Writing Center Review

Selected Essays by Students of Kent State University

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Cover Art:

Ali Miltner, *Untitled*
I never had a separate writing room and preferred to write with my children swarming about me.

Kate Chopin

Writing is often a solitary occupation practiced in a seeming vacuum. Our aim in publishing The Writing Center Review centers on the notion that things written with such diligence should not be tossed in a drawer somewhere and forgotten. In addition, I open with the quotation by Kate Chopin because of the scope of this year’s selections.

While our selections process has not changed—selections are still made through blind readings in which committee members are oblivious to who wrote which selections—the majority of our selections this year are from non-traditional students who have some additional responsibilities and concerns that, perhaps, more traditional students may not have. Indeed, I suspect that more than a few of our writers this year had to write with their “children swarming about.”

The Kent Stark Writing Center has undergone a number of changes in the last year; we’ve seen staffing changes, changes in the physical environment of the office space, and changes in perspective regarding our responsibilities to the student body. One thing that has not changed, however, is our desire to publish a quality journal that represents the entire student body. With the wide array of disciplines represented in this year’s Writing Center Review, I believe we have accomplished that.

I will graduate in May, so this will be my last year involved in The Writing Center Review. I feel privileged to have worked with such a capable staff for the last three years and feel confident that Keisha can easily take over the helm next year. Indeed, she could have done just as well without any assistance from me at all this year.

Keisha joins me and the Writing Center Staff in thanking the following faculty members, who graciously gave their time to serve on selections committees:

Greg Blundell, Assistant Professor of M&IS
Laura Dolan, Adjunct Instructor of English
Violet Dutcher, Instructor of English
Lee Fox-Cardamone, Assistant Professor of Psychology
Dennis Hart, Assistant Professor of Political Science
Leslie Heaphy, Associate Professor of History
William Kist, Assistant Professor of Education
George Klee, Associate Professor of Biology
Michelle Madej-McCoy, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communications
Lori McGee, Assistant Professor of Spanish
Robert Mittner, Assistant Professor of English
Jayne Moneysmith, Assistant Professor of English
Jen Riley, Coordinator of Women’s Studies
Brad Shepherd, Assistant Professor of Psychology
Pete Smith, Instructor of Mathematics
Terry Ford Sosnowski, Assistant Professor of English
Linda Stafford, Assistant Professor of Sociology
Tom Taylor, Assistant Professor of English
Lisa Waite, Lecturer of Communication Studies
Jen Welsh, Instructor of English
The co-editors would also like to thank Dr. Jay Sloan, our Writing Center director, for his professionalism, devotion to the success of the Writing Center, and his continued support of the publication of this journal. In addition, we would also like to thank Dr. Jen Riley for her assistance in desktop publishing, and Jeff Grametbauer at the Print Shop in Canton, Ohio.

Finally, we want to thank the staff of the Writing Center, for taking control in various positions throughout the process of finalizing this journal:

Jonathan Cordes
Kelly Lohman
Paul Petrovic
Kurt Sampsel
Angela Saunders

We look forward to the continued success of The Writing Center Review, applaud all who submitted, and congratulate those whose work is included in this, the seventh edition of The Writing Center Review, 2002.

Kris Shearer and Makeisha Miller, Co-Editors
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The Desouling of Akaky Akakievich in Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat"
David Arn

Dr. Jeannette E. Riley asked her English Studies (ENG 30001) students to write a 5-7 page Marxist critique of a text. In his critique of Nikolai Gogol's "The Overcoat," David Arn comments on the exploitation of Akaky Akakievich, caused by the "hierarchy and bureaucracy that dominated the social order of 19th Century Russia." Arn points out that the text calls for its readers to question the oppressive economic system in which Akaky lives.

Originally published in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1842 under the harsh, despotic rule of Nicholas I, Nikolai Gogol's short story, "The Overcoat," exposes the socioeconomic climate of Russia at that time and the dangers of hierarchical systems. The characters' behaviors and interactions give vent to the malevolence inherent in the dominant ideology, which values materialism and denigrates humanity. The power structure and ideology of the main character's Akaky Akakievich's, work environment reflects the class hierarchy and crass ideology of his social environment. The inhumanity of the ideology and the disparity of power in the bureaucratic structure of Akaky's political, economic, and social world limit the qualities that make him human, namely his health, freedom, consciousness, and spirit.

Akaky, caught in a vicious cycle, suffers as a member of the lower class in a bureaucratic system that encourages inequality by means of its hierarchical structure. Within this hierarchical system, the bourgeoisie devalue humans and view them merely as social tools worth only as much as their exchange values. For their own benefit, the bourgeoisie use the bureaucratic system to dehumanize Akaky by turning him into a machine, which makes them rich but desensitizes Akaky. This desensitization restricts his consciousness and, as a result, makes it easier for the bourgeoisie to exploit him. Indeed, Akaky's lack of awareness culminates in his blind acceptance of his own exploitation. Akaky does stumble into social mobility, but only by way of physical need rather than conscious thought; and, as befits a materialistic society, he (and others) realize his human worth only after his material condition improves.

The inhumanity and exploitation that Akaky suffers from emanated from the hierarchy and bureaucracy that dominated the social order of 19th Century Russia. The emperor at this time, Nicholas I, "strengthened and centralized bureaucratic structures to an unprecedented degree" ("Nicholas I") and "decreed there was to be no social mobility" ("Nicholas the Cop"). From the story's beginning, the narrator presents Akaky, a victim of this oppressive social system, as bound to the proletariat class. The permanence of Akaky's social position evidences itself through his role as "perpetual titular councilor" (390, my italics) where "he was always to be seen in the same place, in the same position, the same occupation—always the same copy clerk—and it was rumored he was born in his daily uniform" (391). His "daily uniform was not green but a rusty red color" (392), which implies his social position's inertness and stagnation rather than its change and growth. The fact that Akaky's father occupied the same position before him enhances the scope and magnitude of this social immobility. The determinism of his social class intensifies with the portrayal of his birth, during which his mother declares "it is clearly fate...His father's name was Akaky, so let his son's name be Akaky too" (391). The narrator then states that "the child [Akaky]...howled and made a face, as though he foresaw that his destiny was to be a titular councilor" (391). Akaky's inheritance of his job, social position, and his name from his father exemplifies the social determinism of the period, which worked to seal "his destiny" (391).

Akaky's powerlessness over his social position extends into his work environment. Those of Akaky's rank are "a type whom some writers commonly ridicule ... for [they] are fond of attacking those who cannot fight back" (390). Akaky's inability to defend himself signifies his social impotence: a trait shared...
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The young clerk’s realization possibly parallels the feelings evoked in the reader by the text, thereby raising the reader’s consciousness along with the clerk’s. In this passage, the adjective strange is used to describe words that evoke compassion; this adjective implies that compassion is a strange feeling for the bureaucrats who, like Akaky, are desensitized by their environment. The bureaucrats’ cold heartedness emerges again as

They "showered scraps of paper on his head calling them snowflakes" (391).

The cold heartedness of the despotic government and its harsh bureaucracy metonymically intensifies due to the setting—the
biting cold climate of St. Petersburg—described as:

a powerful enemy of all who [like Akaky] live, more or less, on less than 400 rubles a year...At nine o'clock in the morning, at the very hour when the streets are full of men headed for their departments, it begins to give such potent and piercing nips to all noses impartially that the poor clerks do not know what to do about it. (393)

Akaky, like the rest of the poor clerks, has to shudder through the shivering cold in his threadbare overcoat, which "had become as thin as mosquito-netting; the cloth was worn to such a degree that he could see through it, and the lining was fallen to pieces" (394). His co-workers view the overcoat—like they view Akaky—as "an object of ridicule...they even deprived it of the noble name of overcoat and called it 'the peignoir'" (394). The frailty and impotence of Akaky's overcoat parallels his own social insignificance and powerlessness; it seems that, through the eyes of others, his value as a human being equals the material value of his evanescent overcoat.

The deterioration of Akaky's overcoat led to "his back and shoulders suffer[ing] particularly badly" (394) from the brutal cold, and he then "saw that it was impossible to get along without a new overcoat, and his spirits sank completely. How could he do it? Where would the money come from?" (397). Akaky had no money to spare; he "needed new trousers and had to pay a long overdue bill to his shoemaker for putting new tops on his old boots...in a word, all his money was accounted for in advance" (397). The new overcoat he needs is out of his price range, and even if he works harder there is no chance of gaining a raise for "if his salary had been equal to his zeal, he might...find himself a councilor of state. But his only reward...was a button in his buttonhole [instead of a medal] and hemorrhoids where he sat" (392). Akaky's unjust pay keeps him in a position of need; as a result, he remains perpetually bound to his social class because he hardly makes enough money to survive, let alone move up in rank. In order to purchase an overcoat, Akaky starves himself for months, sacrifices other substantial requirements, and gathers his entire life savings (only forty rubles); eventually, the purchase of the overcoat becomes Akaky's reason to live; it made:

[his life]...[become] in many ways fuller, as if he were a married man or as if some other man lived inside him—as if he were no longer alone and some charming companion had agreed to walk the path of life with him—and that friend was none other than the overcoat...He became livelier, and his character even became stronger, like that of a man who made up his mind and set himself some goal. (398)

To say the overcoat gave Akaky's life meaning and hope is not an overstatement, for it is "the most glorious day of Akaky Akakievich's life" when "[the tailor] finally deliver[s] the overcoat" (399).

Because he possesses a new overcoat Akaky values himself and the world more; also, to the same proportion that Akaky was devalued and dehumanized, the overcoat is valued and humanized as a "charming companion" (398) and a "friend" (398), which in turn, reflects the values of a materialistic society.

Not only does Akaky see himself as a better person because of his new overcoat—so do his co-workers who previously derided him. Now instead of ridiculing him, "[t]hey began to congratulate him and to say pleasant things to him, so many that he...grew embarrassed" (400). Akaky, who before he bought his new overcoat "was not tempted by any diversions" (393), and who had "[n]ever been seen at any sort of evening party" (393) was now invited to a party, thrown to honor his new overcoat (rather than him). When Akaky arrives at the party, everyone "went out at once...to take another look at his overcoat. Akaky Akakievich...could not help but feel pleased when he saw how much they praised his overcoat" (401). Although Akaky's co-workers treat him more as a human being, it is only because of his increased sign-exchange, or material-status, value. In fact, his sign-exchange value is directly proportional to his perceived human worth.

Throughout the story, Akaky's human worth equals the sign-exchange value of his material possessions and/or his exchange value as a laborer. Rather than valuing his human qualities of personality and individuality, the bourgeoisie strip him of his human characteristics by dehumanizing him. The bureaucratic ideology supports the hierarchical socioeconomic system by encouraging inequality, which in turn gives way to a socioeconomic system wherein the proletariat are dehumanized and turned into machines for the benefit of the bourgeoisie. In this classist system, the crass materialist ideology justifies the commodification and exploitation of human beings like Akaky. By exposing the injustice and malevolence...
inherent in such a system, the text evokes—one could hope—compassion for Akaky (and those like him) in the reader; as a result, the text raises its readers' consciousness and begs their critique of such an inhumane ideology and the oppressive system it supports.

