Selected Essays by Students of

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
STARK
Cover Art:

Ali Miltner, *Untitled*
*Watercolor*
We are all apprentices in a craft where no one ever becomes a master.
Ernest Hemingway

Following the success of last year’s entirely student-published edition of the Writing Center Review, the staff of the Kent State University Stark Campus Writing Center eagerly anticipated beginning work on yet another volume of academic achievement and recognition of the students here at Stark. As in the past, our staff worked hard to find and publish some of the best student writing from across the curriculum in an effort to continually increase awareness of the importance of writing, not only to the academic world, but also to those outside of the university.

Over the last several years, the Writing Center has attempted to broaden the scope of writing that is published in this journal. We understand the need for diversity in showcasing our students’ abilities. To this end, we are pleased to announce that the fifteen essays printed in this publication come from both upper division English courses as well as those at the 10000 and 20000 levels, and from the fields of History, Ecology, Psychology, Philosophy, and Education. Our increased efforts to publicize our journal in the classrooms, with much appreciated help from our Kent State Stark faculty, greatly improved the number of submissions, allowing for a wider range of selection. This year, we feel we have really reached the entire student body, creating a greater familiarity with the Writing Center and the Writing Center Review.

This past fall, our staff had the honor of presenting last year’s Writing Center Review at the National Conference for Writing Centers in Baltimore, Maryland. Six Writing Center tutors, Robert Berens, Pamela Wilfong, Jonathan Judy, Kris Shearer, Marianne Jackson, and Carolyn Adelman, along with Dr. Jay Sloan, explained the process of producing an on-campus academic journal—an endeavor not undertaken by many universities across the country. Through this presentation, we were not only able to inspire other educational institutions to attempt a similar venture, but also enjoyed the opportunity to distribute copies of our Review, providing our student contributors with an even greater national audience. This fact proved to be highly successful in encouraging students to submit their work to such a widely publicized and broadly read publication.

In our efforts to publish the finest examples of student writing, every submission was considered for publication on the basis of writing skill, originality, clear organization, effective and appropriate support, and appropriate documentation according to the standards of the discipline represented. All papers were anonymously selected by a team of faculty members and Writing Center tutors. In the final editing process, each paper was edited for sentence level errors, while leaving the student’s voice and personal style intact.

As we were very pleased with the new style and format of last year’s Writing Center Review, we have chosen to maintain the publication’s current professional and readable look. However, as there is always room for improvement, and as revision is a practice that is strongly encouraged in the Writing Center, we welcome any suggestions for future editions.

The Writing Center staff would also like to thank the following faculty members, without whom the selection process would not have been possible:

Ruth Capasso, Associate Professor of French
Lee Fox-Cardamone, Assistant Professor of Psychology
Leslie Heaphy, Assistant Professor of History
The co-editors of the *Writing Center Review* would also like to thank Dr. Jay Sloan, Writing Center director, for his help and encouragement in publishing this journal. We would also like to thank Dr. Jeannette E. Riley for her assistance in desktop publishing, and Jeff Grametbauer at the Print Shop in Canton, Ohio. Having the opportunity to produce this publication entirely on our own, we as student editors have learned invaluable skills that will continue to aid us in our future endeavors.

We would also like to thank the staff of the Writing Center, which has contributed a great deal of time to the completion of this project. Serving in a range of capacities from publicity, to selections, to editing and layout, the following tutors have dedicated much effort to successfully publishing yet another fine journal:

- Jamie Elberson
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- Jonathan Judy
- Makeisha Miller
- Ali Miltner
- Angie Saunders
- Maureen Schirack
- Kris Shearer
- Laura Smith

We applaud the efforts of all Kent State Stark students and congratulate those whose work is presented here. We strongly encourage future submissions and continued efforts to showcase the best examples of student academic writing from the Kent State University Stark Campus. We hope this will serve as an educational device that inspires our students to learn and improve important written communication skills. Thank you for your contributions to this sixth edition of the *Writing Center Review*, 2001.

Pamela Wilfong and Robert A. Berens, Co-Editors
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The American Dream: A Can of Coke and a Lexus
Brenda Ayers-Rodgers

Following the crowd in 2001 is the American way. Our lives have been infected with directions on who, how, and what we should be and do. Every day our televisions blare out talk shows, sitcoms, and soap operas to stagnate our minds. Our radios scream obscenities and false hopes with a beat that permeates our thoughts. Magazines, newspapers, billboards, televisions, and radios continually tell us what we need and want. Fashion dictates the way we dress, what styles we wear, and even the food we eat. We must follow rigid exercise routines in expensive gymnasiums, drive only the best automobiles, and buy only certain brands of products for our families to consume. The media constantly inundates our subconscious with messages that instruct us how to behave, what to say, and gives directions on what is necessary to be accepted in the elite privileged society that we perceive to be the American dream. This is the education we get from the world around us.

Where has this propaganda come from? Why are we not able to see the forest for the trees? Why do we accept all that is handed to us without questioning the motives? We have been led to believe that “they” are always right. We have been taught to fear our own judgment, to accept life without question. Such programming begins at birth, is exemplified by our elementary education, and snowballs as we continue to learn. We are a society of sheep, waiting for slaughter.

Paulo Freire describes this kind of education in his essay “The Banking Concept of Education” as:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the “banking” concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (349)

Schooling in American society has become a process of transferring a pre-arranged amount of information to our children. It begins around age five and continues through the late teens, or until the students have successfully completed the courses required of them. Teachers force-feed a curriculum determined by the state, the county school board, and the school itself. Children attend classes a specified number of days, accept a certain amount of data, and are tested regularly to determine that an acceptable amount of material has been retained. Our children’s teachers have been certified by the state, selected by the school board, and lesson plans follow a pre-set schedule arranged by them. The children’s requirement is to present themselves in a proper, sophisticated manner, prepared to absorb their quota for each day. By age eighteen most human thought processes have developed visible routes through our brains. These routes, once paved into our gray matter, are very easy to follow but nearly impossible to change. Most people continue following the path of least resistance. The well-trodden paths remain active;
those seldom traveled soon become grass-covered and hard to find, thus causing us to lose information that has not been used. We easily forget anything not repeated frequently enough.

While the concept that Freire presents in his essay is accepted as common practice and a necessary tool used to properly educate our youth, it also encourages submissive behavior. Freire explains this in his work by saying:

The more the students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (350).

In examining Walker Percy’s essay, “The Loss of the Creature,” we see how this pre-packaged material called education limits our ability to think for ourselves. Like taking a packaged tour to the Grand Canyon, going on a pre-arranged vacation to Cuernavaca, or dissecting a dogfish in biology class, we are accepting someone else’s plan. Everything is neatly set up: the activities, the sights, and the itinerary. Even when we venture out and find something wonderful, as did the couple traveling through Mexico, we are afraid to trust our feelings. We must have someone else validate our feelings by giving a stamp of approval. How then, can we balance our education so that we learn the necessary facts without losing ourselves in the process? Is there a way to teach our youth without condemning them to a life of slavery, always doing or saying what is expected of them, wearing what everyone else does, and eating only the cereal advertised on television?

When we learn not to accept everything at face value, when we question why or how, we can begin to develop other paths. These new paths will allow us to search for tributaries, enable us to develop entire new maps, to challenge other ideas. In order to accomplish this feat, we must look at more complex ways in which we learn. In Percy’s essay we read about “getting off the beaten track” (566). Here, Percy uses the example of camping out in the back-country, getting up early, and approaching the South Rim of the Grand Canyon in order to see wild terrain where there are no trails or railed-in lookouts. This scene represents the idea of consciously searching out routes from which you can gain new perspective. He urges readers to explore different avenues, to look for something different than the average person sees. Percy succeeds in teaching the concept of “problem-posing” education through his examples.

In the essay “Achievement of Desire,” by Richard Rodriguez, we see a living example of how the banking concept can affect our youth. Mr. Rodriguez shares the story of his education, his desire to possess it, his struggle to achieve it, and his disappointment in finding that in gaining it, he had lost something even more valuable. His saga is a detailed account of how he single-handedly forced education upon himself in order to attain status. Coming from a poor Mexican family, he longed to be like his teachers. He worked hard to lose his Spanish accent and was proud when teachers praised him for this accomplishment. He did not see the loss of his heritage. Solitude was the answer to his inability to focus on his studies in the family setting, so he withdrew from his family. While Mr. and Mrs. Rodriguez were always there to celebrate his victories, taking pictures and telling of their pride in his accomplishments, he felt shame in their lack of education. He soon lost track of his identity, his heritage, and his past. His teachers had become his only living contact with the world.

After years of exile, the day came when Richard began to notice the people around him. They all seemed so distant. How long had it been since he had felt the warmth of human love? He feared expressing emotion in his work because it felt foreign, unknown. His essay tells of his realization.

Not until my last months as a graduate student, nearly thirty years old, was it possible for me to think much about the reasons for my academic success. Only then. At the end of my schooling, I needed to determine how far I had moved from my past. The adult finally
Richard had lost "the creature." He knew it was time to go home.

Richard’s story lends credence to the theories that Percy’s essay described. Living someone else’s plan causes one to lose sovereignty over life. By accepting everything we are given, told, and sold, we are giving up our individuality. Once lost it is nearly impossible to regain. Going with the crowd seems much easier than stepping out on our own. What if someone makes fun of us because we have not dressed in the proper clothing for this season? What if our friends accidentally catch us driving the old car, or the mini van? Can I wear this color now or must I wait until June? Perhaps I should ask a friend to validate because I do not want anyone to laugh at me.

We teach our children to go with the grain. We allow them freedoms unheard of in our parents’ day. They go out when they please, with anyone they want. We have no family night around the radio, no board games, no curfew, no rules. When teens get into trouble at school we testify to their honesty without question. We bail them out time after time. The youth of our nation suffer corruption brought on from lack of love and guidance. Babysitters don’t teach morals. Children learn to believe all outside sources of information, but little from parents who work two jobs, socialize with friends away from home, and think quality time consists of two hours in front of the television watching a rented video and eating pizza. Now is the time to stop the cycle.

We must stand up to our society and scream. “Wake up America! Let us live! Teach us to find ourselves, give back our dignity, and save us from ignorance. Give us back our nation, so we can hand it to our youth without fear of destruction. Teach us now, enable us to teach them.” Education is what distinguishes America from other nations, and lack of education will bring us to our knees. Controlling what is taught, how it is taught, and when it is taught, is sealing our fate as ignorant people with no reasoning power. We are urged to follow the crowd, swindled into selling our souls to buy trinkets, and to pay for all of it with the youth of America. We must regain our personal sovereignty before we can regain our nation, and complete education is the key to our success.

As parents we must take the first step in teaching our youth the morals on which our American society was once built. It is our duty to see that young minds find challenging programs on television and listen to music that gives peace. We must give them literature that will encourage questioning and examining its content. Mothers must take the time to read to babies. Fathers must show sons how to lead the family by leading them. Parents must give children rules and teach them to abide by them. People need to stop and think about how we spend time and money. As employers we must treat our workers with dignity, and understand that sometimes their families must come first. As consumers we must become thrifty. The United States of America, the greatest nation in the world, has become a dumping ground of lazy, uneducated, greedy, jealous people who respect no one, love no one, and give nothing but grief. Children learn first from example. It is time that the example we set is one of intelligent loving adults who are willing to share both time and resources with our fellow man no matter how much it hurts.

**Works Cited**


Mariano Azuela’s novel, *The Underdogs*, provides a personal view of the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Azuela, who served under Pancho Villa as a medical doctor, incorporates his firsthand knowledge of the revolution into this story. It is this personal insight that makes Azuela’s novel successful and, furthermore, very personal to the reader. The novel is made up of two main characters that represent differing views of the revolution itself. These two main characters represent Azuela’s own feelings for the revolution. Azuela believed in the ideals of the revolution, not the actual fighting itself (xi). As the novel progresses, the reader is able to acquire a sense of what a revolution does to a person or group of people involved in it. Through a closer examination of the two main characters and their respective roles within the novel, one can better understand how the Mexican Revolution of 1910 comes to life in *The Underdogs*.

Demetrio Martinez, the protagonist of this novel, does not simply join the cause of the revolution but rather is forced into it for the protection of his family (17). Given this insight, Azuela molds the character of Demetrio into a revolutionary. The process is a gradual one for Demetrio, and as he is given higher rank advancement, he gains prestige and honor among his fellow rebels. He goes from being a peaceful individual to a compulsive fighter. Yet, Demetrio later becomes disillusioned with the revolution. Azuela uses the character of Demetrio to present the view of what went wrong with the revolution. Therefore, Demetrio represents Azuela’s own disillusionment in the goals and ideals of the revolution. “It is clear that Azuela was in favor of what the revolution ideally represented, but the depth of his disillusion... made him withdraw” [from the revolution] (xi). The reader is not given detailed insight about what is going on with the revolution but is left to piece together information along the way.

Within the first section of the novel we are introduced to the other main character of the novel, Luis Cervantes. Cervantes embodies the positive hopes, dreams, and ideals of the revolutionary effort. As he states to Demetrio’s men after being captured, “I want you to be convinced that I am truly one of your coreligionists... that is to say, a person who possesses the same religion, who is inspired by the same ideals, who defends and fights for the same cause you are now fighting for” (22). Cervantes, ironically, had a better understanding of the goals of the revolution than did Demetrio. Right after completing this speech Demetrio asked: “What are we fighting for?” (22). The lack of understanding of the revolution itself on the part of Demetrio is made up for in the character of Cervantes. Cervantes then imparts his ideals of the revolutionary struggle and its meaning to Demetrio.

Unfortunately, Demetrio never really gains a full understanding of Cervantes’ “teachings.” It is late in the course of the novel that we gain a fuller understanding of Demetrio’s disillusioned views about the revolution as the fighting draws to its end with Villa’s defeats. Demetrio states, “I love the revolution like a volcano in eruption; I love the volcano because it’s a volcano, the revolution because it’s a revolution” (146). He has, by this point, reached
the view that fighting is all he knows how to do. He, like Azuela, loses sight of the ideal goals that the revolution stood for. The end of the novel reads: “his [Demetrio’s] eyes leveled in an eternal glance, continues to point the barrel of his gun” (161). In the end, he has returned to where he was first captured, only to be silenced eternally.

Azuela uses the interwoven plots and interaction of these two characters to make *The Underdogs* a successful novel. This novel represents Azuela’s own personal insight into the Mexican Revolution. He truly brings the events of the revolution to life by fusing his own experience and understanding of the revolution into these two fictional characters. It is the combination of these factors, as well as lifelike characters, that make this work a highly significant contribution to better understanding the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

**Work Cited**

It’s Time
Lisa Marie Belopotosky

Dr. Virginia Carroll asked her students in College English I (ENG 10001) to use their observational skills to write about and reflect upon a place that was significant in their lives. In “It’s Time,” Lisa Marie Belopotosky revisits a place—the Players Guild of Canton—that shaped much of her life. She suggests that re-experiencing memories from special places helps us to understand how we build our lives.

