gain +15 utility points. She would enjoy the spacious house, with its full size kitchen and bathroom. Ruth would be glad that Travis would have a real bedroom to sleep in, too. I know that the expected protest from the white population of Clybourne Park would bother her, but I think Ruth can push past their hate. She has endured stressful situations before and is currently dealing with one right now—whether she is going to keep our baby or have an abortion. I believe Ruth has the ability to work through things logically. She does not make impulse decisions (thank God for that—or else our baby might have already been aborted).

Travis—look at him sleep beneath the frayed blanket—he deserves this house more than anything. He is so innocent, so young; nothing he could have done would be worth the punishment of living in this dump. He brings my family joy and a youthfulness otherwise unseen. Mama, Ruth, and I are worn out—we appear years older than our true age—but Travis still retains his youth. Travis is a good son; he takes after school jobs to earn money, and he has respect for Mama and Ruth. He has not experienced the adult life—one of all work and no reward—yet, and because of this, I don't believe that he is as frustrated as Mama and Ruth are. If I decide to move our family to Clybourne Park, I believe that Travis will experience a gain of 20 points. In the beginning, he may lose his friends and have a hard time making new ones. I also fear that he may be targeted for psychological *and* physical violence. Beneatha mentioned once before that "they don't do it like that any more" in a discussion about physical violence (Hansberry 1677). That gives me some comfort, but it doesn't eliminate the fear; nevertheless, I *do* believe that he will experience more freedom with the acquisition of a new bedroom for himself. He will be looked upon as a young pioneer for social equality—a new beginning for the colored race.

Now, I will evaluate myself. I am a man of mixed feelings. When Mr. Lindner first came to our apartment, I was furious! I would not even *consider* his offer

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of money in exchange for a loss of freedom. Then, something terrible, something that was my *entire* fault happened. This is what I was referring to earlier—what made me change my mind, at least for a moment or two. My father recently passed away, and after his death, Mama was paid life insurance. Mr. Mills told me that Angeletta K. Gourdine, a critic, mentioned something about my father's death:

through his [Walter's father's] insurance, he would guarantee that his other children—Walter Lee, Beneatha, and Walter's son Travis—would survive poverty and perhaps taste prosperity. (n.pag.)

Three thousand five hundred of the ten thousand dollars in life insurance money that Mama received was used to put a down payment on the house in Clybourne Park. The rest of the money was given to me, and I was expected to put three thousand dollars in the bank for Beneatha's education, and the rest of the money (\$3,500) was for me to spend/invest wisely (according to Mama's wishes). I invested my money *and* Beneatha's share in a liquor store that I had wanted to open with a couple of friends. Unfortunately, all of the money was stolen when one of my "friends" left town. I called Lindner up and told him to come over so that we could discuss his offer. But, when he arrived, my entire family was furious. Mama kept Travis in the room so that he would see what I was doing to his future and to our family's sense of integrity. I broke down in tears.

Now, I must decide what this move would do for me. A critic by the name of Catherine Gunther Kodat once told Mr. Mill that "accepting Lindner's bribe would, for Walter, mean acknowledging that being black means being less than a man" (n.pag.). I have always felt like a failure because I don't live in a respectable house. This move would give me a sense of pride and newfound hope. I would feel accomplished for living in a spacious house versus this rattrap of an apartment. And with the confidence that I would gain, I believe that I could find a better paying job to help pay for the mortgage and more importantly, Beneatha's education. I know that there will be some tension and perhaps discrimination once we move into Clybourne Park, but if I could reject Mr. Lindner's offer, I'm sure I could reject their ignorant attitudes, too. If I moved the family, I believe I would gain +30 points of utility.

Beneatha, Beneatha—my intelligent, strong-willed sister might have a problem or two, should I decide to move our family. Of all the members of the Younger family, Beneatha is the most radical. The girl has a lot of determination—she has worked hard in school and is striving to become a doctor—which is a hard feat for a woman, let alone a colored woman! Along with fighting racial and gender barriers, she worries about where she will find the money to finance her education, and no thanks to me, she now has lost some of the insurance money that was intended to go toward that. David Cooper, a critic that Mr. Mill knew, told him that "After Beneatha's brother Walter Lee squanders, on an ill-advised investment, the life insurance money set aside for Beneatha's medical education, she gives in to despair, even cynicism, watching her dream of becoming a doctor seemingly go up in smoke" (n.pag.). She is currently involved with two boys, one of whom would like for Beneatha to go back to Africa with him—an offer Beneatha is considering; in spite of this, considering Beneatha's dream of becoming a doctor, I believe her best chance lies here if we move to Clybourne Park. She will be exposed to harsh criticism, and I think that the criticism will make her stronger and more determined to accomplish her goals. If I move my family to Clybourne Park, Beneatha would acquire 20 points of utility.

The white population of Clybourne Park is comprised of ignorant, stubborn people, who possess no desire for acquiring social equality. They have devised a faulty "master" plan for removing or preventing colored people from entering their white community. The plan consists of pooling together the community's money and offering it to the colored folks who have purchased homes in their area. This may work with some colored folks, but not with the Younger family! We are a proud family that will not be bought by dirty money. If we move into Clybourne Park, the white population will experience an increase of +40 points (remember that this value applies to every individual in the group and therefore makes the increase much more than 40 points). The increase will be due to the newfound awareness of the need for diversity and the advantages of a mixed community. It is to be expected that at first, there could be an unhappy reaction, but because Mr. Mill's theory is based on the long term, I do not have to consider this when assigning values. We

(the coloreds versus the whites) could teach each other culture and discuss ideas for developing a better community for our children, no matter what color they are. We live in a culturally pluralistic society, and I believe that people from different ethnic backgrounds should talk about their cultures with others. Perhaps this would help certain folks realize that their hatred of people from different ethnicities, other than their own, is hurting society, rather than helping society.

The colored people of America are plagued by racism and do not have the life chances that people need to succeed and become happy individuals. Currently, the colored people of America live in segregated housing. We (the colored people) need to challenge this idea of social inequality and to do this, we need to do unconventional things. For example, if I move my family into Clybourne Park, things will be uncomfortable at first. There are bound to be acts of discrimination toward my family and possibly even acts committed out of hatred. Yet, if no one makes the first move, the colored people of America will be forever stuck in the groove carved out for them by the white population. Of course, the whites would like us to stay in our subordinate positions! But we must rise up and fight to achieve our freedom to live, to be equal, to succeed! With my family's move, I believe that eventually, the colored population of America will gain 60 points of utility! At this time, the colored population makes up about eleven percent of the entire population of America (*African-American Mosaic*, n.pag.). Think of how many points that equates to when each person in the group will have a gain of 60 points! I am assigning our population such a high amount of points because my family's move will be the beginning of a new era of social equality.

Now that I have assigned values to everyone on my list, I must add up the points that I have assigned and make my final decision. The end results (in utility points) are: Mama with +10, Ruth with +15, Travis with +20, Beneatha with +20, the white population of Clybourne Park with +40, the colored population of America with +60, and myself with +30. When I add those values together, I end up with hundreds and hundreds of utility points. According to Mr. Mill, I should move my family to our new home in Clybourne Park, and that's just what I will do. I don't know why I was

ever *not* considering moving our family to Clybourne Park. I have found Mr. Mill's theory of utilitarianism very valuable, and I will definitely make use of it in the future to aid me with tough decisions. Kindly excuse me now, for I have some business to attend to...."Mr. Lindner! MR. LINDNER! I have made my decision and you may kindly leave our apartment right this minute! I will not accept your 'offer,' and I will be seeing you at the next welcoming committee meeting! Good day, sir!"

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Evaluation: *This, for sure, is a creative version of the literary research essay.*

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# Does a CEO Deserve a Million-Dollar Pay Package?

Steven Lee

Course: Economics 200 (Introduction to Economics)  
Instructor: Getachew Begashaw

## Assignment:

*Write a critical review using some of  
the economics tools studied in the course.*

Nowadays, we are facing a business downturn. In stockowners' minds, there is widespread gloom and doom about their stock investments. In spite of massive layoffs at many companies, most CEOs received big pay packages in 2002. According to an annual *Business Week* study of executive pay, middle executive paychecks reach to \$3.7 million. I claim that CEOs don't deserve those excessive packages.

In hard-hit business sectors, some executives are rewarded with high pay for poor performance. American Airlines (AA) is a good example: "AA urged union members to take huge pay cuts to keep it from bankruptcy filing. Meanwhile, the board had agreed to award multimillion-dollar bonuses and pension plans to management" (Tsao 1). If I were a CEO of AA, I would have some considerations before I take those bonuses. Is that fair to union members, who are struggling with layoffs and pay cuts? I would place myself in their shoes, and feel their fears of unemployment and pay cuts.

Some CEOs may claim that their big bucks are deserved because of outstanding company performance. On the other hand, other top executives are receiving huge paychecks and bonuses while the company has a budget deficit. "Bank of America's CEO McColl was paid more than \$75 million in 1999. In that year, the price of the bank stock declined by 16 per-

cent" ("What a Deal..." 1). "It's customary in America to get a raise for a job well done," said Bruce Raynor, UNITE secretary-treasurer and chairman for Amalgamated Bank. Raynor said, "Bank of America violates this principle in the most offensive manner, robbing public shareholders by awarding Mr. McColl a 50-percent increase in total compensation when the company underperformed under his leadership" ("What a Deal..." 1).

You may think that CEOs deserve fat paychecks because of their contributions to businesses. If so, let me introduce you to an economic term that I learned in an economics class. The term is Marginal Revenue Product (MRP). "MRP is the change in total revenue that occurs when more labor is hired" (Schiller 184). For example, let's say you own a shirt factory that employs ten workers. The price of a shirt in the market is \$20. Now, you want to hire one more worker who can produce ten shirts a day. Then, his MRP will be \$20 times ten shirts equal to \$200. It is easy to measure his productivity by market value. However, we can't easily calculate a CEO's MRP. You can't measure a CEO's performance in dollar value. Can anyone prove that a CEO produces \$10 million worth of goods for the firm? There is no yardstick to measure a CEO's productivity in dollar value.

Some economists may point out that CEO pay has more elusiveness than MRP because a CEO provides strategic leadership and a sense of mission. I basically agree with that proposal, but a corporate CEO's contributions are less well defined. As Schiller points out, "These are critical to a corporation's success but hard to quantify" (Schiller 195). If CEO pay were based on performance, the President of the United States would be worth up to \$58 million a year. Compensation experts say, "now our president only makes \$400,000 a year. Based on performance, a president would be worth up to \$58 million a year if he meets certain goals. Those goals are: keeping inflation rate low, assuring economic growth, reducing crime rates, guaranteeing employment, and lowering the trade deficit. Rewards for those duties are worth \$14 million, \$23 million, \$8 million, \$5 million, and \$8 million respectively" (Schiller 196). No bonus plan is set up for the president, while CEOs are receiving million-dollar bonuses.

Imagine your parents, who are non-native English speakers, migrated into the U.S, and you were born here.

When you grow up, you speak only English. Sometimes when they can't understand what you say, then you get frustrated, and sometimes you humiliate them. Most high-tech companies' CEOs don't know about high-end-technologies. They are CEOs, who are responsible for making decisions to make sure the firm is growing. They don't know anything about how a computer works, but they draw the business plan, and non-management technicians have to perform what a CEO asks them to do. How many computer software companies' CEOs have an advanced degree in Computer Studies? They are just bossing around well-trained computer technicians. CEOs produce no goods and services for businesses. Therefore, they don't deserve higher salary than technicians who provide goods and services.

Some people usually think, "Business profits are brought by CEOs." It is just an opinion. To create profits, businesses have to please customers and buyers. Businesses have to handle customer complaints professionally. They can't just ignore customer complaints. Today, running a business just doesn't mean selling and buying once. The business should be able to persuade customers to buy again. If the business offers excellent customer service, buyers will deal with that business even if it charges a little more. Who carries out a good customer relationship in the business? No CEO conducts business with customers. Front-line employees, whose salary is much lower than CEOs, take the responsibilities of pleasing customers' satisfaction. If they don't treat customers well, the business will fail in today's competitive market. Useless CEOs shouldn't be given fat pay that they don't deserve.

Does the CEO deserve nearly all the credit for the company's success? I believe most people would answer "no." According to *Business Week*, "the average CEO of a major corporation made 42 times the pay of a typical American factory worker in 1980. By 1998, the ratio of CEOs' pay and ordinary workers' difference reached to 419 times. If that rate of exponential growth were to continue, the average CEO would make the salary equivalent of more than 150,000 American factory workers in 2050" (McClayland 3). Managers and other key employees who are responsible for day-to-day company activities are receiving much less compensation for their efforts. Is that fair?

Tsao has said, "Executive pay is a cost. If you go

crazy, you end up hurting the profits of the company and hence the stock price. Oversized CEO pay should raise red flags for investors" (2). Our American businesses should practice like Glaxo SmithKline, Europe's biggest pharmaceuticals group. After taking into account shareholder views, the company has decided to hold off giving a multi-million pound pay rise to its chief executive, Jean Pierre Garnier. "Glaxo shares have slumped by over 30% in the last 12 months, while profits fell 25% in the last financial year" (BBC News 2). Mr. Garnier doesn't deserve fat pay for poor performance.

To sum up, what can we do to oppose excessive CEO pay? If we own shares of stock, we must use our shareholder power to oppose excessive CEO salaries. Why should we do that? Simply, most CEOs don't deserve excessive pay packages. When a company budget shows negative signs, useful front-line workers are laid off or have to agree to take huge pay cuts. That is not ethical and it is not balanced, and in my view, it is absolutely not fair to the majority of workers. We call for government intervention to limit the maximum amount of CEOs' salaries.

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Evaluation: *Steven exhibits not only mastery of the basic economics concepts applied in the article but also excellent writing skill and style that keep the reader tantalized. He has blended concepts of economic efficiency with fairness, which are often antithetical. This is a well researched and argued article.*

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# The Silence Is Recognized

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*Kenneth Lehmann*

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

Assignment:

*Write a seven-to-10 page literary research paper on a topic of your choice, using at least seven secondary sources.*

In his writing, Tadeusz Borowski uses an unusual literary device to capture the bleak reality of the concentration camp existence. At least that's what I thought after reading "This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." The narrator of this story had a detachment from his subject, and the story presented the bare facts with neither comment nor judgment. The story doesn't include someone whose presence stops the parade of Jews marching off to the gas chambers. There are moments of humanity in the inhumane conditions of the camp, but signs of hope are missing: it seems that everyone is a victim. Contrary to standard literary convention, Borowski uses this unusual style in his writings to explore human depravity and degradation rather than the few glimpses of hope and life within the concentration camp.

I work in the building construction field. In my line of work, drawings of how a building is to be constructed are prepared before any work can begin. These drawings, or plans as they're referred to by the building

trade, tell the story of how the building is to be constructed, starting from the foundation and working up to completion. The majority of the plans are prepared from a perspective in which each section of the building is viewed as a finished component. Each finished component becomes part of a finished assembly, each finished assembly becomes part of a finished level, and each finished level becomes part of the finished building. There is a detachment from the design; the plans explain in a matter of fact manner what is to be accomplished. No opinions of construction techniques or practices are given. The sequence of the construction is left to the builder's interpretation. This is similar to the perspective Borowski uses in his stories. His stories are told in a manner in which the components are assembled and layered into the completed story. Detached from the events, his writings tell the story in a matter of fact way, offering no opinion of what has occurred. The interpretation of the story is left to the reader.

At first, this style of writing was confusing to me. It didn't follow the classic style of tragedy that I had become accustomed to. Andrzej Wirth wrote in his criticism of Borowski, "The design of tragedy based on a Creon-Antigone situation in relation to the tragedy of mass annihilation in Auschwitz is as useless as the Shakespearean tragedy of the 'great steps' by which History ascends amid dynastic murders" (20). The events of Auschwitz could not be told in the classical sense. Auschwitz was itself another world, and life within the camp is difficult for those who did not experience it to understand. Borowski adapted a style in which the tragedy could be told without the constraints of classic literature. As I studied Borowski's stories, I had an uneasy feeling that there were things that I was not understanding. The values that I was taught throughout my life didn't appear in these stories. I was having difficulty identifying with characters who showed no hope and who seemed willing to go along, without discontent, with the horrific decisions made for them by others. It took awhile to realize that in a place like Auschwitz, the values I associated with were not available. The tragedy lay somewhere within the circumstance and not within the characters. "It has nothing to do with the classical conception based on the necessity

of choice between two systems of value. The hero of Borowski's stories is a hero deprived of all choice. He finds himself in a situation without choice because every choice is base. The tragedy lies not in necessity of choosing but in the impossibility of making a choice" (Wirth 20). The characters had no control over their situation and therefore could not exercise the same values now as they had prior to captivity. Their alternatives were limited to trying to survive within the brutality of the concentration camp or being killed. Stories of individuals of good character fighting for a just cause could not adequately tell of the horrors within the concentration camps. As one critic states,

Borowski does not make either the victim or the murderer the hero in his stories. The first eventuality demands that the individual be given exceptional positive qualities. Those qualities, because they are then crushed by a superior force, excite the feeling of tragedy. In Borowski's Auschwitz stories the difference between executioner and victim is stripped of all greatness and pathos, it is brutally reduced to a second bowl of soup, or an extra blanket (Parmet 4).

By using this technique, Borowski elevates the stories beyond the individual level and places them within the circumstances of the time and place in history. "He explored human depravity and degradation rather than the morsels of hope and life in concentration camps" (Best 2).

Borowski's stories, some only a few pages long, tell of the daily life within the concentration camps. The concentration camps were set up and organized by the Germans to efficiently shoot, strangle, beat to death, starve, gas or burn alive six million people. The exterminated were then stripped of their hair, teeth, and the fat of their bodies in support of the Third Reich. The stories take us from the arrival in cattle cars of the Jews who will be gassed and burned, to the long days in the camp among the prisoners who are managing to survive by luck, cunning, strength or cruelty, and then on to liberation and the days afterward. In his stories, he includes strange ironies as in "The Death of Schillinger." First Sergeant Schillinger ranked among

the murderers in the camp who "boasted that they had personally succeeded in killing with the fist, the club, or the revolver, at least ten thousand people each" (Borowski 144). Schillinger was shot by his own pistol by a naked woman he tried to take from the line to the gas chamber. As he laid on the ground dying, he groaned, "'O Gott, mein Gott, was hab' ich getan, das ich so leiden muss?'" which means—"O God, my God, what have I done to deserve such suffering?" (Borowski 146). His stories included frank observations to produce effect such as "Real hunger is when one man regards another man as something to eat..." (Borowski 54).

Lawrence L. Langer suggests that in the opening line of "This Way to the Gas"—"All of us walked around naked" (Borowski 29)—Borowski "introduces us to an unrecognizable Eden, where men and women exist not by naming the beasts but by being confused with them, breathing (while their garments are being deloused) not the glorious air of paradise restored but the odor of Cyclone B, 'an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in the gas chamber'" (25). It is as if the world is degenerating back to its roots, yet somehow man is still in charge. The confusion this represents is the same confusion the Jews face on their arrival to Auschwitz.

The delousing is a tool used by Borowski to show the dehumanizing nature of the concentration camps. He compares the inhabitants of the camp with lice first, with Cyclone B being an efficient killer of both lice and men, and then when describing camp security. "The camp has been sealed off tight. Not a single prisoner, not one solitary louse, can sneak through the gate" (Borowski 29). The comparison indicates that the prisoners are not treated with any sense of humanity, where even in death they do not expire as human beings but instead are exterminated in the same manner as lice.

In Borowski's stories, the narrator is a victim who himself is taking part in the crime. As a political prisoner, who is of Polish descent, he was housed in the smaller Auschwitz I. The smaller Auschwitz I throughout its history was reserved for political prisoners, mainly Poles and Germans. His nationality provided him some small amount of protection against execution as the Germans were in the midst of the "Final Solution," the extermination of the Jews. The Jews were sent to the

larger Auschwitz II facility, which was equipped with the facilities to gas and cremate large numbers. To process the incoming Jews, prisoners were used to fill shortages of manpower. The narrator, a Kapo, a prisoner trustee put in charge of other prisoners, assists the Germans by unloading the trainloads of Jews, separating them from the luggage, taking bundles and packages from their hands, and ushering them towards the camp for extermination. For this work, Kapos are permitted to scavenge food, drink, and items of clothing from the condemned. His survival, at least temporarily, is dependent on the death of someone else. The narrator is strongly affected by the events that in part he's helping to bring about. Though he tries to mentally distance himself from what is taking place, he becomes overwhelmed and physically ill, and he vomits. The act of vomiting symbolizes his attempt to rid himself of his guilt and responsibility for the deaths of the Jews who through his efforts have been sent to their deaths.

The conventional sense of sacrifice is twisted in these stories. To suffer so that others can live does not apply in the concentration camps. In "A Day at Harmenz," after the initial meal of soup is served, two caldrons are left over. The Kapo, based on his tenure in the camp, is entitled to decide who will get a second helping of soup. With the end of his ladle, he points to the fortunate few who will receive a second helping. "The second helping is for those who work better, for the stronger, the healthier. The sick, the weaklings, the emaciated, have no right to an extra bowl of water with nettles. Food must not be wasted on people who are about to go to the gas chamber" (Borowski 70). The Kapo never makes a mistake in his distribution of second helpings. In the concentration camps, traditional reason does not apply. The dispersal is based on the limited quantity of food available. To serve a second helping to those it cannot nourish will in effect weaken the stronger ones whom it can. In Auschwitz, a different value of sacrifice is defined: by letting the weak suffer, the strong can survive.

The extermination of the Jews is described as if it's a natural occurrence within the camp. An example of this is in the story "The People Who Walked On." The prisoners were permitted to build a soccer field. The field was created with great care, to the point where the grass

was watered daily by carrying barrels of water from the latrine. When the field was completed, the prisoners would play after their evening meal. On one occasion, the narrator, playing goalkeeper, a position in which his back is towards the camp, observes, "Between throw-ins in a soccer game, right behind my back, three thousand people had been put to death" (Borowski 84). The event, which goes unnoticed by the other participants of the game, is portrayed with indifference as if it was part of the natural process of selection. After reading this part of the story, my first thought was, has the narrator become so accustomed to the atrocities of the camp that he no longer views them as unnatural but instead as commonplace, quite simply just part of life within the camp? Simon Gray explains that, "From the special position of the narrator poised between the victim and the murderer emerges that unexpected 'alienation effect' in the flash of which Borowski portrays the truth about the camps. This alienation effect is brought about by the description of unimaginable crimes as if they were something almost natural" (21) Gray's theory is supported as the narrator describes his days in the camp: "Each day, as I got up in the morning to scrub the floors, the people were walking—along both roads. Women, men, children. They carried their bundles. When I sat down to dinner—and not a bad one either—the people were walking.... On warm evenings I sat at the barracks reading *Mon frere Yves* by Pierre Loti—while the procession continued on and on, along both roads" (Borowski 84). The narrator is showing that regardless of events occurring in the prisoner's life, the procession to the gas chambers continues without pause. Even as the tide of the war is changing and the allies are advancing on two fronts, the trains loaded with people still arrive; they are unloaded and begin walking along both sides of the road. The supply of Jews seems endless, and the prisoners are powerless to stop it. Survival is dependent on one's ability to adapt to this situation. The "alienation effect" depicted by the narrator, at least for me, intensified the brutality and the harshness of the camps.

"In his hatred, Hitler considered all Jews unclean, subhuman, like maggots in a rotting body. It was reasonable to him that decent society should be scrubbed clean of such filth" (Byers 13). Yet in Borowski's stories, the only people who acted with a sense of human-

ity and respect found in decent society were the Jews, this in spite of the brutality with which they were met. Examples of this are found in "This Way For the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen." An old woman being sent to the gas chamber is forced to carry the dead bodies of trampled infants retrieved from the train cars along with her. Despite her gruesome task, she shows the narrator pity for the work he must do. A small girl with only one leg is being carried to the trucks painfully by the arms and the leg, and she politely addresses them as sir. Rudolph Hoss, the SS Kommandant of Auschwitz commented in his autobiography that he observed the Jews act with compassion and dignity. "I also watched how some women who suspected or knew what was happening, even with the fear of death all over their faces, still manage enough strength to play with their children and to talk to them lovingly" (Hoss 158). Contrary to Hitler's belief and demonstrated by Borowski, only the Jews displayed the qualities of compassion, sympathy, courtesy, and dignity one would expect to find in decent society.

Borowski's stories, although written in a distant and what can be described as a cold blooded fashion, provide an unmistakable protest to the absurdity of life within Nazi Germany's concentration camp system. His descriptions and accounts capture the bleak and brutal reality endured by both the prisoners and those slated for extermination. Yet in his stories he expresses no moral outrage; the moral outrage is a product of reading the stories. I remember reading an article, unfortunately I forget where, in which the author of the article compared Borowski's stories to "a moral silence, like a pause which follows a scream." I wish I had the talent and vocabulary to provide a better description.

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Evaluation: *This paper gets at the heart of what makes Borowski's work so unique and unsettling.*

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# Home Is Where the Heart Is

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*Anna Leja*

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Greg Herriges

Assignment:

*Students were required to write a 500-word description essay that might contain elements of narration.*

I have heard various people say, “Home is where the heart is” countless times, and it never bestowed any real meaning. I was born in Zakopane, Poland, and my family moved to America when I was only three years old. I grew up in Chicago, and naturally I considered it my home. I, however, had a lingering feeling that I didn’t really belong. My parents did not earn enough money, and it was impossible for our family of five to go back to visit. Even though my parents had meager salaries, they managed to hold on to their first home in Koscielisko. In the summer of 2000, my parents finally decided to go back and reconcile with family members and get us reacquainted with a lost lifestyle. I was excited to see my family and the house my father spoke so fondly of.

I recall vividly when I first saw the three-story, wooden giant. It appeared ill kept and untamed as we drove up the driveway. The dark green grass grew unfettered across the shaded yard, and the wild mushrooms yearned to be released from the smothering soil. The wind crashed against the pale glass windows, and they howled back in anger. Years of rain and snow darkened the once golden wood to rotten brown remains. The mountain air was soothing to my pollution-filled lungs, and I took a refreshing deep breath as I cautiously approached the uninviting front door.

The house silently sighed of relief as my father turned the key and slowly opened the creaky door. Immediately it appeared welcoming; it had been waiting for us, for twelve long years, to return. The air inside smelled and tasted of freshly cut lumber. The walls looked of gold when the sunlight gleamed upon them. I nervously crept up the smooth, silent staircase and awaited my mother’s permission to explore the endless rooms. Even though the outside was obviously affected by time, the rooms were surprisingly undisturbed. In each of the bedrooms, the beds were made, and the multicolored blankets lay on top as if they had just been slept in. As I continued through the house, I noticed old clothes, toys, and pictures that my parents left behind. In the playroom, a tiny brown rocking horse sat anxiously in the corner, waiting to be taken for one more ride. The toys were lined up neatly across the room, and the dolls seemed to smile as I walked past. I sat, touching the still smooth fur of the

stuffed animals, when my father yelled, “Anna, come here. I want you to see this.”

I sprinted through the dark hallway and out onto the large balcony on the second floor. The sun was setting behind the Tatra Mountains, and it delivered a sea of magnificent colors that gleamed off the high mountain-tops. I stood arm in arm with my father and watched as the great mountains consumed the dying sun. After all color disappeared from the infinite sky, I went back inside to continue my journey.

For the next three weeks I learned about every room, every toy, and every mark, scratch, and bump in the house. I looked at old pictures of my parents and when the house was first being built. It was then that I understood why they had held on to it for so many years; their love for each other and their dreams of a family were poured into that house. My father planted a tree in the yard the day I was born—sixteen years later, it stood tall and proud alongside our house. I began to realize, as the days passed, that my parents’ love for the house was in actuality their love for me.

As we slowly drove down the cement driveway on our way to the crowded airport, I noticed how tall the house stood amidst the colossal mountains. I wasn’t afraid anymore; I was deeply saddened to leave it behind. Old memories, hopes, and dreams along with laughter and tears were all safely hidden within the sturdy walls. I never had a place I could truly call home, and as we drove off, I knew that this was that place. After all, part of my memories and my heart will always remain enclosed within that house.

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Evaluation: *Anna vividly recalls her first “home-coming” to her family’s home in Poland. The language is simple but rich, and it appeals to most of the senses. Also, there is an implicit sense of self-discovery that develops throughout the prose tour.*

# The Metamorphosis

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*Wendy Lippert*

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write a literary research paper.*

For as long as I can remember, I have been obsessed with abnormal psychology. I find it endlessly fascinating to discover the existence of disorders like psychogenic fugue and selective mutism. Naturally, it is always a thrill when I can rule them out of my own psychological profile. After much research, I have diagnosed myself as being only slightly unbalanced. Happily, albeit somewhat irresponsibly, I am able to shift the blame of my minor neuroses on growing up in a dysfunctional family. Of course, my situation is hardly unique. Who has a family that is not somewhat dysfunctional? Certainly nobody I care to know. In “The Metamorphosis,” Franz Kafka presents the reader with siblings, Gregor and Grete Samsa, who each give a unique perspective on how crucial a role family dysfunction can play in defining personal identities. On a superficial level, the title of the novella applies to the fantastic physical transformation that Gregor undergoes as he changes from a man to an insect. However, aside from the dramatic change in his body, I would argue that Gregor largely remains a static character. More significantly, the title addresses the dramatic emotional, physical, and psychological transformation that is exhibited by Grete through her actions toward dealing with her brother.