Works Cited


In all probability, nearly everyone wants to be a millionaire, or at least a winner. Game shows, horse races, the casinos in Vegas, and state lotteries all rely on probability and the ever-present hope of beating the odds. Be assured that the organizers of such activities are aware of the methods of increasing the odds in their favor, and have made the necessary adjustments. While they have not made winning impossible (such obvious exploitation and manipulation would be bad for business), they have made winning as unlikely an event as they can. Is there any way for the player to beat the odds?

**Nature of the Study: Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

At a mathematical game show with \( n \) players, the host blindfolds the contestants and puts colored hats on their heads. The color of each person’s hat—red or blue—is determined by a coin toss, independently of all the others. After the blindfolds come off, each player can see his teammates’ hats, but not his own. When the host gives a signal, all players simultaneously either guess the color of their own hats or pass. If there are no incorrect guesses and at least one correct guess, the players share a $1,000,000 prize. There is no communication between the players during the show, but they are told the rules in advance and are allowed to discuss their strategy. What should they do to maximize their chances of success?

This problem deals with developing a strategy by which a certain number of players \( (n) \) can increase their odds of winning a shared prize. The contestants are only able to discuss their strategy prior to hat color assignment. After this point, the only information they receive is the color outcomes of all other players, not their own, and an opportunity to guess their own hat color or pass.

The odds of one person guessing his own hat color with others passing is 1 in 2, or \( \frac{1}{2} \) (50%). If all \( n \) players guess, the odds of group success gets worse \( (\frac{1}{2})^n \). In this case, the best probability is with all players passing except one who would guess his/her hat color. Obviously we want to increase our odds of success beyond those of one designated player guessing.

How to increase the odds to better than 50%? A process using binary matrices allows us to improve those odds through a series of simple calculations and a response to the outcome of those calculations. For brevity and simplicity, we will use a smaller number of players and demonstrate the operation of the matrix as it is applied to each player’s observations.

**Methodology**

For a population of \( n = 2 \), we can easily assign binary numbers 01 (vertically assigned as ac) and 10 (bd) for one and two respectively, and construct the first section of the matrix.

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
a & b \\
c & d
\end{pmatrix} = \begin{pmatrix}
0 & 1 \\
1 & 0
\end{pmatrix}
\]
We then assign single digits to the two colors: blue = 0, and red = 1. After the blindfolds are removed, player A mentally assigns the upper register (x) a 0, and observing the color of player B’s hat, assigns either a 0 or 1 to the lower register (y).

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
0 & 1 \\
1 & 0
\end{pmatrix}
\begin{pmatrix}
x \\
y
\end{pmatrix}
= 
\begin{pmatrix}
0 & 1 \\
1 & 0
\end{pmatrix}
\begin{pmatrix}
0 \\
or 1
\end{pmatrix}
\]

The resulting numbers are then calculated according to the matrix multiplication diagram below and entered in the third set of parentheses.

\[
\begin{pmatrix}
a & b \\
c & d
\end{pmatrix}
\begin{pmatrix}
x \\
y
\end{pmatrix}
= 
\begin{pmatrix}
ax + by \\
cx + dy
\end{pmatrix}
\]

Player A then makes a guess or passes, based on the outcome of the numbers in the third set of parentheses as follows: if all are 0s, guess red (1) for self, and if one's own binary number is in the third set of parentheses, guess blue (0) for self, and if there are any other sequences, then player A passes. Player B performs nearly the same operation, instead assigning the lower register (y) a 0 and in the upper register (x) places the color number (1 or 0) which corresponds to the observed color of A's hat.

Using this method, the outcomes and subsequent guesses or passes are calculated for n=2 (See Appendix 1.) and n=3 (See Appendix 2.).

**Analysis of Data**

From these cumulative guesses and passes we can compute the improved odds of success for each population in acquiring at least one correct guess and no wrong guesses.

**Tabulation of Outcomes for n=2, n=3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n</th>
<th>Odds using random, one-player guesses</th>
<th>Odds using binary matrices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 in 2 (0.50)</td>
<td>2 in 4 (0.500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 in 2 (0.50)</td>
<td>6 in 8 (0.750)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 in 2 (0.50)</td>
<td>112 in 128 (0.875)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

Further discovery and development of a spreadsheet program will allow for comparison of the odds increase for larger populations. It has been shown that this method works best with numbers of the form \(2^n-1\). Can we show somehow by manipulating numbers other than these to behave like 3, 7, 15, etc.? Further study using octal, decimal, or hexadecimal matrices, different bases, or other methods may prove fruitful.

Another possible strategy would be to artificially manipulate the number of players to equal one of the \(2^n-1\) numbers by disregarding the appropriate number of players (they would automatically pass every time) so that only 3 or 7 or 15, etc., players are calculated into the matrices in order to maximize the odds. However, it is important to remember that although higher n values mean greater odds of success, they also require a larger, more elaborate matrix, and all of the more elaborate operations which would follow.
From this hypothetical contest, we have seen that one is able to create a method to correlate unrelated known facts, to incorporate them into a mathematical operation, and to arrive at a conclusion which will increase the odds well beyond those of random guessing (here, up to 87.5%). Granted, this is only a hypothetical game show, but in the real world there exist situations in which similar mathematical operations can be applied in order to increase the possibility of success. Care to place a bet?

Acknowledgements and Resources


Private communications with Dr. Bathi Kasturiarachi.
Appendix 1
Three players A & B (n = 2)
Red Hat = 1, Blue Hat = 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Trial #1</th>
<th>Trial #2</th>
<th>Trial #3</th>
<th>Trial #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Binary identity # for player A = \( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \), for player B = \( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \).

**Strategy for “Observation”:** Assign either 0 or 1 to other player by observing the hat color. Always assign 0 to self.

**Strategy for “Decision”:** If outcome is all 0’s, tell game show host you guess 1 (red) for yourself. If outcome is your own binary number, tell game show host you guess 0 (blue) for yourself. All other cases you pass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Observe</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 1 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 1 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 1 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 1 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>pass</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 &amp; 1 \ 1 &amp; 0 \end{pmatrix} ) ( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>( \begin{pmatrix} 0 \ 0 \end{pmatrix} )</td>
<td>red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2
Three players A, B, & C (n = 3)
Red Hat = 1, Blue Hat = 0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Trial #1</th>
<th>Trial #2</th>
<th>Trial #3</th>
<th>Trial #4</th>
<th>Trial #5</th>
<th>Trial #6</th>
<th>Trial #7</th>
<th>Trial #8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Binary identity # for player A = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \], for player B = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \], and player C = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 1 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \].

Strategy for “Observation”: Assign either 0 or 1 to other players by observing their hat color. Always assign 0 to self.

Strategy for “Decision”: If outcome is all 0’s, tell game show host you guess 1 (red) for yourself. If outcome is your own binary number, tell game show host you guess 0 (blue) for yourself. All other cases you pass.

### Player Observe Outcome Decision Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Observe</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0 0 0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 1 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 0 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trial #1:**

- B: \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 0 0 \\ 1 0 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \] = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \] blue

} Lose

- C: \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 1 1 \\ 1 0 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \] = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \] blue

### Trial #2:

- B: \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 0 0 \\ 1 0 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \] = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \] pass

} Win!

- C: \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 1 1 \\ 1 0 1 \\ 0 \end{pmatrix} \] = \[ \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 0 \\ 1 \end{pmatrix} \] blue
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Trial #3: 

\[
\begin{align*}
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\quad &\text{pass} \\
B &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 1 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{blue} \\
C &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
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Trial #4: 

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\begin{align*}
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\quad &\text{red} \\
B &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{pass} \\
C &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{pass}
\end{align*}
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Trial #5: 

\[
\begin{align*}
A &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 1 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{blue} \\
B &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{pass} \\
C &= \begin{pmatrix} 0 & 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 0 & 1 \end{pmatrix} \quad 0 = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \end{pmatrix} \\
\quad &\text{pass}
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Night, by Elie Wiesel, tells the terrifying account of how the Nazi regime persecuted, tortured, and enslaved millions of Jews in the death camps. More specifically, however, this autobiography shows how the author changed, both mentally and physically, during his imprisonment in the concentration camps at Auschwitz, Buna, and Buchenwald. This horrific experience changed his relationship with God and his father, as well as changing his appearance to the point that from the strenuous labor, exhaustion, and starvation, he did not recognize himself in the mirror. The catastrophes he witnessed and the actions of the Nazi Soldiers and Jews changed his perspective on life.

Before coming to the concentration camp, Eliezer was a devout Jew. He constantly studied the Talmud and cabbalistic books, such as the Zohar. In 1941, at the age of twelve, he had already asked his father to find him a master to guide him in his studies of the cabbala, which Jews did not begin to study until thirty years of age. Since he was too young and there were no cabbalists in Sighet, he went and found himself a master, Moshe the Beadle. Elie and Moshe the Beadle would talk for hours in the synagogue about the mysteries and prophecies of the cabbalistic books. Elie wanted to follow God's word. It was in the concentration camps that Wiesel began to doubt God. He wanted to know why God was allowing the extermination of the Jews to happen. At the age of fifteen, he had been witness to many disturbing images, such as hangings and his father's slow death, as well as experiencing excruciating pain, exhaustion, and starvation. He began asking about God, 'Where is he?' (62).

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the prisoners gathered at the place of assembly to praise God. Elie thought to himself as the thousands of prisoners repeated, "Blessed be the Name of the Eternal:" Why, but why should I bless Him? Because He had thousands of children burned in his pits? ... How could I say to Him: "Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory?" (64)

Elie did not know how these men, amidst all their suffering, could still pray to their God, who allowed this enslavement and persecution to happen. He knew what he was thinking was wrong, and he immediately asked God for forgiveness. Yet, he still felt like a stranger to the crowd of men praying to God. He felt alone, "terribly alone in a world without God and without man" (65). Whereas Eliezer grew farther away from God inside the camp, he grew closer to his father.