I, like most people, have a place from which I got my start, a place that gave me the inspiration and encouragement to move on. My particular place is just a small, overlooked rehearsal studio in the basement of a local theater. Over time, the Players Guild of Canton has become very special to me, like another home. The people there have taken on the role of my second family. Aside from the main stage, the rehearsal studio is my favorite place in the entire theater. The studio has seen both my best and my worst, and I gained so much during the time that I was there. Though it may seem extremely difficult, there comes a day to leave that special place and go forward into bigger and better things. After leaving the first time, no one should go back right away. Doing so makes departure harder to deal with, but one must go back eventually. After a lengthy absence from an environment, it is important to go back to re-experience the memories, both good and bad, and rekindle the reason for building a life there in the first place. I have moved on, grown up. Though many of my goals and priorities have remained the same, some have changed. I do not have the time for the studio as I did before. Still, it continues to be a part of me. I have been away from my place for far too long. The moment has come when I can finally say to myself, “It’s time.”

As I enter through the stage door, I am immediately overcome with a sense of comfort and excitement. In front of me lies a staircase—four flights rise above me, and two flights descend below me. They are dark and not necessarily appealing to the eye, but to those familiar with what they lead to, traveling either way on one of these ordinary flights of stairs shows the way to a world of indescribable expression and enjoyment. Knowing what lies before me, I choose to go downward, into the shadows. There is absolute silence in my surroundings. Every move I make seems to be amplified in the stillness. I make my way down both flights of stairs to a corridor. After following a series of poorly lit hallways and passing by a few closed doors, I have found the way to my destination. The door is shut, but not locked—it is never locked. As I grasp the silver handle, I glance up to the fading words printed on the heavy, wooden door: Rehearsal Studio. Instantly, I am hit with a flash of the past. Above the silence, I faintly hear songs and laughing. Smiling, I turn the handle and thrust the door open.

The studio is brightly lit, yet it is empty. As I look around, I notice that not much has changed. My footsteps echo as I walk on the wooden floor to the center of the vast room. The wood beneath me is painted black and very worn from the hundreds of hours of people shuffling around or dancing upon it. Scattered on the floor in what used to be very elaborate outlines, are pieces of colored tape. The tape has now tattered away, but each piece represents something special. It was all used long ago, in the place of set pieces and drops, during a play or musical throughout the “blocking” stages. That tape spread in the studio is as significant as the production’s program—but not necessarily to the same people. The audience barely cherished the booklet, the show, and the final product. The people who were directly involved—the leads, chorus members, dancers, backstage crew, and directors—value so much...
Momentarily drifting from my thoughts, I keep wandering around the room. I am startled when I see movement, but then realize that I have been away far too long. I had not remembered the effect of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors cascading over one wall of the studio. The mirror's primary purpose was obviously for the dancers of any cast, but I can remember times when it was used for other reasons. Before every evening performance, the cast was required to meet in the rehearsal studio for vocal warm ups. I, being the time-ignorant person that I am, was always running late with my make up, hair, and wardrobe. I would bring my make up or bobby pins into the studio and finish primping myself as I was singing. I was the tail end of many jokes for my rituals.

Remembering my amusing habits, I stroll over to one of the three dull, gray, cement walls and run my fingertips over the surface. The wall is worn and has chipped away with time. Oh, the events that have occurred in this room! If these walls could talk, they would tell the most amazing stories; conversations between all sorts of unique and eccentric people, the casting process including the most bizarre auditions, little kids--and adults--deviously getting into trouble, and hundreds of amazing tales told by the most wise and experienced theater veterans. Though I have had a number of memories attached to this place, it would be only a small fraction of all that has occurred here, before my time. I can clearly remember my first experience in the studio. I was just eleven years old. Up until that age, I was always prancing around my house, singing at the top of my lungs. I had always loved singing, and the thought of actually practicing my skill had seemed so far-fetched. Advertised in a local newspaper was a Vocal Production Class to take place at the Players Guild, in the rehearsal studio. That class was my stepping-stone. I realized that with dedication and the proper training, my talent could take me places that I never thought possible. It was a great feeling.

I re-experience that feeling as I saunter along the edge of the studio, my hand still running along the wall. I come to a halt when I stumble upon a couch, an aged, black leather thing that has a block of wood propped under one leg to keep balance. The couch has not always been in the studio. I remember the days when it was upstairs, in the green room, used to make stage mothers, anxious auditioners, and cast members on break more comfortable. At a younger age, I did my share of lounging on that couch during rehearsals. Once the theater stumbled into some extra money, they refurbished the green room with new furniture and carpeting. The black leather couch was demoted and moved downstairs for tired, sweaty singers and dancers.

Still standing, I bend over to run my hand over the exterior. It is familiarly soft, yet it has a few rips and tears on the seat that I do not remember. I conclude that these deformities are a result of another generation's lounging. Gently, I sit down to recall the feeling of comfort the couch had always instilled in me. I lean my head back, resting it on the top of the couch, and look up toward the high ceiling lined with pipes and vents. Music and words could penetrate through the ceiling from upstairs and sound as if it were happening in the next room. I remember one occurrence, while I was still new to the theater, when I had a bit of an encounter with the infiltrating sound. I happened to have a class in the studio while a performance was in progress. While warming up, I was abruptly alarmed by what I thought to be a loud crack of thunder, followed by rain and hail. The others in the class chuckled and informed me that the performers onstage were tap dancing directly above us. I soon became familiar with the "horror" sounds throughout the room. When I was in the cast of particular musicals, such as "A Christmas Carol" or "Plain and Fancy", I had a great deal of time between scenes. I would wander down here, lie on the floor or couch, and stare at the ceiling. I would start thinking differently about everything around me. Emotions would come over me while hearing muffled dancing, singing, and sets being moved, making me realize that there was no other life for me. This indescribable exhilaration took over my body, mind, and soul, making even the most run-down studio seem like a glorious kingdom. This kind of environment was and still is my home.

My gaze is drawn to the doorway directly in front of me. It is not the door through which I entered. It is a door that I have been through but once, leading to a dark hallway and staircase.
Many generations of children and teens have sought pleasure in telling tall tales to new friends about the haunted staircase. Legend has it that during one of the first productions of the seasonal classic, “A Christmas Carol”, a tragedy occurred. During a performance, a woman named Elizabeth was hurrying down the dark staircase when the bottom of her costume got caught on something and she tripped. As she was falling, a part of her dress wrapped around her neck and she choked and died. Every year since, the Ghost of Elizabeth has haunted the stage right staircase during the run of “A Christmas Carol”. I remember being informed of the exaggerated story, and being quite terrified, but now I realize that no production would have been complete without the “haunted staircase” stories finding their way into discussions.

I stand up, realizing that my time here is coming to a close. As I start to drift toward the door, something catches me from the corner of my eye. Turning around, I am astonished that I almost passed up such a significant part of my history in this studio. Sitting in the corner, as it always has, is the grand piano. What was once such a radiant-looking instrument is now aged and in some aspects, ugly. The wood, once fresh and polished, is ruddy brown, dull, and chipped. The ivory keys are so worn that the wood beneath is revealed. The old piano has seen so much; strenuous rehearsals develop into amazing productions, intimidating directors become powerful teachers, shy singers turn into rising stars, and mere acquaintances evolve into dear, dear friends. I know the piano wasn’t brand new when I was a familiar face here, but to me, it was and always has been an astounding instrument. It brought people together. I remember, very clearly, my last night in the studio. Someone was sitting at the piano, playing the theme song from the old sitcom, Cheers. A group of close friends and I stood in a circle around the piano, with our arms around each other, singing “You wanna go where everybody knows your name …” I get tears in my eyes just thinking about that moment. It is one of the best memories I’ll ever have.

My time is through. I turn my back to the piano and slowly walk to the doorway. I turn around to look at the room one last time, to absorb every detail. To any ordinary person, the studio may seem empty, but to someone such as me, it is abundant with emotions and experiences. The last element that my eyes fall upon is the mirrored wall. The only movement that the mirror reveals is just an old friend, back to relive the memories and atmosphere, after an extensive absence. I know I will be back, when it is time again for me to re-encounter my past and remember my companion.
As I approach the final semester of my college education, I finally understand the study of literature. As an English major, a reader/writer/poet who has spent a great deal of time reading the works of others and writing about them, I am reminded of something I have heard my father, a teacher, say repeatedly about the modern American attitude toward education. "Nobody learns just to learn," he observes sadly, pointing out the way in which students often view particularly higher education as some kind of training ground for a career. I know exactly what he means. Every time someone asks me what I plan to do with a degree in English, I am reminded of the inquisitive student who interrupts a classroom lecture to ask in earnest "Is this going to be on the test?" or the equally deplorable "Do we have to know this?" The clear message in these questions is that nobody wants to waste their precious time learning something that won't immediately benefit them in some way. The majority of students insist on expediency and efficiency in education. Our goal-oriented society has resulted in a student that retains necessary information in short-term memory long enough to regurgitate onto an exam, pass the course, grab a degree, get a job, make money, prosper. Next.

Occasionally, however, there comes the English major--the enigmatic, bookworm type, who puzzles his classmates by carrying fiction while they tote science, mathematics, and Business. They examine this strange creature, fascinated by one who displays such a blatant disregard for wealth and success. They poke this animal, wondering why he would live this way, and what possible good can come from poetry. And once in a while, the prodding and gawking gets to him. The English major is forced to reexamine his "goals," to recall what inspired such a daring and experimental approach to learning. Quite simply, the answer lies in the obvious categorical heading of Humanities that English falls under. If others train for careers, learning practical skills with "real world" implications, then the Humanities student simply learns about being human. He attempts to recognize universal experience and reflect it in art. As ambitious as that may sound, I find my pursuit of English studies to be quite useful in my own life. Let me explain.

One year ago, my wife and I separated. When she left, she took with her (according to mutual agreement) all of the furniture and household amenities, leaving me with only the barest essentials. For several weeks afterward, I returned home to my modest quarters that contained no more than a mattress, my work desk and my books, and one small stand on which to place a stereo. I must confess that in the near month before my parents rescued me, supplying me with a dispossessed sofa, love seat, and T.V. (What do you mean you don't have a television?), I accomplished much more in my work and studies than ever before.

I came to realize in that period the true definition of necessity. Though my wife had retained the comforts of modern living that one gets used to, I found I could still satisfy my basic human needs within the five empty rooms of my apartment. I was reminded of my reading of Thoreau's *Walden*, and his experimental living in the woods that invited the criticism and skepticism of...
many of his contemporaries. Inspired, I embraced the challenge. With only a roof over my head, a place to sleep, all the fast food I could stomach at my disposal, and some much needed uninterrupted time in which to work, I imagined myself a modern day Transcendentalist. I had been granted the highly unlikely occasion to practice my human skills. Faced with the absence of modern comfort, I realized my own reliance on such extraneous furnishings, and the hard fact that others live much worse each day. I knew that all I needed was there before me. I had simply never imagined life without these luxuries.

Yet, once they were gone, and I was left in the cavernous echo of my now too large apartment, I was blissfully undaunted. I lay down each night on my thin mattress, bundled myself in the warmth of the comforter I was allowed to keep, and slept soundly, drifting off to peaceful classical melodies rather than The Late Show. The satisfaction of romantic survival, and the knowledge gained through literature that I was not alone, filled me with extraordinary calm.

My odd reaction could be attributed to any number of factors. The separation itself, following months of quarreling, could have brought a sense of relief; the ample time I now had to work very diligently contributed greatly to my lack of stress, even the solitude lent itself nicely to a period of much needed reflection. Whatever the reason, I did not panic or wonder anxiously what I was going to do. When stripped virtually of everything, everything that is that constitutes a normal standard of living, I survived. I was forced to embrace a part of humanity that many poets and writers I had studied for a long time entered into willingly and purposefully in order to realize something of the human condition.

In that moment, faced with unusual circumstances, I found that I had been armed first by the romantic notion that I was indeed a “suffering artist,” and, secondly, the warm comfort of knowing my misery had company. Surely, all human predicament has been experienced before and written about, vividly depicted by an artist so compelled to share his discovery with fellow human beings who share his pain. Now, while hovering over a pizza box on my living room floor, listening to soothing music on the radio, I felt that I had earned a place as a poet, as a human being with experience and understanding.

Though I now know why some of us choose to study literature and poetry, it is difficult to explain to someone who has not experienced literary empowerment firsthand. In terms of “Do I have to know this?” my answer is a resounding “yes.” “Will this be on the test?” Daily. The test is daring to live in a world where sometimes it seems that all is lost. Love, friendship, sadness, grief, even contentment are better understood in the context of a heartfelt poem or story. Thoreau's Walden romanticized my isolation; however, it may have been Updike's Rabbit or Edith Wharton's sad portrayal of cold in Ethan Frome that brought me to that state.

Poetry and literature are so passionate as to inspire the reader in spite of himself. I can no more control the effects they may have on me, than I can the way in which I react. They are practical guidelines, manuals of living. They can hurt or heal, create or destroy. When one has a better understanding, though, the experience is wonderfully enlightening. And I need to know. I use them everyday.
In her Ecology, Evolution, and Society (BSCI 10002) class, Dr. Kim Finer engaged her students in a board game called "Extinction: The Game of Ecology." As a follow-up, students were asked to use data accumulated from the game to create a scenario report. Dorothy Bush's essay examines the evolution of a pride of African lions, and she concludes that the future of the pride looks bleak.

Extinction Game
Dorothy Bush

It is another hot day in the bush lands of Africa. The pride has retired for a short mid-day nap. The lion cubs frolic under a nearby tree as the adult members of the pride keep a watchful eye. There is an unusually large amount of members that have grown up within the pride. There is a population of about 30, including adults and recently born cubs. The bush lands have received a lot of rain for the last three years, which caused good growing seasons and contributed to great hunting for the pride, with an abundance of available prey.

The dominant male of the pride was once swift and healthy, traits that were passed on to his offspring. But within the past year he fell prey to disease and it doesn’t seem that he will live to see the next winter. Contrary to the previous three years, this summer was extremely difficult for hunting because of a drought that has lasted over the past five weeks. The singed grass and the migrating herds of game, which have moved on to search for better grazing and more water, could be noted as effects of the drought. With the lack of food, the pride has no other choice but to also migrate in order to survive. The pride stops one last time at an almost dry watering hole as they venture onward through the bush.

It has been three days since the pride left familiar territory. They have been successful in their hunting by bringing down three antelope, but the impact of the heat and drought has claimed the life of three members. The dominant male has died and the stronger, younger male resumes the position of leader. Their travel brings them to a small river that runs past a small city. The pride is thirsty and tired and stops to drink and rest for the night. Unknowingly, the pride is subjected to a chemical poison being spilled into the river by an industrial plant, located on the river 25 miles away. By morning there are several casualties, including three males and three cubs. The pride retreats back into the bush lands and continues the search for food.

Later that day, while on a hunt, the pride comes across a competing pride. They have taken down an ox, but now they must compete with the challenging pride over the kill. The pride is out numbered and surrenders the prey after a brief fight. Weak and injured they move on, tired but alive to fight another day. It is early morning, but the sky is dark as rain clouds dance turbulently across the sky. The earth seems to sigh with relief as the water pours down and pounds against the surface of the land. The pride is relieved too, for they have survived another drought.

It has been one year since the drought. The pride has reduced in size from disease. They now number about half the size of the previous year. The dominant male has not successfully reproduced this year. They have possibly developed a problem from drinking the poisoned water in the river from the previous year. The small city that lies about 50 miles to the north is growing larger but has not hindered the pride from hunting. There is also an increase of farms in the area contributing the development of the city.

Winter has passed and spring is in the air. The bush land is slowly being cleared for farm and grazing land, which is slowly shrinking the pride’s
habitat. As the city grows larger, more industrial plants and factories spring up. Air pollution is being piped into the atmosphere. The sensitive balance of the ecosystem is being destroyed and various plants and animals begin to disappear. Nitrogen run offs leech into the river from the fertilizers being placed in the fields. The water is no longer safe to drink. Once again, it is time for the pride to move on.