From the opening pages of the story, the reader attains a sense that Gregor’s entire existence is ruled by guilt. He spends all of his time working at a job he hates, supporting his entire family, because his father has declared bankruptcy and has stopped working. While he is not happy in his role as head of the household, he makes no effort to rectify his situation and commits himself to paying off his parents’ debt for “another five or six years” (Kafka 394). Even after he awakes one morning to find his human body transformed into that of an insect, his new “jutting brown underbelly” and “back as hard as armor” are merely afterthoughts (393). His primary concern is the fact that he has overslept and is going to be late for work:

“Before it strikes seven-fifteen, I must without fail be completely out of bed. For one thing, someone from the company will have come by then to inquire after me, because the office opens before seven.” (396)

Surely, waking up to such a startling transformation would cause sheer terror in most people. For a character like Gregor, who is sadly lacking any real personal identity, the change in his body goes almost unnoticed. According to author Walter H. Sokel,

That Gregor's metamorphosis literally incarnates guilt becomes apparent first of all by the fact that his immediate reaction to his transformation is a guilty conscience. He has missed the hour of his work and feels guilty for it. He feels guilty for having plunged his family into misfortune. He is ashamed. He seeks to hide, to make himself invisible. (110)

The obligation Gregor feels towards supporting his family takes precedence over the concerns he should be feeling for himself. This obligation, rooted in the guilt imposed by his father, is likely the catalyst for his new subhuman form.

After Gregor fails to emerge from his room as expected, his family begins to suspect something has gone awry. Grete whispers to Gregor through his door, asking if he is ill or if he needs something and begs him to open the door. Thus, the first impression we get of Grete is that of a timid, loving sister. When her pleas and those of her parents fail to get Gregor out of his room, Grete breaks down into tears (398). Gregor wonders what is causing her to cry and immediately thinks that perhaps it is because he is in danger of losing his job. This is an interesting observation by Gregor and suggests that he is aware that his family is using him for their own selfish comforts, yet he has chosen to remain complacent in his role as the family "breadwinner."

Once Gregor reveals his transformation into an insect to his mother and father, they are understandably appalled and react by collapsing and sobbing. Once the initial shock wears off, his father becomes violent, forcing Gregor back into his room with a stick while "spitting out hissing noises like a wild beast" (402). Despite their astonishment upon encountering a giant insect where they are expecting to find their son, Mr. and Mrs. Samsa never express any doubt that the creature they have discovered is indeed Gregor. Benno von Wiese addresses the behavior of Gregor's family immediately after their discovery: "Significantly, no one around

Gregor reflects upon the amazing, inexplicable quality of this transformation. They accept it as a fact, albeit a repulsive one, just as Gregor himself and even the narrator accept it" (qtd. in Rolleston 59). The lack of any real concern for Gregor's predicament emphasizes the parents' parasitic treatment of their son. It is irrelevant if Gregor is human or an insect; he is still treated in the same manner by his family. "Gregor Samsa is not independent of his cockroach form...he is now really himself. No longer is he the insignificant commercial traveller, the family breadwinner; his new form is the pure expression of his personality" (Parry 87).

In the first step toward her transformation, Grete takes it upon herself to become the sole caretaker to her brother. Initially, she is the only member of the family to venture into Gregor's room and make a concerted effort to find out what Gregor can eat:

He could never have guessed, however, what his sister in her goodness actually did. In order to test his preferences, she brought him an entire assortment of foods spread out on an old newspaper. (404)

While Gregor is very pleased with his sister's actions, it does not take long for his guilt to rear its ugly head as he decides to hide under a sofa whenever Grete enters the room, so she will be spared the sight of having to look at him. At this point, he has been a bug for several days, yet he is still unconcerned with himself and simply does not want to make anyone uncomfortable.

For most of Grete's young life, she looked up to her brother as a "father figure." They were very close siblings, and Grete likely saw her brother as a role model. Gregor's paternal instincts were surely in place as he planned to send his sister to a music conservatory despite his parents' objection. His plan brought him great joy and further expressed his sole purpose in life, taking care of his family. It is only natural that Grete took it upon herself to care for her loving brother in his troubled state. Yet, within a short period, Grete's actions upon entering her brother's room begin dramatically to change. Whereas she initially "came inside on tiptoe" (404), within a month she entered Gregor's room and "ran to the window and hastily flung it open" (408). Grete's attitude toward her brother is obviously turning

sour. While this is apparent to Gregor, he remains unconcerned for himself and instead tries to pacify his sister by devising a plan so that he can hide from her sight. As noted by Ruth Tiefenbrun, "He was extremely grateful to her but could not bear to face her revulsion...When Gregor realized how disgusting he was to his sister, he worked for four hours to drape a sheet over the sofa so that he would be completely invisible"(126). This serves as another sad reminder that Gregor is incapable of changing who he is, a man lacking his own identity who has wasted his life at the whim of others.

While Gregor has noticed a change in his sister, he also becomes aware that his parents are noticing a change as well: "he often heard them praise his sister's current industry, whereas they had previously complained a great deal about her, as she had then seemed to them a rather idle girl" (408). As time passes, and Grete becomes increasingly less compassionate for her brother, there is evidence that she is beginning to resent him. When Gregor's mother finally ventures into his room and once again collapses at the sight of him, Grete is furious: "'Gregor, you-!' cried his sister with a raised fist and piercing gaze" (411). This is significant in that it is the first time Gregor is referred to by his name since his transformation into a bug. Obviously, Grete is aware that the insect body does indeed still contain her human brother. Despite this, she allows her self-appointed duties of being Gregor's caretaker to diminish. She gets a job outside the home and no longer makes an effort at food preparation or cleaning Gregor's room. Her "metamorphosis" is fully underway, and as Gregor realizes his family no longer needs him, he begins to slide closer to his demise.

With Gregor no longer supporting the family, his father, once slovenly and inactive, quickly mobilizes and regains his role as head of the household. His antagonistic attitude toward Gregor since his transformation likely stemmed from resentment that he was once seen as a failure while his son prospered. Now that the situation is spectacularly reversed, the father simply has no use for Gregor. "These successive displacements—first the father's, then the son's...have their contrastive complements in the parasitic exploitation of the winners by the losers. Before Gregor's metamorphosis, the father

was the parasite. After the metamorphosis, the son assumes this role" (Sokol 110). With Mr. Samsa back in charge of the family, Gregor is completely and irreversibly irrelevant to the lives of his entire family.

Once a loving sister, Grete ultimately betrays her brother when she feels overburdened with caring for him. As soon as the family hierarchy has shifted, Grete's attitude follows suit with that of her father's:

"My dear parents," said his sister... "we can't go on like this. If you can't see it, I can. I don't want to use the name of my brother in front of this monster, so let me just say this: we have to try to get rid of it. We have tried as much as humanly possible to care for it and put up with it. I don't think it would reproach us in the least." (419)

Grete takes it upon herself to make the decision that the family must rid themselves of Gregor, but she seeks the advice of her parents, further proving that the family dynamic has changed. As noted by James Rolleston, "[Grete] is developing a personality whose urge for an identity is fundamentally antagonistic to Gregor's own" (62). Her lack of apathy toward Gregor suggests she has become aware that her brother is and has always been doomed. She determines her continued care of Gregor would not be to her advantage and, unlike Gregor, does not allow guilt and family duty to determine the course of her life.

It is in the final pages of the story that Gregor attempts to shed the guilt that has imprisoned him for much of his adult life. For the first time since his transformation, he ventures out of his room because he is emotionally drawn toward the music his sister is playing on her violin. Looking his most hideous, covered in food particles and dust, Gregor presents himself in the family living room. He is no longer consumed with worries over acting in a considerate manner toward his family, but rather wants desperately to reconnect with his sister and again express his great love for her. However, his effort at asserting himself is futile and merely serves as another disruption to the family's current life. His appearance in the living room leads Grete to declare, "'It has to go'" (419). Hearing this comment, Gregor fully realizes the disdain his family now feels toward him, and dejected,

he retreats back to his room. "Gregor carries out the death sentence on himself that his sister, as the representative of the family...has pronounced against him" (Sokel 115). Despite the despicable treatment Gregor received, "He thought of his family with compassion and love. His conviction that he had to disappear was even more definite than his sister's" (Kafka 420). Just as Gregor lived his life out of guilt, he dies out of guilt.

While Gregor's death is met with some sadness by the family, the more prevalent emotion expressed is relief. The family spends the day together celebrating their newfound independence without acknowledging it was the selfless death of their son and brother that brought about the positive changes in their lives. Gregor's death stands in sharp contrast to the final images of the story. While his body is now "completely flat and dry" (421), Grete has "blossomed into a pretty and well-developed young woman" (423). As Grete reaches the end of her journey with her family, she "rose first and stretched her young body" (423). Almost as a butterfly emerges from its chrysalis, Grete is now free to stretch her symbolic "wings." Mr. and Mrs. Samsa notice the change in their daughter and note, "it would soon be time to look for a good husband for her" (423), suggesting perhaps their independence will cease yet again in the future. Critic Richard Lawson states that "Grete is highly marriageable, a condition not without its advantage to Mr. and Mrs. Samsa...it could be said that, having sacrificed Gregor to the system, they are quite prepared to do the same—if in a different way—to Grete" (32).

Indeed, the family life of Gregor and Grete Samsa contributed to their respective transformations. While Gregor remained enslaved to his family before and after his "metamorphosis," Grete utilized their family situation to mature and become independent. She emerged from a timid adolescent into a strong young woman and will continue to grow under her parents' direction. While Grete's "metamorphosis" appears to be more significant than her brother's, it remains to be seen if Grete will succumb to the guilt and shame her parents instilled in Gregor. As is often the case with family dysfunction, patterns repeat themselves, and Grete runs the risk of becoming or possibly marrying "another Gregor."

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Evaluation: *Of all the papers I've seen on this story, this might be the best. It's extremely unified. It weaves the secondary sources into the essay beautifully. It's well styled. Plus, I think I detect a little ironic wit "between the lines." It's a fun, easy-to-read, outstanding research paper.*

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# My Dear Papi

Mirja Lorenz

Course: ESL 067 (Writing IV)

Instructor: Wallis Sloat

Assignment:

*Think about an older relative. What did that relative teach you? Write at least one and a half typewritten pages. Later, edit your composition for grammar and structure, focusing on well-constructed complex sentences.*

A small, skinny man, almost seventy, is eagerly playing the piano while around him a bunch of children are singing and enthusiastically playing his self-made instruments. He looks so playful and vivid. This is my dear Papi. There is a frail man sitting on the shoulder of a street. He had to get off his moped because one of his dizzy spells had haunted him again, so he couldn't drive anymore. Unfortunately, it is too far to walk, and it is cold. The man had been too proud to take the mobile phone with him. He looks so helpless and so alone on the street! This is my dear Papi. At Christmas, a huge family is gathering for dinner. The same man is sitting at the head of the table, but he can barely hear anything, so he is quiet the whole evening. His thoughts are probably very far away, somewhere in a world which only belongs to himself. He looks so sad and so lonely! This, finally, is my dear Papi, too.

What kind of man is my father? Even though he had to go through a lot of fate, he still has hope and childlike power. He is as sad as he is full of vitality, and he always goes his individual way. This man has raised four children alone, and I am the youngest of them. It was definitely not easy to be his child; however, I know he was full of kind ideals for us children, and he did as well as he could, so I can easily forgive the bad sides. In fact, I would never want to trade him for anybody else. One

example of many valuable skills I've learned in my father's school of life is "persistence."

The first lesson in this chapter was "waiting." Whenever he left us to buy groceries, I used to nag and to beg for candies. One day, he promised me he would bring me some, but first I had to learn how to wait, because knowing that would be very useful for my whole life. So I bravely sat down, half grudgingly but also determined, and waited endlessly, it seemed, until he finally came back and gave me my long desired candy. Actually, I got one reward more because he emphasized that even a lot of adults would have problems with this skill. Since then, I've become an adult, too, and I think with satisfaction that I'm still quite a patient person.

The next lesson in the chapter on persistence was also rather hard but certainly not less gratifying. There was a time that I was fond of horses, and I strongly wished to have my own pony. When I eventually dared to ask my father if I could get one, he apparently reacted wisely, for he said that I might get one as soon as I could pay for it completely by myself. He didn't expect at all that I was such a good student in waiting, nor did he realize that I would really start to save every penny; in fact, I didn't buy even chewing gum from my pocket money anymore. Although the next years seemed like a strenuous eternity, I hung onto my goal because I had already learned my lesson. At long last, I triumphantly showed him all my money and demanded that he fulfill his promise. He was quite surprised, maybe even shocked, and obviously, it didn't please him at all, but he remembered our old deal, and in the end, I got my own pony. Wasn't it his own fault, because he was such a good teacher? It was indeed; however, after he got used to the hungry, feisty consequence, named Bento, he was proud of his excellent student.

The following story isn't really the last one but probably the most important. After my mother died when I was eight years old and the youngest of four children, my father got swamped with all the grief and the amount of responsibility which attacked him suddenly; however, he developed very kind, good resolutions for us, and he had all sorts of ideas to give us and himself the best possible support. Nevertheless, the

burden was just too heavy for him to carry alone, and unfortunately, soon after the accident, he got addicted to alcohol. Consequently, the following years were covered with heavy, dark clouds for the whole family, and a lot of things went so wrong that they will never be repairable. Every time he struggled in an attempt to get clean, it meant for us shattered hopes, over and over again. Luckily, when we children eventually were older and already living our own lives, he finally and surprisingly got the drive to resist his addiction. First, we hesitated to develop new hope, but so far, it seems that he really will never touch it again.

So, one time more, he proved to me that there is no reason, ever, to give up. Life is not so simple that we can wallow in our self-made despair. In conclusion, persistence and hope are the magic formula that helps us through hard times. And it is always rewarding, because somewhere in the future, the better times, sunshine and miracles are already waiting, for everybody in every situation.

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*Evaluation: Ms. Lorenz' composition displays an outstanding grasp of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence sophistication. More importantly, her words authentically express her feelings of tenderness, sadness, and triumph as she recalls lessons learned from her father.*

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# A Matrix of Morals: *Beowulf* as Didactic Poetry

Surbhi Malik

Course: Literature 2344 (English Literature to 1800)

Instructor: Richard Johnson

Assignment:

*Write an original research essay exploring some of the themes brought up in this course in at least one text from the semester.*

The poem *Beowulf* is like a huge, intriguing tapestry. It is woven in the same way as peace was woven by queens of the time, as words were woven by scopas into tales of valor and honor, and as nets of treachery were woven by kinsmen or thanes. Into the narrative cloth are woven tales of loyalty, courage, and betrayal. The tapestry is embroidered with patterns, both subtle and explicit, and is embellished with intricate details. There are narrative strands that present the illusion of being left loose but are in fact deftly woven into the whole. When I see the tapestry from a strategic point, I see morality as the dominant, unifying pattern of *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is didactic poetry; the aim of the poem is to exalt virtue and condemn vice. *Beowulf* establishes a code of personal, military, and economic conduct through the poet's careful use of devices such as digressions, contrasts, and

non-human monsters; further evidence can be found in the poem's oral tradition. The moralistic reading of *Beowulf* is not a subtext but the text itself.

Critics have often categorized *Beowulf* as a heroic-tragic or heroic-elegiac poem. It must be remembered here that the morality of the poem is closely woven with the heroic ideal and the values of the prevalent warrior society. The poet endows the heroic characters—kings, princes, queens, and thanes—with ideal virtues. The poet not only delineates the moral values but also makes it clear to the reader that those are worth emulating with phrases such as “He was a noble king!” (l.11), “So should a kinsman do” (l.2166), “Such should a man, a thane be” (l.2078). The undesirable, to-be-avoided traits are set off with phrases such as, “The deed was a dark sin” (l.2440), and “diseased thinking” (l.1758). The reader does not have to disinter the meanings from below the words; rather, the poet clearly spells them out. Gwyn Jones, in his book *Kings Beasts and Heroes*, mentions the intentions of the *Beowulf* poet: “Also, he (*Beowulf* poet) was deeply concerned with values: the bonds that prevented society flying apart, heroic conventions, the claims of piety, a warrior's worth and woman's excellence, the qualities of good kingship, the means to fame” (4). The concerns of the poet are reflected in the character of Beowulf; Beowulf adheres to personal ideals (humility, generosity), military ideals (bravery, vengeance) and economic ideals (comitatus, payment of wergild) and therefore can rest in peace on his deathbed. His heart is contented, and he says to Wiglaf:

But in my own home I have awaited my destiny, cared well for my dependants, and I have not sought trouble, or sworn any oaths unjustly. Because of all these things I can rejoice.a. (ll.2735-39).

Thus, *Beowulf* can more accurately be described as a heroic-didactic poem.

Another feature of *Beowulf* that a moralistic reading can clearly explain is its digressions. There are five main digressions in the poem: the Sigemund lay (ll. 874-900), the Heremod episode (ll. 901-15), the Hrothgar sermon (ll. 1698-1784), the Finn episode (ll. 1068-1159), the episode involving Thryth (ll. 1931-62),

and the Danish-Heothobard feud (ll. 2024-69). The reason for the digressions has been the subject of much debate among critics and students. Some of these digressions, such as that of Heremod, the Finns, and the Thryth episode, seem to have no plausible cause; they spring forth seemingly without any motivation. For instance, the scop sings the sorrowful Finn episode at the occasion of much celebration following Grendel's death. Clearly, the song and the occasion are ill-matched. But the *Beowulf* poet seems to have a purpose, a reason for the digression. First, the sorrowful tale helps to maintain the overall gloomy atmosphere of the poem. The atmosphere of doom makes the reader particularly receptive to the key message of the poem: life is transient and nobody escapes death. Second, and more important, while the poem praises the battles undertaken by Beowulf against non-human monsters, justifying them as victories of righteousness over evil, the Finn episode shows the poet's skepticism about the value of bloodshed and consequences of a human war that is not as clearly justified as that between Beowulf and a monster. This is not an isolated incident of the poet's skeptical views on war; he again questions the usefulness of war: "What kind of bargain / was that, in which both sides / forfeited the lives of friends?" (ll. 1306-09). In the Finn episode the poet dwells elaborately on Hildeburh's pain. Commenting on the futility of war, the poet says, "The ravenous flames / swallowed those men whole; made no distinction / between Frisians and Danes" (ll. 1122-24).

Another episode whose status as a digression is debatable is Hrothgar's homily addressed to Beowulf, when he comes to Hrothgar after slaying Grendel's mother, to assure him of the Danes' safety. In this sermon, Hrothgar elaborately lays out the ideals of behavior. He warns Beowulf against harboring pride, arrogance, and unlimited, unjustified ambition. He talks about God's greatness, the frailty of old age, and the inevitability of death. Hrothgar urges Beowulf to be generous and humble because he is just an instrument of God. He reminds the war hero that nobody on this earth is indispensable; like everybody else, he has a limited time on earth that he should use to strive for eternal gains rather than for worldly ones. In her book

*The Cruces of Beowulf*, Betty Cox examines the relationship of the sermon to the story itself and feels that Beowulf's actions do not indicate any susceptibility to pride (139). Cox rules out the possibility of Hrothgar's sensing a hint of pride in Beowulf as the basis for his sermon, for that would mean a contradiction to the compliments that Hrothgar had earlier so generously bestowed on Beowulf (141). Beowulf is not afflicted with pride; therefore, the sermon does not in any way foreshadow the future. It serves, however, as a moralistic warning and exhortation for Beowulf and through him for the poem's audience. The content of the sermon is general in nature and has a meaning for every human being. Cox brings out the implication of general and wide application of the morals of the sermon: "In addition, I think the passage accords with a certain rhythmic flow of the poem which calls for a periodic didactic application of a given situation to a wider group of people" (144). Hrothgar's sermon lays down the tenets of moral behavior and warns the general audience against temptations of vice; this is in accordance with Hrothgar's character as an ideal king and human being and Beowulf's acceptance of him as a mentor. The digressions are, thus, not isolated episodes but are well-intended, purposeful parts of the narrative.

In *Beowulf*, digressions serve as the primary instruments for establishing morality. The sole purpose of their existence in the narrative is to set forth the moral and the immoral and to motivate the poem's audience to follow the righteous path. The digressions achieve this purpose by offering a contrast between virtue and vice, the heroic and the unheroic, the worthy and the unworthy. The Sigemund lay establishes a comparison between Beowulf's courage and Sigemund's dragon-slaying prowess and a contrast between Beowulf's righteousness and Heremod's sin (ll. 874-900). Later in the poem, in his sermon, Hrothgar establishes the value of giving and sharing by drawing a contrast between Beowulf and Heremod (ll. 1709-1723). In establishing the economic code of conduct, the poet heralds Hrothgar as an ideal king who shares everything with his people "but not men's lives or the public land" (l. 73). On the other hand, Heremod disobeys the comitatus ethic and lives a wretched life. *Beowulf* drives the

point home that treasure is happiness when shared and a disaster when hoarded. On a number of occasions, the poem comments on the transience and uselessness of wealth: "Hold now, O earth, since heroes could not, / these treasures owned by nobles!" (ll. 2247-48) "They bequeathed the gleaming gold, treasure of men, / to the earth, and there it still remains / as useless to men as it was before" (ll. 3164-3d66).

Another interesting contrast the poet makes is that between joy and sorrow. The characters in *Beowulf* find joy when they follow the code of ideal conduct and find sorrow when they stray from the idealistic path of morality. Beowulf dies a happy king because he has led a heroic, moralistic life (ll. 2735-39), while Grendel, the evil monster, is lonely, grim, and sorrowful; the laughter and gaiety of the men at Heorot enrage him. The poem is rich in instances in which grief and sorrow follow merry-making in the mead-hall, either due to man-eating trips of monsters like Grendel and his mother or due to feuds or the mention of them. For example, the scop casts an atmosphere of doom by singing the Finn episode while much jubilation is going on at Heorot in the wake of Grendel's death. According to Jack Durant, "The fading of social joy is, of course, rich in thematic values. Most significantly, it provides a grim parable for social man, pointing up the necessity of human interdependence.... It enlarges upon the total theme of social joy by suggesting that while one is never free from the menace of human frailty, one can minimize the frequencies of sorrow by scrupulous observation of social decorum and by uncompromising respect for social order" (4). Thus, the contrast between joy and sorrow is drawn up in a way that warns an individual of dire consequences if the moral code is not followed. Another contrast in which the poet explicitly handles the question of virtue and vice is the one between Queen Hygd and Queen Thryth (ll. 1926-1959). As with other contrasts, this is also set in a digression. Queen Hygd is portrayed as the virtuous ideal—generous and discerning—while Queen Thryth is "proud and perverse, pernicious to her people" (ll. 1932). The contrast does not end there with its implied meaning of right and wrong. The author chooses to tell us: "It is not right for a queen, / com-

pellung though her beauty, to behave like this,..a"(ll. 1940-41). The poet emphasizes that the possession of worldly assets such as beauty and wealth never justify giving up morals and ideals. Thus, in all the contrasts that the poet so skillfully draws and expertly places, he portrays all vices as a hindrance to human joy, and that forces the poem's audience to think about the choices they make to attain eternal happiness.

It has been established by now that the poem *Beowulf* is not subtle in its moral overtones. The strokes of morality are bold and persistent in the *Beowulf* tapestry. We need to delve into the history of oral tradition of the poem to find out what facilitated and accentuated these moral strokes. The oral poet was often more than a poet; he was a performer performing in close proximity to his audience. His role was similar to that of the scop in *Beowulf*. Victoria Wodzak, in her article "Of Weavers and Warriors: Peace and Destruction in the Epic Tradition," sees the role of a scop as that of a weaver weaving the text of a poem with his words and producing a "complex interlace of values"(6). Wodzak argues that while an oral poet might sing of heroes and feuds, his concern for the moral values cannot be ignored: "Yet this poet is also the spokesman for his society's values, the repository of its knowledge"(6). This argument is in accordance with the scop's multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary role in *Beowulf*. He is expected to know not only poetry but also history; he is well versed in the heroic stories and the ancient traditions and customs. In *Beowulf*, it is a scop who sings the Sigemund's lay and the Finn episode; the implications of these digressions on a moralistic reading of the text have been discussed before. The oral poet is responsible for paving the moral path of his audience through the text and intent of his poem. Oral poetry, by its nature, is exhortatory and serves to motivate and inspire. The scop in *Beowulf* sings of God's greatness so that everybody who listens feels humble; he sings tales of heroism and of the rewards of following the righteous path—tales that would motivate the warriors in the mead-hall to embody all the noble virtues. Thus, a poem like *Beowulf* served as an ideal vehicle for an oral poet to establish the code of conduct.

The *Beowulf* poet makes an astute choice of characters to convey his message. It is his choice of human heroes and non-human monsters that leaves no doubt as to what his message is: there is strong, evil temptation all around, but one can vanquish this evil and attain eternal happiness if one follows the tenets of the code laid out in *Beowulf*. The non-human monsters make us realize that there is much more to *Beowulf* than the story of a hero's exploits. The moral code enunciated by *Beowulf* is colored with religiosity. Grendel is Cain's descendent and therefore an enemy of God; the dragon with his abode in the bosom of the earth appears to be Satan's image; there is mention of fate that cannot be decried and of sacrifices to please Gods. These religious references make the moralistic reading inescapable. The moral values delineated in *Beowulf* derive from both pagan and Christian sources and hence, are more universal in nature. It is noteworthy that the poet does not dwell on any human feuds. Had he chosen three evil human beings instead of the three monsters, *Beowulf* would have been a mere earthly tale of vice and treachery. The non-human monsters represent the enormous strength of evil forces in this world and serve to endow *Beowulf* with a moralistic hyper-text. J. R. R. Tolkien, in his famous essay "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*," notes the importance of the non-human monsters in *Beowulf*: "It is just because the main foes in *Beowulf* are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant than this imaginary poem of a great king's fall. It glimpses the cosmic and moves with the thought of all men concerning the fate of human life and efforts; it stands amid but above the petty wars of princes, and surpasses the dates and limits of historical periods, however important" (33). Thus, we see that the *Beowulf* poet through his choice of inhuman monsters invests his endeavor with a didactic purpose, and it offers a clue to deciphering the meaning of different strata in *Beowulf*.

A moralistic reading of *Beowulf* explains aspects of the poem such as digressions, contrasts, and use of non-human monsters that have, over the years, perplexed critics and students alike. It leads us to conclude logically that *Beowulf* is didactic poetry. The richness of the text, the unified structure, the craftsmanship, the tech-

nique, and the universality of *Beowulf*'s ideals and morals have enriched the lives and challenged the intellects of readers over hundreds of years. Many cultures are revisiting their ancient didactic texts and are putting them to practical use in contemporary world. For instance, in India, corporate managers are using Lord Krishna's teachings in Mahabharata to enhance employee morale and aid decision-making processes with encouraging results. In some ways, we are still the warrior society that is portrayed in *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is based on general human experience, and the analysis of its morals, ideals, and processes can have much to contribute to modern-day human society.

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Evaluation: *In a very close and compelling reading of the "moral" texture of Beowulf, Surbhi makes a strong case for the essential unity of the poem.*

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# A Good Man Is Nowhere to Be Found

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Kevin Merkelz

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

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

An escaped convict on the run, a grandmother who has lost her faith, a man who has given up on his, and a family of six on vacation slaughtered by the roadside. Is this a gripping Hollywood film? Is it a real life news story, gruesome in fact and heart-wrenching in detail? Wrong on both accounts: it is a fictional short story, a short story that has been deemed as simply as a “grotesque tale of sudden violence” (Kaplan 903), and yet it is a story lavishly woven with deeper meaning and thought-provoking questions. On its most literal and superficial level, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is a story about a family on vacation to Florida. The family leaves early in the morning, heading for Florida, and after several hours of driving, they stop at Red Sammy’s Barbeque for lunch, and then continue on. Just outside the city of Toombsboro, the grandmother of the family suddenly recollects an old plantation from her childhood that is in the area. She asks her son, Bailey, to turn the car into a dirt road that leads to the plantation. However, after only driving down the dirt road for a few minutes, the grandmother has a horrible realization: the plantation she thought was down this road was in fact not here in Georgia, but in Tennessee.

She is so embarrassed by this that she upsets her cat, who in turn leaps onto the driver of the car, Bailey. The car careens off the side of the road and flips over and over; thankfully, no one is hurt. Soon after, a black car shows up on the scene carrying three men. One of them is The Misfit, an escaped convict on the run. He and his two associate thugs then systematically murder the six family members. Even though O’Connor’s story appears to the average, uneducated reader as simply a short story dealing with graphic, calculated, cold-blooded murders by the roadside, I believe there is far more going on beneath the surface. Much more. Through the events of the story, I believe O’Connor is attempting to convey and display some of the deep truths of the human psyche. She proposes probing questions that delve into religion, moral character, and what makes a person “good.” At the pinnacle and focus of all these “deep” questions is to answer the question, “what makes a good person?” Is it the way he or she dresses? Is it that person’s heritage? Is it that person’s beliefs, regardless of his or her actions? Or is it that person’s actions, regardless of his or her beliefs? Interestingly, although the answer to the question is hinted at throughout the story, it is not actually answered until the final sentences. However, regardless of how long it takes O’Connor to answer, when she does, the answer appears clear: A person is determined good by his or her actions. Appearance, beliefs, past, and other eccentricities do not define a person. Only a person’s actions can make him or her “good.”

With such a focus so profound and against the norm, surely this short story could only be the work of an elderly author who has a view of society built on years of observation, correct? Surely only a woman with years of experience in life could write this head-turning work? Even more surprisingly, the author, Flannery O’Connor, penned “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” at the unpracticed age of twenty-eight. In fact, “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” was O’Connor’s first widely read story. But, sadly, O’Connor was able only to compose two more short stories and two books before her untimely death in 1964 at the age of thirty-nine. However, her short lifespan was unable to stop her from authoring some of the most symbolic and philosophical, and yet shocking

works of her time. Author Mary Mumbach comments that “O’Connor’s short stories are distinguished by their uncompromising apocalyptic revelation. They present moments in which the veil of worldly appearances is torn apart to reveal eternal realities that demand immediate and ultimate choices” (353). “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” is certainly no exception. Looming over the entire last quarter of the story is the harsh reality of impending eternity for the grandmother as The Misfit prepares to murder her. It is in such a circumstance that O’Connor pops the cork on all the philosophical and religious questions and statements that she has kept bottled up for the majority of the first half of the story. Contrasting the solemn realities of life and eternity with extreme, yet subtle, humor, O’Connor is in her true element in these last sections of the story (Mumbach 353). Of course, such a style of writing is nothing new for O’Connor, and it has been noted many times that she “enlarges the moral boundaries of that medium while simultaneously exploring the farthest reaches of comedy” (Mumbach 353). No more do these writing characteristics shine more purely and unobstructed than in the case of the main character of “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” the grandmother.