Elie Wiesel's father ran a shop and was one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Sighet. Members of the community would often consult him about public as well as private matters. He was more concerned with the other people in the community than his own family. He was not well versed in family matters because he was always helping the community. Elie tells about the time when a cousin came to visit them. "She had been staying with us and eating at our table for over a fortnight before my father noticed her presence for the first time" (40). Since Wiesel was studying the Talmud during the day and the cabbala at night, and his father, who never displayed any emotion, was consistently engaged with the problems of the community, he did not have a close relationship with his father. It was in the death camps that he grew closer to his father. Ever since Elie heard the SS officer give the order,
“Men to the left! Women to the right,” he knew that at all costs, he and his father must not become separated (27). As his father’s health began to fail, Wiesel concentrated most of his efforts on keeping his father alive with the hope that they would soon be liberated. At Gleiwitz, Elie saved his father from the selection. His father was told to go to the left, which is where the weak were being sent. Wiesel ran after him, and several SS rushed to bring him back. It created so much commotion that his father was able to sneak over to the right. As his father grew weaker, Elie would bring him coffee and bread, but when he saw other sons trying to get away from their fathers or killing them over a piece of bread, he began to think to himself, “If only I could get rid of this dead weight, so that I could use all my strength to struggle for my own survival, and only worry about myself” (101). As soon as he thought this, he immediately felt ashamed of himself. Upon his imminent death, Elie’s father pleaded Eliezer to stop giving his ration of bread and soup to him. Instead, Elie should take his father’s rations because in the concentration camps there are no fathers. Through all the beatings, the malnutrition, and exhaustion Wiesel continued to help his father fight against death. Even though Elie knew that the chance his father was going to make it was slim, he still had a glimmer of hope that they would be liberated and his father’s health would be rejuvenated. It was an enormous sacrifice, considering Elie’s own problems, such as his swollen foot he had operated on at Buna and his own survival.

Night, by Elie Wiesel, brings out reactions of anger and sorrow as the reader learns of the horrific events that changed the author from his forced entry into the death camps until his liberation from them. As one reads this novel, he must keep reminding himself that this is not fiction. Since the summer of 1944 until three days after he was liberated from Buchenwald on April 11 by the Americans, Elie had not seen himself in a mirror. It was in that mirror in the hospital that he saw the corpse he had become. Wiesel stated, “The look in his eyes, as they stared into mine, has never left me” (109). He cherished life now, more than ever. Before the camp, he lived to study the Talmud and cabbala. In the camp, he lived just to survive. Now, he lived to tell others about his appalling encounter with the death camps. He had fought death and won.

Work Cited

Weakness
Terri Good

My mind has labeled weakness
   A curse upon my race.
A nameless shackle keeping me
   A step behind first place.

But lately I have seen the wise
   Living day to day
Not always finding inner strength
   The strong man's way.

Can weakness be their inner strength?
   Can failure be their prize?
Does weakness have an honored place
   That few may realize?

Strong we want to be today,
   We search in every sense,
To gain a new experience
   Or jump another fence.

Now how to find that inner strength,
   That only finds its guide
In being humble, looking weak,
   And not ashamed you've cried.

A true example Jesus gave
   His strength in being weak
He served the blind, was crucified,
   His nature, true but meek.

But then with courage death to face
   No weakness in our eyes
Knowing hope is not dissolved—
   Beyond the treasure lies.

In her ballad, "Weakness," Terri Good responds to the Christian theology text she read in her Honors Colloquium (HONR 10297) class. Based on the assignment given by Dr. Terry Sosnowski, Good contrasts the value of "strength" with the virtue of "weakness." Good points out that even though the "strength" of being "weak" may be negatively regarded in today's society, we should still follow Jesus Christ's example and strive to serve others with an attitude of meekness and humility.
One Small Step, One Giant Leap: A Narrative on America's Illiteracy Crisis
John A. Huntsman

Despite the brightness of the room, a cold shiver runs up Sandy's back as she enters. Beads of sweat crown her brow, her pulse quickens, and the hairs on her neck leap stiffly to attention. She gauges the huge stranger's distance from about ten to twelve feet away. From the look of him, he'd be able to close that gap in a nanosecond. Her only advantage is that he has not seen her yet. Her mind races, her heart pounds in her chest. Should she have come here? Was this all a big mistake? Should she run, now, as fast and as far as she can from this room and this immense stranger? She can see what he holds in his hand, too, which horrifies her all the more. Blind terror nearly overtakes her as she begins to turn and flee. She glimpses movement by the stranger and slowly turns her head back till their stares lock in a few seconds of shared understanding. The stranger rises, his stature more foreboding than she had imagined, and closes the gap between them by a third. Steeling herself, she bravely steps toward him; this was, after all, her idea, and she'll be damned if she is going to give up without a fight. Another step and they are face to face. His 6'6" frame looms over her as he raises his hand and speaks, at last. "Hi, I'm Bob," he says, pumping her hand firmly as he speaks. Releasing her hand, he points with his right hand toward his left, which is still firmly clutching its enigmatic contents. "I'm going to be your reading tutor," he says through a grin, still pointing toward the object in his left hand, "and this is the first book we'll read together."

The dismal, disenfranchised life of an illiterate person is a frustrating and difficult existence. Illiteracy, even with all the misery it purveys and the breadth of its effect, seems to be linked to a few common factors. They are: the inability to derive meaning from written language due to neurological or cognitive dysfunctions; the age-old debate over phonics versus "look and say" learning; and, a lack of motivation for literacy, linked to apathy and fear, which is perpetuated from one generation to the next.

After overcoming her initial terror, Sandy sat next to Bob, staring blankly into the open book, her mind adrift to a long-forgotten place of silent suffering and isolation. The memories came flooding back from that awful era, of the frequent embarrassments and constant self-loathing, all stemming from her inability to make sense of the mish-mash of vowels, consonants, and punctuation sprawled out before her in black and white. She was amazed and saddened that her seventeen-year hiatus from academia had provided her neither a means for triumphing over her handicap, nor deadened the stinging memories of those past failures. Her teachers thought she was being a "smart-aleck," but it was more like a "short-circuit," Sandy would explain to them. Sandy realizes now that she was, and probably still is, dyslexic.

Most people can associate certain groupings of letters with their corresponding sounds, and can, in turn, form letters into groups to make syllables, and eventually, words and sentences. When one cannot accomplish this, often it is due to a dysfunction of neurological or cognitive processes. Most people are familiar with the term "dyslexia," which is one example of these types of dysfunctions. The existence of these "short circuits" in comprehension becomes easier to understand when the brain's intricate system of interpreting information is better understood. One researcher, Saul Kassin (60), writes about how the steps necessary just to read and repeat the written word "ball" are amazingly complex. The eyes send the impulse to the
visual cortex, then from there, it travels to the angular gyrus, where it is recorded, then to Wernicke's area for understanding, then to Broca's area, where a message is sent to the motor cortex to make your tongue, lips, and larynx operate to repeat the word aloud. This is what it takes just to read the simple word "ball." Dyslexia, while relatively common, is just one of many of these cognitive and neurological obstacles, and may be more treatable than others. Imagine how perplexing this type of handicap must be to those afflicted by it.

For Sandy, as a child, the frequent changing of schools had a disastrous effect. Because her father's job meant transferring to different schools, she never seemed to be exposed to the same reading curriculum long enough to be able to benefit from its use, much less master it. One school would stress the grouping of letters to make sounds. The next would make her try to memorize specific words by their size and shape, to be resurrected later when viewed in another piece of writing, even if a definition could not be recalled. The vast differences in these modes of education served to confound her even further. Even groups of teachers within the respective schools argued the validity of on method over the other. To this day, she wasn't sure which method was better.

Still another potential cause for illiteracy is the age-old debate over phonics versus "look and say" methods of learning. A University of Florida researcher reports that one method for literacy education is "decoding," which stresses recognition of letter formations and their corresponding sounds. Students are taught to sound out words, phoneme by phoneme, or as most people would say "phonetically." According to this study, the argument many have against this type of instruction is that it doesn't give students an instantly utilizable vocabulary or the definitions of the "sounded-out" words. Also, English, many argue, is not very phonetic, in spite of its alphabetical roots. The "look and say" critics' main concern main concern is that students' vocabularies may not be sufficient, nor able to be increased quickly enough, to keep up with the lexicon of ever-advancing texts. U.S. Senator Edward Zorinsky of Nebraska, in a 1986 Time magazine article by Ezra Bowen, criticized the "look and say" method, saying that many children "are not learning to read and therefore not learning much of anything ( )."

For years now, Sandy had fooled everyone from her many bosses to her own unsuspecting daughter. She'd had her share of close calls, though. There was the time she was supposed to help with the school play her daughter was performing in; she said she was too busy learning a new system at work. There were innumerable incidents at work that she'd made excuses for. But this time, excuses weren't going to cut it; she was going to have to learn the new computer system that was being installed or else find a different job, which would, undoubtedly, mean a lower-paying job. Still, as an adult, she didn't want to be sucked into some demeaning program that took her all the way back to reading first grade books. She wanted a program that would address her specific literacy goals, and yet, would not be demoralizing in its approach. She had moments of resolve in the past, but this time there could be no wavering. Terrified or not, this time she simply had to learn to read.

The third common denominator for illiteracy, it seems, is an overall lack of motivation for literacy, linked to apathy and fear, which is passed on to future generations. The University of Florida researcher cited earlier, makes the "lack of motivation" point in her study of the difference in U.S. literacy rates versus those in Japan, where over 90 percent of Japanese mothers read a great deal to their pre-school children, and where, subsequently illiteracy is practically non-existent. She theorizes that Japanese mothers, while they may not know any more about neurological or cognitive disorders, may know more about motivation, at least where their children's reading is concerned. Many illiterate adults in the U.S., however, don't convey the importance of learning to their children, often because they have not gleaned its benefits and rewards for themselves. This motivational breakdown could be due to any combination of factors, but one prominent one is fear. People fear the unknown, they fear change, and they fear failure, both past and present. Illiterate adults fear a reading program that doesn't meet their particular needs and expectations. The Program Administrator's Manual for the Ohio Department of Education's Adult Basic and Literacy Education lists some primary concerns of potential literacy program candidates. It states that adults participate in literacy programs for 1) educational or job advancement, 2) self-improvement, 3) literacy development, 4) economic need, 5) family responsibilities, 6) diversion, 7) launching into a new life, 8) urging of others, and 9) community and church involvement. Reasons for not participating are due to 1) low perception of need, 2) situational barriers,
3) perceived effort (school is difficult), and 4) dislike of school. Competent instructors, relevant curricula, and encouraging dialogue can go a long way in alleviating fears of program participants. Congress, in 1993, directed the National Institute for Literacy to query adult learners across the country regarding their specific wants and needs from an adult literacy program. Their common responses were: access to information to orient themselves in the world; a confident voice with which to express ideas and opinions; the ability to solve problems and make decisions without enlisting the help of others; and, learning how to learn to be able to keep up technology in an ever-changing world. By and large, these are pretty reasonable requests, and when addressed by a competent, customized adult literacy program, fears would most likely be diminished and enrollment rates increased.