The future of the pride looks bleak. Humans have polluted the water source and air. Disease has crippled and killed half of the pride. They have not been able to reproduce over the last two years. The other prides in the surrounding area outnumber them in size and it is difficult to compete for prey. Unlike the smaller prides, they have no problem reproducing. Their only hope of survival is to relocate again, find a pure water source and good hunting grounds, and eventually begin to reproduce again. If the dominant male is strong enough, they can join another pride and reproduce with the help of a rejuvenated gene pool.
James Engler’s essay “The Ramayana: The Mythology of a Great Indian Epic,” was written in response to an assignment for Dr. Leslie Heaphy’s class History of Civilization I (HIST 11050). In this essay, Engler discusses the themes of adventure and heroism in R.K. Narayan’s interpretation of The Ramayana, utilizing, among other works, Joseph Campbell’s The Power of Myth.

A significant section of Joseph Campbell’s book, The Power of Myth, concentrates on the hero’s adventure. According to Campbell, the adventure involves “a hero or heroine who has found or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience” (p. 151). The adventure itself, in Campbell’s view, “is symbolically a manifestation of [the hero’s] character” (p. 158). Campbell further elaborates on the role of the mythological protagonist in his book, The Hero with a Thousand Faces. He explains that the “hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory won...” (p. 30).

Additional insight into the realm of mythology is also offered in the publication, A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living. In it, Joseph Campbell expounds on the hero’s journey, which begins with an invitation from a guide. Accepting the call to adventure, the hero will “cross the threshold...into the dark forest” (p. 78). Along the way, the hero encounters characters that aid in the task at hand, while others must be confronted in a pattern of “increasingly difficult trials” (pp. 78-79).

In the book, The Ways of Religion, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a distinguished intellect and former Vice President and President of India, explains that human growth consists of four consecutive stages. The attainment of a greater spiritual being requires existence in the third stage which Radhakrishnan terms “the forest dweller” (p. 17). In the process, according to Radhakrishnan,

The individual begins to feel the greatness of the soul that is behind the veils of nature and longs to reach his true universality.... The mystery of life, as of death, each one has to discover for himself. We can sing and taste with no tongues but our own. Though each one has to attain his purpose by his separate encounter, the result is of universal significance (p. 17).

R. K. Narayan’s interpretation of The Ramayana brings the reader quickly to the main attributes of a mythological account just noted. Sage Viswamithra is announced to the king, Dasaratha. The sage is characterized as one with “complete mastery over his bodily needs through inner discipline and austerities...above the effects of heat, cold, hunger, fatigue, and even decrepitude” (pp. 7-8). This description coincides, by the way, with the fourth stage of human life outlined by Radhakrishnan, in The Ways of Religion. It is the stage of the monk, or sahâyasin. Radhakrishnan describes the monk as one with “a freedom and fearlessness of spirit, an immensity of courage, which no defeat or obstacle can touch, a faith in the power that works in the universe...” (p. 17).

Meeting with the king, Viswamithra asks for Rama, the king’s son, to accompany him on a journey to perform a sacrifice (yagna) that “will strengthen the beneficial forces of this world, and please the gods above” (p. 8). It is Rama’s call to adventure--the commencement of the hero’s journey.
During the initial phase of crossing over to the dark forest, Viswamithra, Rama, and Lakshmana (Rama’s brother) are greeted by hermits offering assistance. Harsh conditions prevail and malevolent creatures confront the hero and his company from the onset as well.

Rama subsequently earns the hand of Sita in marriage. He does so by an extraordinary act. As a condition to marrying King Janaka’s beautiful daughter [adopted as a baby girl—“a gift of Mother Earth”] Rama must lift, bend, and string the king’s bow, which had been left to an ancestor by Shiva (p. 27). Narayan’s account describes Rama’s feat:

Rama approached the bow. Some of the onlookers, unable to bear the suspense, closed their eyes and prayed for his success, saying, “If he fails to bring the ends of this bow together, what is to happen to the maiden?” What they missed, because they had shut their eyes, was to note how swiftly Rama picked up the bow, tugged the string taut, and brought the tips together. They were startled when they heard a deafening report, caused by the cracking of the bow at its arch, which could not stand the pressure of Rama’s grip. (p. 28)

Thus, Rama performs, in accordance with Joseph Campbell’s classification in The Power of Myth, “something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience” (p. 151). (It might also be argued that, in addition to doing something extraordinary, Rama found something extraordinary—Sita.) This achievement directly precedes Rama’s real thrust into the dark forest, which is initiated by the contrived efforts of his mother-in-law, Kaikeyi.

As one of two boons granted by her husband, King Dasaratha, Kaikeyi requests that Rama be banished “to the forests for fourteen years” (p. 45). Hence, Rama must inhabit the forest regions in which, according to Radhakrishnan, “true universality” can be sought (p. 17). Accepting his fate, Rama addresses his mother, Kausalya:

After living in the forests, I will come back—after all, fourteen years could pass like as many days. If you remember, my earlier stay in the forests with Viswamithra brought me countless blessings; this could be a similar opportunity again, for me. So do not grieve (p. 49).

The call to adventure is again embraced by the hero with an acknowledgement that, from the time spent in the forests, great boons can be had.

Nevertheless, the trek is a dangerous one. Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita face various demons, culminating in combat with Ravana, ruler of the demonic rakshasas and abductor of Sita. In addition to the direct aid provided by Lakshmana along the way, other benevolent creatures offer their assistance. The great eagle, Jatayu, contributes to the adventure (pp. 94-95), as does his elder brother, Sampathi (pp. 129-130). The monkey race inhabiting Kiskinda, and especially the efforts of Sugreeva and Hanuman, are instrumental in the conclusion of Rama’s confrontation with Ravana. Again, these attributes demonstrate the classic tradition of mythology present in The Ramayana.

Furthermore, Rama’s purpose, while chronicled throughout the story, is not fully attained until after Rama concludes his habitation in the forest. While meeting with King Dasaratha to acquire the talents of Rama for the upcoming expedition, Viswamithra advises the emperor that everyone “when the time comes, has to depart and seek his fulfillment in his own way” (p.10). Fulfillment for Rama (the accomplishment of his mission) entails encountering and destroying the asuras (demons) “causing suffering and hardship to all the good souls” (p. 67). He cautions Ravana’s sister, Soorpanaka, during his exile that “my mission in life is to root out the rakshasas from the face of this earth” (p. 74). In essence, especially by the denouement of the story, Rama is mankind’s single combat warrior—in battle against Ravana and the demons.

Moreover, after victory over Ravana, during a period when it appears that Rama has “lost sight of his own identity,” the ultimate boon is presented to the hero (pp. 163-164). Brahma (the Creator) counsels Rama:

Of the Trinity, I am the Creator. Shiva is the Destroyer and Vishnu is the Protector. All three of us derive
our existence from the Supreme God and we are subject to dissolution and rebirth. But the Supreme God who creates us is without a beginning or an end. There is neither birth nor growth nor death for the Supreme God. He is the origin of everything and in him everything is assimilated at the end. That God is yourself, and Sita at your side now is a part of that Divinity. Please remember that this is your real identity and let not the fear and doubts that assail an ordinary mortal ever move you. You are beyond everything; and we are all blessed indeed to be in your presence (p. 164).

Thus, in agreement with Radhakrishnan’s assertion, Rama, by virtue of his forest journeys, reaches his “true universality.”

The mythology of the sort examined has probably permeated every culture. Like the modern-day saga of Star Wars, myths such as The Ramayana capture the conscious (and subconscious) ideals of one’s being. Their application in the respective societies adhering to their content likely has always traversed many different levels of interpretation. As Narayan cites in his introduction: “The Ramayana pervades our cultural life in one form or another at all times, it may be as a scholarly discourse at a public hall, a traditional story-teller’s narrative in an open space, or a play or dance on stage” (p. xi).

Indeed, Rama and the entire company of other characters that compose The Ramayana create a mythology that works on many levels. Throughout the account, for example, there are references to desire and the consequences of unbridled passion. In Chapter Two, “The Wedding,” while attesting to their very deep love for each other and laying the foundation for their union, the passions of Rama and Sita that are presented to the reader also illustrate the potential obstructive nature of such uncontrolled sentiment. Sita’s scenario follows:

The cry of birds settling down for the night and the sound of waves on the seashores became clearer as the evening advanced into dusk and night. A cool breeze blew from the sea, but none of it comforted Sita. This hour sharpened the agony of love, and agitated her heart with hopeless longings. A rare bird, known as “Anril,” somewhere called its mate. Normally at this hour, Sita would listen for its melodious warbling, but today its voice sounded harsh and odious.... The full moon rose from the sea, flooding the earth with its soft light. At the sight of it, [Sita] covered her eyes with her palms. She felt that all the elements were alien to her and combining to aggravate her suffering (p. 25).

While Sita’s desire for Rama impeded her natural existence, Rama, too, was afflicted with a similar fever:

In the seclusion of his bedroom, he began to brood over the girl he had noticed on the palace balcony. For him, too, the moon seemed to emphasize his sense of loneliness.... Now he caught himself contemplating her in every detail. He fancied that she was standing before him and longed to enclose those breasts in his embrace. He said to himself, “Even if I cannot take her in my arms, shall I ever get another glimpse, however briefly, of that radiant face and those lips? Eyes, lips, those curly locks falling on the forehead—every item of those features seemingly poised to attack and quell me—me, on whose bow depended the destruction of demons, now at the mercy of one who wields only a bow of sugarcane and uses flowers for arrows...” (p. 26).

Ravana’s passion for Sita obviously is a natural aspect of the story. It is this passion that ultimately leads to the final confrontation between Rama and Ravana, Rama’s victory, and his subsequent realization of “true universality.” Dealing initially with his obsession for Sita, Ravana’s erratic and nefarious nature contrasts strikingly with the noble and steadfast resolve of Rama. “[O]verwhelmed by the vision before him,” Ravana concedes in one moment that he’ll “make her the queen of [his] empire and spend the rest of [his] days in obeying her command and pleasing her in a million ways” (p. 91). In the next
moment, in appreciation of the contribution of his sister, Ravana vacillates: "How good of my darling sister to have thought of me when she saw this angel! I shall reward my sister by making her the queen of my empire. She shall rule in my place..." (p. 91). It is the perennial statement of the unpredictable and selfish character of one whose disposition is less than honorable.

Of the virtues considered in The Ramayana, one’s obligation to duty is perhaps most pervasive throughout the tale. Dasaratha is the dutiful king, father, and husband. Lakshmana is the obedient brother. Sita is Rama’s faithful mate. Rama’s duty is to mankind—the quintessential single combat warrior. The importance of one’s commitment to duty is disclosed aptly in Narayan’s account of the counsel offered by Dasaratha’s wife (Rama’s mother), Kausalya, as her husband grieves over the exile of his son:

Kausalya, when she saw her husband’s plight, was most moved and tried to comfort him in her own way. Concealing her own misery at the prospect of Rama’s exile, she told her husband clearly, “If you do not maintain the integrity and truth of your own words, and now try to hold Rama back, the world will not accept it. Try to lessen your attachment to Rama and calm yourself” (p. 52).

In her own way, as a wife and mother, Kausalya consoles her husband while shrouding her own anguish over the matter of Rama’s expulsion. The king is properly reminded of his obligation to honor integrity and truth, lest he lose the approbation of the world.

Lastly, one more analysis of the forest representation will perhaps best conclude this examination of The Ramayana as myth and its transcending references. After Kausalya concludes her counsel with her husband, Dasaratha responds with the following recollection:

Once while I was hunting in a forest, I heard the gurgling of water—the noise an elephant makes when drinking water. I shot an arrow in that direction, and at once heard a human cry in agony. I went up and found that I had shot at a young boy. He had been filling his pitcher; and water rushing into it had created the noise. The boy was dying and told me that his parents, eyeless, were not far away. He had tended them, carrying them about on his back. They died on hearing of this tragedy, after cursing the man who had killed their son to suffer a similar fate. And so that is going to be my fate... (p. 53).

The fact that the event occurs in the forest must be considered. It is while in the forest that one can experience growth, where boons are bestowed, and, subsequently, where one can advance to the stage of sannyasin.

Yet, the forest can be a treacherous place. The boy’s “eyeless” parents, for example, cannot traverse the forest without the aid of their son. One cannot, therefore, tread in the forest blindly. From that, the consequences of proceeding into the forest without sight of the reason for doing so are made manifest by Dasaratha’s actions. He shoots an arrow at an object (perhaps better termed as his objective) without ever actually seeing it. The resulting tragedy is the result of Dasaratha’s blind pursuit.

Furthermore, no boon is conferred upon Dasaratha. Rather, from this seemingly inconspicuous little tale composing only a very small part of the whole story, the boon is bestowed upon the reader! That, after all, is the power of myth.

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The Great Depression of the 1930's, which has been called the "invisible scar, the absent presence," continues to impact American culture (Rabinowitz 17). The devastating effect of failed businesses, the dust bowl, farm foreclosures, and an unemployment rate of 30 percent reminds us that capitalism is fallible. Although we recall with humility this bleak period of our history, we seldom reflect on the plight of the Depression's most vulnerable victims—the underpaid, uneducated working poor. In Yonnondio: From the Thirties, Tillie Olsen gives readers a searing personal account of a family struggling to escape, or at least manage, abject poverty. Their journey from a Wyoming mining town to a farm in South Dakota to a slaughterhouse in Omaha presents one disaster after another for the Holbrook family. Because of this cycle, they represent thousands of unsung heroes who struggled to survive and maintain a family unit during difficult times.

Although the novel depicts the family's struggle as a unit, three members emerge as the main characters. Trapped by lack of opportunity and a faltering self-image, Jim Holbrook works under subhuman conditions to provide for his family. His struggle demonstrates how patriarchal culture oppresses both men and women into ascribed roles based on impossible ideals. Anna, his wife, holds the family together with the meager resources brought in by her husband, who devalues her role because she is a woman and earns no money. As a result of this oppression, she grapples with her own identity, as motherhood and domestic responsibility limit her opportunities for personal fulfillment and expression. In turn, Anna and Jim's daughter, Mazie, emerges as the novel's heroine as she determines to escape the hopelessness of her childhood and define her own reality.

Through these characters, Olsen creates a narrative that simultaneously dramatizes and propagandizes the experience of the poor working-class. The novel serves as an outcry against an economic system that dehumanizes both labor and laborers, forcing them into silences that alienate them from society and each other. As a result, Yonnondio explodes with "connections between class and gender, domestic work and wage work, production and reproduction" (Jameson 1). Olsen also challenges the American Dream as a false, oppressive illusion, and she explores patriarchal culture as a snare which victimizes both men and women. Although this novel speaks with profound melancholy and despair, it does not abandon hope as a significant survival mechanism.