If a person’s past determines who she is today, the person she is today determines what actions she makes, and the actions she makes determines whether she is a “good” person, wouldn’t a person’s past be the root of whether that person is “good” or not? Thus, perhaps a look into the grandmother’s past will yield vital evidence concerning the decisions she makes in the story. Evident from the very outset of the story is that the grandmother has been brought up to be a woman with strong opinions and emotions. In fact, when the story begins, “the grandmother didn’t want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change [her son]’s mind” (O’Connor 1380). Unsurprisingly, these first sentences set the grandmother’s tone for the rest of the story. In everything from the destination of the family’s vacation to the way people dress, to ordinarily complex issues such as racism, the grandmother’s opinions remain staunch and even brash. In one instance, only a few hours after the fami-

ly has left for their vacation, they passed “a Negro child standing in the door of a shack” (O’Connor 1382). With her usual brazen candor, the grandmother comments, “Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!” (O’Connor 1382). Regardless of how shockingly racist her comment is, it nevertheless provides intriguing insight into the grandmother’s true character. How can the grandmother consider herself a good woman when the very next moment she makes unbelievably demeaning remarks about other races? Does she even consider herself a good woman? Perhaps she doesn’t, and realizes that a woman who makes such horrible comments could never be a good woman at the same time. Author Martha Stevens reveals the answer to this when she writes, “The grandmother has seen herself as a good woman—and a good woman in a day when good men and women are hard to find” (363). As shocking as Stevens’ comment might seem, the grandmother herself backs that statement with her own words and actions. After a description of the stylish (well, to an old woman, at least) clothes, hat, gloves and other apparel the grandmother has attired herself in for the car ride, the narrator comments, “In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady” (O’Connor 1381). Finally, vital details begin to show us the reason why such a controversial woman could consider deeming herself “good.” The reason? Her idea of a “good” person is much different from the norm. Her ideals and qualifications that make a person “good” are revealed yet again later in the story as she attempts to appease The Misfit in order to save her own skin as the rest of her family is being slaughtered. The grandmother pleads, “I know you’re a good man. You don’t look a bit like you have common blood. I know you must come from nice people!” (O’Connor 1390). Once again, it becomes obvious that the grandmother’s definition of “good” relies upon superficial qualities such as a person’s appearance, heritage, and upbringing, and has nothing to do with a person’s actions. As John Holmes puts it, “being ‘a lady’ is an important part of the grandmother’s self-identity, yet it is defined externally, by clothing, and seems dependent on other people’s opinions” (Holmes par. 3). Will the grandmother ever redeem herself and start down the

path to becoming a good woman with “good” actions, or will she forever be doomed to be rooted in her old mindset? The answer comes at the most unlikely of times.

After The Misfit and his gang have slaughtered all of the grandmother’s family, The Misfit and the grandmother have a few minutes alone, before the inevitable. Focusing mostly on trying to convince The Misfit that he is a “good man” and therefore wouldn’t kill a lady, the grandmother attempts to stop The Misfit from murdering her. And then, at the very end of her rope, when all such attempts to change The Misfit’s mind using her old mindset have failed, “the grandmother’s head cleared for an instant” (1391). She realizes that empty words and meaningless compliments will never alter The Misfit’s mind; only a true, sincere act of “goodness” will ever change The Misfit. With her head finally cleared, the grandmother does the only thing she can think of to impart kindness on The Misfit: she reaches out, touches him lightly on the shoulder, and says, “Why, you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children” (1391). Unfortunately for the grandmother, the one act of true goodness she commits in her life is met with insane rage when The Misfit springs back “as if a snake had bitten him” (1391) and shoots her three times in the chest. If the one act of true kindness and goodness for the grandmother only resulted in her demise, was it even the right thing to do? How could an act that provoked a man to cold-blooded murder be an act that demonstrated true goodness? Did it show that the grandmother had truly begun to be a good woman? Interestingly enough, Flannery O’Connor herself comments on the grandmother’s action toward The Misfit when she says, “And at this point, she does the right thing, she makes the right gesture” (“On Her Own Work” 339). Indeed, it would seem that if the grandmother had only made such loving and genuine actions all her life, she would have died a good woman. If only she had not waited until on the brink of death to make such gestures, she might have actually been a good woman. In fact, mere minutes after killing the grandmother, The Misfit makes the same observation to one of his henchmen: “she would have been a good woman...if it had been somebody there to shoot her

every minute of her life” (1391). I believe The Misfit is correct. If the grandmother only had had the same motivation to be truly “good” as she had that day with The Misfit, she would have been a good woman.

If the grandmother’s moment of saving grace came only at the curtain call of life, then what about The Misfit? Is it possible for such a horribly evil and demented man to even have a chance of being “good?” Actually, I feel that the question has already been answered: The Misfit is not good. The Misfit is a “zealous proponent of meanness” (Sloan par. 8); he is a horrible person who does horrible deeds, of course, yet I believe therein lies his “good” quality; the one thing that sets him above the grandmother. But what could possibly be good about a man so undeniably evil? To quote T.S. Eliot, “...It is better, in a paradoxical way, to do evil than to do nothing” (qtd. in Stephens 361). The fact is, while the grandmother may think she is a “good woman” because of her superficial qualities and attributes, she fails to actually *act* upon anything. She is a woman of words and not of deeds. That is why she falls so short of truly being a good woman until her very last action. If a person’s actions define him or her, then the grandmother is a woman who has lived her life in the gray area—undefined and uncommitted. She is too cowardly to physically act upon her desire to be a good woman and a “lady,” and too ashamed to act out the person she truly is. This is where The Misfit towers over the grandmother. Even though The Misfit is a terribly confused, depressed, and angry individual, he at least has the courage to act upon his feelings. He is not afraid to let his actions define the man he is, instead of using empty words and possessions, like the grandmother. Instead of fooling himself into thinking that the clothes he wears and the car he drives define him as a person, he lets his actions characterize him.

However, a comment at the end of the story throws the readers another curveball and a wrench into the above theory. After finally killing the grandmother, one of The Misfit’s henchmen, Bobby Lee, comments on murdering the old lady and says, “Some fun!” (1391). The Misfit oddly responds, “Shut up Bobby Lee...It’s no real pleasure in life” (1391). What? Where does this come from? Obviously, “although he murders all six

members of the Bailey family, he doesn't take any pleasure in killing" (Muller 356). How could this be? If, after all, The Misfit's actions define him, yet his words suggest something polar opposite, what is one to surmise? Is he a good man who speaks well but has become trapped and defined by his evil actions, or is he an evil man whose evil actions truly define who he really is but speaks as if he really is caring and "good?" Perhaps refreshment on the true nature of a "good person" will answer the question.

And so, after six pages of deliberation and expounding upon the subject of being a "good person," has anything really been learned from the grandmother and The Misfit? Has either exemplified a sincere good person? One thinks that she is good simply by her words and her possessions, and the other is a man who isn't ashamed to let his actions define him, yet whose very actions are undoubtedly evil. Neither is precisely good. And yet, as odd as it may seem, shouldn't this make sense? In a short story titled "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," shouldn't good people be hard to find or even entirely absent from the story? In fact, what O'Connor has managed to do in this short story is rather unique and yet at the same time, extremely subtle. Throughout the course of a story that many would imagine would thoroughly outline and explain the markings of a true "good man," the exact opposite occurs. Instead of laying out for the audience what a good person is, O'Connor does something ingenious: she spells out everything a good person is *not*. She makes clear to readers that even though The Misfit is noble by letting his actions define him, as a good man should, when those actions are despicably evil, they do not make for a good man. O'Connor also makes clear that even though the grandmother might not be as insanely diabolical as The Misfit, her definition of a "good person" rests in frivolous details and qualities, which do not make for a good woman either. Author Martha Stephens concurs when she comments, "To see that The Misfit is really the one courageous and admirable figure in the story; that the grandmother was perhaps—even as he said—a better woman in her death than she had ever been....To see all these things is to enter fully into the experience of the story" (363). And perhaps,

that is O'Connor's point: separating people between simple "good" and "not good" camps is too black and white for the real world. Every person on the face of the earth has good attributes and bad attributes; no one is truly a good man.

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Evaluation: *What makes this paper special is the writer's discriminating, clearly focused thesis, economical prose, relentless sense of direction, and nice balance of textual evidence and secondary research.*

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# The Generation IV Nuclear Reactor: Is It Safe Enough to Be Welcomed Within Your City?

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*Timothy A. Meyer*

Course: Physics 122 (Introductory Physics 2)  
Instructor: Deborah Damcott

Assignment:

*If you were a member of the Illinois State  
Legislature, how would you vote on a  
proposal to build a Generation IV  
nuclear reactor on the shores of Lake Michigan?*

Energy use in the world continues to increase at a constant rate, with the United States leading the pack as the number one user and abuser of Earth's resources. Research suggests that in the next 50 years, the world's energy needs will rise to levels that extend beyond our current production capabilities (Allen 2003). Can our current resources be expected to support increased demands in the future? If not, what new technologies will allow the world to continue moving toward a global lifestyle that the United States has enjoyed for several decades? Understanding current environmental concerns, how do we accomplish this without destroying our planet, fellow plants and animals with which we share Earth, and the future of humankind?

Nuclear reactors have produced energy since the 1940s. As with most technological developments, original designs have been improved to increase safety and production, and operational efficiency, while decreasing waste. Historically, the uninformed public has frowned upon the use of nuclear power as a legitimate source for the production of energy, citing safety and waste storage concerns. Supporters have failed to educate and convince the public about the benefits of nuclear energy, thereby requiring most countries, especially the United States, to continue to rely heavily on the use of fossil fuels for energy. This heavy use of fossil fuels for energy has negatively impacted Earth's global health, causing many environmental changes in a very short time span of approximately 100 years. Research indicates that continued burning of fossil fuels may lead to an increased global atmospheric temperature, which could lead to the destruction of various life systems on Earth. Science concepts reveal that all life systems interact with each other, and the diminishment of one will contribute to a negative affect on all others.

Supporting the future global energy needs while maintaining the important balance of Earth's environmental systems will require the use of energy sources that do not pollute the atmosphere. Nuclear energy is one such source that can accomplish these goals. Advantages to the use of nuclear fuel over fossil fuels include a greater amount of energy produced per unit of fuel used, increased production efficiency (fossil fuel plants rarely operate at greater than an efficiency of

33%), and no pollution released into the atmosphere (Allen 2003). Disadvantages include the known toxicity of nuclear radiation to living things, the tremendous half-life time requirements for the decay of radioactive isotopes, and the appropriate location for the storage of nuclear waste.

Because of the probability of grand-scale injuries in the event of nuclear meltdown, scientists have searched for ways to increase the safety and efficiency of nuclear power, so as to make it as favorable as possible. New Generation IV nuclear reactors are more efficient and safer than ever, producing more electricity with less fuel, making the concept of nuclear fuel limitless ("Generation IV Nuclear Reactors," n.pag.). Protective casings around reactors make unauthorized entry from the outside, as well as the release of radiation from the inside, nearly impossible. New Generation IV technology has found ways to recycle nuclear byproducts, reducing the final amount of waste production, including high-level waste material (Allen 2003). It is because of these new designs, that I would support the proposal for the fabrication of a Generation IV nuclear reactor along the shores of Lake Michigan, provided two criteria are established and maintained.

Safety and security must be kept to a maximum level. As per Western Hemisphere regulation agreement, nuclear reactors must establish and maintain safety criteria that include a two-layer containment structure designed to completely contain and protect the reactor in the event of either an interior or exterior emergency. The outer layer of the structure must be made up of four feet of steel-reinforced concrete, while the inner layer must include a six-inch-thick steel reactor vessel built around the reactor. Additionally, the plant must be wired with surveillance systems that are managed by heavily armed and trained security personnel at all times ("Generation IV Nuclear Reactors n.pag.). The safety of Lake Michigan's water supply as well as its aquatic life must also be guaranteed.

The Generation IV reactor must be one of the four new designs that recycle the fuel. These Generation IV designs include the gas-cooled fast reactor, lead-cooled fast reactor, sodium-cooled fast reactor, or the molten salt reactor. The process of recycling significantly

increases the percentage of fuel used, thereby producing less waste for disposal. Recycling also aids in meeting an important goal of producing waste that is very similar in nuclear toxicity to the original mined uranium (Allen 2003).

Nuclear power is the future of the world's energy production. It is important to realize the limitations of fossil fuels and the damaging changes they have contributed to Earth's climate. We must continue to strive toward improvements in research technology so that we are able to meet the growing needs of the world's energy consumption. We must educate the public about the safety and benefits of nuclear energy in attempts to remove negative inaccurate perceptions. And we must claim the responsibility of providing our future generations with safe, efficient, and clean sources of energy.

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Evaluation: *Tim's paper not only presents his opinion but also makes very persuasive arguments in its support. The work is clear, concise, well-documented, and most importantly, emotionally moving.*

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# Circus Girl, Without a Safety Net

Erika Miranti

Course: Literature 105 (Honors Poetry)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

Assignment:

*Write an analytical essay about a poem.*

"It's time" (1) for her to come "out of the nest" after a childhood of "ribbons" (7) and "pantyhose" (11), but is she ready? In "Mother," Tori Amos writes about a young woman who is leaving to go off to war. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker is reluctant to leave the life she knows. Before the end of the poem, her life has been taken from her. Unlike many popular poems on the subject of war, this poem carries with it no political or ethical statement, but rather tells of one individual's experiences. In fact, the war itself is not even mentioned despite the abundance of situations that the voice of the story conveys. Another unique characteristic of the poem is its informal structure and word usage, a style which actually helps to increase this poem's poignancy and depth. "Mother" is a stream-of-consciousness poem that is highly personal yet also moderately conversational, a combination that allows readers to glimpse the soul of the speaker without feeling intrusive. The voice relates her feelings and the story of her life by using a large amount of figurative language, speaking to different listeners at different times throughout the poem, and using both repetition and distinct breaks in repetition.

The speaker in "Mother" almost exclusively uses figurative language to describe her situation and her feelings. Though she never lived in an actual "nest" (2) nor is she truly a "circus girl, without a safety net" (4), these words clearly reinforce the initial reluctant tone of the poem. When the speaker tells herself, "Tuck those ribbons under / Your helmet" (7-8), she is not breaking military dress code by wearing ribbons in her hair while wearing a military-issue helmet. In fact, she has not yet left her home and is still wearing her "pantyhose" (11). The speaker finally leaves her home when she is picked up by a military Jeep, or, in her words, a "green limousine" (14). She is "dancing" (15) for her superiors by following orders and doing whatever they ask of her without question. She asks for her family to "leave the light on" (17) because she fears that she will come to enjoy having such little control over her own life, and she wants to make sure that she "can remember where [she] come[s] from" (19). With the simple words "brides in veils for you" (23), the speaker describes both the feeling that she now belongs to her commanding officers and the sense that everyone is shrouded in so much secrecy that no one is able to truly know anyone else. The words "The phone has been disconnected / Dripping with blood" (26-27) prove that the voice feels cut off from everything she knows. Also, the words "blood" (27) and "poison" (29) foreshadow the speaker's impending death. The speaker is finally able to return home, but she arrives in a "black chariot," a hearse. By saying "he's gonna change my name" (34), she explains that her commanding officers plan to cover up the circumstances surrounding her death. The "escape" (38 and 39) that the voice mentions is not an escape at all; the speaker's life story ends ironically in the fulfillment of her "favorite" (49) fear, one that has hunted her throughout her life and "across the sky" (41). She finally accepts that she cannot go back and change what has happened and uses the metaphor "breadcrumbs lost under the snow" (47) to illustrate this idea. The poem would not have nearly as much depth without its figurative language.

The voice in "Mother" effectively tells of her own experiences by talking to different listeners throughout the poem. She begins by speaking words of encourage-

ment to herself: "go now / Out of the nest it's time" (1-2). She reassures herself that she does not need a "safety net" (4) and tells herself "don't cry" (5) because she can "be a good soldier" (8). The voice ceases to speak in second person when she explains her reluctant shuffling of her feet— "First my left foot / Then my right behind the other" (9-10)—but does not yet identify the speaker. In line 12, the voice's mother is directly addressed, though the voice seems to also be speaking to other people who are close to her when she asks for "somebody [to] leave the light on" (17). Interestingly, instead of using the pronoun "I" to identify herself to her family, she uses the phrase "redhead / Dancing, dancing girl" (14-15), thus giving that part of the poem a somewhat detached tone. The listener remains unchanged until the next stanza when the voice begins speaking to a slightly ambiguous "you" (20), apparently addressing multiple superiors. She even groups herself with fellow low-ranking soldiers when she says, "We told you all of our secrets / All but one, and don't you even try" (24-25). In the fourth stanza, the speaker is again talking to her mother and perhaps close friends and relatives. The listener in the next stanza is very ambiguous. At this point in the poem, the person or persons who share the speaker's "fearscape" (40) could be any number of people, including her mother, her entire family, the military, or perhaps even everyone. Still, the meaning of the fifth stanza remains nearly the same regardless of the individual or individuals addressed. In the first three lines of the final stanza, the speaker is once again addressing someone or a group of people whom she knows well. However, she makes a significant change in the pattern when she says "Father Father Father" in line 51. The voice is undoubtedly addressing God, but her message is unclear. She may be in awe, seeing or sensing Him for the first time, or she may be praying for forgiveness. If the former is the case, the speaker's next few lines, all of which had been said earlier in the poem, may be simply the result of her sense of amazement. If she is praying, on the other hand, she may be asking Him to "leave the light on" (54) because Heaven is really where she originated and where she wishes to be once again. Regardless, the last words of the poem, "Mother Mother Mother" (57), are the voice's way of saying goodbye to

her mother as she rejoins her Heavenly Father. The speaker whom she is addressing changes many times during the poem, a technique which allows the reader to gain a multidimensional view into the events of the poem.

"Mother" is rich with repetition, a device which enhances the poem's overall storytelling in a number of ways. The poem starts out with the speaker saying "go" four times in line one and then three more times in the third line, showing she is trying to convince herself to leave her "nest" (2) though she still has doubts. "Here" is said twice in line five as the speaker is attempting to comfort herself, almost as though she were two separate entities. "First my left foot" (9) and "then my right foot" (9) clearly parallel each other, thus connecting and emphasizing the two lines and drawing attention to the shuffling motion that the lines describe. The repetition of a word is found again when the word "dancing" is used twice in line fifteen, then "dance" is used in the next line, and "dancing" (19) is found again in the last line of the stanza. This simple reiteration is meant to establish the overall significance of the speaker's "dancing." The same kind of emphasis is placed on the word "dream" (20 and 21), a word which is used three times as she explains that she no longer has the capacity to "dream [her] own dream" (21). The next time repetition is used in the poem, its purpose is not to provide emphasis, but rather to allow the poem to flow from one thought to the next. The word "with" is used to illustrate the speaker's feeling of being alone in a crowd, to express the passage of time, and to convey that the speaker is still "dancing" (15 and 18) to the commands of her superiors.

The next stanza is very similar to the second stanza but is not a refrain, thus drawing the reader's attention to the lines that are not identical to previous ones. The "black chariot" (14) replaces the "green limousine" (32), a break in the repetition which comes just as the speaker dies. Also, the speaker will no longer "dance for him" (16), but instead "he's gonna change [her] name" (34), indicating that she no longer serves the military and that the military will go on as though she had never existed. "Somebody leave the light on" (17) is replaced by "maybe you'll leave the light on" (35) in

the fourth stanza, changing her words from a request to a more passive statement. In the next stanza, the words "escape into" (38 and 39) demonstrate the importance of "escape" and give a rhythmic flow to the lines, a flow which continues with the word "fearscape" (40) in the next line. The same pattern is found in the next three lines with the words "across" (41 and 42) and "I cross" (43). The next two lines are perfect repeats of lines in the first stanza, and again, the break in the repetition is significant.

"Breadcrumbs lost under the snow" (47) reveals that the speaker fully understands that her life is now gone and that she can never go back to being the girl wearing "pantyhose" (11) that she once was. The broken thoughts in the final stanza are almost all direct repeats of other lines in the poem, allowing the elements of the poem to come together before the poem is concluded. The only word never to appear previously is "Father" (51), and this break in the repetition is highly significant, as now the voice is speaking to God. The fact that the word "Father" is said three times further demonstrates the importance of the line. In the final line, the speaker is saying goodbye to her mother in the same manner as she greeted her Heavenly Father, repeating the word "Mother" (57), as though she is praying. The repetition in this poem is able to enhance the significance, meaning, and clarity of words and ideas that are important to the voice's experiences.

The voice of "Mother" conveys how she feels and what is happening in her life through the use of figurative language, by constant change of the person to whom her words are directed, and with an effective application of repetition and distinct breaks from repetition. The speaker's words, the direction of those words, and the recurrence of some of those words all assist readers in understanding the actual occurrences mentioned in the poem and, perhaps most important, how those events affect the speaker. Clearly the speaker of the poem begins as a young woman and ends as a lifeless voice, but the most significant changes are in her psyche. At the beginning of the poem, she is crying, innocent, and youthful. Before the end of the poem, she has emotionally grown and hardened as a result of a number of realizations and experiences. This change is

not entirely negative, as the speaker of the poem now comprehends the world around her more than ever before and, more significantly, is now reaching out for even greater understanding as she is speaking to her "Father" (51). She has come "out of the nest" and into a world that takes her life away, and, though her "favorite fearscape" (40) has been realized, she will always remember "where [she] came from" (37) even as she finally meets her "Father" (51).

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Evaluation: *Erika writes a particularly detailed analysis of the lyrics of "Mother," a song by Tori Amos. Erika's sensitive interpretation is enhanced by her sophisticated, memorable style.*

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# The Other Existentialism: Simone de Beauvoir

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Amanda Norton

Courses: English 101 (Composition)  
and Philosophy 105 (Introduction to Philosophy)  
Instructors: Kurt Hemmer and Herb Hartman

Assignment:

Choose any author from Linda E. Patrik's  
Existential Philosophy: An Introduction,  
and write an argumentative essay about the  
author's significance to existential philosophy.

What does it mean to exist? This question lies at the heart of existential philosophy. For Simone de Beauvoir, however, the answers that philosophers had reached in the past were not an adequate fit for her. While Beauvoir was devoted entirely to existential philosophy, she discovered that, for her, the question needed to be modified. As a woman, she reasoned, her experience of life was essentially different from that of a man. So, she asked herself, "What had it meant for me to be a woman?" (qtd. in Leighton 25). Her fiction writings and philosophical works all expound on this central question and shed light on many of the dilemmas unique to women that are faced in the quest for a life that is existentially meaningful. In the male dominated realm of philosophy before Beauvoir, the issues of women had been largely ignored. In order to address the difficulties that women face in achieving more meaningful existences, Beauvoir used the existing foundations of existentialism. In the article, "Beauvoir's Minoritarian Philosophy," Linnell Secomb writes, "Beauvoir elaborates a new plane comprised of

old concepts. She utilizes Sartre's concept of freedom, Merleau-Ponty's flesh, Hegel's in-itself and for-itself, Heidegger's *Mitsein*, and Husserl's embodied perceptual experience and applies these to femininity" (103). Beauvoir contributed a female voice and perspective to existentialism that was otherwise lacking in philosophy, to address the issues that women face in the search for a meaningful existence.

The central theme of Beauvoir's philosophy is the concept of Woman as Other. In *Existential Literature: An Introduction*, Linda E. Patrik describes this concept. She writes, "For Beauvoir, the cause of women's failure to be truly free and equal to men is a complex social dynamic by which women are defined as Other, while men define themselves as the One" (101). In this concept, men and women occupy two distinctly different castes, with the majority of power belonging to the caste of men. Beauvoir believed that men strongly defended their position as the One in order to remain superior to the Other—women. Patrik goes on to say, "Men regard women as the Other, or essentially different from themselves" (101). Beauvoir would agree that women are different from men, but the principal differences between them have been created by the male-dominated society. In *The Second Sex*, she combined these many differences into three principle categories: biological destiny, history, and myth. Beauvoir asserts that these three principle differences are responsible for women's inferior status and describes the ways in which these differences hinder a woman from developing an existentially meaningful life.

The first of these three differences is biology. Jean Leighton, in *Simone de Beauvoir on Woman*, describes Beauvoir's view on this as a woman's "biological fate as the weaker and childbearing sex" (30). Beauvoir, however, did not believe that biology alone was responsible for a woman's inferior position. She states, "One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society" (qtd. in Leighton 34). Rather it is men who have turned women's biological destiny into, as Leighton writes, "a condition of permanent social, political, and even existential dependence and inferiority" (30). For Beauvoir, the impediment to

existence was not determined by a woman's biology. The impediment lay in the other two categories of difference (history and myth). Biology is important for Beauvoir, however, because history and myth are built upon women's apparent biological difference.

History, for Beauvoir, is the process whereby a woman's existence has been made inferior to a man's on the basis of her biological difference. Until very recently, women were denied political power and most of the economic opportunities enjoyed by men, solely on the basis of their gender. Beauvoir herself did not have the right to vote. Women, through history and tradition, were relegated to the roles of wife and mother. The fulfillment of a woman's biological destiny, marrying and having children, virtually assured her dependence on a man, but even a childless professional woman was still likely to find herself in a situation of dependence. Beauvoir writes, "I met a large number of women over forty who, in differing circumstances and with varying degrees of success, had all undergone one identical experience: they had all lived as 'dependent persons'" (qtd. in Bair 383). Beauvoir likened the state of a woman's economic dependence to moral parasitism. By accepting the economic support of a man, a woman remains dependent, always living for, or through, another rather than for herself. Independence, economic and otherwise, for Beauvoir, like all existentialists, was essential for the achievement of authentic existence. She writes, "To sustain oneself materially is to feel that one is a complete person" (qtd. in Leighton 42). These dependent women, however, in Beauvoir's view were not truly existing, but living lives of immanence. They did not create the societal and ethical values by which they live; instead, they passively accepted the values passed down through history that had been created by the One for the Other.

To achieve a life that is existentially meaningful, existentialists believe that man must determine and live by his own system of values. Men, in Beauvoir's view, being the One, are determiners of values. For them, it is natural to assign values for themselves and thus determine their own identities. Women, however, being the Other, are programmed to accept the values of the One. A woman would therefore be more inclined to determine

herself based upon her relation to the existing values. For mainstream existentialists, the individual is self-determining, but for Beauvoir the individual is determined in part through her relationships with others and the world at large. While a man is more likely to determine his worth by what he does, a woman is programmed to determine her worth by the people in her life that she serves.

The myths that surround human femininity may even make this situation look desirable to a woman and make dependence her meaning and goal in life. Leighton writes, "the myths that men have woven about woman through the ages...express their profound ambivalence toward her—mother and goddess, virgin and temptress, exalted and defamed, but always at last 'the other,' the inessential" (30). There is an abundance of myths surrounding femininity. All too often, women become more concerned with living up to one myth or another and neglect the development of an individual identity. This constitutes for women the greatest obstacle to a meaningful existence. While the institutions of history, imposed by the values created by the dominant male caste, may make for an unequal social standing, the myth encourages the woman to subordinate herself. She subordinates her wants and needs to the needs of others and defines herself in relation to those around her. This has proven true over the course of time. Many of the social and cultural institutions designed to keep women in a secondary role have eroded since Beauvoir's time, but the myths remain. Though women now have most of the same rights and privileges as men in society, most still find themselves in positions of dependency, relegated to the predetermined roles of marriage and motherhood, living inauthentic lives. Leighton writes, "Women are insidiously persuaded to take the easy way out by becoming merely wives and mothers and conforming to the feminine myth. All of society is in collusion to make them accept their presumed inferiority and passive role. Woman becomes an accomplice in her own slavery" (37).

The mainstream existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus hold that mankind is unavoidably condemned to be free. Does this hold true for wom-

ankind as well? Women, because of their biological destiny, have been forced to play a role in society. A woman's life, unlike a man's, has been ascribed a meaning and a purpose before her birth and without her consent. She is expected to fulfill her biological destiny and in return, she is expected to passively accept the gilded cage of dependence. The concept of existential freedom then becomes difficult, but not impossible, for a woman to achieve. Beauvoir came to believe that society must provide the individual with some means to attain freedom. Freedom for a member of the dominant male caste is encouraged and expected. He may freely choose his actions and deal with his consequences and therefore considers himself condemned to his freedom. Women have been discouraged from seeking this independence. Society has made it all too easy for a woman to go through life without making any choices at all, and therefore be condemned to immanence. A woman, however, is not condemned to freedom, nor is she condemned to immanence and passivity. The freedom to choose freedom is available to a woman, even if the choice has been well concealed from her.

The principle threats to freedom, in Beauvoir's opinion, are the institutions of marriage and motherhood. She sees them as little more than traps set by society to hinder the individuality and independence of women. Housework and childrearing are not transcendent work, according to Beauvoir, and they will not give adequate meaning to a woman's life. Furthermore, she finds these traditional occupations of women to be an escape from living a transcendent life. Woman's biological destiny of motherhood makes these roles seem necessary and valid, but in truth, by accepting a fate rather than choosing it, a woman is denying her rightful existence. Beauvoir writes:

It's only by free decision, and thanks to the play of circumstance that the true self is revealed...for me, a choice is never made, it is always being made; it's repeated every time that I'm conscious of it. The horror of the definitive choice is that it engages not only the self of today, but that of tomorrow, which is why basically marriage is immoral. (qtd. in Simons par. 9)

By this reasoning, motherhood too would be immoral to Beauvoir. Motherhood, like marriage, is a choice that cannot be unmade, and it therefore hinders the independence of the woman's future self. Furthermore, Beauvoir believed that most women were incapable of being good mothers, and that motherhood was merely a selfish way to glean emotional satisfaction and live vicariously through another. In essence, she believed that motherhood brought out the worst in a woman.