Much work is needed to help solve the literacy crisis in America. Those who need help must recognize the need and ask for help. Funds must be allocated, curricula must be augmented, teachers must be trained, volunteers must be enlisted, and barriers must be removed. A wise person once said that even a very long journey is begun by just the first step. However, it is up to each one of us, whether or not to take that first step.
A Man at the Range
Joshua Matthew Keane

The choices in life seemed simple to me as a little boy. As an Irish Catholic American with eight sisters and four brothers, my world was small but overwhelming. When I say Irish Catholic, I mean it: St. Patrick and Mary everywhere, Notre Dame football, Irish proverbs plastered the walls, praying the rosary daily, catholic school, and, of course, potatoes with every meal. My family watched constantly as I practiced the Mass, with saltines the host, water the wine, and the priesthood my dream.

Then came adolescence. But it was not alone. Things changed for me. We still had potatoes with every meal and prayed the rosary every day, but my world expanded, my dreams changed. Suddenly, growing up in Canton, Ohio during the seventies and eighties became living in a new wide world of possibility for a lifetime. In my new confusion, not knowing my future, a ray of hope came home on leave. During my teenage years, it was my brother, Jim, I looked up to the most. Consequently, when my brother walked through the door with his class A uniform on, my ignorance of my future disappeared. I never really considered the Army before then. On that day, that very day, consumed by patriotism, I knew my future.

Over the next couple of years, these feelings developed greatly into not only a sense of duty but also of anticipation. At the age of seventeen I left for basic training. During basic training I was transformed into a person with responsibility, knowledge, devotion, honor, and an unbelievable sense of pride. Then came the hard part, AIT (advanced individual training). Becoming a Combat Medic in the U.S. Army is a formidable task, so these were defining times in my life. My sense of duty drove me to excel, and I came through it all with a great sense of pride and accomplishment.

When I came home on leave, wearing the same class A uniform my brother had worn years ago, I knew I was a man. How wrong I was. I was home for a couple of weeks, and when I returned to duty, it was in Korea. I was assigned to the 560th Ambulance Company. I never imagined another place could be so different! The people, the country, the language, and culture were the definition of foreign to me. I drove an ambulance in support of units all over South Korea, one month here, one month there.

The most determining day of my life would take place on the edge of a river on the opposite side of the earth from my Irish Catholic American home. It was December, 1993, and it was ten degrees below zero that day. I was supporting part of the largest FTX (field training exercise) I had known to date. Early that morning, Sgt. Washington and I drove through the mountains to our staging area. Just after we arrived—I will never forget this amazing and rare site—six Apache helicopters came over the mountain behind us and unleashed a torrent of explosive fire on plywood targets in front of us. Then it happened. A short time later that morning, we got the call. An Abrams tank had rolled over in our sector, not far from our position. There was a snake of diesel and oil slithering down river from the overturned beast. We quickly called for a MEDEVAC helicopter, grabbed our gear, and rushed into the frigid water. The hatch and only access was submerged under water; crimson bubbled up slowly from beneath the surface. Sgt. Washington, without hesitation, dove in. I, too, dove into the burning sensation of that frozen water.
The moment I saw the carnage inside of that vehicle, that freezing, burning sensation parted and a sick, gut-twisting sensation overtook me. There were three men inside, all beaten, broken, and bloodied. The smell, that horrifying smell, of blood and diesel combined into a smell that seemed to penetrate my very soul, and is there yet today. The reality of that day, not my training, not my scores on tests, but the reality that those soldiers' lives depended on me, that reality was mine in that moment and forever more. We had to save them, through the horror, the smell, the sight, the fear, they needed us to save them. That we did.

That day, that overwhelming day, I learned something life altering for me. Being a man has nothing to do with what we know, what we feel, who we are, our ability, but everything to do with how we use these things to help others and how we use these things to live life with honor and responsibility. The world closed in on that little Irish Catholic boy who thought he was a man and the door to a whole new world opened for the man who knew that life was how we affected others. The illusions of the past were gone, only the manly realism of that day existed.
I was attending a pageant not too long ago when the contestant field had been narrowed down to twelve young ladies. In the final round, these women had to take turns answering questions chosen at random. One contestant, who was fairing quite well up to this point, was asked, "What are your opinions of women who decide to have both children and a career?" She answered, "I don't think women should choose to do both. Children of career mothers do not receive enough attention and turn out to be rebellious. We need more women to stay at home and concentrate on raising a family. Thank you." Let me say that was the wrong answer to tell the judges who were looking for a twenty-first century role model who believes she doesn't have to choose between two roles, but rather may live them both successfully in harmony.

This notion of both/and vision is further discussed by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, a literary feminist scholar, who says women no longer have to make either-or decisions regarding self-identity. Moreover, she proposes that women have many different experiences that influence their complex characters. She says it is damaging to live in a world of dualism where one side has to be valorized over another (DuPlessis 132). DuPlessis' theory is in distinct opposition to what the pageant contestant believed, but it is an idea that many twentieth century novelists have explored. In fact, Maxine Hong Kingston is a great example of an author whose autobiographical novel, The Woman Warrior, supports DuPlessis' desire for a "both/and vision."

In her autobiography, Kingston, who is an Asian American writer, explains how she spent her childhood and adolescent years believing that she had to choose one life role over another as she struggled to form an identity. In The Woman Warrior, she illustrates the two dichotomies that existed in her life, which were mother/slave versus "woman warrior" and American main culture versus Chinese subculture. It isn't until the final section of the novel that Kingston fully reveals what she has learned as an adult and explains her decision not to choose one role over the other. Instead, she realizes that her identity is influenced but not determined by what she has been taught by her mother and what she has experienced herself. She discovers she can be both a mother and a "woman warrior" and live an American life influenced by a Chinese subculture. To further solidify Kingston's example of "both/and vision," it is important to take a closer look at least one of these oppositions: mother versus "woman warrior."

In the opening narrative, Kingston tells the "talk story" of "No Name Woman," a story her mother told her at puberty to warn her of the consequences of sex before marriage. The tale is about Kingston's paternal aunt who got pregnant when her husband had been gone for years. The villagers were keeping track of her pregnancy and raided her house on the night the baby was to be born. "At first they threw mud and rocks at the house. Then they threw eggs and began slaughtering our stock," Kingston's mother remembered. "Your aunt gave birth in the pigsty that night. The next morning when I went for water, I found her and the baby plugging up the family well" (4-5). The story Kingston's mother told her about her aunt's pregnancy was meant to teach her that sex was a dirty thing not to be enjoyed. Furthermore, feminist literary scholar Sidonie Smith maintains the story also taught Kingston at a young age that the female body was created for only one reason: to be contracted to a male authority through marriage and then to
carry legitimate sons. If a woman decided to use her body to entertain strangers and not to provide sons for the line of descent, her community would undoubtedly punish her (Smith 1119).

Kingston's mother finishes the "talk story" by telling her, "Don't let your father know that I told you. He denies her. Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born. The villagers are watchful" (5). This short paragraph reinforces the idea that Kingston is growing up in a patriarchal society that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles. It sets up for the reader that Kingston's mother believes women are in the position to be forgotten if they make a mistake or defy what their culture expects of them. She teaches her daughter that women should not be assertive or self-confident, but rather they should be self-effacing and submissive to the societal demands of the villagers (Tyson 85).

After telling Kingston about the story of her aunt, teaching her the responsibilities of being female, Kingston's mother tells her the story of Fa Mu Lan, a woman avenger, in the second narrative, "White Tigers." It is no accident that Kingston juxtaposes these two stories back to back, representing the dichotomy of mother/slave versus female warrior. The mere act of writing these stories in this sequence reveals the intensity of Kingston's struggle throughout childhood and adolescence to resolve the conflict that these victim/heroine stories created (Smith 1118). Kingston opens up this second narrative by saying, "When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves" (19). However, it is at this point she begins to tell the story of Fa Mu Lan, whose character she now takes over. The narrator leaves her family to go into the mountains and receive an education from an older couple. She spends twelve years training to become a warrior, and then returns home to fight a battle against the barons who are exploiting and terrorizing the community. She does have a child during the battle, but she kept him for only a month before sending him to live with her parents-in-law -- thus signifying she could not be a mother and a warrior at the same time. When the battle ended, the narrator returned to her parents-in-law, put her warrior days behind her, and had more sons for the family lineage.

In the last section of this novel, Kingston tries to decipher the meaning of her past, her subjectivity, and her desire (Smith 1134). She is able to find the reason and meaning behind her beliefs by articulating her interpretations of her mother's talk stories through telling her own talk story, The Woman Warrior. Kingston realizes that she can be a different person than her mother was, she can interpret her mother's stories in ways that make sense to her life, and she can retell those stories how she believes they should be told. Therefore, in conclusion, and in reality, Kingston was able find an identity where the roles of mother and "woman warrior" co-exist instead of existing as binary opposites. Continuing her autobiography into her adult life, Kingston became a wife and a mother, and, at the same time, a professor and respected author. Her creativity teaches readers in a unique way that a woman does not have to choose between a career and motherhood. In fact, the stories that Kingston's mother told her growing up, although conflicting, helped her to develop a strong aesthetic on which to base her writing.

Works Cited


When asked by her English Studies (ENG 30001) professor Dr. Jeannette E. Riley to analyze a specific text using a Marxist critical approach, Kelly Lohman chose F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz." In this essay, Lohman explores the socioeconomic injustices that existed between the bourgeois upper-class and the poverty-stricken lower class of the American 1920's. She critiques the symbolic images of wealth and power that continually surface in the story's plot, and ultimately concludes that the "commodification of humanity" has disastrous, dehumanizing effects.

When examined through a Marxist and materialist perspective, F. Scott Fitzgerald's short story "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" depicts the destructive nature of the indulgent 1920's American socioeconomic structure. While classism shapes Fitzgerald's text, the story objectively critiques such a structure, revealing its detriment to the human spirit. For instance, Critic H. Alan Wycherley believes that the socioeconomic structure of the 1920's directly influenced all of Fitzgerald's writings, and that in this story, "once again appears the theme of the attractions of wealth, here carried to the level of science fiction" (262). Although Fitzgerald did not directly associate himself with Marxism, he seems to have intentionally crafted "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" to challenge the class struggle and commodification that plagued the 1920's. The characters' motivation for the power implied within wealth creates a microcosm within the story, representing the 1920's socioeconomic structure as a whole. Greed not only creates the classes within the story, but also dehumanizes the characters, causing them to judge each other solely on economic worth. The story's linguistic devices display this dehumanization and show the undeniable link between socioeconomic conditions and human consciousness.

Characterization is asserted as the story's most striking element, emphasizing the dehumanization of individuals through their positioning within a socioeconomic structure. As the story progresses, the characters develop into little more than representations of their social class. The characters who belong to the bourgeois shamelessly flaunt their wealth, while the proletariat characters cater to the upper class's every whim, in pathetic hope of one day achieving a similar status. Such is the case with the story's main character, John T. Unger, a member of the proletariat who visits the estate of the Washington's, a wealthy family who represent the bourgeoisie. In contrast, John originates from the town of Hades, perhaps symbolizing the hellishness of his proletariat lifestyle. Fitzgerald characterizes John as naïve and simple-minded, possessing a great admiration for the wealth he will never possess. John abides by the idea that, "The richer a fella is, the better I like him," and in turn, devalues himself for his own shameful proletarian status (77). John's character shows how the socioeconomic structure breeds discontent within individuals of lower classes. His attitude toward the bourgeoisie expresses paradox because he finds both comfort and frustration within the 1920's socioeconomic structure. Because of ideas that the bourgeoisie has imposed upon him, John admires his oppressors, thus devaluing his own life.