In the opening section of the novel, the Holbrooks live in a Wyoming mining town where Jim works for a meager salary, "part money, mostly company scrip" (7). The financial hardships, together with the harsh surroundings, create an atmosphere of helplessness and hopelessness in the Holbrook household. Jim Holbrook must suffer the indignity of working in what Marie Kvaternik calls "the bowels of the earth" (2). Olsen describes this experience from the male point of view: "You lose that heritage of man, too. You are brought now to fit the earth's intestines, stoop like a hunchback underneath, crawl like a child, do your man's work lying on your side,"
stretched and tense like a corpse” (5). The “heritage of man” of which the narrator speaks stems from a cultural belief in the American Dream, which socializes men to believe that having a good work ethic, regardless of the job, will provide a good life for their families. If they work hard enough, they can attain a better position than their fathers before them. Having a son to follow in his father’s footsteps is a rite of passage rooted in that work ethic. The narrator describes the experience of young Andy Kvarternik replacing his dead father as an ironic perversion of that ritual. Because of the tragedy involving his father, Andy must leave school at thirteen and work as a man does to support his family. At a time when other teenagers are thinking about their futures, Andy’s has already being decided. He will labor in the mine until either an accident kills him or the coal dust, “like a hand squeezing your throat,” produces a fatal respiratory disease (5). As a result, Andy, like Jim Holbrook and many others, becomes a slave to the capitalist machine that “eats the men that come down” into the mine, destroying them body and soul (4).

Emasculated and physically weakened by his daily experience “breath[ing] and breath[ing]” the coal dust, Jim faces the knowledge that he cannot control his fate (5). A series of whistles governs his day from morning till night. In an effort to regain some sense of control, Jim inundates his family with physical and verbal abuse. His “evil mood” affects the family so deeply that the “whole house walked in terror” (6). Yet before we can judge Jim, we must place his behavior in its proper historical and cultural context. In the 1930’s, men were expected to be the providers and protectors of the family. However, working in the mine pays just enough to provide the barest essentials for the Holbrook family, nothing more. According to Lois Tyson in her chapter “Feminist Criticisms,” “failure to provide adequate economic support for one’s family is considered the most humiliating failure a man can experience” (86).

In order to avoid the feelings of humiliation, Jim deals the children “heavy blows” and “struck Anna too often to remember” (6). Rather than admit that he shares her deepest concerns about his safety and the family’s future, he dismisses her with taunts like “Quit your woman’s babblin” (2). Jim has been socialized by the culture to believe that pain and fear are feminine emotions, which, in his mind, associate them with weakness. In her book, Protest and Possibility in the Writing of Tillie Olsen, Mara Faulkner argues, “patriarchal attitudes and not just poverty lead proletarian men to dominate their wives” (72). The culture, dominated by patriarchal values and poverty, prevents Jim from fulfilling the role of husband and father as he imagines it.

Although Olsen structures the first section of the novel as an elegy for the poor working underclass, the narrative belongs primarily to Mazie. As the oldest daughter of Jim and Anna, Mazie observes and absorbs her surroundings, recording impressions about what it means to be both poor and a woman. Since we normally consider a child between the ages of 6 and 9 little more than a baby, it seems strange to us that so much responsibility falls on such a young child. However, poverty and lack of education force Mazie to share in domestic chores such as cleaning, cooking, and child rearing. Because she is the eldest female child, Mazie’s “developing subjectivity will grow out of relations of dominance structured within her family rather than those on the factory” (Rabinowitz 126). In other words, Jim releases his frustration onto Anna, who, in turn, releases hers onto the children. Yet out of all the children, Mazie receives most of it because she occupies the position closest to the mother. Anna screams at Mazie to “Shut baby up...I don’t care how” (17). As a result, Anna worries that “Mazie, for all her six and a half years, was like a woman sometimes. It’s living like this does it...makes ‘em old before their time” (2). More importantly, while poverty forces Mazie into the oppression of womanhood, as a child, she lacks both the language to express her rage and a place to deposit it.

Being an old, young woman, Mazie becomes aware of the harsh realities of her life before she has any power to change them. One of those harsh realities imposes on her as she takes a walk to town with her father. Mazie wants to know “does the boss man have a white shiny tub bigger than you and he turns something and water comes out?” (9). Jim’s response makes her aware that the poverty that engulfs her family does not affect those for whom her father works; they lead a different kind of life. Although Mazie does not
Although they quickly grasp the ability to read, the children in their academic development (35). That as some absurd rite of passage from mother to daughter, she begins to make the connection that, as her mother says, “it means your hands stay white and you read books and work in an office” (3). This realization marks the beginning of a quest that follows her throughout the novel.

In addition to the economic subjectivity Mazie encounters, she learns in the mining town that as a woman, she is sexually vulnerable, unable to protect her own body from a raging man. In a state of delirium, Sheen McEvoy, a deranged miner, attempts to avenge the deaths of miners by offering Mazie, “a little child, pure of heart” to the mine (11). As her senses take in “the red mass of jelly that was his face” “his body...hot and putrid. Stinking,” Mazie forms a permanent association of sex with abuse of power. As she moves closer to adolescence in the novel, “the dangers become more overt. The sexed body of the working-class girl more thoroughly positions her in a (sexual) economy than does her laboring body” (Rabinowitz 127). In other words, Mazie learns through experiences, and by watching her mother, that her value both to society and to her family lies in unpaid domestic labor and reproduction. Through Mazie’s deceptively simple narrative, Olsen demonstrates how class and gender equally subjugate women.

As the novel progresses into the second section, the Holbrook family leaves the mining town to try farming in South Dakota. This section represents a period of renewed hope for this family, especially for Mazie. Even the landscape of the farm signals hope and possibility, as the narrator describes how “the laughter of summer was on the earth” (31). Mazie embarks on a process of self-discovery that results from a mentoring relationship with Mr. Caldwell and a deeper understanding of her mother’s life and desire for her children to be educated.

In Mr. Caldwell, Mazie discovers a wealth of knowledge, which reawakens the desire for education that first ignited in the mining town. He encourages Mazie to “build on the knowing with the wondering” (37). However, as Mazie becomes “acutely conscious of her scuffed shoes, rag-bag clothes, [and] quilt coat,” she also becomes aware that she and Will are already far behind the other children in their academic development (35). Although they quickly grasp the ability to read, the school eventually closes, and Jim sells the books that Mr. Caldwell bequeaths Mazie. These events signal the end of Mazie’s formal education, which for Anna, Mr. Caldwell, and Mazie, means that her opportunities to escape the domestic trap will be fewer.

On the farm, Mazie again must play surrogate mother, but this time to a greater extent because Anna’s latest pregnancy causes her to slip into a daze and neglect her housework. The narrative in this section of the novel places Mazie strategically between her mother and father, so that the reader understands how Mazie identifies more closely with her mother than her father, although she enjoys moments of warmth with him. As Mazie watches her mother grow “monstrous fat” (40), she assumes what her father calls “a woman’s [***damned] life,” which consists of feeding the smaller children and entertaining them with “things cut out of a catalog” (41). Jim’s frustration with the now failing farm and his wife’s inactivity results in further violence and accusations against Anna.

Again, patriarchal culture rears its ugly head in the Holbrook household. Mazie hears her father scream at Anna, “No wonder nothing ever comes right. Lots of help I get from my woman” (41). However, since Mazie has taken on the household chores, she comprehends Anna, who responds, “You get plenty help. Kitchen help, farm help, milkin help, washerwoman help. And mothering too” (41). As Elaine Orr asserts in her article “On the Side of the Mother, “Olsen writes near the mother. She hears and requires the reader to hear from the daughter’s close positioning; thus, readers are ‘touched’ by the sounds of the mother’s pain mediated by the daughter’s thinking” (5). Although Mazie is still a young girl, she develops a strong sense of motherhood as a circumstance that can “simultaneously hinder and nourish genius” (Gottlieb 1).

Mazie has witnessed her mother’s swing of emotions from jubilant to deeply depressed, through songs when she is happy, and silence when she is sad. The reader experiences Anna’s childbirth, not through her own interpretations, but through Mazie. Jim leaves Mazie behind to help her mother prepare the bed for the delivery. In a more romantic tale, this scene would be depicted as some absurd rite of passage from mother to
Nevertheless, Anna holds on to a glimmer of hope for her children despite the bleak surroundings and personal struggles as a woman: her hopes, dreams, the pain and blood associated with bringing forth life, the corpse gray, puffing out baggier and baggier...Her mother. Night, sweating bodies. The blood and pain of birth” (43). Because of this, Mazie places womanhood and motherhood into the same mixture of pain and powerlessness she felt when Sheen McEvoy attacked her at the mine, remembering “the night bristling, the blood and the drunken breath and the blob of spit, something soft, mushy, pressed against her face” (77). As if to validate this perception, Anna warns her daughter later in the novel, “Mazie you fix yourself so you don’t have no kids. Don’t ever let no man touch you, see, unless you’re fixed” (147).

For Mazie the distortion of one’s body, the pain and blood associated with bringing forth life, does not draw her closer to Anna, but instead alienates them both. Mazie watches as Anna’s visage becomes “a look of not seeing,” a look that isolates the mother from the daughter who desperately needs her own anxieties calmed as she cries “Momma” (43). The childbirth experience forces both mother and daughter into silence because it represents “the continued reproduction of working-class womanhood, a cycle of mothering, housework, wage work, and sexual vulnerability that distinguished working-class men and women, girls and boys” (Jameson 2). Simply put, a new baby means more work for both Mazie and Anna, and another mouth that Jim must work hard to feed.

After a year of “workin’ like a team of mules,” Jim fails at farming (39). He feels he has no other choice but to relocate the family to Omaha, where he will find work at a slaughterhouse. At this point in the novel, the narrative shifts to the perspective of the mother. Although this section presents the most overt political stance on behalf of the proletariat, we learn more about Anna’s personal struggles as a woman: her hopes, dreams and fears for her children, and the devastating effects that repeated pregnancies, poor diet, and inadequate housing have had on her body. Nevertheless, Anna holds on to a glimmer of hope for her children despite the bleak surroundings and sense of failure she feels.

As a mother, Anna exemplifies great courage and humanity as she experiences what can be described only as a complete breakdown, physical and mental. Yet she never completely relinquishes her role as wife and mother. As the narrator relates: “Remote she fed and clothed the children, scrubbed, gave herself to Jim, clenching her fists against a pain she had no strength to feel” (56). Anna’s illness “serves to deaden her senses, and the result is an increased awareness not of herself and her needs but of her failures as a poverty stricken mother” (Macpherson 3). Exacerbating those feelings of failure, Jim, projecting his own helplessness as a husband and father, devalues her work and blames her for his inability to succeed financially.

By this time Jim realizes that the American Dream to which he has been clinging is a cruel fallacy. Although “freedom of opportunity and a ‘chancetorise’ are worthy ideals, they do not guarantee success in a flawed capitalistic system (62). Jim reaches the sad conclusion that “a job was God, and praying wasn’t enough, you had to live for It, produce for It, prostrate for It, take anything from It” (62). By moving back and forth from Jim’s experience at work to his behavior at home, Olsen demonstrates how both poverty and patriarchal culture oppress the women in Jim’s life. As a subjugated worker, Jim re-enacts his own powerlessness on his family, especially his wife. The cycle of domination moves from the job to Jim, from Jim to Anna, and often, from Anna to the children. Paula Rabinowitz describes the process this way: “The organization of the family—at once hierarchal and communal—differs from yet mirrors the rigid economic stratification of the social spaces across which the Holbrooks travel” (125). Jim feels intense emotional pain over his plight, but because “being a real man in patriarchal culture requires that one hold feminine qualities in contempt,” he finds no words to express his hurt (Tyson 87). He waits for the day when “hands will find a way to speak this: hands” (79). As a product of patriarchal culture, Jim associates manhood with labor; what a man accomplishes with his hands becomes his voice in the world. Therefore, the absence of adequate work leaves a man voiceless.

In this section of the novel, Anna speaks more
through her silence than her actual words. After the miscarriage, she drifts in and out of a fever-induced delirium. One day, in desperation Anna cries, “the children. What’s going to happen to them?” (90). Anna’s poignant question resonates with broad implications for society as a whole. The Depression era begins after a period of hope and prosperity experienced in the 1920’s and before the 1940s, which brought social reform in the New Deal. What could a poor, working-class family expect in terms of assistance if one of the pillars holding up the family were to collapse? Without heralding her own cause, Anna demonstrates her value to her husband and children. Even though in a weakened state, Anna takes in laundry to earn a few extra dollars for the family. As a woman, she exemplifies the courage that many women showed during the Depression as they defied their physical, social, and economic limitations for the survival of their families.

Crucial to that survival for Anna is the ability to maintain hope and a sense of self, despite the poverty and constrictions of the home. The scene that best demonstrates this finds Anna and her children on an afternoon stroll beyond their squalid neighborhood. Always perceptive, Mazie becomes aware of a “strangeness rising in her mother, not like the sickness strange, something else” (97). For the first time in the novel, Anna reflects on the happier days of her childhood. Mazie watches in awe as “a remote shining look was on her face, as if she had forgotten them, as if she had become someone else, not their mother any more” (100). Anna had not actually forgotten her children. She had, however, remembered herself. Not sure how to interpret her mother’s strangeness, Mazie asks, “Don’t we have enough yet?” (100). But Anna physically engulfs her, strokes her; she sings softly to her. In this scene, as Caldwell predicts before his death, Anna passes a legacy of resistance on to her daughter. By sharing the essence of her self, the “womanness” that yet exists within her body and soul, Anna transcends the struggle to survive. Between the song and the caresses “the fingers stroked, spun a web, cocooned Mazie into happiness and intactness and selfness” (102).

This burgeoning sense of self will serve Mazie well as the novel draws to an uncertain conclusion. The three added conclusions to the novel suggest that more heartache will come. The only hope the reader can take away from the bleak epilogues is that Mazie will gather enough strength and determination to overcome the obstacles of her gender and socio-economic position. Perhaps the specific details of the ending are not important to what we gain from this novel. In Yonnondio, Olsen gives us a glimpse of class warfare and the collapse of the American Dream from woman’s perspective. As a “mother-worker-writer” of the Depression era, Olsen understands both the frustration of the underpaid, working underclass, and the complicated mixture of joy and confinement that mothers face. She brilliantly writes the characters in this novel so that those of us who will not experience utter poverty and lack of opportunity will feel how desperate the silences were for those who did.

Works Cited


The Psychology Behind the Serial Killer  
Laura Lawler

Dr. Denise Ben-Porath asked students enrolled in Introduction to Clinical Psychology (PSYC40383) to construct a profile of a specific personality type. In “The Psychology Behind the Serial Killer,” Laura Lawler offers a profile of human predators in order to examine the psychological disorders that create serial killers. She concludes that psychology can offer only a partial explanation for such abnormal behavior.

Creeping around the shadowy house, the predator found its prey waking to strange sounds. The victim lay facedown, with a sweating forehead pressed fearfully into the pillow, silently praying the noises would just go away. Suddenly the victim found himself straddled and pinned to the bed. He was unable to scream for help due to the pressure of the handle of the pick-axe against his throat, preventing any breath from escaping, much less any sound. The victim struggled beneath the weight of the assailant. The scant light from the sodium-arc street light outside cast a peculiar silhouette on the walls of the darkened room, projecting an image that looked oddly like that of a cowboy saddled upon a bucking bull at a rodeo. Struggling to dismount the attacker, the victim felt the piercing blows of the sharp point of the pickaxe, succumbing to death only after receiving eleven stab wounds to the chest and throat. The thrill of the kill was stimulating enough that, when interviewed later, the murderer reported “popping a nut,” that is, becoming so sexually aroused by the event, to the point of having an orgasm (Pearson, 1998).

Does this sound like the heinous acts of Jeffrey Dahmer, Jack The Ripper, or Ted Bundy? How about the petite, pretty, fawnlike, Texas teen named Karla Faye Tucker? A woman? A killer? A sexual predator? Never before had such a thing been heard of, until Miss Tucker.