Beauvoir believed that most of the stereotypes about women were basically true. She writes, "many of the faults that are attributed to women: mediocrity, pettiness, timidity, meanness, laziness, frivolity and servility simply express the fact that their horizons are severely limited" (qtd. in Leighton 117). She believed that the male-dominated society had created the situation which brought out these traits. Women had become products of their upbringings; living lives of dependence and immanence had left them bitter and unfulfilled. In response to the discontent and frustration that women feel in the face of their own powerlessness and dependency, they act out in ways that are not very admirable. In order for women to overcome this essential negativity, they would need to be liberated from their circumstances. If the society changed, then so too would women, for they have no innate tendency toward this negative behavior. It is a behavior that is learned in order to adapt to the dominant male power structure.

Existential philosophy holds the key for women to overcome this negativity and discover their independence and individuality. The existentialism of men is not enough, though. Beauvoir's work in existentialism, taking the concepts of existentialism and modifying them to suit the unique position of women in society, created a dialogue that asserted that women too were worthy of existence. Many have criticized Beauvoir's flagrant appropriation of the philosophical work of her contemporaries as a lack of originality. On the contrary, by applying the existing existential principles to a new set of problems, through her own distinctive point of view, the concepts themselves become something new entirely. Beauvoir certainly used existentialism as a starting point for her thinking, but her conclusions often differed from those of her contemporaries. The fact that Beauvoir

## The Other Existentialism: Simone de Beauvoir

took and modified many of the central themes of existentialism does not suggest, however, that she believed that these fundamental principles were flawed. The difference between her point of view and that of her contemporaries lies in the fundamental difference between men and women, the One and the Other. While mainstream existentialist thought is appropriate for the dilemmas faced by the One, Beauvoir's philosophical take becomes more appropriate for the dilemmas faced by the Other.

While Beauvoir provides great insight and depth into the obstacles that women face in the practice of existentialism, she was unable to find a solution to them and still provide for the continuance of the human race. Her own solution to living freely and independently was to avoid the traps of marriage and motherhood and to encourage other women to do the same. If human beings are to exist in the future, then more thought by other great women philosophers will need to be done to reconcile the impasse that women face between fulfilling their biological destinies and fulfilling their need for authentic existence. Men have been discussing the nature of their existence for millennia. It was only six decades ago that Beauvoir opened the discussion of women's existence. It may take millennia to find a good solution.

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Evaluation: *Amanda's paper is without a doubt the most sophisticated student response to Beauvoir's work that I have ever read.*

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# The River and the Babies

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Tulay Nubani

Course: ESL 073 (Reading V)

Instructor: Ilona Sala

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Assignment:

*Write a story through a child's eyes.*

Recently, my Uncle Mehmet and my Aunt Emine got a new baby girl from the river. The river divides our big and green village into two parts. I have never seen babies while they are swimming through the river. I hope I can see them one day as they swim.

I went to see the baby today. She was sucking her mother's breast. Everybody says she is very cute, very sweet, and very pretty. I cannot find any reason to make that ugly creature cute, but I will not say a word because I know all of them will say, "She is jealous of her." Of course, it is not true. Unfortunately, as you all know, adults are always right. In addition to their rightness, it is extremely hard to explain yourself to your parents because they know everything, and they know how to convince you with their smart talking.

My poor aunty has been willing to catch a baby for a long time. She had wanted one so much. She had even become ill in her tummy. My uncle was upset and preoccupied about her, so he caught that baby, Secil, from the river.

Secil looks so ugly, and I can not still believe how Uncle Mehmet chose that wrinkled and noisy baby among the others. My mother says that I was just like that creature when they hunted me from that river.

I ask my mom, "Mommy, do you remember who caught me from the river? Who saw me first, you or daddy?"

"I have told you before, dear."

"Tell me again, mommy, tell me!"

"I will tell you later. I have a lot of work to do; go get yourself a job."

"But ma! You are always saying 'later' to me. Please tell me one more time how I was swimming. Please, please."

She has always thousands of tasks. She is also an expert at finding a task for me while I am asking her questions. That makes me crazy, but what can I do about it?

"Dear, did you feed the ducklings and baby chicks?" or "Let's hunt for some flies for the chicks!"

I love chicks. Once I tried to make them swim in my bathtub, but they could not make it. I think they have forgotten swimming, like me. However, only the ducklings could be successful. I envy these stupid ducks. Why can't I swim? I am miserable.

"Mom, why can't I swim like I was swimming before?"

"Because you forget when you grow up, dear."

I realize why mostly adults may be so stupid and unreasonable. They forget everything when they grow up.

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*Evaluation: Tulay shows a deep understanding of a child's thinking, especially as the child comprehends what adults say.*

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# Why No One Should Ever Wear a Seat Belt

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*Alicia Preo*

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Alicia Tomasian

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Assignment:

*Write an essay that persuades the reader  
to take or support a specific action.*

In an ideal world, Angelina Jolie would appear in a public service announcement, dressed in full Lara Croft garb, and announce: “Seat belts are for suckers.” She’d stare into the camera with smoky intensity, her words dripping with authority and intelligence the way only an English accent can provide. It would be the perfect combination of sex and smarts that the remaining 75% of seat belt wearing Americans would need to push them into the land of milk and honey—this secret garden of bliss the rest of us play in every day (Martin). Once enough people were converted, work could begin on the ultimate goal, which is naturally the banning of seat belts in all motor vehicles. Seat belts are holding Americans back, and not just in the way in which they are intended. Banning them would be the most important thing this country could do.

Obviously, the most important reason for the banning of seat belts is population control. There are simply too many people in this country. There’s nothing worse

than being in a packed movie theatre and sharing an armrest with a stranger. Also, when shopping at Target, no one wants to wait in a line of people for ten minutes. It would be so much easier if they simply weren’t there. Since most people in the United States ride in a motor vehicle at some point during the day, the banning of seat belts is a perfect way to thin out our ranks. Seat belts save the lives of approximately 10,000 people per year, and frankly those are 10,000 people we could really do without (“Memorial Day National Effort”). The government’s current attempt at population control through the ever-increasing inaccessibility of health care, while a wonderful idea, simply isn’t working fast enough. A supplemental plan is needed. Another alternative would be a national lottery in which people were randomly chosen for disposal, but banning seat belts just seems so much more humane.

Of course, for the sake of population control, all child restraint systems should be done away with as well. Currently, child safety seats reduce the risk of death by 71% in infants and 54% in children ages 1-4 (“Memorial Day National Effort”). That’s clearly a lot of kids we could get rid of. Really, it’s more logical to focus on reducing the number of children. It stands to reason that there will be considerably less grief involved for a person to lose a child than a full-grown person. A child has lived a shorter life than an adult and therefore can’t possibly be missed as much. There wouldn’t be as much time to form an attachment. It’s sheer numbers. If someone has to fly through a windshield, better a new person rather than an experienced one. And as a bonus, there would be fewer ubiquitous baby pictures for me to have to pretend to fawn over.

There is another bonus the banning of seat belts would result in: fewer teenagers. No one likes them anyway. All one has to do to prove this fact is look at the popularity of horror movies. We pay millions of dollars a year to see teenagers smashed, sliced, torched, and dismembered. Anyone who claims they root for the teenagers and not the slaughtering villains in horror movies is a liar. Since teens are at a higher risk of being in an auto accident than any other age group, having no safety restraint system would be a very productive way of eliminating great numbers of them (Martin). Most

people secretly wish for the eradication of teenagers, so what a perfect, secret plot the banning of seat belts would be.

A lack of seat belts, while useful, would also be really fun. Our society is filled with thrill-seekers. Extreme sports are so popular that there are competitions, television channels, magazines, and video games devoted to them. Not only are there people who devote their lives to participating in these life-threatening sports, but even the average office Joe enjoys bungee jumping or cliff diving. Roller coasters are no longer enough: we want the possibility of death. The possibility of death exists for most of us each day, and all it requires is not wearing a seat belt. If we banned them, hopping in a car and driving to the grocery store would provide the same electrifying intensity as any half-pipe ride ever could. Our culture is one of self-destruction, and the beast must be fed. The public would find this new and deadly law a very satisfying snack indeed. Who needs to swim with sharks when the possibility of your sternum being cracked against the dashboard exists so readily?

The ban of seat belts could also provide both a formal and an informal status structure. Listen to any random conversation and you'll notice a subtle game of one-upmanship. People love to engage in a game of "Who's Got it Worse." Imagine the possibilities that a ban of seat belts could provide to this arena. Tales of broken noses could be outdone by stories of shattered vertebrae, which would in turn lose out to descriptions of lost limbs. Of course, the description of the bloody death of a loved one would trump everyone, giving the teller the highest status. Also, great numbers of car accidents would not result in death and instead only cause severe head injuries. This would be nothing but beneficial to our society. Those left in a non-vegetative state would be perfect employees for any repetitive-motion-based task. This could help to truly cement an immovable lower class. There really isn't enough social stratification in America, and banning seat belts could serve as a useful tool of separation.

Perhaps the most important reason to ban seat belts would be the romantic opportunities the loss of such devices could provide. If seat belts were banned, the driver would clearly be responsible for the passenger's

safety in a "stopping short" situation and would therefore be required to throw his or her arm across the chest of the passenger. This would result in the driver essentially copping a feel. This could be beneficial to drivers who wished to engage in a more intimate relationship with their passenger but were unaware of how to broach the subject. It could also serve as a serendipitous moment between two people who would have never felt a spark had it not been for an inadvertent grope. It's true that once the relationship found a foothold, the person's new beloved would be more likely to later die in an accident, but the risk seems worth it. Banning seat belts would really bring people together.

Overall, life would be better for us all if seat belts were abolished. Well, at least for those of us who lived. So Angelina, I implore you: enough with the starving Sudanese refugees. There's a country full of privileged, bored people trapped by their own safety who need your help right here. Life has become too stagnant, and we need you to help deliver our death wish.

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Evaluation: *Alicia takes a standard topic, seat belt use, but uses humor to entertain and engage her readers while presenting important facts about the importance of seat belts.*

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# Pauline's Quest for Power in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*

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Pietrina Probst

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Catherine Restovich

Assignment:

*An option for the final research paper of the semester was to take a seemingly "unpopular" stance regarding a character in Tracks.*

Upon reading Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, one might feel the struggle between one narrator, Pauline, and her subject, Fleur, over who is the more powerful woman and more able to overcome life's misfortunes. One may clearly see the similarities between the two characters, for both become pregnant out of the constructs of marriage, and both love Eli Kashpaw. However, according to many critics such as Patricia Angley, Fleur is the central character and thus is portrayed as goddess-like, exhibiting more power than is humanly possible. These critics assume that Pauline has little strength and does not possess any power in either Native American society or white society and that it is this lack of power that reinforces her invisibility that she feels earlier in the novel.

Despite these critics' views of Pauline, Erdrich says in an interview, "[Women] are taught to present a demure face to the world and yet there is a kind of wild energy, and not only transforming to them but to other

people" (Erdrich, Interview 82). Erdrich wants to show that Pauline has that wild energy. At the beginning of *Tracks* and up until the point at which Pauline enters the convent, Erdrich presents Pauline in this same modest and serious way to show her readers that women of mixed blood can possess power. Pauline states in her narrative:

Power travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth. It comes down through the hands, which in the Pillagers are strong and knotted, big, spidery and rough, with sensitive fingertips good at dealing cards. It comes through the eyes, too, belligerent, darkest brown, the eyes of those in the bear clan, impolite as they gaze directly at a person. (34)

Erdrich defines power through Pauline's eyes. According to Pauline, one is either born with power or can acquire it through a supernatural being like the lake monster. Yet, through Pauline's passage, Erdrich, who is a mixed-blood like Pauline, seeks to contradict the notion that one's power is solely derived from one's heritage and that women either of white or Native American blood can transcend society's view of them being inferior. Though it cannot be argued that Fleur does not possess power, it must be clarified that Pauline, too, possesses power equal to Fleur's. Erdrich uses Pauline to prove her point that women of mixed blood can transform their power.

Though Erdrich at the conclusion of her novel portrays Pauline as a powerful individual, it is not accurate to say that at the beginning of *Tracks* Pauline exhibits power. While in Argus with Fleur, she witnesses Fleur's rape by three men with whom the Pillager played poker and won their week's earnings. When the three men run after Fleur to avenge her for taking their money, Pauline says, "That is when I should have gone to Fleur, saved her, [...] I closed my eyes and put my hands on my ears" (26). That is the point when Pauline realizes that she has no power to defend a fellow woman, a fellow Indian. It is evident by the nightmares she has while staying with Bernadette and her daughters that she continuously recalls this horrific event and regrets not having done something to prevent it. This one event reminds Pauline that she has no power.

Yet Pauline gradually regains that power which she lost that night in Argus. She feels strength when she is able to put Mary Pepewas, who is dying of lung sickness, to rest. She says that she shreds the rope that is connecting Mary to the shore, to life. Erdrich writes, "And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below" (68). At this point, Pauline transforms into what Erdrich describes as an animal. This "symbolic transformation" is the "moment a woman allows herself to act out of her own power" (Erdrich, Interview 82). Pauline, then, possesses the power to sway the branches of the trees, to brighten the sky, and to climb to unbelievable heights. On numerous occasions in the book, Fleur is compared to an animal; she is described as having claws and padded feet. Pauline is now at an equal level as Fleur.

Midway through the novel, Pauline describes the night she and Napoleon Morrissey secretly go to an abandoned house. As the two lay on the ground naked, she says, "I tried to shut my eyes, but couldn't keep them closed, feeling that if I did not hold his gaze he could look at me any way he wanted" (73). It is a power struggle between Pauline and Napoleon. Pauline wants to maintain her dignity, and Napoleon wants to fulfill his sexual desires of her.

It is Pauline's own sense of powerlessness that drives her to use a magic potion on Sophie and Eli and force the two into a passionate love scene together. For countless hours, Pauline forces the two to make love. "They were mechanical things, toys, dolls wound past their limits" (84). Since she feels unable to attract Eli herself, she projects her sexual desires on Sophie. "Through Sophie, Pauline constructs an elaborate 'love medicine' plan to 'seduce' Eli and to gratify her sexual desires voyeuristically" (Cornell 56). It is not until Pauline's last narrative that she realizes that she possesses the power for which she had been longing for many years.

The ultimate moment at which Pauline uses her power is when she battles Misshepeshu, thus halting the centuries-old legend of the monster in the lake that frightened women from traveling in the lake. This drains Fleur's power given to her through her many suspicious interactions with the water beast. Pauline states,

"I believe that the monster was tamed that night, sent to the bottom of the lake and chained there by my deed" (*Tracks* 204). When Pauline notices that the beast she is attacking is Napoleon Morrissey, who is the father of her baby, she feels all the more powerful that she is able to defeat a man and that, in her eyes, her power amounts to something good.

Although critics cannot all agree through the literary examination of Pauline's character that Pauline exhibits power, the one question that always arises as they analyze Erdrich's novel is why she chooses to show Pauline's perspective of the events occurring between 1912 and 1924, rather than Fleur's. It is clear that Erdrich wants to show two perspectives of the same events involving a group of individuals, and that is why she incorporates a male voice (Nanapush) and a female voice (Pauline) in her novel. Sheila Hughes cites one critic who states, "'Tonguelessness,' in traditional Indian literatures, is a sign of disempowerment" (7). Both Nanapush and Pauline are given voices in the novel. It is their opinions and experiences that Erdrich wants her readers to focus on. Erdrich gives those two the power to convey emotions, heartaches, and fears.

By using Pauline's descriptions of the events during that twelve-year period, Erdrich is giving Pauline higher status than Fleur. Erdrich is putting Pauline in a position in which she has more authority than Fleur to show her readers that a mixed-blood woman can have a voice. Others such as Nanapush and even Margaret Kashpaw, who are both Chippewa natives, may feel that Pauline does not deserve a voice, but Erdrich begs to differ. Fleur's voice, on the other hand, is never heard, and though both Nanapush and Pauline interact with Fleur frequently, Fleur's thoughts are not exposed to the audience. Fleur is denied a voice, indicating her powerless state to convey her experiences.

In some instances, however, Nanapush's narrative counteracts with Pauline's, for he portrays her as a crazy, unreliable source of information. Nanapush states:

For while I was careful in my known facts,  
[Pauline] was given to improving truth.  
Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it  
must be said, Pauline schemed to gain atten-  
tion by telling odd tales that created damage.

[...] That is all to say that the only people who believed Pauline's stories were the ones who loved the dirt. (*Tracks* 39)

Consequently, the reader begins to disbelieve any stories that Pauline tells, giving little or no credential to her narrative. Automatically, the reader believes Nanapush, for he is male and one hundred percent Native American. One critic states, "To accept Nanapush's point of view as the truth about Pauline is to accept the cultural consensus imposed by representational systems that only admit one vision" (Cornell 53). In this case, only the male view is accepted. All else is seen as inferior and unimportant.

Perhaps, Erdrich is questioning on what basis the audience of any kind comes to the conclusion that one person's word is more believable and thus more reliable than another's. From early on in the novel, Pauline seems reliable, but then as the reader learns more of Pauline's mental status from Nanapush, she is regarded as unequal. "These narratives live by means of multiple voices, of the transference from tongue to tongue, and individual speakers generally deny individual genius or primary authorial status" (Hughes 7). Nanapush's narrative is no different. He degrades Pauline's status to uplift his own. By playing upon Pauline's weaknesses, Nanapush can present himself as the more powerful of the two narrators. Yet Erdrich sets her novel up using two narrators for a purpose. The reader can read Nanapush's criticism of Pauline and argue that his statements are incorrect, citing information to prove that Pauline is more powerful. Nanapush's poorly justified reasonings will thus strengthen the reader's ability to decipher the truth.

One reason for Nanapush's denial of Pauline's power is the notion that because Pauline is half Indian and half white, she is in a state of confusion, not being able to identify her true self or being able to find her place in life. Erdrich proves that the mixed-blood woman does not need to be invisible. She can have a voice. "The mixed-blood woman, successively more displaced by gender subjugation, class hegemonies, and physical appearance is inevitably Other. Silenced, stereotyped, rejected, and obscured, she is denied a birthright of voice, story, history, and place" (St. Clair 151). Erdrich

speaks the opposite. Pauline is depicted as different from the others because she is a Puyat and, as Nanapush points out, "an unknown mixture of ingredients" (*Tracks* 39). Yet, in contradiction, Pauline is, nonetheless, a powerful being as is evidenced by her final taming of Misshepesu.

Paula Gunn Allen writes of a woman suffering from lupus disease in her poem "Dear World." She writes, "A half-breed woman / can hardly do anything else / but attack herself, / her blood attacks itself. / [...] / I know you can't make peace / Being Indian and white. / They cancel each other out" (12-15; 18-20). Similarly, Pauline's mind is figuratively attacking her, for she does not know what she wants. She is half white and half Chippewa. Half of her is drawn to nature, and half of her is drawn to the materialistic world, which is where she ends up. She does not know which way the path of life leads her; she is lost wandering through the woods, hoping that it will lead her to her destiny. One path leads her to the convent where any woman with a drop of Indian blood is banned. The other path leads down the trail through the forests of birch trees, deer, owls, and bears.

As Allen illustrates in her poem, Pauline cannot have both worlds. She must choose between one or the other. According to Lorena Stookey, "Pauline desires to reject her identity as a woman and Native American because she perceives that the colonizing culture regards these social categories as inferior in status and power" (87-8). To Pauline, it is as if she can only acquire power in the white man's world but can only be born with Indian power. Feeling that she has no power, Pauline decides to wipe her hands of any Indian traditions. Pauline sees that the Native American way of life is increasingly diminishing. Pauline states, "[...] Even as a child I saw that to hang back was to perish" (*Tracks* 14). She says on numerous occasions that she is invisible. Men only see Fleur, for she reels them in like fish. Pauline, however, draws in souls for Christ.

Yet, as a mixed-blood, Pauline does not try to fully escape her Indian identity. She writes that Fleur "said that perhaps [Pauline's] family had moved north to avoid the sickness, as some mixed-bloods did" (15). On the contrary, Pauline, while still in the convent, lurks around the Pillager household in an effort to draw more

souls to Christ. Because of her mixed heritage, she is able to wander from one world to the other. Erdrich states in an interview, "It took a while to be comfortable and just say, 'I'm not going to fight it'" (77). Pauline should do likewise. Though she does not fully abandon her Indian heritage, in order to retain her power, she must stop fighting her Indian identity and accept that she resides on the fence between Native American society and white society.

Erdrich is trying to show that a woman can find power in both the Indian, natural world and the white world. However, the rapid assimilation of Indian people and the fierce government policies to snatch the land away from their Indian owners causes Pauline to feel that Indians possess no power. Julie Tharp describes Paula Gunn Allen's position on this catastrophe in female tribal culture. Tharp says, "Allen writes that in response to the 'inhuman changes' wrought by Anglo colonization, Indian women are trying to 'reclaim their lives. Their power, their sense of direction and of self will soon be visible. It is the force of women who speak and work and write, and it is formidable'" (9). Erdrich has that force to write her feelings down in an effort to preserve what she does not want to lose: her ancestry and her history. Erdrich makes characters like Pauline visible to the reader.

Pauline longs to be powerful like Fleur. Because she was born half-Indian, Pauline feels as if she has no control over her fate; that she has been predestined to fail. The Lord tells her how to act, and she becomes frustrated that she cannot plan her own future. She does not realize that in her hands she possesses the power to thrive in an ever-changing world. Pauline says:

[Fleur] was the one who closed the door or swung it open. [...] Fleur was the hinge. It was like that with Him, too, Our Lord, who had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank. [...] There would have to come a turning, a gathering, another door. And it would be Pauline who opened it, same as she closed the Argus lockers. Not Fleur Pillager. (*Tracks* 139)

This statement epitomizes all of Pauline's fears and focuses on Pauline's struggle to maintain faith in herself that she can be powerful. Pauline feels powerlessness with Fleur, with God, and with white citizens, yet she knows that the war can be beaten. She can win the ultimate battle and gain what she feels she deserves: visibility and power.

Though Pauline envies Fleur's ability to entice men, especially the lake monster, Misshepesu, Fleur loses her power at the end of the novel as she fails to save her land. In the beginning of the novel, she is able to save her land with the money she raises playing poker with the men in Argus. Yet, several years later, when the time comes again for her to use her strength to preserve her culture, Nanapush says, "Fleur had not saved us with her dream, and it now seemed what was happening was so ordinary that it fell beyond her abilities" (176-7). Power is not permanent, as is evident through examining Fleur's life. Nanapush says:

Power dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength, that was my secret. (177)

Pauline does not realize that power does not flow through a cycle. It is linear. There is an end. Fleur sees that end. Her power withers away as she struggles to maintain her land, to maintain her culture, to maintain her distinct Indian identity, and to ward off new ways of life.

Pauline seeks power, finds it, and walks away. Knowing that her power will eventually fade away if she follows the Indian way of life, she crosses the border into the white world, envisioning the power she can have teaching arithmetic to the students at the Catholic school in Argus. She feels that she has power to thrive in her new culture. She is adapting to white culture and white ways of living. She is using the power that she gains at the beginning of the book to move on in her journey of life.

In her journey forward, Pauline is making tracks for women of mixed-blood and for other "crow[s] of the

reservation" (*Tracks* 54). Rather than closing the door to her future as Fleur does when she sends Lulu away to a government school and wanders around the reservation, Pauline accepts entry into the white man's world. She will never ignore the many struggles she faced trying to assimilate in a world where she did not fully belong, but she can open the doors to a new future.

Erdrich, in an interview with Joseph Bruchac, states, "I believe that a poet or a fiction writer is something like a medium at a séance who lets the voices speak" (77). Erdrich allows her feelings to flood out of her mind. She is projecting her emotions and experiences onto Pauline. Depicting Pauline, a female mixed-blood like herself, Erdrich is sharing with her readers the pain and confusion associated with not being able to identify her true background. It is not an easy task to find one's purpose in a world that does not initially accept one's existence.

According to Pauline, she accomplishes her goal of following the path of her dreams. As she views her future, she states, "*Leopolda*. I tried out the unfamiliar syllables. They fit. They cracked in my ears like a fist through ice" (205). By the time she enters the convent and takes her vows, she is no longer the invisible and weak Pauline that Erdrich presents at the beginning of the novel. She is no longer the crow that Nanapush describes. Erdrich transforms her into a bear running through the forests that is capable of accomplishing anything that crosses her tracks.

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Evaluation: *This essay is original, exciting, and almost perversely persuasive.*

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# Nature in *Moby-Dick*

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Magda Przybycien

Course: Honors Literature 115

(Introduction to Fiction)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

Assignment:

*Write a scholarly essay.*

I always loved to walk in the forest and listen to birds; I loved to climb the mountains and watch the beautiful views; I loved to sail or simply sit at the seashore and watch the waves or the stars. There was nothing better, more relaxing and calming for me, than forgetting myself in nature. When I was in nature, I never thought about the bad sides of it; I never thought about the danger that could be waiting for me in either of these places. I always appreciated and loved nature; I never thought about it as about some vicious, merciless power. I felt more like Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American writer, who thought that nature is good, beautiful, and helpful for human beings. I always appreciated and loved the balance and all the colors that are in nature. Even though Herman Melville tries to show both good and vicious sides of nature in the book *Moby-Dick*, in some parts of this book, he seems to have exactly the opposite view of nature than Emerson does. According to Melville, nature is a bad power that only waits for a human's mistake to kill him. In *Moby-Dick*, he opposes Emerson's ideas about nature and shows the bad sides of nature. According to Melville, nobody is able to get

to know nature or God, and nobody can try to rise against it.

Emerson says that "Nature never wears a mean appearance" (904). It is always calm and good; it is always beautiful and helpful for people. It works for people and it serves the "ministry to man" (906). It gives us the stars, the moon, the sun, mountains, trees, flowers, oceans, and animals. We should be able to see the beauty and generosity of nature. Unfortunately, we are not able to see it; we are preoccupied with our lives too much in order to see the good of nature, but even so, nature remains friendly, and even the rain and thunderstorms are necessary for us. Nature works for us; it gives us food, shelter and relaxation. Birds sing for us and bring tranquility to our lives; seas, oceans, rivers, and rain give us water that is essential to our existence; trees protect us from the pollution and extensive sun; some animals and plants produce food so we can live and grow, and finally, the sun makes everything grow and work for us. As Emerson notices, "All the parts [of nature]...work into each other's hands for the profit of a man" (906).

According to Emerson, we can get to know God by observing nature. Nature reveals everything for human beings. As Emerson indicates, "the universe becomes transparent, and the light of higher laws than its own, shines through it" (914). The whiteness is good, and it symbolizes this transparency of the universe through which we can see God. Nature is like an open book, a textbook that we can read, that describes all the mysteries of divine powers and that we can learn from. In his essay, Emerson says that

By degree we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause.... Space, time, society, labor, climate, food, locomotion, the animals, the mechanical forces, give us sincerest lessons, day by day, whose meaning is unlimited. (915)

We can look at nature, at every aspect of it, at the trees, animals, oceans, and the sky, and see God, the "final cause." We can learn about nature and God from nature

itself, but we have to be able to expose ourselves to nature. According to Emerson, we have to be able to forget about our lives and our problems and merge with nature in order to open our eyes and souls for the knowledge that nature offers us. When we are in nature, we are able to feel the existence of God. Emerson tries to describe this experience in this short passage from his essay called "Nature." He says that "Standing on the bare ground,—my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,—all mean egoism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" (905).

In addition to the goodness and generosity of nature, there is an established order in nature. Without this order, chaos would govern the world. Stronger species have to kill weaker species in order to keep the balance in the world. If there is not enough food for the stronger animals, their population declines. Aldo Leopold, an American environmentalist and philosopher, seems to elaborate on this balance in nature. He talks about the Land Pyramid. On the bottom of this pyramid, there is the layer of soil: "plant layer rests on the soil, an insect layer on the plants, a bird and rodent layer on the insects, and so on up through various animal groups to...larger carnivores" (Leopold 522). Nature knows when it needs stronger and when it needs weaker species: it replenishes itself when it requires replenishment. Leopold says that "Each successive layer depends on those below it for food and often for other services, and each in turn furnishes food and services to those above" (522). As he observes, in nature everything works on behalf of others. Everything depends on something. Because people are parts of nature, nature cannot be bad for them because it establishes this stable and "highly organized structure" in which everything lives and works together (522).

Melville had a totally different opinion about nature. In *Moby Dick*, he tries to prove that nature is vicious and evil. He shows many examples in which nature is deceitful, powerful, merciless, and violent. According to Melville, nature may be beautiful, but it is beautiful only at its surface. The beauty of nature is only a delusory view. Melville describes the under-water sea in order to show us one example of this illusion. The sea is calm on

its surface, but underneath, there is a great struggle and pain. We are not able to see this struggle; nevertheless, it does not mean it is not there. Melville wrote:

As the three boats lay there on that gently rolling sea, gazing down into its eternal blue moon; and as not a single groan or cry of any sort, nay, not so much as a ripple or a bubble came up from its depths; what landsman would have thought, the beneath all that silence and placidity, the utmost monster of the seas was writhing and wrenching in agony! (281)

Nature hides its real face under the surface of the water. Nobody, especially one who doesn't know the sea, is able to see the real, hidden struggle in nature. This fact shows us how unreal and deceitful nature is.