Also, John's constant hope of attaining the bourgeoisie's wealth causes him to waste his youth, always hoping to achieve a higher status. He simply cannot find contentment in his current economic situation. According to the story's narrator it is because of John's, "...felicity as well as insufficiency that he can never live in the present but must always be measuring up the day against his own radiantly imagined future" (90). Thus, John continues to feebly adhere to the bourgeoisie's commands, hoping that his devotion to them will earn him a place within their elite ranks. As displayed through John's example, the proletariat as a whole can never appreciate the present because of their discontent with their economic situation.

Such discontent explains why the proletariat continue to admire those who oppress them. In essence, the higher classes represent the only goal for
which John and the rest of the proletariat have. Paradoxically, the bourgeoisie give proletariat existence a false purpose through devaluation. Ultimately, John's admiration for those who keep him subservient displays the Marxist belief in the presence of a false consciousness among society's lower classes. John possesses the misinformed belief that he actually has a chance to rise above his current status. Overall, John's character shows how socioeconomic structure has a direct influence upon the beliefs and actions of the proletariat masses.

Less obviously, socioeconomic conditions have an equally detrimental effect upon the consciousness of the bourgeoisie. The character of Percy Washington best displays how the warped consciousness of the bourgeoisie keeps the proletariat in submission. Percy's wealth prompts him to view all individuals, including John, according to how they can further his already excessive wealth. Fitzgerald characterizes Percy as an arrogant and cunning individual who alienates others on the basis of their lack of wealth. Percy takes great pleasure in his own alienation, "keeping aloof from the other boys at his school" and being "entirely uncommunicative concerning his home or his family" (77). Percy's bourgeoisie status isolates him from his peers because he views himself as superior to them. He possesses the standard bourgeoisie belief that the individuals of the proletariat exist solely for his benefit, and he treats them in any manner he pleases. Thus, Percy's character shows the tension between the commodification of humanity and the alienation that it creates.

When viewed through a Marxist perspective, Percy embodies the beliefs of his class as a whole, in that the preservation of his wealth assumes top priority within his consciousness. He stops at nothing to protect his family's estate, even if it means sacrificing a proletariat life. He simplistically believes that the ends of his destructive efforts to achieve wealth will justify his means. Percy supports his father's belief that "Cruelty doesn't exist where self-preservation is involved," displaying how his treatment of the proletariat depends only upon how they can enhance or diminish his wealth (95). Percy's beliefs perfectly illustrate the Marxist principle that classism determines consciousness and causes individuals to be viewed as commodities. Also, Percy's suicide at the story's end displays the Marxist belief that commodification of human lives prompts the human spirit to self-destruction.

Imagery within Fitzgerald's story also displays the detriment of class struggle to the human spirit. The detail and extravagance depicted within certain images in the story represents how the bourgeoisie's greed keeps the proletariat in constant subservience. Certain overpowering images of wealth and power also assert how material possessions assume a greater value to the characters than human life. For example, the image of the Washington's' prized diamond becomes the story's unifying element, tying together the story's themes of commodification and class struggle. The narrator describes the diamond as being grossly oversized, which displays the excessive enormity of the Washington's and the bourgeoisie's wealth. The diamond takes on grand proportions, and as Percy proudly describes, "The mountain was a diamond - it was literally nothing else but solid diamond" (87). This image becomes the story's key symbol for the bourgeoisie's intimidating wealth. Each of the story's characters, bourgeoisie and proletariat alike, covet the diamond's priceless extravagance. For members of the lower classes, the diamond looms as a false symbol of the ostentatious wealth that they hope to eventually achieve. For the bourgeoisie, the diamond represents the immensity of the power which they wield over the proletariat. The socioeconomic structure within the story simply prevents the proletariat from ever achieving the wealth that the diamond represents. The diamond, and all other riches, always loom large and visible in the distance, but they will forever remain just out of reach for the proletariat, reinforcing the idea of a false consciousness.

Abiding by the Marxist ideas concerning the corruptive nature of wealth, the diamond's excessive size eventually prevents the Washington's from hiding it any longer, and they decide that they must destroy it. However, because they know that they cannot retain their socioeconomic status without the diamond's presence, they decide to commit a collective suicide during the simultaneous destruction of their precious jewel. Ironically, the Washington's' most valuable possession ends up "possessing" them, and the diamond's destruction dictates their own fates. Their suicides represent a useless attempt to gain control over the wealth that has controlled them for so long. Moreover, their suicides also display the Marxist idea that even the bourgeoisie are not free from the trappings of an oppressive socioeconomic structure. In keeping with Marxist ideals, the diamond's destruction at the story's end suggests that the capitalist system itself will eventually self-destruct. The destruction of the story's most powerful image represents how the bourgeoisie will eventually become too powerful for its own good and how power will inevitably turn
Irony is a final aspect of the story that asserts Fitzgerald's idea that the 1920's socioeconomic structure deprived the human spirit. Irony lies within the bourgeoisie's inability to appreciate their economic situation, and their constant fear of the destruction of their wealth and power. The Washingtons are even willing to "sacrifice some of their best friends" in order to keep their riches a secret (101). Their wealth isolates them from the rest of society because of the paranoia that their diamond creates for them. The Washingtons' need for wealth eventually overshadows their need for affection from other human beings. Yet, even when they acquire more wealth than any other member of their community, they still cannot live in peace because they must devote their lives to protecting their diamond. The Washingtons' situation can be viewed as ironic because it shows how spiritual emptiness festered within the economic goals of the 1920's. Every character in the story becomes a slave to the wealth that is supposed to bring him or her ultimate freedom and happiness. The irony of the bourgeoisie's unhappiness becomes especially evident at the story's end when Percy's father tries to bribe God with the diamond to satisfy his own selfish wish to remain a part of the bourgeoisie. With his arms outstretched toward the heavens, he begs that "matters should be as they were yesterday at this hour and that they should so remain" (111). These pleas are ironic because they highlight the degradation of the human spirit that resulted from the greed-ridden 1920's socioeconomic structure. Even the Washington's, powerful members of the bourgeoisie, cannot exist without fearing their economic future. At the story's end, desperation and fear reduces Percy's father to little more than a "magnificently mad" individual (110). This irony displays the Marxist belief that class struggles lead to a destruction of the human spirit, even if one does indeed achieve their desired status.

"The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" reveals much about the hidden trappings within the 1920's socioeconomic structure. Fitzgerald's short story shows how external circumstances can gradually work their way into the human spirit, and the diamond represents the fragility of even the most well established wealth. Fitzgerald's writing itself, as well as the issues his story tackles, show how a socioeconomic structure may often discreetly influence personal beliefs. His stories also assert the Marxist belief that class struggle dilutes the souls of both those who possess power and those who strive for that power. However, such beliefs should not only be applied to Fitzgerald's story or even the time period in which it was written. Fitzgerald's story prompts readers to compare the 1920's socioeconomic structure to the current structure of American society. It remains to be seen whether or not the current socioeconomic system will collapse in a similar manner as the system in Fitzgerald's story. As displayed within Fitzgerald's story, this fate lies within whether or not human beings continue to choose to exploit each other for wealth and place faith within the fragility of material possessions.

Works Cited


Phthalates: A Threat to Human Health  
Gabrielle Lorenzo

“Phthalates: A Threat to Human Health” was written for Professor Sandy Muirhead-Gould’s College English II (ENG 10002) class in which students were asked to write a research paper on an environmental problem and to offer an effective solution. Gabrielle Lorenzo’s essay suggests that phthalates, a toxin found in a variety of consumer products, might cause cancer. By incorporating credible outside sources to support her claims, Lorenzo demonstrates how phthalates are a potentially hazardous substance, and may need to be banned in order to reassure consumers of their safety.

Millions of people risk their lives every day, although many are unaware of such risks. Toxins are present in air, water, food and even the ground. Some of these toxins are used in common goods and may have harmful effects on the human body. One such toxin, phthalates, has been the subject of an ongoing debate within the scientific community. Recent studies have linked phthalates to atypical development in children (Raloff, “New” 1).

Although phthalates have been in use for the last few decades, their effects on reproduction have only recently been considered. Phthalates are used in a variety of products, including cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, vinyl flooring, toys, detergents, and food packaging (Knight 2). Phthalates have been under scrutiny since 1998 when the US Consumer Product Safety Commission asked toy, pacifier, and medical supply manufacturers to stop using most of these chemicals in production (Raloff, “New” 1). The cause for alarm was a study that linked cancer and organ damage to heavy phthalate exposure. Also of concern was the possible correlation between phthalate use and abnormal reproductive development (Raloff, “Girls” 1).

Consequent research has shown that phthalates may cause reproductive abnormalities in both male and female development. Puerto Rico has recently seen a rise in premature thelarche (breast development) in girls as young as 6 months. Sixty-eight percent of these girls had detectable levels of phthalates in their blood, compared to only 6% of normally developed girls (Raloff, “Girls” 1). While the study does not prove that phthalates are responsible for premature development, their presence offers the most likely explanation so far.

In addition to possible links to abnormal development in human females, research has shown phthalates to affect reproductive development in studies on male rats. As reported by the online book, Our Stolen Future, a test conducted by EPA scientist Earl Gray has shown that the male reproductive development of rats is “acutely sensitive to some phthalates.” One phthalate, (diethylhexyl phthalate or DEHP) was shown to damage Sertoli Cells when metabolized by the body. These cells are responsible for production of sperm and, once damaged, can result in a low sperm count when adulthood is reached (Colburn 2).

Another study conducted at the Chemical Institute of Technology showed abnormalities in the male reproductive health of fetal rats after the pregnant mother was given DEHP. The findings show that fetal exposure to phthalates caused epididymal and testicular abnormalities (“Phthalates” 2). This research shows a correlation between pregnant females’ exposure to phthalates and its effects on their offspring. Pregnant human females can be exposed to phthalates through a variety of products including cosmetics, baby teethers and IV bags (Colburn 3). With phthalate use as common as it is, such exposure is nearly unavoidable.

With several studies linking phthalates to abnormal reproductive development, the safest solution is to issue a nationwide ban on the phthalate use in all products while further research is conducted. Such a ban is currently advocated by the National Environmental Trust (NET). NET is a firm believer in the Precautionary Principle, which states that “when an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not
fully established scientifically. In this context, the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof" ("National" 1). Essentially, the Precautionary Principle states that if a substance is suspected of being harmful to mankind, safety measures should be taken to minimize exposure and risk of health. In regards to phthalates, one such safety measure is a ban.