Typically, when one thinks of serial killers, such images as Son of Sam, John Wayne Gacy, or the Boston Strangler, come to mind. Though these men do indeed fit the description, there are many myths and misconceptions surrounding the definition of serial killer, first and foremost that serial killers are always men. To try to clear up a few of the misconceptions and myths about the serial killer, this paper will attempt to clarify what, how, who and, perhaps, why a serial killer is a serial killer.

Definition: What
What is a serial killer? Retired Special Agent Robert Ressler, a twenty-two year veteran of the FBI’s Behavioral Sciences Unit in Quantico, Virginia, is responsible for creating the term “serial killer.” He defines this person as “one who commits a series of murders, usually three or more, the victims most often being strangers, and usually with a cooling-off period in between each kill” (Kelleher & Kelleher, 1998; Pearson, 1998; Ressler and Shactman, 1997). This precise definition is necessary to distinguish this type of predator from the mass murderer (who kills many simultaneously), mercenaries, war criminals, or mafia hit men.

Profiling: Who and How
Though serial killer may have a fairly specific definition, there is no single precise profile for the serial killer. Each has a unique identity, set of motives and methods, and a unique psychopathology that would attempt to explain the mens rea, that is, the purpose or intent of the murder. “Psychological profiling is an investigative tool used strictly to answer the how of the crime, not the why” (Severence et al, 1992; Lanier and Henry, 1998).
1998). By examining the psychological make-up of the serial killer, it is often possible to explain the behavior, which might make it a useful tool in solving crimes.

Theories of Criminal Behavior

Many theories have been proposed to explain criminal behavior. English psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) believed that “criminal activity was a type of release valve for pathological minds, to prevent them from going insane.” Isaac Ray (1807-1881) believed that some criminals were driven to deviance by their psychological urges.” These, of course, are assumptions of a biological nature that criminals are “born” as such.

Recently, it has been demonstrated that there are certain psychological factors that might produce criminal behavior (Monahan and Steadman, 1984; Lanier and Henry, 1998). Rather than being biologically predisposed to criminal activity, some psychologists postulate that deviant or criminal behavior arises as a result of poor socialization or faulty development in one or more of the fundamental early stages of life. Criminal behavior could be the result of experiencing traumatic events early in life, such as abuse and/or neglect. Perhaps criminal behavior is caused by some underlying psychological disturbance residing quietly in the mind, waiting for some social, environmental, or emotional trigger to summon it to the surface.

Of course, Sigmund Freud had his own opinions regarding criminal propensity. Though Freud wrote very little on the subject of criminality, students of Freud’s psychoanalytical approach to human behavior fundamentally relied upon the assumptions and necessities of proper development and the influence of the human mind to explain human behavior (criminal or otherwise). Freud’s psychoanalytic theory placed great emphasis on the role of the unconscious mind’s influence on behavior, and the events that shape the unconscious mind. Students of Freud’s psychoanalytic school of thought concluded that, “crime is an expression of subconscious internal conflicts, resulting from trauma or deprivations experienced in childhood” (Aichorn, 1935; Healy and Bronson, 1926, 1936; Alexander and Healy, 1935; Bowlby, 1946; Abrahamson, 1944, 1966; Friedlander, 1947; Redl and Wineman, 1951, 1952, Redl and Toch, 1979, Lanier and Henry, 1998).

Males and Females: Differences and Similarities

Are these psychological explanations the same for male serial killers as for female serial killers? Finding information on the female serial killer requires some extensive research, as she tends to be very elusive. One has to wonder why we do not hear of female serial killers nearly as often as their male counterparts. When the media portrays a serial killer it is almost always a man with some deep psychological disturbance. He is usually a sexual predator like Ted Bundy, or a signature killer such as Buffalo Bill in The Silence of The Lambs, who leaves a trail of trademark calling cards for the young, pretty, pout-lipped female detective to follow. So why then is it that we do not hear of female serial killers? Perhaps it is because their male counterparts so frequently cause terror in their respective communities, while female serial killers tend to be more elusive. Female serial killers often conceal their activities in their homes or places of employment and commit their crimes more covertly. Most often their victims are related to them or under their charge. They also tend to disguise their crimes, making them look like accidents or naturally occurring events. They are quiet killers, every bit as lethal as male serial murderers, and we are seldom aware one is among us because of their virtual invisibility. Unfortunately, the media portrayals are all most of us know of these predators. This is one aspect that makes them so dangerous.

Why: The Mind Behind the Mask

Though they are equally capable of serial murder, males and females are often very gender-specific in their approach, motive, and modus operandi (MO); that is, “their way of perpetrating the crime or abducting their victim” (Douglas, 1997). Furthermore, it appears that behind the evil facade of every killer there seems to be a sort of underlying psychological disorder, which assists in explaining their propensity towards murder (why they do it).

With respect to motive, male serial killers
typically fall into certain categories. Those that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, might classify as "schizotypal personalities" are the "visionaries," the killers who act in response to instructions from inner "voices" or alter egos. They may claim to be demon possessed, or to be receiving instruction from God, and use this to justify or rationalize their acts of murder. David Berkowitz (The Son of Sam) is a classic example of a delusional personality type. When police searched his apartment in Yonkers, they found scribbled all over the walls the message "Kill for My Master," a command he allegedly received from the "voices" (Lane and Gregg, 1992). Also under the heading of schizotypal personalities is the "missionary" type who feels it is his job to rid the world of its so-called "undesirables." Jack the Ripper terrorized the East end of London for three months in the year of 1888, with his savage and brutal "cleansing" of the streets of Whitechapel, where he mutilated and dissected the bodies of five prostitutes.

Then there is the "hedonistic" type, who actually gains pleasure from killing. Under this category are three subtypes: 1) lust killers, 2) thrill killers, and 3) gain killers, under which female serial killers may fall, as will be demonstrated later.

The lust-killer is probably the most common type of male serial killer. For him, gratification comes as the result of sexual sadism, "intense, sexually arousing behaviors that involve the psychological and/or physical suffering of the victim" (DSM-IV, 1994). There is usually a typical pattern of behavior, or steps, that lead up to the hedonistic-lust kill. First, the fantasy stage. The desire to kill is usually cultivated by the use of pornographic materials that allow the killer to imagine himself or role-play in his mind. These events eventually lead up to the second stage, referred to as the "hunt" stage. In this stage, the killer searches for a specific type of victim, as did Ted Bundy. Bundy specifically selected his female victims—all having straight hair parted down the middle. The killer may also tend to be "place specific," tending to stay in an area familiar to him. However, as in the case of Bundy and some others, the hunting range may extend for hundreds of miles. The third stage is the "kill" stage. Here, the fantasy becomes real, and he is able to do with his victim what he wishes. Very often, there are paraphiliac (specifically fetishistic) elements involved where the killer may derive sexual gratification from a photograph of the victim, or a severed body part, which he may store in a freezer for future sexual gratification. Finally, there is the "post-kill" phase. The act is completed and the victim is dead, leaving the killer feeling alone and empty (this is not referring to the cannibalistic killer who becomes hungry a few hours after digesting his prey!). This feeling of desertion is most likely believed to be a result of a defective psyche, possibly stemming from early experiences of abandonment, rejection, or neglect. If he is so inclined, it is during this stage that he will write letters of confession to police or media, or he will begin the killing cycle all over again. Jeffrey Dahmer is a prime example of this sort of killer, who could clearly be observed going through all of these stages with his victims.

"Thrill killers" kill just for the sheer excitement of it. Although they may be quite sadistic in their rituals, sexual gratification is mostly an incidental byproduct of their act. Their main goal simply is to kill. The more they torture and mutilate their victim, the more exciting it becomes for them. Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo, a husband and wife killing team, found sadomasochistic torture and rape of young virgin girls (including Karla Homolka’s own sister) to add an element of excitement to their marriage. Homolka and Bernardo could be described as having a number of psychological disorders. Together they were partners in what is referred to as "Shared Psychotic Disorder, or Folie a Deux" (DSM-IV, 1994, Pearson, 1998). This is a delusional disorder that develops in an individual closely related to someone who already has a predominantly delusional psychotic disorder. The two people involved seem to share their disorders, both becoming equally delusional, feeding and fostering the other’s psychoses. Paul Bernardo was obviously a masochistic, misogynistic individual, whose need to make young girls suffer was encouraged by his equally sadistic and masochistic wife. Not only would Karla Homolka participate willingly as his sex slave, but she would also play the role of master to her husband’s enslaved young victims, all of whom...
she helped him “catch” or lure.

The level of excitement Homolka experienced served her histrionic personality well. “Histrionic personalities are emotionally shallow, inappropriately sexually provocative, and overly concerned with being the center of attention” (DSM-IV, 1994). It was only during these crazed moments of perversion that she would receive any praise or attention from her husband. In fact, she would often make sure she was front-and-center of the video camera Bernardo would use to record their perverse criminal activities.

Two other categories of serial killer that males and females seem to share are the “power seeker” and the “gain killer.” The “power seeker” usually has a very low self-esteem, and uses murder as a means to obtain a sense of control, or power, or to gain attention and sympathy from others” (Lane and Gregg, 1995).

Mary Beth Tinning found that she could easily become the center of attention at the funerals of all 9 of her children. After her first child died naturally of meningitis, Tinning found herself to be not only comforted, but also cheered up, by the sympathy and adulation she received from the mourners at the funeral of her newborn infant. Once she realized the amount of attention she could receive, she found that by harming, injuring and eventually killing eight more of her own children, she could gain even more attention and sympathy (Pearson, 1998).

Tinning is one of many women who “use their children to express their will to power” (Pearson, 1998). Very often these women are babysitters, caretakers, nurses, or doctors’ wives. They frequently have extensive medical knowledge and access to a variety of medications that they use to make their children ill or even to cause their deaths. These women are described as having a psychological disorder known as “Munchausen syndrome by proxy,” a term introduced by Richard Asher to describe “a person (usually a woman) who inflicts injuries on another, frequently a child or elderly person, to manipulate others to gain their attention or sympathy” (Pearson, 1998; Kelleher and Kelleher, 1998). Though some of these women kill their children, most of them carefully monitor the medications they give their children, administering just enough to keep them alive, thereby prolonging the amount of attention they receive. Those children that do die appear to do so from natural causes, such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), pneumonia, or Reye’s syndrome. Often the cause of death is such a mystery that coroners are unable to determine any specific cause of death and label it as “unknown.” All of the drastic attention-seeking behavior is most likely a result of abuse or neglect the mothers themselves received as children, or from the emotional abuse and neglect they receive as adults. One could only predict that children who manage to survive might grow up to become parents who will do the same thing to their children.

The serial killer who murders to gain profit is also frequently a woman—one who kills for insurance settlements, property inheritance, or some other financial benefit. She is often given the nickname “The Black Widow.” Due to the victim-specific nature of her crimes, she must adhere to a very precise definition in order to be worthy of her maleficent moniker. To be considered a Black Widow, “she must systematically kill multiple spouses, other family members, or others outside of her family with whom she has developed a close, personal relationship” (Kelleher and Kelleher, 1998). Childhood abuse and neglect might serve to explain the multiple murders committed by Nanny Hazel Doss. “Over a period of nearly thirty years, Doss killed four husbands, two of her own children, one of her grandchildren, two of her sisters and her own mother, all for profit from life insurance policies and family savings” (Kelleher and Kelleher, 1998; Lane and Gregg, 1998). Three of her husbands died from “stomach troubles,” as the coroner’s report read, her two daughters died from “accidental poisoning,” her grandchild from “natural causes,” and her mother also from “accidental poisoning” (Kelleher and Kelleher, 1998; Lane and Gregg, 1998). It was not until the death of her fourth and last husband that anyone became suspicious. An autopsy, requested by medical personnel, revealed that her husband had died from ingesting a large dose of arsenic. When apprehended by police, she confessed to a total of ten murders. She denied greed as her motive, insisting that she was simply looking for the right man to give her the love and affection she
never had as a child; yet another case of criminal behavior probably caused by faulty childhood development. Incidentally, she was given the nickname “the Giggling Grandma” because of her tendency to giggle nervously when she spoke of her crimes (Kelleher and Kelleher, 1998; Lane and Gregg, 1998).

Conclusion
Psychology can attempt to explain only some of the causes of criminal behavior. Serial murder is an especially perplexing phenomenon. No one, not even the actual perpetrator, really knows why they are the way they are. Many psychologists and criminologists believe there is usually a psychological disorder that might attempt to explain the evolution of any human being into a serial killer. The evidence certainly does suggest this is true. What thoughts go through the psychopath’s mind when he or she is killing? “Psychiatrist J. Reid Meloy compares the mind of a psychopath to that of a reptile, a cold-blooded animal working solely on instincts that tell it to feed, mate, hunt, or kill” (Pearson, 1998). We may never know what forces create the serial killer, but it should serve us well to recognize the importance of psychological development and its influence on human behavior. While female and male serial killers are very different in their motives, methods, and the victims they choose, the results are the same: innocent people end up suffering violent deaths at the heinous hands of psychopathic serial killers.

References
Mealtime Manners: The Idea of Courtesy in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Jane Ann Lindsey

In modern society, Martha Stewart and Miss Manners are authorities in the social amenities of community gatherings, and they promote their ideas in television programs and books. But in the Middle Ages, elegant behavior is illustrated in the Middle English poem, “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” in a detailed account of a holiday celebration at King Arthur’s castle. In this text, the idea of courtesy is shown as the foremost attribute of a knight, and King Arthur is introduced as the “most courteous of all” (26) rulers. In a mealtime setting, the lives and customs of “[t]he most noble knights known under Christ” (51) are displayed, and courteous behavior is established as the hallmark of knighthood. By showcasing the common experience of eating, the narrator reveals the significance of courtesy in courtly life and discloses the customs of this era. Indeed, the sequence, kind, and presentation of foods at the feast provide a framework for the courteous demeanor in this adventurous tale.

When the feast begins, servants enter with great fanfare as “the first course comes, with clamor of trumpets” (116) into the hall. Tables overflow with “dishes rare” (121), exotic, and plentiful. In fact, food is so abundant “[t]hat scarce was there space to set before” (123) diners. The sumptuous fare and opulent surroundings distinguish this event from an everyday dinner and reinforce the idea that courtesy requires specific utensils, table coverings, and demeanor. Formal presentation of the repast indicates a high regard for guests because it is delivered on “service of silver” (124), typically associated with special occasions. Further, the narrator specifies the meal is served “on cloth” (125) as befits a formal occasion.

Along with the decor, the superior quality of food and drink plays a prominent role in the idea of courtesy because the finest provisions are generally reserved for special occasions. The narrator describes “[g]ood beer and bright wine” (129) as standard beverages for the event. Likewise, guests feasted on “dainties . . . [and] dishes rare” (121) served in elegant fashion. The superb caliber of the fare reflects a conscious effort to favor guests in gracious style.

The idea of courtesy is further developed in the action of the work. That King “Arthur would not eat till all were served” (85) distinguishes him as a polite host. Also, prior to the meal, guests congregate to celebrate, then “washed, . . . went to their seats” (72) and began eating. Knights are seated according to their rank while King Arthur “stands in state” (103) and surveys the gathering. Music fills the hall as the “noise of new drums and the noble pipes” (118) provide a fitting backdrop for the gaiety. Similarly, the service is impeccable and reflects the noble breeding and gentility of the host. The narrator asserts “no tittle was wanting” (131) at the holiday feast where guests rest at their ease while “dainties were dealt out” (121) before them.