And what about all the colors of nature? Are they real, and are they supposed to make human lives more beautiful and happy? According to Melville, making the world beautiful is not the point of all these colors in the landscape. He tries to explain that all the beautiful colors cover the whiteness of the world. Whiteness, in the view of most people, is supposed to symbolize purity, innocence, and goodness. Melville has an opposite view again. He says that the whiteness represents nonexistence, nothingness, and deficiency. He states that "as in essence whiteness is not so much a color, as the visible absence of color" (165). Emerson argues that the transparency and whiteness of the world made God visible, but Melville says that is not true. He states that the lack of anything is apparently a lack of God. He worries that there may be simply nothing because the white color is essentially nothing. Nature craftily paints everything for a human's eye in order to cover that lack of anything from people. On the other hand, if the transparency exposes everything, people would be able to see also the bad sides of nature easily. That is why nature covers this transparency and whiteness with colors and makes it mistakably friendly for people.

Because of this unreal appearance of the surroundings, people should never forget themselves in nature. It can be very dangerous for a man to dream while being in some solitary place in nature. It is very easy to forget about everything, about life and dangers of the wild

world, while being in the forest or under the beautiful sky in the night, but Melville cautions us to be aware and alert observers of nature. He tells us that there should be no philosophers or dreamers in the wild world—at the very least, he warns us that there should be no philosophy and pure dreaming to the point of self-abstractation. In one of the chapters of *Moby Dick*, called “The Mast-Head,” Melville describes the danger that waits for someone who starts to dream in nature. He describes an image of a sailor who is supposed to watch for a whale while standing in the place called the mast-head. The seaman stands on small slats one-hundred feet above the deck of the ship. During the night, there is nothing around the man who stands on the top of the mast, but silent deck, calm sea, and starry sky. This calmness and rolling motion of the sea make it very easy for a person to start dreaming or fall asleep. As Melville wrote, there, high above the deck in the middle of the sea, “you stand, lost in the infinite series of the sea, with nothing ruffled but the waves. The tranced ship indolently rolls; the drowsy trade winds blow; everything resolves you into languor” (133). This “languor” can be very dangerous because the man who forgets where he is can lose his balance and fall from the masthead. Nature, which makes the person so cozy and relaxed, waits for the person’s one moment of unawareness, distraction, and lightheartedness to engross him in the deepness of the sea. Underneath the sailor on the mast-head swim huge dangerous monsters waiting for the human mistake. For Melville, nature is deceitful and filled with trickery. We should be aware of that.

According to Melville, nature is very bad because it is mysterious and nobody will ever be able to get to know it in full. It is impossible to get to know it because it is too big and too powerful for small and weak human beings. Moby-Dick, the white whale from Melville’s novel, represents nature and, by extension, God; it represents nature’s and God’s power, indestructibility, and inscrutability. When Ishmael, the narrator of *Moby-Dick*, examines the anatomy of the whale he comments that

The more I consider this mighty tail [of the whale], the more do I deplore my inability to express it. ...Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never

will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face. (296)

According to Melville, nature is just too great and it has too many mysteries for a human to explore it. As a person is not able to see the full head of a whale because he is not able to see both eyes at the same time, he is not able to comprehend the whole of nature, not to mention the real face of nature. Human beings may be able to get to know one side of nature or some part of it, but the other side and the rest of nature will always remain unknown for them. Nature teases a man, revealing some parts of itself and encouraging him to explore more, but it will never expose all of itself to human understanding. Melville may be also opposing Emerson here by saying that even though nature supposedly reveals God but is inscrutable in itself, God, too, will never reveal Himself fully. Again, it shows how cruel and vicious nature is.

Melville opposes Emerson’s view about nature being friendly for human beings directly in the chapter called “The First Lowering.” In this chapter, nature does not seem to be friendly for people at all. Nature is dangerous, and the sea is an unsafe place for a weak man in a small boat to be. The narrator of the story writes

The wind increased to a howl; the waves dashed their bucklers together; the whole squall roared, forked, and crackled around us like a white fire upon the prairie, in which, unconsumed, we were burning; immortal in these jaws of death! In vain we hailed the other boats.... Meanwhile the driving scud, rack, and mist, grew darker with the shadows of night; no sign of the ship could be seen. The rising sea forbade all attempts to bale out the boat.... There, then, he sat, the sign a symbol of a man without faith, hopelessly holding up hope in the midst of despair. (187)

In this passage from *Moby-Dick*, there is nothing friendly and good about nature. Nature does not help the sailors to get out of trouble and to get safely to the

ship; nature does not follow Emerson's "ministry to man" theory (906). It gets worse and worse as the men have more and more problems staying alive. It was deceitful and intentional that the storm happened when the sailors were far away from their main ship in their small boats, when they had nothing that would help them to protect themselves. Leopold's Land Pyramid does not seem to work here, either, because there are no higher-order predators that would have to kill human beings in order to live, but there is nothing upon which the men can feed, either. Besides, in this scene, all the forces of nature seem to be against humans; there is no balance in nature at that moment. The powers of nature are much bigger than the powers of people. This passage is very dark and depressing. The last sentence shows us that the human being is helpless as far as the power of nature is concerned. There is no hope for people to win the battle with nature. Human beings are totally dependent on the "will" and "mercy" of nature.

The false appearance of nature includes its beautiful colors and its superficial peace, the danger of forgetting oneself in nature because of its unfriendliness and deception, and the mystery and inscrutability of nature—and, in turn, God; these seem to be great arguments about the real face of nature. At least they spoke to me. After reading *Moby-Dick*, I started to look differently at nature and its beauty. I started to notice the danger that could wait for me in all the places I loved to be. I started to realize that there could be some wild animals in the forest that could attack me if I forgot myself and went too far in; I realized that nature could wait for my moment of unawareness while I was in the mountains, which would probably result in me falling down the cliff, and I also realized how many dangers could be waiting for me in the moment I would forget where I was while I sailed or spent a time by the sea. Nevertheless, I will still love nature and I will probably still enjoy being in nature alone or with somebody; I will still probably love to dream and relax in nature, but the reading of *Moby-Dick* made me understand nature more than I used to in the past. Even though Herman Melville did not make me hate or dislike or even be afraid of nature, which probably was not even his intention, he made me be nature's more cautious lover.

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Evaluation: *Magda captures Melville's ambivalence where nature is concerned. It's an organized, smart essay on a famously difficult text.*

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# Giving

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Patricia Reyna

Course: English 100 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

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Assignment:

*Write an essay that goes “behind the scenes” at the workplace, to educate an audience about it. In the essay, capture the rhythm of a day, highlight specific people and incidents, and explain tasks associated with the job.*

At seven-thirty in the morning, I am in my uniform, looking down a white, tiled, chilling hallway. I am wondering how many patients I can make another day in this hospital a good day.

Northwest Community Hospital long-term care unit is where I volunteer twice a week for a total of eight hours. This is one of the few hospitals that has this type of unit in their facility. This unit is for the patients who are dying of cancer or other terminal diseases. I am what most people call a candy striper. I love my work. I have been a volunteer here for nine years. I first heard of this unit in high school, as I was attending the Harper College certified nursing program. After I completed the program, I was offered a job at Northwest. As I was working there, I heard that they needed volunteer help on this unit. Therefore, I decided to try it, and I loved it.

It is difficult to volunteer on a floor with patients of all ages dying of a disease for which there is no cure. The role of a volunteer is to make sure that the patients are as comfortable as possible. The first job of the day is to go to all the patients' rooms on the unit, toss out their water in the drinking jug, and refill it with fresh water, so that they do not have to drink water that has been sitting in their room all night. The next job is to then go to the rooms with the patients that can get out of bed and ask them if they need any assistance in getting dressed, or in brushing their hair. Women can ask the volunteer to try to give them the hair style they always wanted, and the volunteer can help the men shave or trim their hair. After those patients are ready for the day, then it is the turn for the patients who are bed ridden. We go to their rooms and ask them if they would like some assistance. Some patients love for us to do their hair, give them a nice shave, or just make them presentable for their loved ones who visit. The last job for the day is really up to the volunteer. I like to go to all the rooms of my patients for the day and just let them know that I am leaving for the day, and to hope to see them in either the two days to my return or the four, whichever day I am working next. Many of my patients like this about me, because they say they feel that they are important in my life, and in reality, they are important in my life.

One has to like this kind of work because, being a volunteer, one has to have a heart for the good, the bad,

and the nasty. There are patients who are great, some who are ok, and some who make you hate yourself for coming to work. For example, there is a little old woman who is about ninety-five years of age, dying of lung cancer, who is a peach when she is on her medications, but in the mornings, she is a dog on wheels. She is the first patient of the day, and that is because she scares me to death.

“Good morning,” I say to her, and she gives no responses. “How are you this fine morning?” I say again. “What do you think, I woke up, doesn’t that tell you anything?” is the woman’s response. “I think that tells me you are lucky to have another day,” I respond. “No you dum... that tells you that I am here to make your next four hours a living hell.” “There is no way you can make my life a living hell, I love coming here and seeing you and everyone else,” I say. She says, “Little girls like you don’t come around here, if you ain’t looking for something, now get out because you make me sick.” I leave her, return in about half an hour, and come back to her room, hoping not to be knocked out by something flying at me. Nevertheless, it is all right, because by then her nurse has come in and given her what she calls her happy pills.

Then there are the teenagers, who I like to be around. They know that they are not going to live life to the full, but they are happy and eager to learn more about life itself. These are the kids who ask what the clubs are like, or what the nightlife in Chicago is really like. The young men want to know what, and why, women think the way they do, and why women play games with men. The young ladies want to know if the men really say stupid pick up lines at the clubs, and if the horror stories of childbirth are true. The teenagers have so many questions and great ideas that make me think that I take life for granted. They also make a volunteer feel like thanking god for not being sick.

Then, there are the elderly men who make life just plain interesting. There is nothing like an older man who is dying and still wants to be twenty years of age. Our uniforms are white dresses that go down to our knees and a red and white striped apron, with white shoes. At seven-thirty in the morning, there is “the man,” who is what we all call the ninety-year old male

sitting outside of his room in what he calls his hot rod, his wheelchair. “Let’s have a wet dress competition, and I will be the judge,” the man says as we pass him in the mornings. All we do is laugh, and I am the one who always responds: “You can not handle it; this will give you a heart attack before the cancer will.” “It will be more worth dying like that than in pain,” he responds. We all walk away laughing with him. That is not all he does. He loves to follow us and try really hard to slap our behinds and pull our dresses up. As much as we complain to someone about his behavior, the worse it gets. So now the poor man gets a male nurse, and we are not allowed in his room without another male in the room, so they can control him.

The hardest part of this job is the attachment to the people. Just think about it for a moment. You are coming to work and making new friends that are in your life for a short period of time. One spends time talking to them and sharing experience, helping them be as happy as one can make them in a cold, sterile, quiet hospital. There is some kind of attachment to the right people and their families. Every day, one has to think, will I see this person the next day that I am working, or will I be going to get to talk to them in the next hour or two that I am helping another person? We never know how long a patient (or how I like to address them as—my friends) is going to last on this lovely earth.

For example, one of my closest friends was a female that was about ninety-six years of age. She was on my unit for two months before her time was up. I was so attached to her, that I would come on the weekends to visit her. She would call me at home, when she was feeling lonely, because her family was too busy to come and see her or even talk to her on the phone. So one day, she called me and asked me if I would like to come over and visit with her and her family. Her family was taking her out for dinner. So I agreed because something in me was saying, “Make her happy.” So we went, and during dinner, she spoke to us in a peaceful frame of mind. She explained to her family everything that I had done for her, from coming on my days off, to studying for an exam at her bedside, being there when she was feeling lonely, taking her out for walks. She told everyone that she was so grateful to have met me. After I stopped cry-

ing from her words, I made a toast to my friend. I asked everyone to raise a glass to a fine woman, a woman who let me into her life, a woman who accepted me as one of her own, and who confided in me. A woman who let me cry on her shoulder, when no one else would hear me. I was grateful to have her in my life. Then we took her back to the hospital and said our good-byes and went home.

The next morning, I was feeling so happy for what had happened, that I went to the hospital to see her. Coming up to her room, seeing that it was emptied, gave me a cold chill down my back, as I looked down the hall, and only saw her daughter sitting at the window. She turned around and said, "I was waiting for you to come." I just stood there with tears in my eyes and responded, "No, this can not happen to her, we were all just together, she can not leave me." The daughter stood up and said, "She loved you so much, she wanted me to tell you." I just stood there and cried.

The next day was the funeral, and my boss gave me the day off. At the family request, they wanted me to attend the funeral services, so I went. I really believe that it was the best decision that I had made. In the service, the family got up and spoke about her. At the end of the service, they read a letter written by her. Her letter stated the following:

I would like to thank everyone attending this party for coming. I am not with you but I am. I cannot believe that this many people loved me. I also want to thank my family for treating me the best they could, and for all my friends being there when I needed them. I was not the saint of saints but I am happy with what I have done in my lifetime and how I raised three beautiful children and helped with their children as well. I would like to say one more thing before God decides to take me. I would like to thank Patty for being there in my last couple of months. This young girl made my days at the hospital wonderful and full of life. She had me feeling that I was young again. I would like to thank her and everyone in the room.

After her daughter read that letter, I was crying like I had never in my life. I no longer felt that empty feeling

like she had left me. I now know that she will always be in my heart, mind, and soul.

This happened when I was in my second year of volunteering. I was going to let the volunteer office know that I was no longer going to work there, but my friend made me realize that there are people out there who need me, and I need them as well, so I decided to stay.

Working as a volunteer is not as bad as most people think it is. I believe that there is nothing better for one's heart and soul, than to take a couple of hours out of one's busy schedule and help those who are less fortunate than us. Also, one needs to think, that one day we might be in the same situation in life, and need the same kind of loving care. I get great satisfaction knowing that I have helped give these people one of the most important things in life, and that is their dignity. Working on this unit has helped me look at life in a better light and help me understand life better.

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*Evaluation: This is an interesting, touching look behind the scenes, revealing the insight gained through a very special type of work. Patricia's experiences are meaningful and clearly rendered, to make a convincing argument for the value of human compassion and connection.*

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# To the Master of the Scriveners

Scott Schoenknecht

Course: Literature 115 (Fiction)

Instructor: Andrew Wilson

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Assignment:

*The students were to write creatively in response to one of the works of literature we'd read over the semester. One option was to put on the guise of a particular character from one of the stories we'd read and write something: a letter, perhaps.*

Master of the Scriveners,

I sincerely apologize for the manner in which you are receiving this letter, as upon my passing, I have no physical means to secure proper delivery.

I, being certain that you are filled with bewilderment, feel it best to put to rest the uncertainty that troubles you and certainly deserves explanation, that pertaining to my uncommon approach to life as I define it. Though I prefer not to, I offer this simple and unique message, in hopes of comforting you and in thanking you for your unwavering attention to this lowly scrivener, Bartleby.

I will forever be indebted to you for employing me, including me in your assembly of distinctive scriveners: never realizing our lives would be changed evermore. You watched me, cursed me, as I slowly moved along like the shadow of a cloud on the cobblestone street, ultimately accountable to no one but myself, as are we all. You see, each of us choose, every minute of every day, whether to live the life we are given, or the life others

choose for us. We decide what is priceless, insignificant, worthy or worthless. I choose freedom above all else.

You are an educated man, yet I feel you don't comprehend the significance of freedom. As I see it, you are trapped, a prisoner of your own inability to observe, to choose. Many days have I spent watching, believing you capable of distinguishing between the self-made prison in which you exist, and freedom, unselfishly granted to you with each breath you take. A thousand times seven days you have opened your eyes, yet sadly, you still do not see. Like the cork in Turkey's bottle of brandy, your eyes remain sealed, closed, oblivious to the price you are paying. It is a price no one can afford.

I am running out of time and do not want to drift without further explanation. Through your eyes, I was to be a copy, a duplicate of Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut, nothing more. I am a living breathing, human being, who was created, not duplicated like some book or ledger. Though you persist, I prefer not to be directed how to work, where to live, what to eat, or how to conduct my life. I alone make these decisions; I alone accept responsibility and undoubtedly, I alone am paying this charge. The price for freedom I willingly pay, for it is far less than the eternal debt man's soul will pay the devil devoid of it. I pray you see my meaning, someday.

A final farewell to thee, oh Master of Scriveners. Thanks be to you for all you have done, and attempted to do. May you realize that few are the acquaintances in one's life that allow him to be himself, not just a copy, not just another word in a book. My friend, I am truly sorry, for I do not possess the passion of your dreams, the riches required to repay this magnificent gift. I must quickly say goodbye, though I prefer not to, for it seems Freedom has finally come for me.

Bartleby the Scrivener

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*Evaluation: In this letter, Scott (who pretends to be Melville's Bartleby) tries to convey to a certain nineteenth-century lawyer (Bartleby's boss) the true meaning of freedom. I like the slightly antiquated tone of the language, which is appropriately assigned to a nineteenth-century scrivener.*

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# Tracking Deceptions of “Hunters in the Snow”

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Patrick Schorn

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Nancy L. Davis

Assignment:

*Write a paper of analysis exploring the depths  
of a literary work that has affected you in some way.*

When we first meet the characters of Kenny, Tub, and Frank in Tobias Wolff’s “Hunters in the Snow,” we see three men who seem to have a turbid relationship, with a spirited camaraderie among them. It appears as if they are looking for a relaxing day of hunting, just a day away from the everyday toils of their monotonous lives. However, while the main characters seem to be simple-minded men, their relationships are based on calculated deception and unlikely fantasy. We discover that, like the land beneath a blanket of snow, things are not always as they seem.

Tub is a naïve and seemingly meek man. He believes that he can lie about his eating habits and no one will be the wiser. When Frank makes an obvious reference to Shakespeare, “Juliet was only thirteen,” it is lost on Tub. He believes Frank is talking about another young girl whom they know, and he is beside himself thinking that his friend has any interest in a girl that “doesn’t even have breasts” (120). After they leave the first tavern, Tub sheepishly admits to Frank that he “pulled a real boner,” and left the directions to the hospital back on the table. We also witness his loyal and trusting nature as he tells Frank, “When you’ve got a friend it means you’ve always got someone on your side, no matter what. That’s the way I feel about it anyway” (121).

But Tub is also a man who is desperate for acceptance. To Tub’s disappointment, his friendship with Kenny and Frank is superficial and tentative at best. Kenny teases and cajoles Tub, and Frank sits back and lets it happen. When Kenny almost runs Tub down with his truck, Frank says, “Come on, Tub...Kenny was just messing around” (113). Then, as the group embarks on its trek for deer, Tub feigns interest in hunting by trying to rally the others, saying, “Are we hunting or what?” (114). But when they split up and walk both sides of the river, Tub finds himself alone. He is suddenly aware of the fact that he is not a part of the group and quickly loses interest in the deer hunting.

He focuses on rejoining his posse as Tub “stopped looking for tracks and just tried to keep up with Frank and Kenny on the other side” (115). Once they are reunited, the trio takes a break from tracking in order to have some lunch. Kenny begins to tease Tub about his weight. Kenny says to Tub, “All I can say is, it’s the first

diet I ever heard of where you gained weight from it," and Frank joins in with "Tub, you haven't seen your own balls in ten years" (114). Tub holds back the anger and resentment he feels toward Kenny and Frank in order to hold on to any approval they may give him, but these bottled up feelings are only festering within himself.

The animosity toward Tub is not unprovoked; he continually tries to deceive everyone about his closet eating disorder. Tub believes that no one, including his wife, is aware of the fact that he gorges himself with enormous amounts of food. When the group stops for lunch, Tub has only one hard-boiled egg and a celery stick while sitting with Frank and Kenny, but as soon as he is alone, he eats sandwiches and cookies that he has hidden in his jacket. He thwarts any attack on his weight by saying, "What am I supposed to do?...It's my glands" (114).

This deception allows Tub to fantasize that he is leading a double life. He feels that he can somehow liken his inability to control his eating to that of a spy having a false identity. He says to Frank, "Nobody knows. That's the worst of it, Frank.... Having to lead a double life like a spy or a hit man.... I know what they go through" (122). Ironically, although Tub has neither the skill nor the wit to be mistaken for a double agent, he effectively becomes a hit man when he shoots Kenny. He then uses Kenny's demise as an opportunity to solidify his relationship with Frank and finally gain the acceptance he so desperately seeks. Tub confides in Frank and tells him, "The truth is I just shovel it in" (121).

Frank has a bit more depth and complexity than his counterparts but is simple in his own ways. He believes that there is nothing wrong with wanting to have a love affair with a fifteen-year-old girl. He wants to be one with nature, man at his instinctual base. He believes that pigeonholing individuals creates unhealthy attitudes.

While Frank may appear to be laid back, he is also very guarded. He is a man facing his own mortality. In his effort to appear cool and contemporary, he utters phrases that seem out of character to both Kenny and Tub. For instance, when Kenny almost runs Tub down, Frank says to Tub, "Be mellow" (113). Upon finally getting to their hunting spot, Frank gets out of the truck,

takes a deep breath and says, "Tune into that energy." He then tells Tub to "Get centered" (114). When they finally lose the deer tracks, Frank brings out the philosopher in himself and says, "There are all these forces out here and you just have to go with them" (116).

This façade of hippie wisdom serves as a catalyst for Frank to deceive his family and friends. He is either having or imagining a love affair with a fifteen-year-old girl who watches his children. He deludes himself by trying to justify his actions, telling Tub, "Don't you see how you're dividing people up into categories? He's an executive, she's a secretary, he's a truck driver, she's fifteen years old" (120). His view of morality has been skewed based on his perceived need to break out of a mundane life.

His fantasy of leaving his wife, Nancy, for the babysitter has him believing he can turn back the hands of time. He confides in Tub that he is in love with this girl because "She's opened up whole worlds to me that I never knew were there" (121). But Frank knows that this fantasy will never become reality. He knows that keeping his secret is the only way the fantasy will continue to exist.

Kenny is the leader and clearly the most primitive member of the group. He drives a truck with a broken windshield and no regard for safety. He almost runs down Tub just for the fun of it, and he jibes Frank about his moral indiscretions. He continually provokes his comrades with intentional insults. But he is a rebel, and he controls the group's activities. It is Kenny's truck that they take hunting, even though the heater does not work and the snow is tunneling through the hole in the windshield. Kenny decides where they are going to hunt even though "Tub was for trying someplace different" (113). His control over Frank is based on the secret he keeps about the babysitter, and his control of Tub is based on Tub's fear of not being accepted.

Kenny walks a fine line when he continually wields his power over the others. He isolates Tub by asking him, "You still on that diet?" just so he can sarcastically lay into him, saying, "You're wasting away before my very eyes." When Kenny seems annoyed with Frank's hippie attitude, he antagonizes Frank and says, "Next thing you'll be wearing a nightgown, Frank.

Selling flowers out at the airport” (114). He acts without thought of consequence.

It is Kenny’s thoughtlessness that leads to his downfall. Although it may not have been Tub’s intention to shoot Kenny, the deed has been done and now come the consequences. Unwittingly, Frank and Tub understand the complications that will arise from this mishap. When Tub wants to call for help, Frank exclaims, “Jesus, What are we going to say?” (117). A new alliance is forged out of desperation and self-preservation, deceiving Kenny into thinking that they are taking him to the hospital.

This new group order has a great appeal to both Tub and Frank. For Tub, it means he is no longer a third wheel. For Frank, his secret will be safe. But there is a very delicate predicament that needs to be overcome; what will they do with Kenny? Without ever discussing it directly, both Frank and Tub seem to be on the same wavelength. They stop twice on the way back to civilization, only to solidify their position that Kenny alive does them much more harm than Kenny dead. The first stop they make at the tavern represents Frank’s commitment to proceeding with the undisclosed plan. Frank confides his love of the babysitter to Tub in order to show that he is willing to commit to the arrangement. During the second stop at the roadhouse, it is Tub who seals their fate by telling Frank about his eating disorder. The penultimate act comes as they return to the truck, taking the blankets that seemingly are Kenny’s only salvation, as Frank says, “They’re not doing him any good.... We might as well get some use out of them” (122).

We can only imagine how far this final deception will go. Like the glaze of the snow on the fields that “held up Kenny and Frank but Tub kept falling through” (115), this charade can be exposed at any minute. Did Tub really lose his footing when he “slipped and threw out his hands to catch himself” (118), or did he intentionally try to finish off Kenny? Did Frank really call the hospital, or did he just pretend to use the phone at the farmhouse? The answer lies in two simple men’s desperation to continue their own illusory fantasies.

### Works Cited

- Wolff, Tobias. “Hunters in the Snow.” *Literature and the Writing Process*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Ed. Elizabeth McMahan, Susan X. Day, and Robert Funk. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2002. 113-23.

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Evaluation: *Don't be deceived: Pat's seamless analysis of Tobias Wolff's story of deception and frozen hearts is impressive, to say the least.*

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# Ode to the Bodybuilder

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*Mark Schuler*

Course: Speech 101

Instructor: Louise Perry

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Assignment:

*To provide a eulogy in praise of something that is important to you. For this assignment, you may also consider as your subject an animal, object, concept, institution, place, activity, time, or period of life.*

Many sports require intense dedication, grueling effort, and vigorous focus. Bodybuilding is no different. However, few sports require more from the human body and mind than bodybuilding. Like a never-ending roller coaster of personal ups and downs, bodybuilding is as much taxing on the mind as it is on the body. The athlete is able to experience the natural high of serotonin release within the brain after a grueling workout, a sense of accomplishment and achievement, and increased overall health. On the other hand, the downs can lead to extensive inferiority complexes, social disconnection, and/or acute to major depression.

Despite popular belief, the workout is only an ounce of the equation. True growth only occurs after the last rep is completed. To achieve this, the bodybuilder must consume seven meticulously calculated meals each day, follow a carefully executed supplement schedule to the “tee,” and deal with the agonizing delayed-onset muscular soreness that may only start to rear its lowly head days after the workout.

As in any other sport, dedication is important to success; bodybuilding takes this to a different and distinct new level. Dedication within the realm of bodybuilding encompasses not only never missing a meal and showing up to each and every workout with a winning attitude, but also getting enough sleep to properly recover and do it all over again the next day. Dedication also means devouring those two chicken breasts while not being hungry, topping off every day with 300 or more grams of protein, drinking at least a gallon of water a day, and abstaining from alcohol on a consistent basis, even while friends place pressure on drinking.

As in any other sport, effort is important to success; bodybuilding pushes the envelope. While many individuals utilize the gym for social agendas and cell phone conversations on Stairmasters, the bodybuilder is there for one reason, and one reason alone: to lift. Effort like none other gleams from the bodybuilder’s face like rays from the beating summer sun as the weight of a couple average-sized girls is pressed above his tormented, war-torn chest. With sweat running down his face like a small river and veins bursting, pain begins to surface, yet fearlessly he drives on, rep after agonizing rep. The last gasp of breath is sent charging outwards in an

explosive blast, leaving a vapor mist on the mirror after its phoenix-like birth in his lungs. Under maximal intensity, the glimmering bar is coerced in an upward fashion. As quickly as a shotgun recoils, a peak contraction is achieved, and the two mountain-like structures sizzle in fatigue; the set is finally finished. All of this effort, exerted only to grow a mere fraction of a quarter-of-an-inch.

As in any other sport, focus is important to success; bodybuilding is no different. The bodybuilder must always clearly see the “big picture.” He knows that changes do not occur overnight, but rather over weeks and months of hard work. He must not worry about what else is going on in his life while he is training; he must block it out. He knows what he does today can and will affect the way he will be tomorrow, for better, or for worse. He knows that every meal is a battle, lost or won. He knows nothing less than one hundred percent.

The sun has fallen, and the day nears its end. One more meal for our tired friend. He gives until he simply can give no more, arms tired, back sore. Fatigued, he collapses on the cool floor. Carefully he stretches, every muscle, every tendon. Slowly he swallows the pills until there are none. “One day longer, one day stronger,” he repeats in his head. One more snack, then it’s off to bed. His dreams are filled with the promise of a new day, growing stronger in a new way.

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Evaluation: *The speaker has exemplified the grueling regimentation of being a disciplined body builder—through the use of vivid descriptive images, illustrating the blood, sweat, and tears needed to grow strong—in mind, body, and spirit.*

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# E-Commerce Web Usability

Niyati Shah

Course: CIS 218 (E-Commerce Development)

Instructor: Terry Morris

## Assignment:

*Information technology professionals often need to research new areas of technology and report to a manager or project team. This assignment provides students practice with this job function. In this business research report, each student chooses an aspect of e-commerce that interests him or her. The student explores, researches, and prepares a report on the chosen topic. The scope of this business research report is five to nine pages. The students work on this project for much of the semester and are required to meet milestones, including topic approval, research and source evaluation, outline, rough draft, and final report. This provides the students with guidance and feedback throughout the semester on their work. Students are mentored during the process with the goal of a successful business research report in mind.*

Web technology provides a means for sellers of a wide range of products the ability to easily reach their customers, providing up-to-date information on the product or even allowing them to buy the product online and saving them from the hassle of physically going to a store to shop for the product. More and more businesses are realizing the advantages of conducting commerce over the web. From the customer's point of view, this is beneficial, as they are being provided with increased shopping options. For example, customers shopping for a book on the internet now can choose from several

online stores as compared to their limited number of options during the early e-commerce era. However, for stores selling their products online, this means increased competition.

The question now is, which web site would customers prefer to buy their products from, given the growing number of competitors offering the same service? Consider the example of shopping for a book online. There are several web sites that allow customers to buy books online, using their website. Which site would a customer rather buy the book from? Factors that influence this decision may include cost of the product, quality of customer service, shipping times, and so on.

To beat the competition, each store now has to stand out. Offering discounts, quicker shipping times, and better customer support are just a few areas where online stores try to obtain an edge over their competitors. For example, consider the online book stores offered by Amazon and Barnes and Noble. Both of these bookstores are well established and are quite popular. They might have the same collection of books and would probably have equally good customer service. Why would anyone prefer one website over the other?