To determine phthalates' role in atypical reproductive development, a control group must exist to compare sexual development of those who are not exposed to phthalates to the development of those who are. In the tests in which animals are used, the subjects have little exposure to phthalates, so the control group occurs naturally. To compare "normal" development to that of development affected by phthalates, animals are intentionally exposed to the substance (Colburn 2). In the human populace, there is not currently a group of humans that has not been exposed to phthalates. Because of the rate of current use, it is impossible to create a control group of humans who have not been exposed to phthalates. Banning phthalates would effectively control phthalate exposure to enable creation of a control group. The necessary comparison of the development of those exposed to phthalates and those who are not exposed to phthalates would be impossible without a ban.

Also, if phthalates are proven to be responsible for reproductive health problems, a ban on their use now would effectively remove them from human contact, thereby lowering the risk of further damage. Recent studies have shown phthalates to be a probable cause of reproductive abnormality (Colburn 2). When there is probable cause to suspect a product of causing such defects, the only cautious solution is to remove that product from public consumption until the risk can be confirmed or denied. There is a definite chance that phthalates are unsafe for human consumption: is this a chance that industries are willing to take? Immediate removal of phthalates by a ban on their use is the most comprehensive approach to ensuring human safety.

Proponents of phthalates would argue that their use over the course of several decades with no confirmed hazards is sufficient proof of their safety. The American Council of Science and Health claims that the "absence of data" proves the safety of phthalates (Colburn 3). Absence of data does not prove without a doubt that phthalates are safe; it merely proves that there has been insufficient research to come to a definite conclusion in regard to safety. Many ancient Greeks used the logic of absence of data to refute Pythagoras' belief that the earth is round. His belief has since been proven, showing that an absence of data is not necessarily an indication that an idea is true or false. The argument that phthalates are safe because of an absence of confirmed data is illogical.

Based on the absence of data argument against a ban on phthalate use, the solution may be proposed to assume that phthalates are safe, and continue their use without further investigation into the matter. The reasoning behind such a solution is based on the assumption that lack of existing data proves the safety of phthalates. Should phthalates prove to be a health risk, such a solution would not have addressed the problem. Conversely, those who support a ban could take the stance that since phthalates have not been proven to be safe, they can assume that they are not. Such reasoning is hypocritical and does not support actual fact, but is rather a cyclical reasoning that benefits only the interests of one group or the other. Continued use of phthalates without further research would be irresponsible on the part of the scientific world.

Another possible solution, then, is to monitor continued phthalate use until studies can prove that they have negative effects on human reproductive development. This solution solves the problem of determining whether phthalates are safe, yet it does not take any precautionary measures regarding their use in the mean time. If serious risks are proven, the public will have been exposed to phthalates even with the current plausible cause for concern over their use. This would likely result in public outrage and legal action if the government allowed the use of phthalates without any type of proven safety. Until there is no question about the safety of phthalate use, it cannot ethically be conditioned in products commonly used by consumers. Again, the only viable solution is the combination of a temporary ban on phthalates and further research into their effects on human reproductive development.

Those who support phthalate use would object to a ban on their use by claiming that finding alternatives would be costly and time consuming. Toy manufacturers and retailers apparently do not share this objection. Following the CPSC's recommendation that phthalates be removed from children's products, many companies voluntarily did so in the interests of public safety. Companies such as Disney, Evenflo, Gerber, Hasbro and Mattel halted the use of phthalates in their...
production of children's toys and teethers ("National" 2). Although switching to other substances may be more expensive or time-consuming, this is preferable to risking the safety of the consumer. As a plasticizer, polyethylene can be substituted safely for phthalates, and there are substances that could easily replace phthalates in other uses while still preserving human safety. Human safety is essential to industry not only for moral reasons, but for public relations as well. This safety is only possible if phthalate use is stopped while further research can be conducted.

In this respect, perhaps the strongest reason for a ban on phthalates is to reassure the consumers of their safety. With many doubts circulating about phthalates, the consumer should be justifiably apprehensive about using products that contain them. Until phthalates are given a definite mark of safety, consumers need the psychological reassurance of safety that a ban would provide. If phthalate use is banned temporarily, the public will be ensured of its own safety, and is more likely to resume using products with phthalates if they are then proven safe. With the primary motivation for a ban being concern for human safety, such an action is likely to be accepted and supported by the majority of the public.

Therefore, the first step in assuring public safety and psychological reassurance is placing a ban on phthalates in all products. Industry has been responsive to voluntarily ceasing phthalate use in children's toys and teethers, so it seems plausible that they would comply with a legal ban on their use in all products. Considering the financial strain this may put on industries, tax breaks should be issued to companies that comply with the ban, while those who resist should be fined or otherwise penalized. While tax breaks may reduce the money brought in by Federal and State governments, the money made by the imposed fines can replenish most of these funds. Financially, this would help make a ban on phthalates a relatively low-cost solution.

In conjunction with the ban, unbiased research into the effects of phthalates on human reproductive development should be conducted. To provide the most accurate testing, both governmental and independent studies should be conducted. By using a variety of different research teams, the combined results of testing will be more likely to present an accurate, unbiased decision as to whether or not phthalates are safe. During all phases of testing, quarterly reports must be made available to the public. Under public scrutiny, scientists should be less likely to conduct biased testing, and the public will be kept informed of their progress, thus satisfying the need for psychological reassurance. Since phthalates are used in common products, the consumer also has a right to be kept informed in all matters pertaining to their safety.

With the combined ban and established research criteria, such a solution is the safest, most inclusive one. Since the ban is temporary, it does not immediately condemn phthalates, but rather curbs their use until a conclusion can be reached. Economically, the reward and penalty system will ease the burden of implementing the solution on industries. The solution also addresses concerns of public health and safety. When considering all aspects of the problem, such a solution seems to address each one.

The National Environmental Trust simplifies the phthalate situation by asking one question: "Do we want to risk our children's health as industry and government agencies conduct months or years of further testing on a chemical additive whose presence is clearly unneeded in toys?" ("National" 1). This issue is not about the interests of industry or the economy; it is about protecting mankind from a potentially hazardous substance. The current uncertainty regarding the effects of phthalates on human reproductive development is just cause for doing what is necessary to preserve human safety. In light of recent studies, phthalates have shown to be a very reasonable cause for alarm. Precautions taken now could have a beneficial impact on the health and well-being of future generations. In order to ensure that human health is not being jeopardized, scientists and industries must stop focusing on their own interests and act conservatively by treating the situation as though phthalates pose a danger until proven otherwise.
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Although Mark Twain's intentions for writing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* have been highly debated since its first publication, at the very least, his novel exposes controversial social issues of the mid-1800s. Many modern-day readers define Twain as a blatant racist, whereas others defend him and his "classic" by labeling it as an accurate representation of the time period in which it was written. Even if a growing number of scholars do not consider *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* a literary classic, its value as a historical classic is indisputable. As a Postbellum novel set decades before the Civil War, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* accurately mirrors not only southern culture, but also the obvious internal conflict Twain personally battled as he wrote it. Most of all, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* unveils the American South's reliance on African Americans to not only help create its literature, but also, more importantly, its identity as a whole.

Internationally acclaimed African American author Toni Morrison asserts that all American literature is "reflexive" of not only the author, but also the culture and context in which it was written. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison states, "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (17). As a product of society, an individual naturally replicates the attitudes and mindsets of that society. Therefore, since culturally conscientious individuals create literature, their work also displays the conventions of the society in which it was written. The presence of African Americans has molded this nation, and in turn, shaped the literature she produced. According to Morrison, this "Africanist presence was crucial to [American's] sense of Americanness," and American literature such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is proof (6).

Morrison also claims that "[t]he fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious" (Morrison 17). In other words, when Twain created this novel, Jim's character served a much greater purpose than to simply give Huck a companion. His every word and action resulted from a conscious, thoughtful decision made by Twain. In this way, the inconsistencies displayed through Jim, Huck, and even the plot focus in general reflect an obvious uncertainty in the mind of its creator. Twain's discrepancies indicate ambiguity and confusion, which are exactly what America experienced at the end of the 19th century as she adjusted to the liberation of millions of slaves. Considering all this, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* signifies how America was structured not only before, but also after the Civil War.

Even though many American authors deny the Africanist personae portrayed in their works, Morrison argues that even an absence—especially an absence—of African Americans in a work, or portion of a work, makes a statement not only about the author’s intent, but also especially the culture in which it was created. Numerous times throughout the novel, Twain conveniently removes Jim from the picture. For instance, Jim "disappears" directly after two "gentlemen," who are looking for five runaway slaves, approach Huck and Jim on the river. When Huck struggles about whether or not to turn Jim in, he faces a conscious internal battle about what Jim is—a slave or a man. His decision to remain faithful to his fellow escapee and lie about seeing any Blacks along the river indicates his decision. Then the conditioning of culture, Huck's and Twain's, surfaces when Huck second-
white man, Tom uses his status for
symbolizing cause Huck to revere him and his opinions. Tom's sophisticated education and
those commands respect and reverence from not need from him that inquiry, but what Mark Twain, Huck, and Tom
of Jim is an
persona. For groups of significant people unacceptable to use them and take advantage of mindset of the
treatment of Jim
century readers (Tyson 396). Either way, Twain's
with Jim's and satisfy his readers, or at
"Niggers" are subhuman and not nearly as significant as Whites; therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to use them and take advantage of them to benefit oneself.

Each of Twain's characters symbolizes groups of people who lived in the 19th century South, which also exemplifies an Africanist persona. For example, Tom Sawyer's treatment of Jim is an analogy of how Whites dominated Blacks during this historical period. According to Morrison, "It is not what Jim seems that warrants inquiry, but what Mark Twain, Huck, and Tom need from him that should solicit our attention" (57). Tom, the well-read white boy, commands respect and reverence from not only those "below" him, but also from his so-called peers. Jim's response and blind obedience to Tom merely results from society's conditioning of Blacks—and Whites—during the pre-Civil War era. Tom's sophisticated education and civilization cause Huck to revere him and his opinions. Symbolizing the arrogant, educated, Southern white man, Tom uses his status for personal benefit and, in turn, reinstates the condition for the next generation.

Tom and Huck's attempt to release Jim from prison, at least his physical prison, demonstrates Tom's influence. His authority manifests when they decide how to free Jim. Tom insists on designing the plan after his "education," and although Huck does not see the point in such a long, drawn out plan, without question, he agrees. Similarly, Jim does not even consider suggesting a different idea because he has been trained to assume "whites are indeed what they say they are, superior and adult" (Morrison 56). Neither Tom nor Huck consider Jim in their decision; instead, two white children toy with the freedom of one black man. If Jim had been a white character, even a convicted rapist or murderer, Twain would not have even conceived such a plot. The society Twain creates in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn fully permits two white children to humiliate a black man—once again portraying an Africanist presence not only in the novel, but also, more importantly, within the culture of its creator.