A holiday feast is an appropriate setting to highlight the idea of courtesy. Special foods are prepared and the finest cutlery and linens are used. Like King Arthur, modern hosts strive to provide a “table of trifles fair” (108) and congenial surroundings for their guests. In this work, the narrator connects the
idea of courtesy through a vivid portrayal of a feast "fittingly served" (114) to an elite party. In this way, the common experience of dining is elevated to a feast fit for kings.

Work Cited

While a student in Dr. Jay Sloan's College English I (Eng. 10001) class, Denise Nelson was asked to contextualize her own concepts of race in response to Zora Neale Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" and Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." The result was Nelson's own take on "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," an essay which analyzes her own experience of race.

* * *

Just as Zora Neale Hurston explained in her article, "How it Feels to be Colored Me," I never thought much about race until I was about thirteen years old during my junior high school years. As Zora stated, "I remember the very day that I became colored" (30). I, too, recall the day I realized that I was white and that it meant something more than just a Crayola color. No longer was white just a color; it was the race I belonged to with its own rules and regulations.

Prior to writing this essay, I really had not noticed the effect that race had on my life. That is, not until I was forced to look race straight in the eye. This was a very difficult thing to do because it brought back some unpleasant memories I thought I had locked away in permanent storage. I had to be brutally honest with myself and examine my innermost feelings on how race affected my life. Only then did I truly realize how race impacted my attitude, behavior, education, employment, and privileges.

As a kid, I didn't understand what race meant or its implications. I was pretty much oblivious to it. Race meant getting some kids together and running a foot race. The one who made it to the end of the block won. I never felt that I was special because of my race. Nor did I feel discriminated against. Of course, I was sheltered from race and racism. I never knew any people of color because I grew up in an all-white, lower-to-middle-class blue-collar neighborhood. I never encountered someone of another race, and my parents made sure of it. I wasn't allowed outside of our own neighborhood block, as my mother kept a strong leash on me. Not until I was much older did I wander outside the safety net of our all-white neighborhood.

Without a choice, and after graduating from elementary school, I, like many others in the same grade, had to change schools and begin junior high school. Since I lived within one mile of school, there were no free bus rides. Like many other kids in the surrounding neighborhoods, we had to walk to school. We often heard horror stories about how the black kids would gang up on the white kids and start fights. Naturally, we were afraid to leave our comfort zones and negotiate through uncharted waters. As much as we dreaded that walk to school, we were even more fearful of what would happen to us once we arrived at our new school. Regardless, we didn't have a choice in the matter; we had to do it despite our worst fears. We dealt with these fears by staying with our own kind and made sure we were never alone. We always walked in groups of two or more because we didn't want to be "sitting ducks."

Once acclimated to our new surroundings, we noticed there were a lot of black kids at the junior high school—more than we had ever seen in a our lifetime. However, we were sure to notice that we (the white kids) still outnumbered them. Even so, it was a little frightening to us. I'm not sure what frightened us most—perhaps it was fear of the unknown or the imaginings of our worst fears coming true—but I think the black kids were more afraid of us since they were outnumbered. For the most part, the black kids never really did anything to us. Sometimes they gave us dirty looks or made smart
One experience during my junior high school years that really stands out in my mind is a bittersweet memory of a black girlfriend I once knew. We got along really well and decided to ride bikes together after school, and we had a lot of fun. Who would have thought that something so innocent as riding bikes with your friend could cause such a ruckus? I can vividly recall my mother pulling me aside one day as she instructed me to stop riding bikes with my black friend. She said we could still talk at school, but no more after-school bike rides. My mother said, “It doesn’t look good being seen with a black girl in an all-white neighborhood.” She said that people were beginning to talk about this and, “you don’t want to be labeled a ‘nigger lover.’”

Naturally, I was very upset with my mother and “the people who were talking” who made such an innocent thing as bike riding with a little black girl a crime! I had to stop being friends with her just because the color of her skin was black. I didn’t think this was fair to deny us our friendship. Besides, who were we hurting, and why was it any of their business in the first place? I really liked her a lot, and I felt awful having to tell her that I couldn’t go bike riding with her anymore. I was hurt and confused, especially since my mother was always giving speeches on the importance of treating everyone fairly regardless of how they looked. Her famous words were, “It’s not what’s on the outside, but what’s on the inside that really counts!” I think she meant that only applied to people of our own color. She was contradicting herself, and it went against everything she ever instilled in me. How hypocritical! I respectfully voiced my opinion on the matter, but I was not so bold to accuse her of being a hypocrite. Back in those days, you would not dare criticize your parents because that was called “back talk.” You did not give your mother “back talk” or the next thing you knew, you were being punished.

After that incident, I didn’t talk much to my black friend and, come to think of it, I haven’t heard from her since. Thinking back, I wonder how she felt knowing that her color could get in the way of our friendship or, more accurately, knowing that it was my color that got in the way of our friendship. I wonder if it made her distrust white people. I really didn’t understand what my mother meant by being a “nigger lover,” but because of the tone in her voice, I knew it had a negative connotation. I thought about disobeying her orders, but if I were caught, I would have been punished. Looking back on this many years later, I know that she was just trying to protect me, but it affected the way I saw things from then on. I finally noticed the difference of skin color, and how it could cause so much controversy. For some reason, which I didn’t understand at the time, having black skin had a negative connotation. This was my first real experience with racism. I didn’t understand all the politics, but I knew it had serious implications if I went against the status quo.

By the time I got used to one school, it was time to move on to another. This time it was senior high school. I wasn’t nearly as worried about attending senior high school as I had been at the beginning of my junior high school days. Not only was I older, but I was also accustomed to being around blacks. At age 16 I wanted to date boys, like other girls my age, but my mother ruled our home with an iron fist and was so strict that I wasn’t allowed to date until I was 18. I got tired of fighting a losing battle, so I just began sneaking out. I even considered going out with a couple different black guys in high school but remembered that was strictly forbidden. I was willing to take risks, but not that big a risk because dating black boys was another taboo subject in our household. My mother told me several times, “Don’t you ever come home with a black guy because your father and I will disown you!”

After high school, I was still employed in a dead-end job at McDonald’s. Even though I
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attended a vocational program in commercial art for two years, I couldn’t find a job in my field of specialty, so there I was flipping burgers and taking customer orders. “Would you like fries with that?” I uttered that phrase so many times, it became part of my regular vocabulary. In the early 1980s, our state was hit hard by a recession. We had lost a lot of manufacturing jobs in our county, and the unemployment rate was in the double digits. Getting a job was very difficult, and anyone who had a job—even a McDonald’s job—was lucky to have it and hold on to it with all their might. I remember prospective employees asking for job applications and telling them we weren’t taking applications at this time. I felt like a failure because I had spent several years preparing for a career in art, and there I was working at McDonalds, and this was not the “career” I had imagined doing the rest of my life. I was going nowhere fast in this dead-end job. About the only thing I looked forward to was the weekend—going to the nightclubs—dancing, drinking, and partying with my friends.

So after three years of this drudgery, I had to do something to get out of this rut. A friend of mine suggested the U. S. Air Force as a way out of this dismal and depressing area, so I went down to the recruiting station, took the test, and did pretty well. They filled my head with all the great things you could do in the military. I went home and pondered for a few weeks and decided to enlist. It sounded like a pretty good deal—free room and board, meals, education assistance, and travelling the world! What did I have to lose anyway? What I didn’t know was how it would forever change me. Nor did I realize all the people of different races, colors, and nationalities I’d meet. All in all, it was to be a very rewarding experience.

However, just as the first day of junior high school was scary, so was basic training. Like most of the girls in our unit, I was scared to death of the drill sergeants—never mind being afraid of the blacks. Our flight was a diverse group of girls, though the majority of them were Caucasian. We had Black, Hispanic, and Chinese girls in our unit, and they came from all over the United States with varied backgrounds. I could not help but notice their skin color, but I did not dwell on it for two reasons. First and foremost, we were just too busy to even worry about it. The drill sergeants kept us marching from sunrise to sunset, so our minds never had a chance to wander, and we had much less time for contemplation. Mostly, we were just trying to remember our left foot from our right one while keeping “in step.” Second and more importantly, we were all on the same team, striving for our mission: to graduate from basic training. If we were to get through this ordeal, we all had to pull together for the good of the team because there was no way in the world we could do it all on our own.

While in basic training, I became friends with several girls, but became especially good friends with a black girl of Hispanic descent. The color of our skin never became an issue. She was like the sister I never had. She and the other girls in my flight became my second family. All we had was each other, and it helped to tear down any racial tensions there might have been. We were all under tremendous strain, and it didn’t take long before we broke down and cried. Some broke down sooner than others, but eventually we all cried the same tears. The special closeness we shared helped lessen our burdens and brought us together in our common goal: to fulfill our mission by graduating from basic training.

From junior high school to the U. S. Air Force and to present, I have had to overcome my fears about race. Until just recently, I thought about race from my own personal experience. It was always “me” or “white” centered. I didn’t think about race from a black person’s perspective until I took an in depth look as I was writing this essay. I agonized over the writing of this essay because it was a very painful examination of my own ideas and belief systems about race. As much as I truly believe in the “it’s what’s inside that counts” ideology, American society places too much emphasis on “it’s what’s on the outside that counts.” I don’t agree with this concept, but I do believe it exists. Statistically, a person of color has many battles to fight, and I must confess how fortunate I am to be white. Who knows what my life would have turned out to be if I had been born black? Even if I had the same determination, would I have had the same opportunities? Probably not. That is why I was so intrigued with Peggy McIntosh’s article “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” While I do not agree with all of her ideas, she makes some
very daring comments in her writings. For instance, she compares white privilege to an "... invisible weightless knapsack ..." we carry on our backs, and don’t even realize it’s there (120). She goes on to state, "...[white] skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make" (124). I think the key phrase here is "to want to make." Being white, I almost always have the option to choose my own destiny. Regretfully, I cannot say the same for most blacks. Perhaps that is exactly what she means by the invisibleness of being white. Blacks see the privilege but whites don’t. Compare this to looking through a window. Blacks are on the outside looking in, and whites are on the inside looking out.

When I first read her article I became defensive. How dare she tell me that I am privileged! She doesn’t know the struggles I’ve had in my life, or how I came from a working-class family. At first I was defensive because I did not particularly care for the tone of this article. Was she suggesting that the reason I am successful is due, in large part, to being white? That is a hard pill to swallow, and I take offense to this line of reasoning because it discredits my achievements and my uniqueness as a human being. The author stirred something inside me, and she succeeded in challenging me to rethink my position. Being white, I have this asset available at all times even though I don’t think about it. The key idea is being white has its privileges by giving us the opportunity “to want to make it.” The point is not whether I use the asset, it’s that I have it in the first place.

Works Cited


One at a Time: What I Believe (for now) About Teaching, Learning, and Schooling

Kris Shearer

A young boy stands on a beach surrounded by thousands of starfish stranded in the sand. The boy picks them up one at a time and tosses them back into the water. An older gentleman walks to his side and says, "Young man, you are wasting your time. There are too many. You cannot even hope to make a difference." The boy smiles at him, picks up another starfish and tosses it into the water, then says, "I made a difference to that one."

---Anonymous

Teachers may sometimes feel like that boy on the beach, as if we are fighting a losing battle against cultural diversity in the classroom, learning difficulties, standardized testing, resistant parents, and politics in education. But, we must remember the most important component in education: the children. And, like that boy on the beach, we must strive to make a difference, one step at a time. During my field experience, I observed teachers who were striving to make a difference one student at a time; they treated their students as individuals and not as carbon copies of one another. Because of the dedication and stamina required, I believe that teaching is a calling not a profession. Profession, to me, suggests that one will do the minimum amount of work required, while calling suggests a dedication that goes beyond "job description." I believe truly effective teachers love learning and will never stop learning new things on a personal level. In addition, I believe teachers should be "guides" and not "leaders." A guide is authoritative, points a student toward a path of self-discovery, is on hand for advice, and answers questions students may have along the way. A leader, on the other hand, is authoritarian and drags students on a predestined path that leaves little room for diversion or discovery. As a teacher of literature, I hope I will not "spoon feed" interpretation to my students and, instead, give them just a little appetizer to make them hungry enough to nourish their own interpretive skills. I believe the most effective teachers adhere to the five tenets of constructivist teaching by seeking students' points of view, structuring lessons to challenge students' suppositions, recognizing that students must attach relevance to the curriculum, structuring lessons around big ideas instead of tidbits of information, and assessing student learning in the context of classroom investigations rather than as separate events (Brooks & Brooks 21). None of this will be easy, of course, and I may often feel like that boy on the beach tackling that pile of stranded starfish. However, as George Wood points out in Schools that Work, "there has [always] been a person or persons who began the process of developing a school vision" (235). If someone has to start a new trend in education, a dedicated teacher will not sit around waiting for that someone to be "someone else."

But teaching is not an independent entity; it must co-exist with the learning process. In fact, Wood solidifies the relationship between teaching and learning by pointing out that, "the most powerful relationship between a
teacher and student comes when they are both learners" (27). What Wood suggests here is that learning is a process that also involves exchange of lessons between students and teachers. I believe that learning should be both practical and applicable to everyday life, carrying relevance to the lives of both teachers and students. Both students and teachers bring prior life experiences to the classroom that affect not only how learning takes place but also what learning will be more easily accomplished and retained. Teachers need to know as much as possible about the prior experiences their students bring to the classroom, as well as engage in self-evaluation and disclosure, and this can be accomplished only through a continuous process of investigation and learning about each other. Thus, learning involves more than merely material printed in textbooks.

John Dewey defines schooling as "a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (22). In other words, schooling is not limited to 12 to 16 years of classroom experience. Instead, schooling provides (or should provide) a knowledge/skills base upon which to build a way of life, a life of continuous education. Our current system of schooling often appears to be more of an assembly line intent on cloning products, and whoever manages to stuff the most information into these products is the most valued worker. I prefer the constructivist approach to schooling. "Education," Brooks and Brooks assert, "is a holistic endeavor" (23). Constructivist education, rather than encompassing only "books learning" (Brooks & Brooks 23), assists students in understanding themselves and their total existence. Holistic health, once thought to be an "alternative" medical practice, is now recognized as legitimate as it treats the entire person rather than isolated, individual, and perhaps unrelated, symptoms. Why shouldn't education follow a similar protocol? Students will be better served if we educate them as whole beings rather than classify them according to skills or deficiencies in certain educational categories. As Wood states, "one has to wonder why we believe that just because kids pass a standardized test they know something" (192).

I have no doubt that I will often feel like that gentleman on the beach, as if the challenges I am facing are as insurmountable as quickly dispersing

that pile of struggling starfish. But I also believe there will be days I, like the optimistic boy, will know that I can make a difference, even if it is only one at a time.

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To Blast, Or Not To Blast; That Is The Question: A Discussion of Situational Moral Ethics With Immanuel Kant and David Hume
Rhonda M. Silva

The worst day of my life began innocently enough with my small group of friends preparing to explore a cave. Each month the four of us, I, Jill, John, and Ted, would choose two or three caves and spend our weekends engrossed in exploring them. Today’s cave was a special one; it afforded just a small window of opportunity for exploration because it flooded completely with each high tide. As we checked our packs and made sure all our spelunking and survival gear was in order, a rather jovial, but sizable, fellow by the name of Scott Porker happened by and asked if he could join our group. We agreed, as we were always happy to be in the company of a kindred spirit, and since the tide had just gone out we began our descent into the cave.