Website design may be a critical factor that may attract or totally shoo away customers. Users' shopping experiences or simply usability of the web site fall under this realm. Usable websites will produce good user experience and contribute toward customer loyalty. One critical factor often overlooked by web-based stores is the usability of the system. Some measures of usability could be the time required to check out a particular product, ease of locating the product, ease of navigation, and feedback provided for actions initiated by the user. One recent study of e-commerce websites by IBM's ease of use group found out the following four specific problems (Tilson):

- The sites did not effectively communicate where and how to add an item to the shopping list (the list of items the user plans to buy).
- The sites did not provide effective feedback when items were and were not saved in the shopping list.

- The sites did not effectively communicate if and when users needed to register or log in to order.
- The sites did not facilitate easy navigation from the shopping list to other parts of the site.

Going back to our bookstore example, Amazon.com enhances user experiences by including features such as providing users with a list of their recent searches; a list of other books that were bought by customers that bought a particular book; and use of color coding to differentiate between different sections of the website, such as books, electronics, and sporting goods.

The aspect of making a web site usable can significantly influence the amount of business generated by an e-commerce site. It could be worthwhile for a business to follow the established guidelines of usability. This report will address the following topics:

- Web usability and its relation to e-commerce
- Measures of web usability
- Principles of website usability
- Good user experience equates to customer loyalty

### Web Usability and Its Relation to E-commerce

Usability, in general, is the measure of the quality of a user's experience when interacting with a product or an interface ([www.usability.gov](http://www.usability.gov)). Web usability can be defined at two levels. First, there is the ease with which users of a website accomplish their goal, which includes for example, researching, buying a product, and checking e-mails, etc. Second, usability includes the extent to which purpose of a website is satisfied; for example, in areas such as selling a product, marketing, and providing researching tools. Although these two levels are not mutually exclusive, for a website to be successful, users' goals should be accomplished with the least amount of effort. In other words, web sites need to be usable.

When it comes to e-commerce websites, specifically, less usable websites may mean lost business, given the amount of competition most businesses are facing these

days. Let us consider the bookstore example again. As soon as a book is added to the shopping cart on Amazon.com, the site takes the user to a page that lists books that were bought by customers who bought the selected book. Barnes and Noble, on the other hand, merely adds the book to the shopping cart. Although the shopping cart reflects the number of items checked out, it is less prominent and hence fails to provide adequate feedback to the customer's action of adding books to the cart. The option provided by Amazon could motivate users into buying related books and hence could mean additional business and at the same time inform customers about relevant books they are unaware of.

Usability problems such as the one discussed above arise from nonadherence to established usability principles.

### Measures of Web Usability

Several measures of usability have been established. The National Cancer Institute maintains the site <http://www.usability.gov>. This website lists the prominent measures that can be used to assess the usability of an interface in general. These measures, listed below, can be extended to e-commerce web interfaces.

**Ease of Learning**—Often, new customers may visit a website, looking to buy a product. Because it is their first visit to the site, they may not be familiar with the navigation mechanism, kind of products available for sale, how to search the product, and other aspects of the entire shopping experience. An easy to learn website will quickly allow users to familiarize themselves with the website and at the same time allow frequent visitors the flexibility to skip steps.

Consider the website [ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com). This website accommodates new as well as experienced users very efficiently. On the main page, it has links for buying and selling commodities, especially meant for new users. These links are listed under the banner "Welcome New User." This allows new users to get up to speed very quickly.

**Efficiency of Use**—Efficiency relates to how fast a task can be accomplished. In terms of e-commerce websites, this would mean how fast a user can shop, browse, or learn about a product. This feature is especially

important for websites that have huge lists of products causing users to possibly have a tough time narrowing down on a product. Walmart.com does a good job of providing categorized lists of products on its home page. These categories, ranging from electronics to financial services, allow customers to quickly find a product, learn about it, and buy it.

**Memorability**—Memorability is the ease with which a user can recall web interaction experience from the last visit. This is important, since second-time visitors wouldn't prefer to start from scratch and learn the interface features again. To enhance memorability, e-commerce websites usually follow a standard practice of listing tabs for accessing different sections in the top row. Each tab, when accessed, provides different subsections or categories in the left column.

To cite a specific example, consider Sears' website Sears.com. It has tabs for accessing different sections, such as automotive, appliances, and clothing at the top, with subsections in the left. Using such a scheme allows even new users to browse through efficiently. Allowing users to customize their own page also ensures that users need not remember the same information again and again. Users who log in to Amazon.com can see a tab for accessing their own page with Amazon's recommendation. This tab is listed in the top row along with the tabs for accessing different sections of the website:

**Error Frequency or Severity**—This relates to the frequency of errors and the ease with which users recover from the errors. Clicking a different button from the one intended, for example, is an error that may occur while interacting with websites. Websites often compensate for errors by providing a help section, although avoiding errors from happening should be the design goal. Asking users to confirm their actions with critical decisions is a good way of preventing errors. For example, the final check-out page on Amazon.com lists all the items on the order and asks customers to review before it is placed. Even if the customers place an order by mistake, they can always access that order and cancel it within a stipulated time period.

**Subjective Satisfaction**—Subjective satisfaction refers to how much users like the website. Although this measure may vary from person to person, it pro-

vides a general user opinion about a website. The IBM study cited above used subjective measures to assess e-commerce web usability.

### Principles of Website Usability

Several usability principles have been established through research. The most critical usability principles (Nielsen) are listed below.

**Visibility of System Status**—The system should keep the users informed about its current status through appropriate and timely feedback. For example, tabs for accessing different sections on amazon.com change color when selected, to indicate what section they are in. This maintains the website's visibility and also provides feedback to a user's action.

**Match Between System and Real World**—The dialogue should be expressed clearly in words, situations, phrases, and concepts familiar to the user, rather than in system-oriented terms. Use of the shopping cart icon is a good example of this principle. The shopping cart icon is used as a metaphor in this case.

**User Control and Freedom**—Users may sometimes choose functions by mistake and will need clearly marked exits to get out of unwanted states without having to go through an extended dialogue. The system should support undo and redo. For example, adding an item is a tentative action, and users should be allowed to easily delete the items from the cart if they add an item by mistake.

**Consistency**—Words, situations, and actions should have consistent meanings. When color is used to code information, it should have the same meaning in every situation or state. For example, amazon.com uses consistent labels such as "featured," "recommendations," "new releases," and "used," etc, under different sub-sections, to mean the same thing consistently.

**Provide Cues**—Cues help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from error. Error messages should clearly indicate the problem and suggest a solution. For example, Walmart.com highlights errors using a red font along with remedial actions.

**Prevent Errors**—The system should be designed to help users avoid errors in the first place. Use of consistent labels and resulting actions helps prevent errors.

Also, button and tab sizes need to be big enough to avoid accidental clicking. Amazon.com is a good example of a website that minimizes errors by using consistent labels and appropriate button and label sizes.

**Recognition Rather Than Recall**—Objects, actions, and options should be visible. The user should not be forced to remember information from one part of the dialogue to another. Use of icons helps users recognize what their actions might develop into. The shopping cart metaphor used on most websites is a good example.

**Flexibility and Efficiency of Use**—This allows users to tailor frequent actions. To accommodate user preferences, whenever possible, sites should provide users with multiple options of completing a particular task. Half.com, an online bookstore, provides users with an option using an express checkout by using the user's saved preferences (shipping address, credit card information, etc). This feature provides users with a quick way of placing an order.

**Aesthetic and Minimalist Design**—Dialogues or labels should not contain irrelevant information or information that is rarely needed. Irrelevant information could diminish the relative visibility of every unit of relevant information. This is especially important for stores that have a lot of items to list in a given amount of display space. Overstock.com sells a lot of items through its online portal. The items range from apparel to electronics. However, this site efficiently uses hierarchical information to hide irrelevant information and show only pertinent information. For example, clicking on its apparel section displays subsections only under "Apparel" while hiding subsections under other sections. This works similarly for all other sections.

**Help and Documentation**—Although it is better if the system can be used without help, it may be necessary to provide help and documentation. Such information should be easy to access and to the point, and concrete steps to be taken should be listed. An interesting feature provided by a few websites these days is an option of chatting live with a customer support representative. Officedepot.com provides this option if a user needs help with the checkout process.

**Good User Experience Equates to Customer Loyalty**—Web-based shopping has many advantages to offer to the customers. However, the increased number of stores has raised customer expectation levels. Apart from just shopping for the product, customers now can discern between features that will contribute toward good shopping experience and features that contribute toward frustration. User-friendly websites will enhance a user's shopping experience, thereby creating a loyal customer base for the e-commerce store.

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Evaluation: *Niyati provided an overview of e-commerce usability issues along with specific suggestions and examples of best practices. Her work is well organized with section and area headings. Niyati successfully drew from both classic studies in web usability and some of the latest findings. Her focus was to not only state the issues but to also provide examples that could be applied in a business setting. While I would have liked to have seen more of the recent research on this topic, Niyati did an excellent job of using a variety of resources to provide useful information and examples of e-commerce web usability issues important for a business to consider.*

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# Gurov, Anna, and Chekhov: The Pursuit of Excellence

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*Hardy Sims*

Course: English 102 (Composition)

Instructor: Kris Piepenburg

Assignment:

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

“Critics are like horseflies which prevent the horse from plowing,” Chekhov was once quoted. “... and what does the fly buzz about? It scarcely knows itself; simply because it is restless and wants to proclaim: ‘Look, I too am living on the earth. See, I can buzz, too, buzz about anything’” (Chekhov qtd. in Gorky par. 60). Such were Anton Chekhov’s feelings toward criticisms of his work. He remarked that the only criticism he ever read that had made an impression on him was one in which he was predicted to “die in a ditch, drunk.” (Chekhov qtd. in Gorky par. 60) Regardless of the author’s personal feelings on the subject, however, “The Lady with the Dog” stands as too deep and meaningful a story to just read quickly, having no concern for the underlying message. One critic, Erik Huber, noticed that “If one is looking for the kind of ‘entertainment’ which helps one escape life, one will not find it in Chekhov, for he invites his readers to perceive and feel the beauty and pity of the world as it is” (par. 1). From this it seems clear that when we read this story, we should search not for a happy ending, a tragic conclusion, or even the popular “Freitag pyramid” of climax and resolution that is so typical of popular fiction. Instead, we should seek only to learn, and experience what we were meant to feel from the doings and feelings of the characters in the story. Perhaps by digging a little deeper, with just a little bit of constructive criticism, we may catch a glimpse at that meaning.

“The Lady with the Dog” takes place in late 19th century Russia, where two people have met and had an interesting affair. Throughout the story, we follow the main characters, Gurov and Anna, as their lives are revealed by the narrator. Each is unhappy with life, and in searching for something better, they come across each other. Eventually, as he wades through the banality of social life in Moscow, Gurov comes to realize that this woman is really the only thing he needs, and he loves her as if she is the only thing that matters. Though the story deals with love and infidelity and various other emotions, these seemingly immoral characters actually find what few people in the real world ever do, a thing that may in reality be expressive of the real life of author Anton Chekhov. An overall theme lies just below the surface of the love story, and in it there can be a lesson learned for anyone willing to listen. Above all else, this story is about people, about love, and about the pursuit of excellence.

At the beginning of the story, we are immediately introduced to a newcomer in the Russian port-town of Yalta, whom we later learn is called Anna Sergeyevna, the “lady with the dog.” The narrator seems to be primarily concerned with Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, a vacationer in Yalta, who is describing his surroundings and his feelings about his life. He has long been unhappy in his marriage; he finds his wife “unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, [he] was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home” (Chekhov 871). It is obvious, as the story progresses, that he has been unfaithful to his wife for some time and is unhappy with his life at home in Moscow. He is constantly searching for the next “fling,” and it seems that Anna may be just this to him.

After meeting in a restaurant, the two of them eventually start talking, and before long they are spending every day together, walking and dining together, discussing their lives. Gurov learns, perhaps through a sharpened wit about such things, that she is married and that she is here for the first time, and alone. He finds Anna somewhat extraordinary, because she is so much different than the other women from whom he has formed his conclusions about the opposite sex. It is in fact interesting to note that Gurov actually has a deep disdain for women, as the narrator states, “...and yet he could not get on for two days together without ‘the lower race’” (872). The reasons for his feelings about

women apparently come from his past affairs, in which each one "...at first so agreeably diversifies life and appears a light and charming adventure, [but] inevitably grows into a regular problem of extreme intricacy, and in the long run the situation becomes unbearable" (872). For some reason, he just keeps on looking, though, only to end up in relationship after relationship with the same boring or infuriating women with the same flaws. Consequently, he is drawn closer to Anna, although he surely feels that he and she will certainly end with the same result.

Some critics argue that Gurov is a sort of chauvinist, and "...was threatened by strong women and preferred a woman he could dominate" (Huber par. 9). This in turn is sometimes reflected onto Chekhov, who indisputably has many similarities with his character Gurov. Critic Charles Silet notes that "Anton also had numerous affairs, a habit he retained until late in his life, when he finally married the actress Olga Knipper" (par. 5). It is true that Chekhov probably once had many of the same feelings as Gurov toward women. But, like Gurov, he eventually found someone he could be happy with, who just may be represented in "The Lady with the Dog" as Anna Sergeyevna.

Regardless, Anna is clearly different from the others in the story. She is youthful, awkward, and inexperienced, things that come across to Gurov as signs of beauty—although to some these might seem like signs of weakness. So irresistible does he find her that he slowly seduces her into a secret affair with him, which would eventually have an unforeseen outcome that was, for each of them, a significant transformation. When all is said and done, they both for once will be able to look back without regret at the time that they have spent together in Yalta.

A week goes by, and we rejoin the pair in a hotel room, where they have just made love for the first time. It is here that we see firsthand Gurov's attitude regarding women. Anna is trying to express her remorse about what has happened, when she says to Gurov, "...you will be the first to despise me now...I have become a vulgar, contemptible woman whom anyone may despise" (875). This quote, which to many seems like a guilt-laden confession of Anna's unfaithfulness with her husband, probably was meant to be expressed as a fear on her part that Gurov would no longer respect her

as a person. She has more fear that he will no longer want her than guilt about deceiving her husband; she shows signs of love in its early stages. Gurov, on the other hand, has yet to understand his true feelings for her. As one article suggests, "Gurov errs in thinking that their affair is unimportant, but this is not so much a moral error as an underestimation of his own moral character. He [later] learns that he is not the cynical lover that he thought he was and suffers terribly for having placed Anna in an unhappy situation" (Smith qtd. in Huber par. 5). Where rightfully he should have comforted her immediately, he instead tries to ignore the situation by munching on a piece of watermelon in the corner. From this action, we can assume that he is still deluded by his past feelings toward women, and he holds them, including Anna, to be unworthy of such attention. Their problems cannot possibly be that important or significant, he must have thought. After eventually coming to her aid and cheering her up, probably for his own reasons, they take a cab out of town, where they sit by the seaside at Oreanda. While sitting by the sea, Gurov has a strange realization:

...the monotonous hollow sound of the sea rising up from below, spoke of peace, of the eternal sleep awaiting us. So it must have sounded when there was no Yalta, no Oreanda here; so it sounds now, and it will sound as indifferently and monotonously when we are all no more...in this complete indifference to the life and death of each of us, there lies hid, perhaps, a pledge of our eternal salvation, of the unceasing movement of life upon earth, of unceasing progress toward perfection. (875)

This would eventually turn out to be one of the most meaningful things he comes to understand. It is possibly what this story is really all about, at its core. Although his thoughts are not literally expanded upon, we later learn what exactly he means through his thoughts and his actions.

When it comes time for Anna to leave, they both seem only mildly affected. Although outwardly they show few signs of sadness, a person can feel through the words the fact that neither of them really wanted their affair to end, but somehow thought it was necessary for things to go back to normal. After she is gone, Gurov shrugs it off as a pity and returns to Moscow.

For some time, Gurov is very happy with himself back home. He greedily indulges in all the pleasures of normal life. Before long, he “felt a longing to go to restaurants, clubs, dinner parties, anniversary celebrations...entertaining distinguished lawyers and artists...he could already eat a whole plateful of salt fish and cabbage...” (877). He is under the impression that this affair will slip from his mind, just like every other, but “his immersion in the old pleasures proves useless, however, in disguising the fact that he has fallen deeply in love with Anna” (Childs par. 1).

This reaction is in fact very normal for human behavior. He is attempting to suppress the fact that he may actually be in love with this woman by completely giving in to his human nature; he indulges completely in his every desire, just as he had done before Anna with all the other women, and just as he might continue to do if he had never met her. Little does he realize that by doing so he is only feeding his desire for fulfillment, without ever coming close to being actually content. Were he a moral person to begin with, he would never have engaged in an affair with Anna, but neither would he have ever left his wife for any woman, and consequentially he would have remained unhappily trapped in his marriage anyway.

Here, also, seems to be a very important statement by Chekhov about the condition of humans. It is human nature to indulge in endless desires, so morality would seem to be the enemy of human nature. But what exactly is morality? It appears to be a duty to oneself, and to others, to hold to principle no matter what the consequences. To Gurov that would mean sticking out his marriage, and perhaps remaining unhappy for the rest of his life. How, then, can this be a proper solution? One possibility is that morality, which is a duty, is a desire. It is a desire to be pious and dutiful by a set of pre-established standards. No matter what the cost, a perfectly moral person will do what is considered to be right, as is decided by the majority of the population. At the same time, morality is also a desire for the respect and trust of others, under the assumption that it will be better for everyone if every person has respect and trust for another. In a world of wickedness, a person with morality will do what is right.

After Anna has left and he has made an attempt to rid himself of her memory, he finds that he cannot do so. All the while he keeps thinking he will forget her: “In another

month, he fancied, the image of Anna Sergeevna would be shrouded in a mist in his memory...” (877). However, he does not forget her. He constantly thinks about her, despite his indulgences, and tries in vain to speak of her to people. Gurov is not even sure what had happened: “And what had he to talk of? Had he been in love, then? Had there been anything beautiful, poetical, or edifying or simply interesting in his relations with Anna Sergeevna?” (877). One night, he makes an attempt to speak of her to an official with whom he had been playing cards. The official’s only response is “you were right this evening; the sturgeon was a bit too strong!” (878). This statement probably makes Gurov see the error in his ways, and it reflects back to his reaction to Anna in the hotel room. “When his friend cannot respond to him, as he could not respond to Anna, he begins to understand what she experienced. As his capacity for empathy increases, his capacity for love and self-awareness increase as well” (Curtis par. 6).

Whether he makes the connection to himself, or just to society in general, Gurov has now had his second realization. He sees the futility in everything he has been doing while in Moscow. The indulging, the denial, and the suppression of his feelings are all made obvious in his understanding that society is to blame for his behavior. The narrator reveals his thoughts:

What savage manners, what people! What senseless nights, what uninteresting, uneventful days! The rage for card playing, the gluttony, the drunkenness, the continual talk always of the same thing. Useless pursuits and conversations...absorb the better part of one’s time...and in the end there is left a life groveling and curtailed, worthless and trivial, and there is no escaping or getting away from it—just as though one were in a madhouse or a prison (878).

This is the first of several places where it is made clear that both Anna and Gurov view society as a disgusting place, as a “prison.” It can also be deduced that Anton Chekhov has the same feelings toward society. He is quoted as saying, “Russia is a land of insatiable and lazy people: they eat enormously of nice things, drink, like to sleep in the day-time, and snore in their sleep. They marry in order to get their house looked after and keep mistresses in order to be thought well of in society” (Chekhov qtd. in Gorky par. 62). Here it is seen again in Chekhov’s description of the town in

which he grew up: "...it had become what the Russians picturesquely called 'a deaf town'...a community where people 'do nothing but eat, sleep, and multiply'—'filthy, empty, lazy, illiterate, and uninteresting'..." (Chekhov qtd. in Lucas par. 1). Chekhov is obviously voicing his opinion about such things through the characters in the story, who continually find new ways of being disgusted by social life in the city.

In this story, at least, it can be assumed that society represents the embodiment of desire; both Gurov and Anna live within it. It appears to be a place of mutual gratification; even in the real world, its chief purpose is to serve the needs of its members and to keep them happy. Some might call it an establishment functioning for the encouragement of desires, and it works to maintain the cooperative fulfillment of everyone's desires. A person "gives" away his energy and time in exchange for the monetary ability to buy goods and services, which in turn supplies someone else with an income. It could of course be called human survival, but it is in fact far from mere survival; it is survival on human terms. As a result of our intelligence, we seem to have attained the audacity to survive how we see fit, which, according to human nature, means the most leisurely, comfortable, and all around pleasurable way, that is at the same time the most advantageous to our innate necessity to survive. The only problem with this is that it encourages yet even more discontentment, with our expectations continually rising and our comfort level becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. It shows evolutionarily as a side-effect of intelligence, as we have already lost the ability to survive in the wild like other mammals. A so called "moral" person would perhaps maintain this idea, and attempt to survive as comfortably as possible without excessive indulgences. It becomes evident in this story that Chekhov is supportive of this view in that his characters, namely Gurov, also come to this conclusion.

This view is illustrated clearly once again when Gurov, after having his epiphany, decides to travel to the town where Anna lives to try to see her. Upon arriving there, he seeks out her home only to find in front of her house "a long grey fence adorned with nails... 'one would run away from a fence like that,' thought Gurov" (878). In this way, everything in society is represented by evil menacing things: the dirty hotel room where

they stay, the "sultry heat" at Yalta, the fence, etc., while everything in nature is related to truth, beauty, and understanding, including his most profound understanding at the seaside in Oreanda.

This connection of Gurov's with society to the evil things he encounters, emotional and otherwise, may in fact be a sign of Gurov's "moral regeneration." Gurov, through Anna, "has come to alienate himself from the amoral, gluttonous, frivolous life of his class...he cares more about another human being...and less about his own sensual gratification, the pleasures of Moscow society, and the institution of bourgeois marriage" (Smith qtd. in Huber par. 3). So, it seems, Gurov and Anna have both become moral creatures once more. They are able to distinguish truth and beauty from evil and filth. But according to what's considered "right" and "wrong," they are still obviously adulterous and therefore still amoral. Gurov, though he has feelings for Anna, has but a throbbing desire to be near her always. It is not because he loves her, but rather because she makes him happy, and he knows this. He has not yet fallen completely in love with her, and though he shows signs of morality, he cannot be content with merely that.

That he can't be content with this feeling he has, and that he wishes to be a moral being, shows two things for certain: it shows that morality, being a sense of duty, is a desire, and that the feeling he has for Anna is not love, it is a desire to love her. And like all desires, these things will be inexorably unfulfilled unless something else happens in the mind of Gurov. He must find true, real love for Anna in his own selflessness.

This thing he is unknowingly searching for is commonly referred to as "the pursuit of excellence." What is this excellence, then? In contrast to morality, which is a desire to be pious and dutiful by pre-established standards, excellence is merely a conviction toward humility, selflessness, and the improvement of the human condition, both individually and universally. There is a difference, and it can be found in the reasons for each. The striving toward morality is of course fueled by the desire to be those things that people respect: to appear "good," and to do good, but for the benefit of feeling good about it, or to "do unto others" as you would have them do unto you. These are all in some way personally rewarding reasons, while the benefits to humanity are merely a side-effect. It's like the religions of the world are saying, "What can our ver-

sion of Faith do for you?" The pursuit of excellence, in this context, also comes from a desire. The desire, however, is that of selflessness, and once acquired, it is for reasons of growth, improvement of the universal situation, and for simultaneous selflessness and fulfillment in that. This is in effect the only way to be truly content with oneself, to be uninterested in fulfillment.

It may seem impossible to demonstrate this virtue, but Chekhov himself displayed at least the aspiration to do so within his lifetime:

...in 1890, Chekhov...lifted himself out of what he described as a 'spiritual stagnation' by undertaking a long and arduous trip to the prison colony of Sakhalin...[to] make study of conditions there. It may be that this trip crystallized Chekhov's belief that a person must not be content merely to see everything; he must also do something about what he sees...

... In 1891, a famine year, he devoted himself to collecting food and money for starving farmers. In 1892, he bought Melikhovo, an estate of 675 neglected acres, and poured his efforts into planting, pruning, and improving. He planted thousands of trees, including an apple and a cherry orchard...he also took on the tasks of constructing rural schools, stocking the Taganrog library, and providing constructive criticism for many aspiring writers, displaying the energy and purpose lacking in so many of his dramatic creations (Short par. 10).

And though it may seem to be lacking in so many of his dramatic creations, one looking hard enough might find these qualities in Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna, for they alone in the story will eventually find the key to selflessness and fulfillment.

It's hard to believe that this man, who at the beginning of the story cared for nothing more than to seduce this woman, now finds himself slowly falling in love with her. Boyd Creasman writes, "It is crucial to recognize that the Gurov at the end of the story is not the same as the one at the beginning, and the difference is not merely that he now needs love, but that he has clearly found the woman he loves" (par. II). Therefore, it is clear that he has always needed love, has always searched for it in vain, if only consciously under the

cover of a womanizer, and "only now when his head was grey had he fallen properly, really in love—for the first time in his life" (882).

Throughout the story, as is typical of Chekhov's work, there is a pervading sense of intimacy with the narrator, who, in this story seems to be the main character Gurov himself. Although the entire story is told in the third person, and the narrator is not omnipotent to everyone's thoughts and feelings, the one exception is Dmitri (although he is still referred to as a "he"). We know his thoughts, and in this way we feel his emotions in a more personal kind of way; we identify with him as we would if we ourselves were in his situation. One critic, however, noticed something curious about the ending of the story. In the hotel room, we read that "they loved each other like people very close and akin...they felt that this love of theirs had changed them both" (882). It is clear in this passage that the once third-person narrator has suddenly become all-knowing, revealing both of their thoughts at once. From this we can only conclude that the author wished to make clear the fact that through true love, they have at last, as in Diane Ackerman's essay, "become one" (839).

Chekhov, through Gurov, describes he and Anna's relationship as "...that sweet delirium, that madness" (876). This is a strange connection, because as Plato is quoted in *Phaedrus*, the ancient Greeks referred to such things as art and true love as a madness, as if it were a possession by the muses, in that "madness comes from God, whereas sober sense is merely human" (47). Gurov certainly seems to display this possession when he finally realizes his love for Anna, when he meets her in a—

Chekhov describes it as Gurov "understood clearly that for him there was in the whole world no creature so near, so precious, and so important to him; she...filled his whole life now, was his sorrow and his joy, the one happiness that he now desired for himself" (879). At this point he has become selfless and desireless, in that his only desire is to do what he is already doing, loving Anna; he cares more for this woman than he even cares for himself. From here onward, as long as he can love Anna, he will no longer pursue morality, happiness, or anything else that might leave him unfulfilled, because she is all that he needs.

Some critics believe that the ending of the story is not really an ending at all. A popular notion is that “the history of Gurov’s relationships with women is a transmutation of Chekhov’s history, and the essential point of the fiction was reality for him: true love had come too late, and complete happiness—poetry, and communication and companionship—was impossible” (Smith qtd. in Huber par. 14). This is in reference to the fact that Chekhov, shortly after finding love and marrying actress Olga Knipper, became deathly ill and knew he did not have long to live. Others might disagree with the assumption that this was Chekhov’s message.

It’s possible that Chekhov is trying to relate something else he has learned throughout his life. If, by truly loving, a person has acquired selflessness, this means that the pursuit of true love is the pursuit of excellence. It relates to both Chekhov and his creation Gurov because they are both, in the beginning, searching through an amoral society bent on the fulfillment of inexhaustible desires. They try to seek fulfillment, but only in acquiring selflessness through love do they ever find contentment. Chekhov seems to have found selflessness in his love for humanity, and a compassion for people in general, and he expresses that emotion in Gurov, who finds selflessness in his love for Anna, along with an appreciation for the world outside of desires and society.

We can conclude that this story is about people, and their struggles with morality in a society of evil. It is also a story about love, because it is the one and only road to excellence, because it is the one and only road toward contentment in selflessness. While Chekhov himself finds what he is looking for, in this way “Chekhov’s characters can turn away mortality and meaninglessness, if only briefly, by turning to each other” (Creasman par. 5).

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Evaluation: *Mr. Sims nicely synthesizes the work of an author, numerous critics, and (so important) his original thoughts into a beautiful essay. His writing and thinking are a pleasure to encounter.*

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# The Apology for Free Expression

Richard Snowden

Course: Literature 23a  
(English Literature to 1800)  
Instructor: Richard Johnson

Assignment:

*Write an original research essay exploring some of the themes brought up in this course in at least one text from the semester.*

In his outstanding Renaissance-era work *The Apology for Poetry*, which constitutes probably the first true work of literary criticism in English literature, Sir Philip Sidney responded to critics who attacked poetry as a form of expression. The fundamental reasoning behind many of the arguments against poetry centered on the notion that poetry represented a threat to society due to its tendency to propagate lies and encourage socially unacceptable behaviors. On this basis, it was commonly asserted by such critics, poetry and its purveyors should be banished from society in order to promote goodness and decency.

In spite of the best efforts of America's founding fathers to create a nation where vital individual freedoms, such as those of speech and self-expression, were protected from censorship, modern society still faces a similar situation today. A wide variety of groups, ranging from far-left feminist societies to moderate parents' organizations to far-right fundamentalist Christian groups, have persistently lobbied against certain forms of speech and expression, frequently using arguments similar to those proffered by the poetry-bashers of Sidney's day. Hardcore feminists contend that the use of misogynistic—or even predominantly masculine—language should be abolished because it is the root of the oppression of women; parents and other children's advocates assert that the vulgar and/or violent language and imagery found throughout modern popular culture is the progenitor of many of today's social problems; fundamentalist Christians decry pornography and any use of demonic allusion in the arts as the cause of modern society's moral decay.