In a similar way, Twain reveals an Africanist presence through his satirical depiction of Christianity's influence on the Southern way of life, especially concerning slavery. From the first chapter, Huck unashamedly proclaims his lack of interest for religion and all that comes with it. After Miss Watson tells him all about "the bad place," he says, "I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it" (4). Unbothered with the knowledge he will go to Hell someday, Huck runs to play with his friends. Symbolically, Huck chooses sin again when he purposely not only escapes with, but also befriends, Jim. Then, much later in the novel, Huck comes back to his certain entrance into Hell, "All right, then, I'll go to hell," he tells himself (206). Huck's willful decision results from refusing to give up Jim a second time. Although Twain pokes fun at Huck's perception of his sin's consequences, sociologist Orlando Patterson explains the historical significance of Huck's choice. He writes that "[T]he slave and ex-slave [have] always been the major symbol of sin in Christian theology. Christianity from its beginnings [has] identified the state of sin as one of enslavement to the flesh" (210). Intentionally or not, Twain's representation of Huck's mindset concerning his relationship with Jim parallels the attitudes of southern culture—once again, establishing an Africanist persona in the novel, as well as 19th century culture.

In spite of Twain's initial objective, The
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn gives modern readers a glimpse of southern American life during a period of tremendous change. While some readers are disgusted with Twain’s invocation of racist language and situations, his portrayal simply mirrors the Africanist presence alive in America during his life. Although never directly condemning slavery or the treatment of Blacks, Twain allows the roots of his society’s issues to surface through his humorous portrayal. This novel’s success rests on the character of a “nigger.” This should not appall, or even surprise, modern readers. The South in its entirety was built on the backs of slaves; the literature she produced is no different.

Works Cited

Saint Maybe
Patricia L. Pearce

Anne Tyler deftly handles the evolving role of women in the later half of the twentieth century in her best-selling novel *Saint Maybe*. As we enter into the lives of the Bedloe family in 1960's Baltimore, we find Bee Bedloe’s apparently pre-shaped existence for her family rocked when her eldest son Danny brings home the “woman who has changed [his] life.” Lucy, who according to Danny’s younger brother Ian “resembles some brightly colored bird held captive by his brown plaid family,” does indeed change not only his life but also all of their lives indirectly and irrevocably (6). This beautiful divorcee with two young children and no family epitomizes women in this era: dependent. Ian unwittingly unleashes the caged bird, setting off a chain of events which captivate our imaginations and the lives of all around him as Tyler unfolds a story of longing, passions too closely bridled, and the consequences of seemingly mundane actions. Moreover, Tyler shows the potential for a bolder future in the next generation of women as the dust begins to settle from the chaos that ensues.

In the midst of adult disorder Tyler presents one little gem of a girl, a diamond in the rough. She sits demurely on the sidelines, at best ignored and at times rebuked in ways she soon becomes accustomed to for a thing beyond her control. This child is unattractive. Early descriptions of Agatha reveal a child “as cloddish as her name-plain and thick, and pasty-faced” (14). The pink frilly frock she wears to the first family Christmas only “seemed to accentuate her monolithic jaw,” and she would breathe through her mouth in a most conspicuous way (22). However, she will not simper, nor try to make-up even when she knows she has answers that are wanted by the adults who will ultimately be responsible for her care following the untimely death of her mother. She allows Bee to walk herself ragged with baby Daphne, then informs Ian that sitting in the rocking chair will do the trick and keep the baby from fussing, establishing a quid pro quo basis to their relationship (95). She has watched her mother fail regardless of beauty and charm, buffeted by bullies in a world where adults rule and life is tough. This reinforces her resolve to use her brain (mind) as the means to her ends, refining the hardness of the diamond within.

Tyler grounds Agatha with responsibility from her earliest memories. She is the comforter of her younger brother Thomas, allowing him into bed with her to tell him a story rather than turn on a light to read. Although her preference is for stories with fairy godmothers, she relents and tells the tale of *Hansel and Gretel*, leading to inevitable visions of two lost children in the woods as she lay trying to sleep. She is also a source of strength for her mother, watching as Lucy struggles against insurmountable odds, reinforcing further the fact that attractiveness and charisma cannot overcome dependence on others for basic need fulfillment. Noticing her tone of voice is hardening like her mother's as she speaks to Thomas, she recalls Grandma Bedloe’s wounding comment at a family gathering: “What a pity Agatha didn’t inherit Lucy’s bone structure” (77). This increases Agatha’s devaluation of her physical self-esteem and underlines her determination to succeed regardless: traits that carry her into adult life. Seven-year-old Agatha firms her resolve not to be a victim, a mere pawn, but to be a strong person and take the initiative, empowering her for subsequent dealings with the Bedloes.

When we find Bee shuffling into Lucy’s abode with a basket of food, she
queries Agatha about the possibility of alcohol to explain Lucy's catatonic state, provoking the child to protect or cover-up for her mother. It is apparent from the state of things inside the house that the bereaved young woman is not coping. She has no money, family, nor help of any kind: the infant is in a squalid cot and the two older children are dirty and have no food to eat. When Ian fills their glasses with milk from the refrigerator "he stops and sniffs, then pours them both down the sink" (70). The children's pathetic plea to Bee goes unheeded when they beg to go to her house: "If you wrap [Lucy] in a blanket she can walk pretty good. Stir some coffee in her Co-Cola, and make her drink it." Ian's fingers stop in mid-air and he and Grandma Bedloe look at each other" (73). This is a pivotal point in Ian's assessment of Bee's ability to 'sugar coat' a situation. He pauses and although he is only seventeen, he senses there is more wrong beneath the surface than his mother is willing to face up to. Their lack of Christian morality foreshadows upcoming events and his instincts prove right: Lucy dies. The calamity of this event overtakes their lives and Agatha watches it unfold.

Whether it is the responsibility of Bee and Ian to act according to the situation as they visibly find it, Agatha watches Bee metaphorically wash her hands of the matter. Lucy shakily enters the room and offers a patently fictitious excuse for "napping in the shank of the afternoon" due to her walking with the children during the heat of the day. Perhaps Bee did believe that Lucy had walked so far with the blanket draped around her as the children had described? No, Bee knows that Lucy and the children have not been out of the unkempt house, yet she accepts the excuse. To add further to Agatha's plight, Bee picks up the thread and runs with it, cajoling Lucy with "Why, my heavens-of course you are worn out." Watching this deceit, this seeming betrayal, Agatha is left in a vacuum. As Ian picks up his Parcheesi piece, a semblance of normality resumes, but for Agatha it has a surreal quality. She knows the adults are accepting a patent cover-up. She and Thomas tried their best to receive help and found the safety and love that Danny's family denied them. Agatha must be brave; she instinctively knows and is "anxious" about the further responsibility she is undertaking (73).

While Bee's recently widowed daughter-in-law draws closer to the verge of sanity (and imminent death) she pushes the child for answers that are apparently meant to appease her own sense of duty. How does the child respond? She shows loyalty, devotion, and resilience developed more forthrightly and steadfastly in this character than in any other throughout the book. Indeed, one wonders whether Agatha might be a reflection of the author herself? Tyler pursues the question of Christianity in the child's eyes even further when the Bedloe's minister comes in to comfort them before Lucy's funeral. Dr. Prescott calls her "Abigail" and tells them "life must go on" (97). Agatha remains expressionless. In fact at this point she has already determined to take the fate of herself and her siblings into her own hands. The mysteriously missing documentation on their previous existence has been carefully hidden away since before her mother's death providing Agatha the element of time required for the Bedloe's reluctant sense of duty to develop.

The avenue of The Church of the Second Chance presents her with a lifeline due to Ian's newfound religious persuasion, and she holds the key to their remaining in his care. She is too astute not to have heard the undertones of adult conversation: "What will you do with the children? You're stuck with them, aren't you?" (114). She remembers the happiness of the afternoons spent with Ian baby-sitting and playing games, when Lucy would come rushing in bringing the freshness of the outside air and the joy of her adventures with her. This is tempered with the memory of Ian leaving them alone on the night Danny died. Agatha is left without firm footing in her reflections, unable to discern the conflicting elements of Ian's character. As Ian acknowledges to himself that "being a child at all is scary, the powerlessness, outsidership-murmurs over your head about something everyone knows but you" (115). She is in tune with his shift of feeling but reserves her inner thoughts, tolerating him for long enough to secure a place to keep the children together. This raises the question of whether Agatha ever finds the ability to show a true and lasting trust in any other individual or whether she must always be in charge in order to manipulate the outcome of events.

By the age of ten she feels confident enough with their position in the family/clan to take their mother's mustard seed locket to Bible camp. Thomas is shocked by this display of faith, as he has been forbidden to mention anything pertaining to their past by Agatha since the indiscretion about his father's Christian name with Mrs. Jordan. This is the beginning of the end of her duplicity: she no longer feels the threat of by the Bedloes. On the other hand, the time is also coming for her to 'absolve' Ian from the responsibility of continuing
to require her presence in the church to show he is doing the 'right thing'. Her early childhood memories of Christian behavior, exemplified by Dr. Prescott prior to her Mother's funeral, had not imbued Agatha with a burning desire to pursue this path. In later years she refers to the Bible camp as "pathetic", and tells Daphne, "[Religion] narrows you and confines you." She goes on to compare living with a family "like taking a long trip with people you are not very well acquainted with. After awhile their [idosyncrasies] make you want to scream and you have to get away from them" (284). Tyler pulls deeply into the depths of Agatha's character to show the adolescent becoming autonomous as she pursues her education and matures. Her ontological persuasion and sovereign attitude have emerged.

Ultimately, we find the adult Agatha little changed from the child. She returns from her medical practice in L.A. following Bee's death with an impossibly handsome husband at her side. While he dresses in "the sort of casual, elegant clothes you see in ads for ski resorts," Agatha shows her usual disregard for time-wasting appearances (270). Her uniformly white face is a carry over from her pasty-faced youth, as she dresses in drab garb remarkable only for its austerity. And her hair is styled in a way that still accentuates her jaw line although she could, by all accounts, present herself in a becoming fashion. Daphne speculates that maybe Stuart is Agatha's one self-indulgence or perhaps (more likely) she hadn't really noticed how attractive he is! This may indeed be the case, for as Agatha relates a dream of a high-school boy proposing to her she laughingly recalls turning him down because of their age difference while omitting to tell him she is already married.

Stuart, on the other hand, shows his admiration for her directness with terminally ill patients: "She's amazing. She'll say straight out to them, 'What you've got can't be cured.'" She banters back with "I say, what you've got can't be cured at this particular time" (282). She goes on to point out that she could not deal with the shallowness of dermatology: Tyler's way of showing Agatha's further rejection of exterior/cosmetic values?