Our newly acquired fifth member was the last in and got wedged in the opening so tightly we thought we would never be able to pull him loose. Finally, our persistent tugging prevailed, and Scott came loose like a cork from a bottle. We quickly set about probing the cave and didn’t give that incident another thought, since we had just three precious hours in which to achieve our goal of exploration.

After just two hours, our very large friend said he’d had enough for the day and was heading for the surface. We told him we’d be out in a few more minutes and to hang around so we could discuss what we’d found. As we began our ascent toward the entrance, we became acutely aware of the complete absence of light the entrance usually emanated. When our flashlights finally found the source of the unusual darkness we were horrified; the big guy was stuck in the cave’s opening again. This time Scott’s head and shoulders were outside, so instead of being able to pull him through, we would have to try to push him out of the opening. We pushed in every combination of ways possible, and needless to say it did not work this time. The paramount problem was that the cave floods from the interior out, so we would all drown if we couldn’t get Scott unstuck, and unstuck quickly.

It was then that we decided to empty our packs in hopes of finding anything we might be able to use. Unfortunately, we found just two things with any potential usefulness: a cellular telephone, and the single stick of dynamite that was in the bottom of my pack. Obviously, we decided to try the cellular phone first, but every number we tried rang busy non-stop, including 911.

Time was running short, and the others began contemplating the unthinkable; use the dynamite to clear Scott from the entrance of the cave, allowing us to escape. They kept saying, “Why should the four of us die because his big butt is stuck? We hardly even know the guy; it’s not like we owe him anything.” While I could see their point, I was unwilling to consent to their plan. Since I was the owner of the dynamite, I told my friends that I...
wanted to try one more call before we made any rash decisions; and they consented to my request, as long as it was a short call.

My shoes were already wet, as I dialed one of two numbers I had impulsively written in my wallet at a philosophy seminar earlier that year. The voice that answered the phone said, "Hello, David Hume speaking."

I replied, "Mr. Hume, you don't know me, but I am in a terrible situation and need your counsel."

"Please continue," he said.

I explained our situation and my ensuing ambivalence and asked, "Would it be morally wrong to use the dynamite to clear the entrance, killing Scott in the process, in order to free the remaining four of us?"

He replied, "Well let me begin by saying, that I believe what we need to ask ourselves is, what would an observer think? Now I don't mean just any old observer, rather one that knows all the particular facts of your situation, has a typical human nature and range of reactions, and has no vested interest in the outcome of the situation. This is what I call an ideal observer."

"Excuse me Dave, I hope it is all right to call you Dave, but what do you mean by all that?"

"Dave will be fine, dear lady. What I mean is, if an ideal observer were to witness both of the possible outcomes of your situation, what would that person's reaction to those outcomes be?"

"I am not quite sure I follow you, Dave," I said.

"Well, let's put it this way," he said. "Let us say that Mr. Porker is not blown up, and you and your three friends drown. Taking into consideration that this observer has a typical human reaction, how do you think the ideal observer would feel about that outcome?"

"Well, I suppose he or she would feel sorry for us but wouldn't really blame Scott for our deaths."

"That is very possible," said Dave, "but what about the judgment that would pass on the four of you if the dynamite were in fact used to remove your corpulent companion from the cave opening, killing him to save yourselves?"

"Well, again I suppose that the observer would feel sorry for Scott but would not really blame us for his death. That still leaves me in a gray area where neither act garners true moral disapproval. Isn't there some glaringly apparent fact to this situation that we could use to reason our way out of this?"

"Unfortunately, I do not believe that reason can be used to draw any moral distinctions. If I were to stand and look at the outcome of your situation, whichever outcome it may be, and make a list of the particular details I can discover empirically, the rightness or wrongness of the action would not be on that list."

By this time I was pretty confused and decided to get one more opinion. I asked Dave if I could put him on hold and then include him in conference call with one other party; he agreed. I put him on hold and dialed the other number I had written in my wallet. Fortunately, a soft-spoken man with a German accent answered the phone.

"Mr. Immanuel Kant?" I asked.

"Why, yes this is," he replied.

"Sir, I have quite a dilemma and am in need of some very quick moral coaching," I said and quickly proceeded to explain my present situation.

"My goodness, that is quite a problem you have," he said. "Am I to understand that your only two options are drown or end the life of another in order to save yourself and your three companions?"

"Yes sir, unfortunately that is exactly what I am telling you. I am having some ambivalence about our options but truly do not want to take Scott's life."

"As well you should not want to end his life, my dear. All rational creatures must be taken into account when making any decision. They have an intrinsic value and must never be used as a means to an end."

"So, are you saying that we should not kill Scott and should accept our fate, Manny?"

"No, not at all. What I merely meant to imply is that this is a decision that bears due consideration and cannot be made in haste. You have to consider the duty of each person to preserve the lives of others and themselves. You must also consider any pledges or promises made to each member of your party. It is your duty to not break a promise you have made and also to preserve life."

"Well, that's just great. I didn't make any promises, but now I have a duty to preserve not only my own life, but also those of all my companions, including Mr. Porker, all at the same time. That's impossible. How will I ever discover
the right course of action?"

"Unfortunately, I think you are right; you have
quite the moral dilemma on your hands. What we
need to do is determine a course of action, and
then take the motivation for that course of action
and test it by making it into a universal principle."

"A uni-what?" I asked, beginning to lose hope.
The water had now risen over my ankles, and I
was becoming impatient.

"A universal principle is one that could be
applied to any person in similar situations to
determine whether an action is morally correct or
corrupt. For instance, we could say that our
universal principle is that you may kill another
innocent rational being to free yourself from
certain death once you have exhausted all other
alternatives. Now think about all the potential
implications and contradictions caused by this and
tell me if it can be universally applied."

I thought for a few moments and replied, "I
don't think it could be universally applied. I
mean, think about if you were being held hostage
and another person blocked your one chance for
escape. It would not be right to kill him to get
out."

"Very good," said Mr. Kant. "Another thing
that has to be considered is that for any action to
be good, it has to be done without the prospect of
any rewards."

"And that means..."

"Simply this: any action with a conditional
value, such as if you do A you will receive B, is
being done for an ulterior reason. A good, or
morally right, action will be done simply by the
virtue that it is the right thing to do, with no hopes
of any type of reward. I call this the categorical
imperative. It is the motive behind the action, and
not the consequences produced by the action, that
makes an action right or wrong. For instance, you
may find yourself in a situation where every fiber
of your being wants to do what is right but is
unable. In this case you are morally free of blame
even if there is a less than favorable, or desirable,
consequence produced."

At this point, as I could feel the water
beginning to tickle the back of my knee, and
decided to begin the conference call. I brought Mr.
Hume back on the line and introduced Mr. Kant; it
turned out that no introductions were needed.

"So David," said Mr. Kant, "were you feeding
this young lady your drivel about an ideal
observer?"

"Well, hello, Immanuel, and I suppose you
weren't force-feeding your universal principle,
categorical imperative nonsense to this young
lady?"

"Guys, guys," I interceded. "Could we please
save the testosterone for later? Potential drowning
victim, or murderer, here asking for help, okay?"

"My apologies, let us put aside our differences
of opinion and see if we can find an equitable
solution to this dilemma," said Manny. Dave
agreed, and we began to hash out a solution.

"Well, what in your opinion would be the
morally correct course of action in this case Mr.
Hume?" I asked.

"In my opinion, you should use the dynamite to
free yourselves. Neither empirical evidence, nor
an ideal observer, could find this action
blameworthy. Right and wrong cannot be
determined separate from the feelings of the ideal
observer. Society may view this differently, but
we have societal rules regarding only preservation
of life, property, and other sorts of things because
it is of some use to society; and we are outside
those boundaries right now."

"Poppycock," exploded Mr. Kant. "Absolute
rubbish, David," he said angrily. "A truly good
action can be produced only through a good will,
when you do something simply because it is the
right thing to do and not to produce a favorable
consequence for yourself. How can you possibly
say that rules regarding the preservation of life are
merely a societal convenience?"

At this point they began to verbally battle one
another, and I was nearly out of time; a decision
had to be made soon. I tried to intercede and say
my goodbyes but could not fit a word in edge­
wise, so I simply hung up. I endeavored to relay as
much as I could to my three companions, but
could tell they were unimpressed. I knew we had
to make a decision right then.

We stood there and debated among ourselves:
was it wrong to save ourselves and use Scott as
our means to do so? Could we live with ourselves
if we did have to kill him? What was the right
thing to do? A vote was proposed, and we each
decided that we needed a moment of private time
to make our final decisions. The water was
approaching our hips as we cast our votes by a
show of hands. Not surprisingly the results were three for using the dynamite, and one against; my vote was the lone “no.” I had decided that I would rather die myself than willingly take the life of another. Although I completely understood that in doing so, I would be sentencing not only myself to death, but also my three friends. I just could not come to grips with visiting such a horrible death upon a totally innocent person. I attempted to reason with them: could we maybe use the dynamite to try to loosen the stones to the side of where Scott was stuck? They were unwilling to possibly waste our only means of escape on a long-shot chance and resoundingly vetoed my proposal. Had they even asked Scott his opinion? They said that Scott had told them to not worry about him, and do whatever it was we had to do; he would understand. I wanted to ask him myself but could not bear to do so. A sick feeling suddenly overcame me, and I knew I had to make an attempt to circumvent what was about to happen.

I had control of the dynamite and decided to make a run for the interior regions of the cave; I had to try to make sure they could not use the dynamite for their intended purpose. Regretfully, I did not get far before John overtook me and wrested control of the dynamite away from me. Ted and Jill immediately took hold of me and restrained me to prevent me from stopping what was about to happen. John apologized to Scott for what he was about to do, and as tears ran down my face while I struggled to free myself, he lit the fuse and tucked the dynamite into the back of Scott’s pants. John ran to us and they all pushed me back into a crevice in the rock. I closed my eyes and held my breath as I waited for the inevitable ear-shattering boom of the dynamite. How I wished the cave’s rocky ceiling would collapse and kill me in the explosion.

The dreaded moment finally arrived with a furious roaring explosion and the sounds of breaking bones and shredding flesh. I was horrified. How could this have happened? How could I ever live with myself? I was numb with shock as my three friends more-or-less physically dragged me out of the cave past the remains of Scott.

Once outside, the cellular phone was used once more, this time to call the police. My friends embellished the story a bit and after a thorough investigation, we were all cleared of any suspicion of wrongdoing. I had initially considered confessing what had actually happened, but then I remembered something that Immanuel Kant had told me about the motives for an action. He told me that if a person wanted to do right with every fiber of her being but was unable to do so, she was not being immoral even if bad consequences resulted from inaction. After thinking long and hard about this, I decided that there would have been no way to stop my former friends from killing Scott in order to escape. Had I persisted, they may have also taken my life and still killed Scott to save their own. There was truly nothing I could have done to save him. Not one day goes by that I do not think of that poor happy-go-lucky plump man and feel sorrow for the end that befell him. I just wish I could believe in my heart those words spoken by Mr. Kant that had brought a sense of peace to my head.
Trying to write an essay is difficult. Reading a book with the very nicely written essays is great and allows me to see examples of good essays. Suggestions such as the journalist’s questions, mapping, brainstorming, and idea books give support and guidance that are supposed to be helpful. After reading all the material of what goes into an essay and the helpful suggestions to get me started in the right direction, such as ways to overcome writer’s block, it is time to begin. Still nothing; I just sit there in front of the computer. I ask myself, how can I use all of the useful information that has been given to me? I try mapping and brainstorming, but a topic or idea is needed. Frustration, irritation, and confusion are very strong emotions I have at this point. I go back to the text and reread one of the stories, and something clicks. An experience comes to me that can be related easily to one of the stories in the required text, so I begin.

Ideas for the essay pop into my head. Writing begins fast at first with all the examples found, personal experiences I can write about, and the thoughts evoked by the story that was read or idea I came up with. When rereading what has been put down on paper or typed on the computer, it all of a sudden becomes unclear or out of focus as to what those written words have to do with the thesis or the story. The ideas somehow have nothing to do with what I was trying to convey. The frustration of what is in my head and what I want to put down on paper is intense.

When taking my ideas to someone to run by them, again the ideas sound great and clear. I do not know how many times I have heard, “That’s great! Write it like you just told me.” How did I say it? What were the words I used? Sitting in front of a computer or piece of paper to write, the ability is not there. The words that make sense are gone, hidden away somewhere and requiring an enormous amount of time to pull them out and put something on paper. The waste of time drives me nuts.

In “Reading for Success,” by Richard Rodriguez, one reason he found reading to be difficult was because it made him feel secluded; the words were colorless and lifeless. He began reading just to read, not always understanding what he was reading. To me, my writing is colorless and lifeless compared to what is in my head. I am writing but not always understanding if what I am putting down on paper is correct or making sense. Then there is the boredom that comes from trying to think and make sense of it all.

In “How I Discovered Words: A Homemade Education,” Malcolm X claimed he felt a certain failure in not having the ability to tell, written or orally, what was in his head. He did not know many words, so he used the dictionary to learn more. The thesaurus and dictionary have become my best friends when typing papers. With a limited vocabulary, it can take me quite a while to look up words, to find others that mean the same. The time required to find the right words takes away from the concentration of getting them down. Finding enough words to fill the page can be and is a challenge. In the paragraph just before this one I use “boredom,” so off to the thesaurus I go. Maybe boredom is not the right word for that sentence. In looking in the
thesaurus “tedious” is found, sounds good, but does its meaning go with what is trying to be conveyed? Next comes the dictionary to make sure the meaning of that word fits with my sentence. Yes, tedious definitely fits.

Where does it all come from? How do I put down more? The panic of having to find another paragraph, the screaming inside my head shows through to the outside as frustration: body shifting, eyebrows furrowing, lip biting, pencil tapping, eyes wandering looking for something to help. Each word and sentence is agonized over as the essay slowly lengthens.

How can something as easy as telling one’s idea or thought be so difficult? We tell people what we think all the time. Why should this be so hard to do since I do this very well many times a day? These feelings of frustration go a long way back to my high school days when teachers shot down my papers and did nothing to help me get back on track with them. They would give me no guidance or give the least amount of hinting about what was needed or expected of the paper. I would strain for the words and ideas, just as I strain for words and ideas to come to me now. Maybe it is just the idea of the paper being looked at by someone who is more knowledgeable with words and the written language. It could be that the ability to write has always been there just dormant for so long it requires an enormous amount of prompting to loosen it up and get started. I personally do not like the feeling of not being capable of performing the task of writing down my thoughts in an organized manner.

When trying to do revisions on this essay, I run into the same problems I had in coming up with the essay. Out of ideas, I refer back to the text Making Connections Through Reading and Writing by Maria Valeri-Gold/Mary P. Deming. Under the helpful hints in revising papers, it asks the question, “Have I chosen the appropriate words to express my ideas?”(23). Words are the problem! What is in my head are lots of words, but are they the right words, and do they go with the ideas that I am trying to express in my essay? How do I get them to come across to the reader in sentences that make sense? How do I come up with enough of them to cover the amount of pages required? The Webster’s Pocket Dictionary and Thesaurus are my only insight into the world of words and their meaning or usage.

How wonderful it would be to have the ability to sit down and just write colorful and animated essays without frustration, irritation, and confusion. I can see my fingers flying across the keyboard, putting down words that make sense to the reader and me. What a thought! Someday this might happen, but until it does reality returns and I am once again asking myself if what I am writing is good enough.