In this context, Sidney's arguments in defense of poetry ring as clear and true today as they did in his time. As to the notion that poetry is the mother of lies, Sidney wisely responded that, by dint of poetry's very nature, it is realistically impossible for poets to engender lies: “[A poet] citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to inspire into him a good invention; in truth, not laboring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not...” (989).

Sidney also conjured a brilliant broadside for those

who claimed that poetry inspired people to wicked behavior. Answering the notion that this rendered poetry unfit for a decent society, he responded,

But what, shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious? Nay truly, though I yield that [poetry] may not only be abused, but that being abused...it can do more hurt than any other army of words: yet shall it be so far from concluding that the abuse should give reproach to the abused, that, contrariwise, it is a good reason that whatsoever, being abused, doth most harm, being rightly used...doth most good. (990)

This response segues neatly into the single most compelling assertion offered by Sidney in defending poetry and poets. Drawing upon Plato as an example, he rightly points out that ultimately, it is those who abuse, pervert, or misconstrue poetry—rather than the poets themselves or their writings—who are to blame for the propagation of lies or evil deeds based ostensibly on the original musings of poets. As Sidney also demonstrated by way of implication, the utilization by poetry's critics of quotes from Plato (drawn from *The Republic*) advocating the banishing of poets from society to bolster their position constituted this very kind of wanton abuse of words:

St. Paul himself...setteth a watchword upon philosophye- indeed upon the abuse [of it]. So doth Plato upon the abuse [of poetry], not upon poetry [itself]....And a man need go no further than to Plato himself to know his meaning: who, in his dialogue called *Ion*, giveth high and rightly divine commendation unto poetry. So as Plato, banishing the abuse, not the thing, not banishing it, but giving due honor unto it, shall be our patron, and not our adversary. (992-93)

America's founding fathers, being especially concerned about potential abuses of governmental power based on such arguments in favor of censorship, were in full agreement with Sidney. This fact is readily evidenced by their choosing to immediately protect freedom of speech and expression under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establish-

ment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press..." ("The Bill of Rights," par. 3). Knowing well that such abuses of power tend to lead to persecution and oppression, the founders of the United States were determined to establish a nation where all citizens had rights to express themselves as they saw fit, without fear of harassment or oppression.

Unfortunately, it seems that things rarely work out in practice as they are designed to work in theory. As Laird Wilcox has well noted,

One would think that given the rather explicit language of the First Amendment, there wouldn't be much ambiguity about what it intends. However, two centuries of various forms of legislation...suggest that this is not the case. While Americans have retained a large degree of expressive freedom relative to other places in the world, there will always be repressive forces in our society...ready and willing to restrict these liberties in order to advance their own particular agenda.... (3)

In terms of modern American society, this is an outstanding summation of a key aspect of Sidney's point regarding people who abused poetry. In responding to those who would kill the messenger rather than addressing the misuse of the message, Sidney rightly drove home the notion that neither poets nor their verses were responsible for social ills; it is those who twist or distort the spirit of such verses—and especially those who would distort words to oppress others or further personal agendas—who need to be dealt with instead. For in reality, it is these people, rather than the purveyors of artistic expression, who represent the true problem.

Probably the most prominent example of extremist efforts to suppress free expression in the past half-century of American history is the so-called communist witch hunt conducted by Senator Joseph McCarthy during the early 1950s. Seemingly gripped by paranoia, McCarthy conducted sweeping and aggressive searches for alleged communists and suspected communist sympathizers in government, bashing his detractors and the so-called liberal media at every turn when they criticized him for his extremist zealotry. Tragically, many Americans became caught up in the same wave of fear

that gripped McCarthy, lending support to his anti-communist crusade. By the time Congress finally came to its senses and censured McCarthy in 1954, his campaign of persecution had ruined a great many lives and careers.

During McCarthy's communist witch hunt, many prominent journalists and public figures failed to call him to account for his abuses, fearing that they, too, would be denounced and blacklisted as communist sympathizers. Fortunately, there were some who were not so easily intimidated. One such person was Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, who spoke out against McCarthy in 1951 in a speech that echoed the sentiments of Sir Philip Sidney beautifully:

It is our attitude toward free thought and free expression that will determine our fate. There must be no limit on the range of temperate discussion, no limits on thought. No subject must be taboo. No censor must preside at our assemblies....The ingenuity [to advance the cause of freedom] will be lacking if fear of Communism shrinks the world of ideas to one school of thought, to one point of view. Restriction of free thought and free speech is the most dangerous of all subversions.... ("The One Un-American Act," pars. 9, 11)

Without question, McCarthy's actions represent some of the worst abuses of ideas used to justify censorship and persecution in American history. They also emphatically drive home Sidney's assertions regarding the need to deal with those who abuse ideas, not the ideas themselves. Ironically, as Justice Douglas rightly pointed out, the fear of communism that fueled McCarthy's persecutory crusade was far more dangerous to the nation than communism itself.

In more recent times, we have witnessed attempts by a pair of presidents—one father, one son—to suppress freedom of speech and expression, again based on a perceived threat to society. In the spring of 1992, during the presidency of George H. W. Bush, a terrible riot broke out in south central Los Angeles after four white policemen were acquitted in the brutal beating of Rodney King, a black man, despite unimpeachable video evidence of their crime. With an outraged nation demand-

ing action in the wake of 54 deaths and more than 4,000 injuries over three days of rioting, Bush and his handlers sought a scapegoat.

They quickly found one: rapper Ice-T, whose controversial song "Cop Killer," performed with his rap/metal crossover band Body Count, made him an ideal target. Although the song did not advocate assaults on police officers, Bush, as journalist Jon Katz recounted, denounced it as an example of "[using] film, records or television or video games to glorify cop killing" ("Time Warner Runs Up the White Flag" 35) and initiated a crusade to have the song banned. Although Body Count's album sales actually spiked briefly thanks to the controversy, the effort was ultimately successful: Time Warner, the parent company of Body Count's record label, pulled the song from the album in November of 1992 and dropped the band from its roster two months later.

George H.W. Bush may have won an apparent political victory, but he lost the point; indeed, in his rush to censor Body Count, he never grasped it. Ice-T was merely a messenger trying to tell America that things weren't right in many people's lives, and he was far from alone. Other high-profile artists like Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Cypress Hill, N.W.A., and Rage Against The Machine were also spreading the bad news via their rhyming verses. But once again, Sidney's admonitions went unheeded. Instead of paying attention to the message, the forces of censorship opted to silence the bearer of unhappy tidings; as a result, the interrelated problems of discrimination, poverty, and disenfranchisement are still wreaking havoc on American society more than a decade later.

Today, Bush's son, George W. Bush, resides in the White House, overseeing probably the worst campaign of systematic censorship in America since the McCarthy era. In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, much of the American media have rarely dared to voice even the slightest criticism of Bush's administration, fearing reprisals reminiscent of McCarthyism. Once more, being labeled unpatriotic or anti-American is the prevailing fear, and it has had wide-ranging effects. Bush and his allies among right-wing media outlets have launched a comprehensive assault on free

expression, mercilessly attacking any person or media organization that criticizes Bush's policies.

As the administration cynically fabricated and distorted the facts in the buildup to the invasion of Iraq, which Bush had singled out as a supporter of terrorism and an imminent threat to America despite an almost complete lack of evidence to corroborate such claims, the mainstream U.S. media sycophantically parroted these claims while doing their best to ignore or silence any voice of dissent. When comedian/actress Janeane Garofalo spoke out against invading Iraq, right-wing media sources instigated such an outcry against her that an upcoming television show in which she was slated to star was quietly cancelled by the ABC network. Similarly, when singer Natalie Maines of the Texas-based country group Dixie Chicks told a concert audience in London, England that her band was ashamed that Bush is also from Texas, two major Bush-friendly radio chains—Clear Channel Communications and Cumulus Broadcasting—promptly pulled the group from the playlists of their country stations nationwide and helped promote a large-scale Dixie Chicks boycott.

Ultimately, Bush got his way in Iraq thanks in large part to such ethically dubious tactics by the U.S. media, and we have seen the disastrous results: Iraq is rapidly turning into a Vietnam-like quagmire, costing American taxpayers some \$4 billion per month while perpetuating violence and destruction in the Middle East; American credibility has been severely damaged thanks to the fabrications and distortions used by Bush and his minions to rationalize their war of aggression; and the very word “America,” which once inspired peoples the world over, now inspires fear, revulsion, and anger in every corner of the globe. And once again, we have witnessed the tragic consequences of undermining free expression, which might have saved America from making one of the greatest mistakes in its history.

The fact that Sidney's writings on the dangers of censorship in *The Apology for Poetry* are still fresh and relevant more than four centuries after they were originally penned is clear proof of the power of both prose and verse to enlighten and inspire. Sadly, it is also clear proof that, as Hegel put it, “We learn from history that we do not learn from history” (qtd. in McWilliams 79).

Those who wish to see a better and brighter future for the world and its inhabitants are left to wonder when—or whether—humanity will eventually come to believe, and live by, the immortal words of one of America's greatest founding fathers, Thomas Paine: “He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself” (Paine 470).

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Evaluation: *Through the lens of Sir Philip Sidney's Apology for Poetry, Richard deftly brings into sharp focus the hypocrisy and crass opportunism of the Bush administration's assault on civil liberties.*

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# Scenes from My Childhood

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*Goska Starski*

Course: ESL 073 (Reading IV)

Instructor: Ilona Sala

Assignment:

*Students were to write in a  
child's voice about their childhood.*

My mom is young, skinny, nervous, and very busy with three of us daughters. My sisters and I are three years apart. I am four years old, and mom takes me with her to the store. We do not have a car, and that is a 15-minute walk; walk for her, but run for me. She holds my hand, and walks fast, so I have to run to keep up with her. "Mom! You walk too fast, my legs are tired," I say. "All right, I will slow down," she says, and she does for a while, then she walks fast again. When I want to free myself from her hand, she squeezes my little hand so I can not do anything. I have to run next to her. Sometimes, I am able to free my hand, and walk behind her slowly, and then she is upset, because she has to stop and wait for me. I think, she would not have taken me with her if she had another choice. Walking

with my mom is not as pleasant as it's supposed to be, but meals with the supervision of my grandma are really awful! My grandma is not retired yet, even though, she babysits us sometimes, but not very often. First, she puts a lot of food on the dish. Second, she makes us eat it all! Not because she cares so much about us, but because food is a gift from God, so we shouldn't waste anything. My grandparents are like many old people, they like to have things, but they do not like to give them away. They hide chocolate from us, but we find it anyway, and we eat it all, then we are in trouble. There are scenes with grandpa in the garden: He is chasing us with his cane around the garden, when he sees that we are eating green gooseberries. "Can't you wait until they are sweet?" he yells at us. "But we like them green and sour," my sister says to him. Another time, he is upset because we pull the apples from the tree. "Don't do that, find some apples on the ground," he says. "Those apples on the ground have bugs inside," I say. "A little meat will not hurt you," he laughs proudly, that he has said something funny. "That is disgusting! I swallowed one yesterday, and it made me almost throw up!" I say to him. "What about that chocolate, what you two ate, did it have any bug inside?" grandpa asks. "Next time you should ask," he says seriously. My grandpa is amazing as only he can be. He is at the wrong place, and at the wrong time, always ready to catch us doing something. One day my sister, the neighbor's kids, and I have an idea to throw rocks into the well. Before we do that, we make sure that no one sees us. All of a sudden, there is grandpa standing behind us. "Aha, I catch you! Don't you have better things to do!" he yells at us. There are many conflicts, when I am growing up that make me feel embarrassed. That is one thing I remember very clearly; I can't wait to be an adult, so I don't have to listen to what I should or should not do.

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Evaluation: *I think Goska cleverly captures a child's thoughts.*

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# A Letter from John Stuart Mill to Willie Loman

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Brian Thomas

Courses: English 102 and Philosophy 115  
Instructors: Andrew Wilson and Barbara Solheim

Assignment:

*Pretend to be one of the philosophers we've studied, and write a letter (as that philosopher) to one of the figures we've studied.*

Mr. Loman,

Greetings from Purgatory! I am writing you as part of a "Divine Intervention," so to speak. I hope you will excuse this intrusion; I have had much time to ponder your plight since being sent to the afterlife. I died the "death of a utilitarian," which is to say reaching for my pencil instead of my gun. After years of intellectual and sometimes physical brawls, my long time rival and foe, Immanuel Kant, challenged me to a duel. When our moment with fate arrived, I quickly began to make a list of everyone that would be affected by the proposed action of shooting Mr. Kant. While I was busy scribbling away, Mr. Kant mumbled something about "self-preservation and duty" and shot me through the stomach. I found no *pleasure* in this; in fact I became immediately *unhappy* and overwhelmed with *pain*. I decided to fire back with my last bit of strength and *good willed* Mr. Kant into his grave. Bleeding slowly to death in the rain was no great aspiration of mine, to be sure, but the vision of that self-righteous Prussian hitting the ground with finality paired with the idea that he could no longer spew his rhetoric upon impressionable minds brought me such immense pleasure, I deemed these means to be justified. God did not. Mr. Kant and I have been ordered to fuse our talents together and seek solutions for the sad and the sordid. We also have been forced to take a *Punctuation in Modern Prose* class, a story for another time. It is only through our success that we will earn our redemption. This is where you come in: Willie Loman, you are our final, albeit most vexing, assignment. Mr. Kant and I worked at great length on your situation. It was not enough for us, as the Lord instructs us daily, to "work hard and play nice, you two"; we had to muster and exhaust our every strength and resource to prescribe your solution. You should receive the full report in a few weeks via airmail, but in light of its size (slightly longer than an Iraqi weapons declaration), I thought sending you a summary to be wise. Pardon the Iraq analogy; I sometimes forget that the living cannot see the future.

We, in short, have agreed that you should go ahead with your suicide plans. I did my mathematical computation and determined that everyone you know would

eventually be better off if you were dead. Biffo and Happy have suffered an awful lot from your lies, pretenses, and fantasies. The values you instilled in them are at best, nauseating. They are insecure, dishonest misfits! You will never see them as the monsters that they are, monsters of your creation, while you are blinded with mortal pride and silly delusions. In order to fix a machine, Willie, one must accept that it is broken. You are in a position to do neither. You cannot fix them now; you can only set them free. Liberate Biff from carrying your expectations on his back; do not burden him anymore with your infirmities. He is not responsible for the actions of a lunatic, and the shroud of guilt is not for him to wear. Your son's heart cannot pump blood for both of you. Your death will absolve him. Willy, you must let him go in every sense of the word. Happy is beyond redemption, a blow-hard and fool at best. Your death will not hurt him. As Biff pointed out, "He doesn't care a bit about you." Your death will perhaps retard, if not cease, Happy's delusions. You will no longer be there to feed into his nonsense, nor will you be available to teach him any more tricks of the trade. This alone is an end that justifies all means.

Your wife is badly in need of rest, to be sure, and some time to remember or discover who she is. Your habits of consuming the spirits and breaking the hearts of those around you have taken a crippling toll on that woman. You have forced her to choose husband or son, a burden too great for most to bear. She chose you, Willie Loman, coolly and without hesitation. You have broken her. I only pray the damage is reversible. Mr. Kant struggled with this terribly. He thought your wife to be irrelevant in the equation, due to the "irrationality" of her being. Her happiness, by his assessment, was no justification for you to betray your duty of self-preservation. The precedent you will set, killing yourself because your wife is unhappy, could cause the death of thousands of mediocre husbands. I don't have a problem with that, if their deaths lead to a greater happiness as an end. Nevertheless, we needed to draft a compromise in order to move on. Consider this "Utilikant Resolution #1." *Willie Loman is hereby authorized to commit suicide on the grounds of the*

*Greater Happiness Principle in conjunction with the "Rational Being" disclaimer.* This is to say that your death will create utility as an ends, and your depraved mental state exempts you from your duty. Mr. Kant adds, "I have allowed into the debate, grudgingly, but in the spirit of philosophical bipartisanship, a new imperative. *Parents need always put their children first.* This is an ambiguous law, but it is in the gray area we can find your salvation. If we accept 'Children First' as a Universal Law, and interpret 'First' as to say above all other ends, then extinguishing your own life to absolve, liberate, and endow wealth upon your sons is not only morally right, but your duty."

I rather enjoyed watching Mr. Kant struggle to get this done! We must admit this last bit is a little contrived and self-serving. I believe Mr. Kant consciously decided that the pleasure in completing our task as well as our final commitment to our jailor far outweighed the pain from selling out his principles, a very nice concept. What is one dead "wack-a-doo," as he affectionately called you, in the overall scheme of things. Working closely together on the Hemingway, Hitler, and Loman files, my former foe Mr. Kant and I have learned to appreciate each other. When you reach the afterlife, which I assume will be sooner than later, check out our new book entitled *Utilikant: How To Do The Right Thing And Be Happy, Too.*

With regards,

John Stuart Mill

P.S. Dr. Freud was over for drinks last night and he wanted me to forward this suggestion. Don't suck on a hose or die with a pipe in your mouth; it won't look good. Consider crashing your car or something!

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Evaluation: *Brian's writing is both funny and knife-like. It's a great response to the assignment.*

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# A Series of Correspondences between Nora and Torvald Helmer

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Matthew Thomas

Course: English I02 (Composition)

Instructor: Barbara Butler

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Assignment:

*Write a creative follow-up to  
Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House.*

My Dearest Nora,

How is my little squirrel doing? Oh how I miss my little squirrel...prancing about here and there. Oh yes, I almost forgot, I cannot call you such things any longer. Well, anyway, I hope you have settled down and gotten some of your sense back. I have made arrangements for you to come back to your, what did you call it? Doll's house? Well, nonetheless, your duties as a wife and mother await you; Anne Marie cannot raise the children all alone, you know. I know what you must be thinking, how can a man ever forgive his wife for talking such foolishness? This must be the reason you have not rung; you surely are ashamed of such an absurd display of behavior. You also must think that a man would think his wife ungrateful and never want her again. Well, I'll ease your mind, Nora, I have forgotten and forgiven you once again. In fact, I have told no one, so you don't even have to be embarrassed around our dear acquaintances, nor in the public eye. I have even told the children and Anne Marie that you are away visiting a sick relative and that a cousin rang for you in the middle of the night and you had no choice but to leave at that instant. So come back Nora; all will be as if nothing happened at all. You will be my squirrel again and I shall be your husband. A car will be there to pick you up around 5:00 p.m. tomorrow, and dress to go out; we have an event with the bank's vice president and his family. Much Love, my dear.

Yours Truly,

Torvald Helmer

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Dear Nora,

Hello, Darling, I was expecting not to be communicating with you by these means any longer; however, there must have been an error in the message I sent to you. I had informed you of a car that would be awaiting your arrival outside your door yesterday but when the car came back to get me, your seat was empty. The driver stated that no such person resides at that address and that he was instructed to never return asking for such a

**A Series of Correspondences between  
Nora and Torvald Helmer**

person. I have gone over the address and the name with the driver numerous times so I am convinced that the mistake is not on this side. However, I do believe that one's foolish behavior cannot outdo one's foolish behavior. Is it possible that my little squirrel has rejected my invitation, that the luckiest little squirrel in all of the world has passed an offer of complete absolution? What a fitting name for such a creature, bustling here and there, never taking the time to appreciate a carefree life, never satisfied in one corner of the world, always stuffing one's mouth with macaroons that never belonged to it in the first place. But no, I know that this is not my squirrel. My little squirrel is the type to show grateful obedience to the hand it feeds out of; my little squirrel is loved and shows love to its own little squirrels. I refuse to believe that my Nora is the first mentioned so I have once again opened an invitation to you. My driver will be awaiting you at the same time tomorrow and I expect that my little squirrel will come home, if not for her sake, for her children's sake. Once again, don't worry; I was able to explain your absence to my boss without incident. I will see you tomorrow.

Yours,

Torvald

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Mr. Helmer,

I am sending this letter back with your driver to save him the embarrassment of a third visit. Maybe I did not make myself clear enough the last time we spoke, I need to discover the world for myself and being locked up as your doll or your, what did you call it? Squirrel? is not the way I anticipate to achieve that goal. Yes, Torvald, you have done a great deal for me but at the same time, you have also done me a great disservice. You have sheltered me from the world, trying to make me utterly dependent upon you as one does an animal in the zoo. So yes, perhaps I am your squirrel or was your squirrel, your squirrel that you hide away in a little box, only allowing it to see or be seen when it suits its master. I am a human being, Torvald, I need to grow, and if you truly meant what you said the day we took

our vows, if you truly meant that you would love and cherish me, you will allow me the space I need to blossom. You cannot keep a rose in a basement if you expect a beautiful flower to flourish. And I can see by your letter that this time apart has done nothing for your growth. I am doing this for both of us, Torvald, we both need to see the world through our own eyes, not the masks that we put on each other's faces. I still hold a dear place for you in my heart and I cannot pretend that a spot in it tugs at me to accept your invitation. But I mustn't. I must remain strong and perhaps the miracle that I was praying for will come another day, but if you continue to call for me, you will only prevent or delay its arrival. As for the children, try to make them understand, if not for my sake, for theirs. One day in the future I will open my arms to you once again, when the time comes that both of us can truly understand what we mean when we say "I love you." Until then....

Love Always,

Nora

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*Evaluation: Matthew's response to the assignment affords deep insights into the characters of Torvald and Nora and provides a fitting continuation of the plot of A Doll's House. In short, Matthew has written an epistolary masterpiece.*

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# Survival in the Smokies

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Christine White

Course: English 101 (Composition)

Instructor: Greg Herriges

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Assignment:

*Students were to write an eight-page  
essay in their choice of mode.*

It was in the fall of 1995 when I asked my boyfriend Jon if he would consider a backpacking trip to Smoky Mountain National Park with me. He was hesitant to go because he had no previous backpacking experience. I reassured Jon of my expertise, describing several previous trips I had taken. This seemed to quell his doubts, so we went ahead with preparations. We were both in great physical shape, and I knew the basics of backpacking. What could possibly go wrong?

I obtained some maps and devised our loop-trail itinerary. I figured we could hike at least ten miles a day with packs. Our proposed route started at Clingman's Dome, the highest point in the park. We would follow Forney Creek, descending south. Next, we would venture west along the base of the mountains, paralleling the peaks. After that, our course would head north on the Eagle Creek Trail, to where it intersected the Appalachian Trail. The loop would be completed by traveling east, dipping into the northern side of the mountain range for a few nights, and following the Appalachian Trail back to Clingman's Dome. The quest would be about seventy miles round-trip. I figured it would be a one-week hike.

We purchased a cook stove, hiking boots, backpacks, and sleeping bags. I had a large old dome tent we decided to use. For cookware, we packed some old pots and pans. I packed flour to make biscuits. By the time we had our packs loaded, mine weighed fifty pounds, and Jon's weighed seventy-five pounds. I dismissed this weight factor as unimportant; after all, we ran and lifted weights consistently, and kept in tip-top shape. I was not worried.

The night before the trip, we loaded my pickup with all the gear. Two days' drive brought us into the mountains. It was gently raining, and the air was misty. We drove to the trailhead at Clingman's Dome to see our starting point. Even though we were at an elevation of six thousand four hundred feet, our view was obscured due to heavy fog and rain. After driving to the ranger station and submitting our itinerary, we received our permit. That night, we camped near the trailhead at Smokemont Campground. By the next morning, the rain had stopped. The sky remained overcast, and everything seemed cold and wet. Arriving at the trailhead around noon, we were packed and ready to go.

We put on our packs and started down Forney Creek Trail. The steep, narrow trail was a combination of loose rocks, mud, and puddles that were running into the creek. Within the first quarter-mile, it was necessary to stop and find walking sticks to aid our balance. A small brown mouse was busily building a nest in the brush where we stopped. I expected to see switchbacks in the trail, similar to the ones I had hiked on in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado. Instead, the footpath continued to steeply follow the creek right down the side of the mountain. This trail was dangerous. Within the first mile, I began to wonder if we should even continue. Next, we came to a narrow section of the trail where the rain had taken enough soil away to leave a slippery, four-inch-wide peat moss ledge angling off the edge of a cliff that worked its way around the mountainside. I stopped momentarily to gain composure, then, facing the mountainside, arms outstretched and hugging the mountainside for balance, I continued. When we were both past this perilous trail section, I looked back, thinking it was likely we could not go back even if we wanted to. We soon reached a spot where the trail crossed a tributary. There was no bridge in sight, so we stopped to

look at the map and trail guide. Much later, after returning home, we learned that rain from a hurricane had moved through the area prior to and during the time of our trip, causing flooding and dropping over fifteen inches of rain. I read a notation in the trail guide that mentioned we might have to hop across some of the creek crossings on rocks to avoid getting our feet wet. There were no rocks to hop across on; in fact, it looked too deep for this to ever have been an option. We tried rolling a few heavy rocks over to try to hop across on, but quickly realized this would not work. Giving up, we trudged across, soaking our boots and socks, and sloshing by a man camped alone in the campsite by the fork. At the time, we did not know he would be the last person we would see for days.

The trail continued the steep descent. It was like walking on a rocky creek bed filled with water. Next, the trail came right up to Forney Creek and stopped. Looking across, I could see the trail continue on the far side. The stream was deep, wide, and without a bridge. The water was rushing, with many pockets of whitewater. We walked up and down the bank, selecting the widest, shallowest section of the creek to cross. Here we could see most of the bottom, and it wasn't more than two and a half feet deep in any one spot. Jon went across first, and then it was my turn. Wearing my pack, watching my footing, I slowly moved one foot at a time, working my way across, using my walking stick as a third leg and support against the roaring whitewaters. After reaching the other side, and traveling less than one-quarter of a mile, we came to another identical crossing. Again we searched out the best spot to cross, and took turns slowly working our way across. After struggling across, we continued on, only to find another crossing immediately. We found ourselves barely able to maintain a one mile-per-hour pace. This grueling pattern continued until we had crossed about ten times. It was becoming obvious that we would not be able to travel as far that first day as our itinerary called for. Exhausted, we decided to stop at a campsite three miles sooner. We had descended three thousand six hundred feet from Clingman's Dome already.

The second day of our backpacking trek started out damp with grey skies. That morning I cooked ham and

cheese biscuit sandwiches, packing them for our dinner. We set out by eight in the morning, hoping to make up some miles. Unfortunately, our pace crawled along at about one-half mile per hour. We forded another eight to ten times in the morning. The creek was getting deeper as we hiked down the mountainside. Other little creeks were joining it. The water was so deep I could no longer ford wearing my pack. It was above my waist, deep enough to submerge part of my pack while I wore it. I would be swept downstream if the water caught me and my pack. We developed a new routine. Jon would take his pack across, come back, take my pack across, and then I would go across. Jon was just tall enough to take the packs across and not get caught in the force of the water. We would then both put on our packs and keep hiking until the next ford. One extremely treacherous ford had two or three tributaries coming together at a crossing. Jon, while searching for the best path across, took his pack off, became separated from it, and got lost. In a panic, trying to retrace his steps, he saw a water bottle like mine float by in the rapids. He was certain I had been swept away while trying to cross. Eventually, we found each other and his pack, but only after being frightened enough to wonder if we would survive.

We spent most of the second day struggling with the fords and descending the Forney Creek Trail. By mid-afternoon, we finally reached a fork in the trail and turned east on the Bear Creek Trail. It was a relief to see this new trail was wide and graded, like a gravel road. The map showed we would be following the base of the mountain range parallel to the peaks along the Bear Creek for several miles. Instead of the level trail we expected, though, we climbed steadily. Bear Creek was narrow and deep. White water cascaded over boulders, roaring so loudly that we had to shout to hear each other speak. The trail continued to climb as late afternoon approached. Becoming tired, we decided to stop at the campsite three miles this side of the one on our itinerary. We never found this site; instead, the trail turned sharply upward and continued. Our tee-shirts became sweat-soaked as we pushed on. The packs we carried felt like they were filled with lead. The straps cut into our shoulders, causing us to try to pull forward on them with our hands to alleviate some of the pressure and

pain. We climbed over one thousand feet in elevation in the last two miles before we reached the next campsite, stumbling in at dusk. This was a luxurious encampment; it even had a picnic table, rare for a backcountry campsite, which is usually nothing more than a marker in the ground. We set up the tent and had a dinner of the ham and cheese biscuits I had made earlier that day. Drained, we both slept like rocks.

The third day, we woke up sore and still tired. An ominous fear settled over us, as we realized how far away from help we were. It had become painfully obvious the itinerary I had created was impossible. The trail was so life-threatening that it was not an option to go back. An even greater fear was that we might come across an obstacle that blocked us from continuing. Fatigued, we stayed camped where we were for another day to recover our strength. Jon boiled water to purify it, filling our water bags for the next day's hike. Bear Creek provided a secluded spot for a bath in the warm afternoon sun. We did not see any people that day.

The ground was wet with dew on Wednesday morning as we packed our gear. My pack was so heavy I had to squat on the ground to strap it on. Then Jon had to pull me up to my feet. The Bear Creek Trail continued sharply up for the next three miles. We built up our endurance by developing a pattern of hiking until we were sweat-soaked, then resting a few minutes before continuing. On Cold Spring Gap Trail, we saw a bear sprint down into a valley. I suspected a camper we passed was a poacher, due to his gear. I almost stepped on a snake that was sunning itself on the trail. Later, in the nature center, I discovered this was a venomous copperhead snake. On the Hazel Creek Trail, we stopped at campsite number eighty three, ten miles behind where we should have been on our itinerary.