Work Cited

Dr. Brooke Horvath asked his College English II (ENG10002) students to compare and contrast two versions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." In this essay, Mandy Welch analyzes not only how the paragraphing of the two versions changes meaning and impact, but also how the abridging and editing of word choices alters the complexities of the original text.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" was first published in *New England Magazine* in 1892. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an advocate for the advancement of women, authored the short story. She intended the piece to bring to light the inherent ineptitude of the Weir Mitchell "rest cure." Though this subject is addressed, many other pertinent topics are broached, ever so subtly. Other themes in the book include the role of women in a society dominated by men, the role of the mother, and how oppression can affect the mind of a creative individual. These themes, however, can be altered merely by how the tale is edited. I intend to point out some of the pertinent differences that exist between the full text of the story and an abridged version, describing how they give the same story contrary interpretations.

To better understand the differences I will be noting, one may find it helpful to be familiar with the basic plot of "The Yellow Wallpaper." Both versions relate the story of a woman losing her mind. She has not been feeling well for some time, so her husband, a physician, decides a summer spent relaxing in the country would benefit her. While there, she is forbidden to write in her journal, as it indulges her imagination, which is not in accordance with her husband's wishes. Despite this, the narrator makes entries in the journal whenever she has the opportunity. Through these entries we learn of her obsession with the wallpaper in her bedroom. She is enthralled with it and studies the paper for hours. She fancies she sees a woman trapped behind the pattern in the paper. The story reaches its climax when her husband must force his way into the bedroom, only to find that his wife has pulled the paper off the wall and is crawling around the perimeter of the room.

The most easily recognizable difference between the original story and the abridged version, which was printed in *Reader's Digest*, can be noted even before reading. This distinction is the way in which the paragraphs are divided. In the full text, the paragraphs are terse and somewhat disjointed. This erratic paragraphing can be attributed to the narrator's precarious mental state. It is possible that in the abridged version paragraphs have been condensed for space-saving purposes and perhaps reader-friendliness. While that is understandable, it takes away from the authenticity of the story. The narrator is indeed a woman on the verge of a mental collapse. It seems reasonable that her writing would be illogical and somewhat irrational, as her actions are, as the story progresses. The irregular paragraphs of the original capture her paranoid state of mind. Her thoughts are broken much like our stream of consciousness. Also, it should be noted that she is writing quickly, hoping not to be caught by her husband or sister-in-law. It would stand to reason that the pressure she is under would lend itself to her fragmented writing style. While both versions tell the same story, the original text is more authentic in that even the paragraphing fits more readily with the plot.

Another pertinent discrepancy between the two versions is the fact that in the *Reader's Digest* version the narrator seems to be more trapped. In the abridged version, much of the description of the garden and surrounding areas has been omitted. The following excerpt is the only extensive reference the
narrator makes in the twelve-page passage regarding her environment outside of the house. “There is a delicious garden! I never saw such a garden-large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them. There were greenhouses, but they are all broken now” (abridged). In the full text, she describes the garden in detail on three separate occasions. In addition to the passage above, she mentions gazing out the window at the garden below and taking intermittent walks down the lane and through the garden. As insignificant as these discrepancies may seem, they can have a profound impact on what we perceive to be the physical and mental state of the narrator. With her obvious interest in her exterior environment in the beginning of the story, we know she has not yet become entirely engrossed with the wallpaper; readers, as well as the narrator, can escape the confines of her room and dwell on the outdoors for a fleeting moment. There is no such escape in the abridged version, where the description is almost exclusively of the room and the maddening wallpaper. The reader feels the wallpaper closing in on him or her, as well as the narrator. While this makes the story more intense, it manages to discredit the narrator’s true mental state by making her seem more paranoid. In the beginning of the full text, she was once able to appreciate spaces beyond her immediate environment. In the Reader’s Digest version, however, the narrator is entirely absorbed with the nursery and its wallpaper. This ultimately gives the story a more claustrophobic and oppressive tone, while it furthers the narrator’s split from sanity.

Though the narrator may seem trapped by her surroundings, she is actually imprisoned by the nature of her husband. Though both versions make it clear he is in control, the original text makes his authority more intense. While the abridged version keeps most statements made by John and any references to him, the full text makes him seem more dominating. It is evident in both the full and abridged versions that John is adamantly against the narrator writing; however, his ruling is more prevalent in the original text. The following was omitted from the abridged version,

[... ] but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least.

He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try. (Gilman 46)

Not only does this important passage depict how John controlled the narrator, but also how he curtailed her imagination. The narrator’s response, “So I try,” is evidence of how submissive she was to her husband’s bidding.

Another significant omission I found regarded the inertia of the narrator’s life. She is a woman in desperate need of social stimulation, though this seems to be disregarded by the Reader’s Digest version for the most part. While there is only one reference to Cousin Henry and Julia in the abridged version, there are two in the full text. The following statement has been omitted from the Digest. “When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillow-case as to let me have those stimulating people about now” (Gilman 46). This significant remark not only serves as further testimony as to the controlling nature of her husband, but also as to how desperately the narrator needs social interaction. The narrator herself mentions this need for social interaction. “I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says that is the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition [... ] (Gilman 42). This inertia is obviously a subject of great concern to the narrator and deserves being addressed entirely in the abridged version.

The most notable and bothersome discrepancy I found between the two versions was how the narrator’s intelligence seems to be discredited by the Reader’s Digest version of the story. In the original text, the narrator makes references to knowing “a little of the principle of design” (Gilman 48). She then proceeds to describe the wallpaper in great detail, using jargon indicative of those familiar with design. This has been cut from the abridged version. In the Reader’s Digest version the narrator, of course, describes the wallpaper, though it is not as credible as the descriptions made by the narrator.
in the original text. It is unfortunate that the narrator has been edited down to a woman merely raving about her wallpaper driving her mad in the abridged version. The character presented by Reader’s Digest is not the woman Gilman had intended her to be; she has been stripped of her intelligence and some of her precious remaining sanity.

On the surface, both versions relate the story of a woman driven mad by the wallpaper. However, the story presented by the original text is much more complex. It is that of an intelligent woman being driven mad by her position in life. The wallpaper merely serves as a catalyst for her breakdown. This interpretive discrepancy, as well as the loss of authenticity and finally the weakening of John’s power, ultimately leaves the two versions of “The Yellow Wallpaper” open to varying interpretations.

Works Cited


In her sixth novel Jazz, Toni Morrison "makes use of an unusual storytelling device: an unnamed, intrusive, and unreliable narrator" ("Toni Morrison" 13). From the onset of the novel, many readers question the reliability of the narrator due to the fact that this "person" seems to know too many intimate personal details, inner thoughts, and the history of so many characters. Although as readers we understand an omniscient narrator to be someone intimately close with the character(s), the narrator of Jazz is intrusive, moving in and out of far too many of the characters' lives to be reliable. No one person could possibly know and give as much information as this narrator does. But, as readers of Morrison novels, we must remember that Morrison is a gifted and talented writer whose style of writing, as Village Voice essayist Susan Lydon observes, "carries you like a river, sweeping doubt and disbelief away, and it is only gradually that one realizes her deadly serious intent" ("Toni Morrison" 6). Therefore, when we consider the narration of the novel, we must examine every possibility of Morrison's intent. One possibility appears with the novel's title—Jazz. The title, which encompasses the pervasive sound, its musical timbre of the decade in which the story is set, resonates throughout the novel as a character in its own right. Just as "New York is presented as the City throughout the novel to designate it as an active character" (Kubitschek 143), so is jazz. Like the improvisation of jazz, the storytelling technique of the narrator "improvises" as it moves in and out of the characters' lives where it would be least expected. Therefore, jazz must be considered an active participant, a character, who, because of its non-entity existence, would spiritually be able to surround and enter characters lives at will and, as a result, narrate the story.

The structure of the novel mirrors the characteristics of a jazz music piece. Although exceptions occur, "most jazz is based on the principle that an infinite number of melodies can fit the chord progressions of any song. The musician improvises new melodies that fit the chord progression [ ... ]" ("Jazz" 2). With this characteristic in mind, we can see this kind of improvisation when looking at the different sections of the novel:

The sections are often subdivided, with extra blank spaces providing a visual gap between parts of the text. Completely blank pages separate the larger sections. This typography accents the large number of sections and subsections to create a sense of disconnection between the novel's segments. (Kubitschek 142)

Each blank space mirrors the improvisation technique of jazz music. When a musician plays the same jazz piece over and over he improvises, changing the music's direction and creating a disconnection from the original piece. Each of the ten sections of the novel relates a different tale about a different character's life, inner thoughts, and history. Throughout the novel, like in a jazz piece, the narrator changes (with each section) the "melody" to fit the "chord" progression of the story. Because the nature of the structure resembles a jazz piece, it helps readers to understand that the "unreliable"
narrator is relating a story in the only way it knows how—disjointed and by improvising, which then helps us to understand that the narrator is jazz disguised as a character. Although the narrator often provides hints as to “its” identity, those clues, which are not easily discernible, become clear in the last section of the novel. The voice of jazz becomes audible in the first paragraph:

Pain. I seem to have an affection, a kind of sweettooth for it. Bolts of lightning, little rivulets of thunder. And I the eye of the storm. Mourning the split trees, hens starving on rooftops. Figuring out what can be done to save them since they cannot save themselves without me because—well, it’s my storm, isn’t it? I break lives to prove I can mend them back again. And although the pain is theirs, I share it, don’t I? Of course. Of course. I wouldn’t have it any other way.

(Morrison 219)

The affection for pain emphasizes jazz’s performance, the playing of a piece and its dependence on the blues. One important element in jazz is its dependency on creating mood: To various listeners, jazz expresses sexuality, anger, a threat, or self-assertion. This variety of interpretations comes not only from the diverse temperaments of the listeners but from the nature of jazz.

(Kubitschek 157)

The fundamental nature of jazz comes from the weary lament of the blues, but the improvising, the variation of riffs—“Here comes the new. Look out. There goes the sad stuff. The bad stuff” (Morrison 7)—is what creates the transition from blues to jazz. The temperament of the listener then determines whether or not there will be a redemption, a “mending” of the mood that has been created. In essence, the narrator is saying, I am Jazz. I am the storm that creates a mood. I feed on it, feel it, relate it, and then mend it because that’s what I am all about.

The narrator then reveals its improvisational side by shifting the mood at the end of the paragraph: “But it’s another way. I am uneasy now. Feeling a bit false. What, I wonder, what would I be without a few brilliant spots of blood to ponder? Without aching words that set, then miss, the mark?” (219). Just like a jazz piece, the mood of the narrator switches, pondering, moving its feelings toward a new syncopated direction. Like the unreliability of jazz, the narrator goes on to say, “It was loving the City that distracted me and gave me ideas. Made me think I could speak its loud voice and make that sound sound human” (220). Here, the narrator concedes its unreliability, but again, a jazz piece is unreliable. The narrator also admits it is not human, and that its voice speaks from the ideas, the stories, the tune of the city, which of course is what jazz does—its voice emerges from its surroundings. After reading this last section of the novel, we realize that jazz is the narrator; as a result, to further reinforce the authenticity of its voice, readers are then forced to look back in to the novel for other clues.

Although some readers still might not recognize jazz as the narrator, subtle hints throughout the novel become very telling. When the narrator makes the statement, “I’m crazy about this City” (7), thinking back to the contents of the last section and the elements of jazz music, it becomes easier to comprehend the reason why the narrator would love the city. Of course jazz would be crazy about the city, for the city provides the “chords” and “melodies” for its improvisation. Jazz thrives on people, places and things in order to “sing” about them. The city allows the narrator to “dream tall and feel in on things” (7); in other words, the city allows jazz, because of its spirituality, to move in and out of the characters lives at will. The narrator also tells us, “[... ] I am strong. Alone, yes, but top-notch and indestructible [... ]” (7), which reiterates the fact that the narrator is not human—no man is indestructible, but the spirit of music has the power to endure.

Midway through the novel there is further implication of jazz as the narrator. The narrator states, “Risky. I’d say, trying to figure out anybody’s state of mind. But worth the trouble if you’re like me—curious, inventive and well-informed” (137). As a non-human entity, jazz has the ability to be everywhere. Jazz’s spirit, its pervasive sound, filled the air of New York City,
invaded and took up residence in the honky-tonks, speak-easies, homes, and lives of black people during the Harlem Renaissance; therefore, feasibility for it to be well-informed exists. Its omnipresence in their lives gave jazz not only the freedom, but also the opportunity to be creative and inventive with the stories it repeated about them. The narrator admits the risk in trying to figure out their minds; but, considering the improvisational nature of jazz, we can accept the narrator’s risky point of view.

The ability of readers to fully understand jazz’s omnipresence, its capability to be everywhere, to see all, again, can be viewed in the last section of the novel. Jazz, as the narrator, confesses its intrusiveness and its failure to speak about the characters’ lives precisely and accurately. However, this acknowledgment emphasizes its non-human existence, while at the same time confessing to the reader its identity as the narrator.

I watched them [the characters] through windows and doors, took every opportunity I had to follow them, to gossip about and fill their lives, and all the while they were watching me[...]. They were, busy being original, complicated, changeable—human, I’d guess you’d say, while I was the predictable one, confused in my solitude into arrogance, thinking [...]. My view was the only one that was or mattered. (220)

Jazz, the predominant music of the era, like a prying, gossipy, neighbor, invaded the private lives and wrapped its “chords” around the characters’ lives so completely that each character had to, as a result, invent new, impromptu, and complicated steps in order to fit into the emerging popular culture of Harlem. Jazz music, because it took up residence in the characters’ lives, would be able to view those steps, and because of its access to their lives, would be able to provide a commentary of sorts about each move the characters made. However, as fallible as the characters’ moves were, so were the narrator’s. Just as jazz watched their every move so it could “sing” about them, the characters watched jazz hoping for a clue as to what their next step should be. The characters, “believe they know before the music does what their hands, their feet are to do, but that illusion is the music’s secret drive: the control it tricks them into believing is theirs; the anticipation it anticipates” (65). Because of the improvising of the narrator and the characters’ anticipation, each became confused about the other one, leaving them, especially the narrator, in their own private solitude to ponder their existence. The narrator (jazz), who thought wrong about Joe and Violet Trace’s next move, “I was sure one would kill the other” (220), suddenly realized its own predictability because its nature is improvisation, thus, predictable. The characters, realizing then the predictability of jazz became used to its meddling variation and began to ignore its presence, which allowed them to mend their lives. Meanwhile, for readers, the identity of the narrator is confirmed.

Any doubt or disbelief about the narrator’s identity and its unreliability disintegrates once readers consider the variation, the improvisational nature, of jazz music. Knowing jazz is predictable, in that we know the formula is based on variation, yet unreliable because of that variation, and knowing that “jazz isn’t merely music, it is a spirit that can express itself in almost anything” (Rogers1), guides readers to comprehend Morrison’s true intent. Morrison intended jazz to be the narrator not because she wanted to create an unreliable narrator, but to create a narrator who could relate a story that would echo the sound of the heart and soul of the African American during the era of reconstruction after World War I. In part, jazz music helped the African American community create an identity all their own. This struggle for personal identity, which is an intentional reoccurring theme throughout all of Morrison’s novels, serves as the catalyst for jazz to narrate the story. Jazz, because of its storytelling ability, its omnipresence in the lives of the African American community, would not only be the most likely “person” to narrate the story, but also the best one.

Works Cited


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