The six mile hike along the Lakeshore Trail was damp and chilly on Thursday morning. Turning north, we started the third leg of our loop, hiking on the Eagle Creek Trail. We crossed a rickety rustic log bridge over Eagle Creek. Looking down from the bridge, I could see this crossing would have been an impossible ford. Within the first mile, we came to two similar dangerous fords across Eagle Creek. Jon had to take both packs across, fighting the current the entire way. We shivered

in the cold water, wearing shorts so as not to get more clothes wet than necessary. The strain of our heavy packs pressing down on us caused us to walk stiffly, slightly bent forward, unable to move our heads from side to side. It was hard to even notice the ancient trees and mosses we passed. At dusk, we arrived at our campsite at an elevation of one thousand eight hundred feet. I quickly put up the tent and tried to start a fire. All of the wood was wet from a rain earlier that day. The only way to keep a fire going was to continuously fan it, which was exhausting work. Suddenly, we heard the crack of logs being broken in the creek. Looking up, we saw an enormous wild boar lumbering across the creek and running straight at us. There was no time to react as the tusked beast charged us. Then, about one foot in front of me, it suddenly turned ninety degrees and ran away. We both breathed a sigh of relief. I cooked a meal of biscuits and gravy that night, which was the best dinner of the whole backcountry excursion. There was a cold chill in the air, and clouds were moving in when we headed into the tent for the night. Heavy rains pounded our flimsy tent all night, buckling the poles and bringing it down on top of us. Cold rain poured in, soaking us and our sleeping bags. All of our clothes and gear became saturated with water.

Friday, we woke up cold and wet. Each of our packs had gained at least ten extra pounds in water weight. Everything was wet. All of our clothes, underwear, food, sleeping bags, and even our money, was soaked. We continued hiking north on the Eagle Creek Trail, which was narrow, sheer, and rugged. The trail crossed Eagle Creek eight times that morning without any bridges. Each time Jon would take his pack across, then come back and take my pack across, then I would go across. The water was above my waist in many spots. Shivering, and averaging a slow one-half mile-per-hour pace, we pushed on. We both feared that hypothermia would set in. Since everything was wet, we hiked in shorts. My legs were crimson with cold. As afternoon progressed, we feared we might be lost. There had been no trail markers for several miles. The path had broken away from the creek. It appeared to be climbing up a dry creek bed. It was so precipitous that we were pulling ourselves up with our hands. I checked the compass

readings, and it looked as if we could be heading too far west. Hours earlier, we should have passed the campsite that we wanted to stay at. Fear of dying spurred us to press on. We did not dare stop, knowing it could mean death. If we kept moving, we would be less likely to succumb to hypothermia. It was starting to get dark, and still we saw no sign of any recognizable landmark. Desperate, we decided the next spot we came to that looked wide enough to set up the tent would be where we stopped. Together, we would try to keep each other warm enough to make it through the night. Just as such a spot came into view, so did smoke on the ridge just beyond it.

As we cleared this ridge, we saw the Spence Field Shelter on the historic Appalachian Trail. This meant we had climbed over four thousand feet on our hike that day. We did not have a reservation at the shelter. I wondered how crowded it was as we approached. The shelter consisted of a three-sided building with a roof and fireplace. The front was a chain-link fence with a locking gate to keep out the bears. The inside had two rows of wooden slots, one on top of the other, to lay out sleeping bags. There were about a dozen spots total. Two were vacant when we arrived. Traipsing in, acting as if we had reservations, we took the last two open spots, laying out our sleeping bags which were dripping with water. There were ten people inside already. Next, we stripped off our wet clothes and put on our rain suits, which consisted of a waterproof rain jacket with a hood and pants. This insulated us from the wet sleeping bags, allowing us to still sleep in them. After a quick dinner of rice and hot lemonade, we burrowed deep into our sleeping bags. We worried that someone would show up with reservations and kick us out. It was interesting to listen to and observe the others in the shelter. They were each hiking a small segment of the Appalachian Trail, spending their nights in these shelters, traveling light, and planning for only a few nights out. None of them were packing a tent or doing anything remotely like what we were doing. Despite the cold and wet, we hugged together tight for warmth and slept well that night.

The weather continued to be poor, raining all night. In the morning, the rain had subsided, but the air was heavy with mist and fog as we discussed the days' hike

over coffee. I figured the pickup was about seventeen miles east along the Appalachian Trail. We abandoned any ideas of camping in the northern range like our original itinerary called for, because we desperately wanted to get back as quickly as possible. Setting out at a brisk pace, we wondered if we could hike back to the truck in one day, but the rain and chilly wind tired us quickly. Our waterlogged packs were so heavy that they were slowing our pace to a crawl. Still unsure if we would even survive the last fifteen miles, we jettisoned most of our clothes and food to lighten our burdens. The path was jagged and rocky, climbing abruptly as we passed a sign showing three miles to Thunderhead Mountain. The frigid wind pelted our faces with cold rain as we climbed. Unable to go any further, we stopped at the Derrick Knob shelter for the night. It was near full to capacity, and again we did not have a reservation. After warming up by the fire, we laid down hoping not to be evicted.

Sunday, fueled by adrenaline, seeing the end was in sight, we tramped the last ten miles in the rain. Day hikers passed us as we got nearer to civilization. Finally we trudged across the parking lot, reaching the truck at last. Each of our bodies was fifteen pounds lighter from the ordeal. Exhilarated, we zoomed out, straight to the nearest motel. Caked with mud, tired, sopping and sore, we checked in at the L Ranch motel, where we ordered Fat Boys' pizza and submarine sandwiches delivered to our room. It was bittersweet arriving at the motel, leaving the wilderness beauty and wildlife. However, I never appreciated a shower, running water, heat, good food, and shelter more than at that moment. I also never appreciated a backpack trip more. When things went wrong during this trip, I learned to reach down within myself and push beyond what I thought my limits were. It taught me that we have deep resources of energy to draw on that we do not know exist. I learned how to tap into this energy, and use it. This was the best trip we ever took, because things went wrong.

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Evaluation: *Chris writes an engaging narrative of survival—and the significance of the experience is apparent.*

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# Triumph over Tragedy

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Nicole Wiwat

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

Assignment:

*Write a seven- to- ten-page research paper, using at least seven secondary sources, exploring the connections between Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin In The Sun and the Langston Hughes poem from which it draws its title.*

Lorraine Hansberry titled her famous play *A Raisin in the Sun* after Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem (A Dream Deferred)." The underlying theme for both of these works explores how people cope with their unfulfilled dreams. E. D. Huntley described the play precisely when he said *A Raisin in the Sun* "dramatizes the seductiveness of American materialistic values" (Huntley 3). In fact, this is true of both works. At first glance, it may appear that both Hansberry and Hughes feel that if a person's dream is not achieved, negative consequences of anguish and heartache inevitably follow. However, once the reader investigates more thoroughly *A Raisin in the Sun*, he or she will realize that this is not at all Hansberry's message. "Essential to Hansberry's vision of reality was the belief that the average person has within him or her the capacity for heroism" (Lederer 13). Though many instances in her play parallel verses in Hughes's poem, her overall message of hope, heroism, and triumph contradicts Hughes's message of defeat and destruction.

The theme of Langston Hughes's poem is that an unachieved dream causes a person to deteriorate emotionally, physically, and mentally. "Does it... fester like a sore—and then run?... Does it... just sag like a heavy load. Or does it explode?" (Hughes 228). This deterioration, in turn, causes a person to compromise his or her set of values and essentially, lose part of his or her character. At no time does Hughes offer a positive alternate ending to a dream deferred. Each line of Hughes's poem suggests that the result of a dream deferred is tragic. "A closer reading reveals... a ground of unresolved conflict... The final line... is the conclusive... answer to the question posed in line 1" (Hansen 1). Moreover, many times throughout the play, the reader can see examples of how these hopeless dreams negatively affect the Younger family.

The most evident example is played out through Walter Younger. Walter is desperate to own his own business and deceitfully uses the family's insurance money for an investment. "Walter Lee is corrupted by the materialistic aspirations of the heart of Western civilization, and his corruption is bodied forth in his petty, little dream. But it was his dream, 'and it was all that he had!' And that made it a matter of life or death to

him....For it could explode if frustrated" (Davis 185). Quickly after taking this risk, he learns that his investment is a fraud. The money is gone and without it, so is his dream of owning a business. Walter is mad with hopelessness and says to his mother, "Life just like it is. Who gets and who don't get....Some of us always getting 'tooken'...I figured it out finally...Willy Harris...He's taught me to keep my eye on what counts in the world" (Hansberry 289). When Walter says, "what counts in the world," he is referring to money. This experience has crippled Walter and turned him into a skeptic. He turns on his values and decides that it doesn't matter how one gets rich. He thinks that there is no sense in being righteous and just, because those that worry about it never win out in the end. His words mortify his mother. She says, "You making something inside me cry, son. Some awful pain inside me....We ain't never been that poor...that—dead inside" (290). From this scene, it appears that the deep wounds of the family are crusting over and transforming them into gross, ugly, negative characters.

Walter is not the only character in the play who succumbs to the poison of unfulfilled dreams. Ruth Younger, Walter's wife, is directly affected by the poor financial state of the family. God-given gifts, the kind that should make for an incredibly joyous occasion, even begin to "stink like rotten meat" (Hughes 228). Ruth discovers she is pregnant, but fears that the impact of another child will be the straw that breaks her family's back. Before telling Walter about the baby, she visits a doctor about having an abortion. Ruth keeps the option of aborting her baby as a backup plan should Walter react negatively to the news. Ruth's actions and thinking are being suffocated by the ever-closing walls of her family's state of being. She is unable to see beyond their current situation. "Walter Lee's penchant for taking center stage has forced his wife to become an observer in his life" (Weales 183). She is being motivated by her confused, clouded sense of reality. In desperation, as Hughes's poem predicts, Ruth's thoughts become those of despair and cynicism, and she allows herself to consider a destructive act for survival.

Another example can be seen when the reader examines the strained relationship between Walter and his

sister, Beneatha Younger. There is not enough money for everyone's dream to be fulfilled, and tension and conflict spills into their relationships and arises between family members. At one point, Beneatha says to Walter, "What do you want from me, Brother—that I quit school or just drop dead, which!" (Hansberry 236). As Hughes's poem suggests, a dream deferred weighs on a person and can drain people of their energy, hope, and love. A dream deferred leaves a person vulnerable to infections. Within the Younger household, greed and selfishness begin to corrupt their actions, and the family members begin to turn on each other. Lorraine Hansberry, however, acknowledges that the story does not end in this sickly state. Rather, she sees past the obstacle(s) to where true healing and hope thrive.

Lena "Mama" Younger is the strong central character in *Raisin* who plays the consistent role of mediator and advice giver. More than just the head of the family, she is the leader on the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual levels. Even though her own strength is under extreme testing, she is the only family member who realizes that the family can pull through this predicament and prosper from it. "Yes—death done come in this here house....on the lips of my children. You what supposed to be my beginning again. You—what supposed to be my harvest.... There is *always* something left to love" (Hansberry 290-1). Many times throughout the play, Mama gathers her family together and tries to explain to them what it means to be a family, to love each other unconditionally, and to stand by each other when times get tough. The attention and nurturing that she gives to her scrawny, weak houseplant symbolizes the love and support she showers upon her family. The size of the plant represents the size of their house. The undernourishment of the plant represents both the family's financial state and the disunity within the family that restricts its growth. Nevertheless, Mama refuses to give up on the plant. "The theme of heroism found in an unlikely place is perhaps best conveyed through the symbol of Lena's plant. Throughout the play, Lena has tended a small, sickly plant that clings tenaciously to life" (Lederer 15). When the Youngers leave their apartment to move to their new home, Mama takes the plant with her and does not leave it behind. This action further exemplifies her

refusal to abandon her family. Whether they are in times of prosperity or despair, she cares for them and bonds the family together.

The insurance money, to some degree, can also be seen as a sign of hope. The money has two faces in this play. One face is that of greed and destruction. Beneatha's boyfriend Asagai says at one point, "Isn't there something wrong in a house...where all dreams, good or bad, must depend on the death of a man?" (Hansberry 285). However, at the same time, the money does symbolize opportunity, growth, and security. With the money, Beneatha will have tuition money for medical school. An education will help ensure a prosperous future for both herself and her family. The money also affords them the opportunity to buy a bigger house. Both Lena and Ruth wish for the day where they will each have their own private bedroom and bathroom. A larger house will not only better accommodate their extended family, it will provide them more sunlight and a yard. The money, when viewed in this light, does hold an element of hope and acts as a vehicle for achieving dreams.

More than just offering hope, Hansberry's writing reflects her desires for people to prosper and become the best they can be despite the unfairness of the world. "For she envisioned a world in which good men and women face injustice boldly, and lift their voices to combat it" (Haley 247). Her play *A Raisin in the Sun* reflects these sentiments. Not only are signs of hope embedded in her writing, but there are also examples of how the Youngers overcome the cruelties in their life to achieve heroism and triumph.

The first example of an act of heroism is from Mama, which is only fitting, considering she is the most grounded character in the play and holds the family together. Without discussing it with any of the other family members, Mama uses a portion of the insurance money to buy a house. She buys a house in an uppity white neighborhood. Despite the risks involved with trying to integrate the family into such a neighborhood, Mama stands firm in wanting the best for her family. She recognizes the death and destruction that her family is succumbing to and takes a heroic leap in reversing the situation. "I just seen my family falling apart today.... We couldn't of gone on like we was today. We

was going backwards 'stead of forwards.... When it gets like that in life—you just got to do something different" (Hansberry 265). Rather than focusing on the risk, she focuses on the possibility. The new house is symbolic of "the hopes of...mothers... who want to save their small world by transplanting it to an environment in which it might conceivably flourish" (Weales 183). It is Mama and her strong beliefs and character that later inspire the rest of her children to take heroic action.

Beneatha's goal of becoming a doctor is also inspiring and heroic. As she reflects upon a childhood experience, Beneatha says, "I always thought it was the one concrete thing in the world that a human being could do. Fix up the sick, you know—and make them whole again" (Hansberry 284). Her aspiration of being a doctor is the one consistent interest that Beneatha holds throughout the play. It is true that at the end of the play, when Beneatha discovers that Walter has unwisely invested her tuition money and that the money is lost, she begins to question the direction of her life. She declares, "It used to matter. I used to care" (284). She leads the reader to believe that she is going to abandon her dream. Yet, at the end of the play, Beneatha's spirits are high, and many questions still linger about her future. The reader is left feeling as if her dream of being a doctor may not be forgotten after all. "Beneatha had always pinned her personal aspirations and her hopes for a more equitable and compassionate society on the prospect of becoming a doctor, reflecting Hansberry's belief that social idealism—the commitment to a better society—is intimately tied to individual moral obligation" (Miller 7). Beneatha overcomes the tragedy of the lost money and continues to hold on to her dream.

Yet another example of triumph can be seen in Walter's growth as a person. Throughout the play, he struggles to realize what it means to be a man. Most often, his actions are childlike and selfish. Many times, Mama makes mention of the fact that she is waiting for him to stand up for his family and act as his father would have if he were still alive. "The play is concerned primarily with his recognition that, as a man, he must begin from, not discard, himself, that dignity is a quality of men, not bank accounts" (Weales 183). It is not until the end that Walter comes upon this realization.

"He submerges his materialistic aspirations—for a time, at least—and rallies to support the family's dream" ("Lorraine" 95d). His victory comes when he tells Mr. Lindner that they will not sell the house. Finally and without reservation, Walter is able to express all that he has learned: "We come from people who had a lot of pride... And we have decided to move into our house because my father—my father—he earned it for us brick by brick. We don't want your money" (Hansberry 292). By putting his own selfish needs aside and considering the needs of the family unit, Walter finally realizes what is truly important in his life. Mama's words finally broke through to him, like sunshine breaking through the clouds after a rain storm. Unlike Hughes's theme, rather than losing part of his character, Walter was able to strengthen his character and learn from the experience.

In conclusion, hope and triumph, two themes that are not present in Hughes's poem, are the strong, underlying themes of Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. By the end of the play, the Youngers realize that the one dream that unites the entire family is the dream of owning a house. With this knowledge, the family's selfishness, inner conflict, and misdirection dry up and all of them are left feeling renewed and reunited as a family. "And yet, Hansberry never gave up hope that eventually, however clumsily, people could solve their social conflicts" (Haley 247). Lorraine Hansberry said, "I think that the race of man is obviously worth saving, ridiculous as it can be" (Haley 247). Surprisingly, *A Raisin in the Sun* originally possessed a different name. "Hansberry originally named her play 'The Crystal Stair' after a line in Langston Hughes's poem 'Mother to Son'" ("Lorraine" 951). Knowing this, the reader may wonder why Hansberry changed her title and chose to title her play after a poem that did not share her same positive sentiments. Perhaps Hansberry chose "Harlem (A Dream Deferred)" to point out the detrimental effects of succumbing to defeat and despair. The true test, according to Hansberry, is to face adversity head on and overcome it. The Younger family accomplished this feat and should be the inspiration for all other families.

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Evaluation: *Rather than providing a mechanical, line-by-line reading of the poem that matches up each line to the play's events, this paper, through careful analysis, discovers the subtleties of the poem and finds a way in which Hansberry has transformed, not merely recycled, Hughes's poem.*

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# Discernment of Truth in Bacon's *The Four Idols* and Lewis' "Meditation in a Toolshed"

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Valerie Zieske

Course: Humanities 105  
(Great Ideas of World Civilizations)  
Instructor: Trygve Thoreson

Assignment:  
*Compare conceptions of "truth" in two or more writers.*

At first glance, Bacon's essay entitled *The Four Idols* and Lewis' analogy in "Meditation in a Toolshed" seem to present opposing methods of examining reality. *The Four Idols* advocates "induction," a method of examination using empirical data as "the proper remedy to be applied for the keeping off and clearing away of idols" (Bacon 420). Bacon outlines in his essay the four different types of false notions, "idols," that cloud human understanding and suggests that truth cannot be discovered while the mind remains rooted in them. "Meditation in a Toolshed," however, discusses the validity of empirical examination and concludes that that mode of perception should not necessarily take precedence over a more subjective method of analysis. A comparison of the two works may at first suggest completely opposing viewpoints, induction versus subjective analysis, but closer examination reveals that Bacon's and Lewis' thoughts were more similar than polar. First, Bacon and Lewis both wrote their works in part as a reaction to the prevailing methods of truth discernment of the times in which they lived. Since those prevailing methods of truth discernment are practically

opposite when compared, Bacon and Lewis approach the problem from opposite directions, but it is the same problem: that of discerning truth. Second, though the authors approach the problem of true understanding from opposite directions, the solution each author arrives at is exactly the same: Neither empirical data nor subjective experience gives a thorough and accurate picture of truth; therefore, both must be employed to obtain complete understanding.

Bacon's approach in *The Four Idols* to the problem of obtaining true understanding takes the form of an analysis of the things possessing the mind that prevent a clear picture of truth. He calls these things "idols" and divides them into four classes: "There are four classes of idols which beset men's minds. To these for distinction's sake I have assigned names—calling the first class *Idols of the Tribe*; the second, *Idols of the Cave*; the third, *Idols of the Marketplace*; the fourth, *Idols of the Theater*" (Bacon 420). Though the four classes of Idols may be founded in different aspects of society, all four Idols serve to distort the truth unless man can prepare himself for that distortion.

The first class, the Idols of the Tribe, distorts the truth by its very foundation in human nature. Idols of the Tribe are ways humans as a whole tend to err. Bacon says, "The *Idols of the Tribe* have their foundation in human nature itself, and in the tribe or race of men" (420). He explains specific idols in the class, including (1) the human tendency to regard information obtained from the senses as infallible and more important than that from any other source, (2) the tendency to find or make proof for what we desire to be proved, (3) the desire to find an explanation for every phenomenon without which explanation the mind cannot rest, and (4) the tendency to impose order in and connections between phenomena where no order or connections may exist. Bacon summarizes, "Such, then, are the idols which I call the *Idols of the Tribe*; and which take their rise either from the homogeneity of the substance of the human spirit, or from its preoccupation, or from its narrowness, or from its restless motion, or from an infusion of the affections, or from the incompetency of the senses, or from the mode of impression" (425). Idols of the Tribe rise from the human spirit, mankind as a whole.

The second class of idols, the Idols of the Cave, distorts truth through the individual. "For everyone...has a cave or den of his own, which refracts and discolors the light of nature.... So that the spirit of [the individual] man...is in fact a thing variable and full of perturbation, and governed as it were by chance" (420-21, brackets mine). These include (1) allegiance to particular theories or certain speculations because of some connection between the person and the theory, (2) the tendency to subject all examinations to the particular perspective with which the individual is most comfortable and lose the penetration another perspective might bring to the matter, and (3) the tendency to confine truth to the understanding brought by the individual's narrow background or personality. Bacon explains, "The *Idols of the Cave* take their rise in the peculiar constitution, mental or bodily, of each individual; and also in education, habit, and accident" (425). Idols of the Cave are individual, personal, and just as misleading as those of the Tribe.

The Idols of the Marketplace, Bacon's third class of idols, distort truth through a man's association with other men. Just as a marketplace is a place for people to gather, the Idols of the Marketplace gather together the misperceptions men create in an attempt to relate. Bacon says, "There are also idols formed by the intercourse and association of men with each other, which I call *Idols of the Marketplace*, on account of the commerce and consort of men there. For it is by discourse that men associate; and words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar" (421). Language allows men to communicate and relate to each other; therefore, examples of these idols mostly center around language, including (1) the tendency for the meanings of words to become distorted or to mislead, (2) the creation of words for something that does not exist, and (3) the lack of words for things that do exist due to lack of observation. "For men believe that their reason governs words; but it is also true that words react on the understanding; and this it is that has rendered philosophy and the sciences sophisticated and inactive" (427). Words are representations of things, not the things themselves, and are therefore deceptive or inadequate. Idols of the Marketplace result from the individual man associating with mankind as a whole and are most noticeable in language created by that meeting.

Bacon's fourth and final class of idols is the Idols of the Theatre. Idols of the Theatre distort truth because

they are accepted schemas or explanations for reality that are passed from one man to another or from one generation to another without evidence or proof. Bacon says, "Lastly, there are idols which have immigrated into men's minds from the various dogmas of philosophies, and also from wrong laws of demonstration. These I call *Idols of the Theater*, because in my judgment all the received systems are but so many stage-plays, representing worlds of their own creation after an unreal and scenic fashion" (421). Examples of Idols of the Theatre include (1) sophisticated philosophy, which hastily gathers together small commonalities of experience and allows thought, speculation, and meditation to reach conclusions on a large scale without real authority or real data; (2) empirical philosophy, which carefully collects data from a few experiments and constructs from a few experiments systems to apply to all experiences; and (3) superstitious philosophy, which seeks to prove theology and tradition by mixing it with philosophy whether or not they are compatible. Bacon explains, "In general, however, there is taken for the material of philosophy either a great deal out of a few things, or a very little out of many things; so that on both sides philosophy is based on too narrow a foundation of experiment and natural history, and decides on the authority of too few cases.... So that this parent stock of errors—this false philosophy—is of three kinds; the sophisticated, the empirical, and the superstitious..." (430). Idols of the Theatre include all systems of belief received without question, whether obtained by culture as a whole or the individual man.

All four classes of idols speak of tendencies to error that cloud the mind and prevent clear understanding of truth and reality. Bacon emphasizes that only with recognition of these dangers and fortification against them will man be able to discern truth. As a tool of fortification, Bacon offers "induction." "Induction" is a method of reasoning that begins with gathering evidence before broadening to theory. By starting with something no idol affects, such as empirical data, a theorist can minimize if not destroy the effects of any idol.

In "Meditation in a Toolshed," C.S. Lewis also discusses obtaining understanding of truth and reality, but he approaches understanding from a different angle. Lewis compares objective analysis like induction with subjective analysis like religion. He refers to scientific objectivity as "looking at" and personal subjectivity as "looking along." Those two phrases come from his

“Toolshed” analogy. Lewis asks “Which is the ‘true’ or ‘valid’ experience?” (Lewis 144). Lewis compared the objectivity of a scientist, “looking at,” with examining in a toolshed a beam of light from the outside. The scientist sees light, but is unable to see what the light illuminates. Subjectivity, “looking along,” results in a completely different experience. Instead of (and in place of) illuminated specks of dust, Lewis describes a glimpse of the world beyond the toolshed. “I saw no toolshed, and (above all) no beam. Instead I saw, framed in the irregular cranny at the top of the door, green leaves moving on the branches of a tree outside and beyond that, 90 odd million miles away, the sun. Looking along the beam, and looking at the beam are very different experiences” (Lewis 144).

Lewis goes on to provide examples of “looking at” and “along.” Those examples include (1) love, which can be described in terms of genetics and biological stimuli or emotions and precious meaning; (2) thought, which can be examined in terms of neurons firing in the brain or significant contemplation of timeless truths; and (3) pain, which can be easily explained as resulting from neural communication but can also be determined as a feeling that employs emotions. Lewis ultimately explains that all thought is biased, with or without empirical data. He says, “You can step outside one experience only by stepping inside another. Therefore, if all inside experiences are misleading, we are always misled” (145).

In both works, then, the authors discuss methods of obtaining truth and discerning reality, Bacon with his complicated description of idols and Lewis with his simplistic analogy of two kinds of “looking.” Certainly, Bacon and Lewis employ completely different approaches to the subject; however, these different perspectives stem not from a fundamental dichotomy of ideas, but from the prevailing attitudes of the times in which the authors lived.

Sir Francis Bacon was born in 1561 to Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Seal under Queen Elizabeth I. His father died when he was eighteen, leaving little wealth to his fifth son, who made his living by law and politics after leaving Cambridge University before obtaining a degree. His father helped him in at least one important aspect: the prestige and position Sir Nicholas Bacon achieved in Elizabeth’s court was practically passed down to his son, and Elizabeth’s favor kept him

at court until Sir Francis was appointed lord high chancellor of England, the highest position he ever held, in 1618. Though later impeached for possible bribery, Bacon published *Novum Organum*, his second work, before his fall from power. Included in *Novum Organum*, the “new Organon,” was *The Four Idols* (Jacobus 417).

In Elizabethan and then Jacobean England, Bacon was surrounded with ideals of the day that were founded in faith rather than reason. Most of these philosophies were promoted by the church and flooded with church politics (Jacobus 417). Perhaps the philosophy to which Bacon most objects was that presented by Aristotle of deductive reasoning. Aristotle taught that theory should be established first which, once in place, would allow truth to be deduced (Jacobus 420). Whether a direct response to Aristotelian deduction or an essay with much broader scope, *The Four Idols* commented on the prevailing ideology of faith without proof, suggesting instead that induction, or the gathering of evidence from which to draw conclusions, would result in more accurate reasoning and true understanding.

Lewis also responded to the prevailing ideology of the day in “Meditation in a Toolshed.” Clive Staples Lewis was born in 1899, also in England, but far removed from the Elizabethan Age. In fact, prevailing thought centered on the opposite idea: instead of faith without proof, proof without faith was most popular. In his book *God in the Dock*, Lewis included “Meditation in a Toolshed.” He directly refers to twentieth-century thought patterns in his essay, saying,

You get one experience of a thing when you look along it and another when you look at it. Which is the “true” or “valid” experience? Which tells you most about the thing? And you can hardly ask that question without noticing that for the last fifty years or so everyone has been taking the answer for granted. . . . The people who look *at* things have had it all their own way; the people who look *along* things have simply been brow-beaten. It has come to be taken for granted that the external account of a thing somehow refutes or “debunks” the account given from the inside” (Lewis 144).

**Discernment of Truth in Bacon's *The Four Idols*  
and Lewis' "Meditation in a Toolshed"**

Lewis therefore centers his essay on showing that "looking along" is just as valid as "looking at."

In his essay, Lewis emphasizes subjective analysis (looking "along"), because his time period discounted it as worthless. Bacon emphasized objective analysis ("induction") for the same reason. The solutions both authors offer, however, are not stark declarations of one method and not the other, but meet somewhere in the middle. Both methods of analysis are considered important.

In *The Four Idols*, Bacon does not discount faith as completely devoid of any validity. Rather, he cautions against using it solely as the reasoning behind "truth." "Very meet it is therefore," says Bacon, "that we be sober-minded, and give to faith that only which is faith's..." (Bacon 431). He does not say man should do away with faith entirely. He also does not say that empirical data alone satisfies the search for truth. Empirical data relies in part on the senses, "but by far the greatest hindrance and aberration of the human understanding proceeds from the dullness, incompetency, and deceptions of the senses; in that things which strike the sense outweigh things which do not immediately strike it, though they be more important" (424). Later, Bacon remarks, "Hence all the working of the spirits enclosed in tangible bodies lies hid and unobserved of men. So also all the more subtle changes of form in the parts of coarser substances...is in like manner unobserved. And yet unless these two things just mentioned be searched out and brought to light, nothing great can be achieved in nature, as far as the production of works is concerned" (424). In this, Bacon emphasizes the soul, which cannot be touched by empirical data or the senses, as mandatory for greatness. The soul is true, for without it we would not see great things achieved in nature, but evidence of the soul lies in faith, not in proof. Therefore, Bacon does not conclude "proof without faith," but rather, "faith with PROOF."

Lewis makes the same conclusion, albeit with a different emphasis. "We must, on pain of idiocy, deny from the very outset the idea that looking *at* is, by its own nature, intrinsically truer or better than looking *along*. One must look both *along* and *at* everything" (146). His conclusion is, "We must start with no prejudice for or against either kind of looking." Lewis does not conclude "faith without proof," but rather, "proof with FAITH."

Because both Lewis and Bacon responded to systems of thought from their various time periods and the system of thought in Elizabeth England became the opposite in 20th century England, the authors appear to start from opposite ends of a spectrum, with faith without proof on one end and proof without faith on the other. They do not, however, pass each other in the center of the spectrum and conclude their essays expressing opposing viewpoints; rather, Lewis and Bacon meet somewhere in the middle. The overall message of Bacon is that proof must be present, and Lewis' essay reiterates that subjective reasoning is often proof in itself. The overall message of Lewis is that faith must be present, and Bacon does not deny that development of any theory ultimately requires faith. The natural conclusion: neither proof nor faith can stand on its own, so the two must stand together.

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