This is the young woman who was shaped by death and loss in early childhood and learned to take the hard truth straight on. She does not dabble in appearances. In contrast with her mother in the 1960's, who could not await the outcome of circumstances, she has had the benefit of education and also the ability and single-mindedness to pursue independence; but at what intrapersonal cost? The traumatized child remains within, aloof from deeper interpersonal commitments. This may well be a reflection of women's roles in society today, as they strive to represent themselves as the epitome of all that is finest in so many diverse arenas. Ms. Tyler used Dr. Prescott as the vehicle of her final analysis when he issued the line, "Life goes on," and through Agatha's character we see that, indeed, it does.

Work Cited

In Stephen Crane's short story, "The Open Boat," there exists an implicit psychological need to create order in the midst of a cold, indifferent world. Without a stable belief in the worth of their existence, the correspondent and his fellow shipmates vacillate between feelings of hope and worthlessness, wherein they ultimately surrender to the pathos of their sad desolation. Thus, the text focuses on the juxtaposition of the death drive over nature's indifference towards man, offering an examination of the shipmates' attempts to come to grips with an irreligious world apathetic to their existence. These men, in finding no order to life on the sea, dwell only on death. Life not only dies on the high seas, then, but also the collective foundation of the men's religious ideology. The story begins with the correspondent and his shipmates stranded in an open lifeboat after their freighter went down, threatened by the indifferent waves. In their desperation to survive and fend off the currents of the sea, "[n] one of them knew the color of the sky" (48). This opening marks first the importance of survival and alert vigilance over the sea, but also verifies the men's implicit trust in heaven and its implication of order. Their faith starts with such magnitude that they do not need to look skyward to know they are being guarded and watched over. Intrinsically, the men do not concern themselves with thoughts of death, for their unconditional faith in Christianity suspends any reflection over their own mortality. As a result, the men's religion, which grounds them, acts to counter feelings of bleakness and despair. Indeed, Crane writes that "[t]o express any particular optimism at this time they felt to be childish and stupid, but they all doubtless possessed this sense of the situation in their minds," for "the ethics of their condition was decidedly against any open suggestion of hopelessness" (51). Their ethos argues against the world being an indifferent world, and this philosophy governs how they view their perilous circumstances. With a firm belief in Christianity, the men have no need to fear the sea or suffer the loss of their optimism. Rather, the structure of faith balances their esteem and spirit, smoothing away thoughts of death and decline. All the same, the realization that this circumstance may not end well begins to seep into the men's minds. When the captain soothes the correspondent and his crew to believe in their rescue, there comes to be "that in his tone which made them think" (51). Whether they are conscious of it or not, the men now begin to see their faith wane and deteriorate. The first thoughts of doubt and hesitation become deadly, then, for they reveal to the men that Christianity cannot protect them from the cold indifference of nature. Rather, each will suffer regardless of his faith, and this knowledge begins to gnaw away at the very outline of their conviction. Accordingly, the death drive in them rises to prominence, for without faith protecting them, the men are naked and spiritually alone. This nakedness highlights the battle of the death drive against their dying faith. Although they attempt to repress and reject thoughts of fatality, struggling to hold onto any thread of order or Christianity, once the men become consciously aware of it, the death drive becomes the center of the narrative. Their denial that the sea "cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me" only further acts to heighten the point, for
at no time before their faithlessness would they have even considered the possibility of death (57). As a result, being consciously aware of death shatters the illusion of a protective faith. No more can they erect constructs of faith against death successfully; rather, they can only contain death by suppressing their knowledge of its very existence.

There should be no surprise, then, that the men’s enthusiasm surges when there comes talk of a lighthouse in close proximity to their location. By having a tangible rebuke to death, by voicing that they are closing in on safety and the shore, the shipmates think they can effectively silence the death drive in themselves. They do not realize that the building has long been abandoned. Once they become acquainted with this reality, though, their recognition of their own futility grows as “[t]he wind slowly died away” (54). Crane uses this metaphor to symbolize the demise of the shipmates’ hope. Nature proves indifferent to the struggles of man, offering no respite to the tired crew. Rather, the crew’s dwindling belief in their rescue becomes envisioned through the decline of the wind, and they begin to surrender to both the indifferent waves and the death drive.

This spiritual breaking leads to the motif of the story, where both the transient nature of faith and the men’s fear of the death drive manifest themselves. Without belief in the significance of their lives, they are left to wonder, “if I am going to be drowned, why […] was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees” (57). Thus, although there remain signs of the men repressing feelings of death and trying to erect reasons why they should not suffer death, their faith in the sacredness of life becomes fleeting. Estranged from land and barred from hope, despair consumes their faith in Christianity.

Indeed, their faith becomes fractured, influenced by the inner struggles that now consume them. The men no longer find it “preposterous” that they should perish out on these waters (57). Rather, they become numb to the utter indifference with which fate dictates their lives. The correspondent mans the oars late in the night when he hears the melancholy breeze, and he notes that “[t]he wind had a voice as it came over the waves, and it was sadder than the end” (64). He begins to identify with the death drive, at last understanding it, thinking that all their deaths are not so bleak as the mournful wail of the wind. Posting this reflection over Crane’s narrative, once aware of his unimportance in comparison to existence, the correspondent begins to lose his fervor and belief in a higher order. Thus, faith and meaning become irrevocably lost, surrendered to the despair of the sea.

At last the men spot land and a wind-tower, but no such renunciation of death will occur, unlike before with the lighthouse. Rather, the weariness of the seafarers continues to overwhelm any sense of euphoria. The correspondent thinks:

This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of ants. It represented in a degree […] the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual—nature in the wind, and nature in the visions of the men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. (68)

The allegorical dimensions of this passage must be considered, for the allusion of the men being but ants negates any and all Christian thoughts and, instead, leads the text into an irreligious philosophy of life. No more can the men pretend selective perception or memory, regressing to a time when Christianity and order protected them, but rather they must come to terms with an indifferent society. Thereby, the men must understand that none of them are safe from nature’s indifferent touch.

Through this understanding, Crane starts to examine the men’s acquiescence to their desolation. Late in the narrative, when the men decide to swim for the shore, the correspondent fears death no more. Rather, “[i]t merely occurred to him that if he should drown it would be a shame” (69). In essence, nature’s indifference to man juxtaposes to birth in the men their own conscious indifference to life. Repression and denial of death disappears and gives rise to a general apathy to existence. This conscious resignation to fate exemplifies the struggle of the men, for the death drive shatters in the men all order and leaves behind only cold indifference to their own fate.

Even so, the correspondent has an awakening, realizing perhaps the closest thing to order in the story. During the swim to shore he gets caught in a current and, struggling in its vicious throes, thinks, “[p]erhaps an individual must consider his own death to be the final phenomenon of nature” (71). Life becomes a cycle of nature then, and death, rather than something to be feared, is merely the final stage of that cycle. Soon after this realization he breaks free of the current and it can be insinuated that he
also breaks free of the death drive, for thoughts of death too wane and deteriorate. Nonetheless, when he reaches the shore he discovers that Billie Higgins, the oiler of the boat, lies facedown in the surf, drowned by the indifferent waves.

This death comes to symbolize their understanding towards the indifference of nature, then, for it verifies that the strongest of men can fall while the weakest live on. By understanding nature, then, they see a reconstruction of faith and meaning, albeit in a dissimilar form. The remaining men, Crane writes, find that “[w]hen it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea’s voice to the men on the shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters” to the apathy of the world (72). This crisis they suffered through makes them learned, and the resulting trauma leads them to feel that they can be prophets, not to Christianity but rather to the indifference of life. Indeed, they erect a new edifice from the old, ready to be interpreters, or apostles, of a new religion. Thus, from the chaos and indifference of the world, the men again create order.

Work Cited

Reflective Statement: Stories
Kris Shearer

In order to fulfill the requirements for Kent State’s writing minor, Kris Shearer wrote a reflective statement as a preface to the “Short Story” section of her Writing Portfolio (ENG 40010). Under the direction of Dr. Terry Sosnowski, Shearer compiled four short stories she had written at different points in her life. Along with exploring the technical aspects of fiction writing, Shearer explains how writing stories is “often a cathartic process that alleviates the stresses of everyday life.”

In Kitchen Table Wisdom, Rachel Naomi Remen concludes that telling stories is not only a way of passing time, but also a way that wisdom and heritage are passed along and that stories contain the stuff that help us live a life worth remembering. In addition, Remen suggests that stories are like compasses, guiding us and showing us what is both good and evil about humanity and ourselves. Stories can, and perhaps should, provide guidance to and commentary about humanity, but, just as a poorly constructed compass will lead its owner astray, the message of a poorly written story will lead readers to a destination the author did not intend. In addition, a compass provides only guidance; it does not take its owner by the throat and jerk her toward a destination. A story that is overly didactic will lose effectiveness amid blatant rhetoric. A story’s message, therefore, should not be beaten over a reader’s head; rather, the message should be so woven into the fabric of the story that the reader does not consciously detect a “message.” A well-constructed story combines content, voice, point of view, and tone to relay its meaning.

The four stories included in this portfolio developed largely out of issues which I, someone I care about, or perhaps someone I’d only heard about needed to work through, or current world issues that concerned me. Using “real” issues, however, does not automatically make a story easier to write. Attention still has to be paid to craft components. Most of the stories here went through at least three drafts before I decided they were complete.

“Saying Goodbye” won Kent State University’s Virginia Perryman Freshman Writing Award in 1998. In spite of its award-winning status, “Saying Goodbye” went through two revisions two years later when I workshopped it in a fiction writing class. Many of my classmates thought the story left too many questions unanswered. In addition, the characters needed more development and the original ending was unsatisfying. I agreed with many of the suggestions and made some changes. For example, the final paragraph was absent in the original version. In addition, my original characters seemed wooden, and I habitually “told” the reader instead of letting the reader experience the story for herself. Minute details, such as Lorene’s change of mood with seasons and her letting the Christmas decorations sit in the basement, had greater impact on the reader than simply saying “Lorene was manic depressive,” as I did in the original version. Furthermore, one student suggested I change the narrative point of view from first person to omniscient third person. I tried this, but the story begged to be written in first person. This story from the third person point of view lost its emotional impact. With first person, I felt there was a greater chance of reader identification; third person left the reader on the fringes of the story as a detached observer. “Saying Goodbye,” a very personal story for me, was the first story I workshopped in class. The experience of taking criticism of a story such as this taught me that writers must learn to distance themselves from their projects, to see their work through the eyes of others, if they are to improve and grow as writers at all.

The original version of “One” was written in 1986 just months after the birth of my daughter, when I was 23 and my husband and I were raising two small children. The idea came out of my feeling frustrated with my life and wondering how it might have been different if I’d known everything during my
teen years that I knew at 23. In addition, I often looked at my children—particularly my daughter—and wished I could shield them from life's hurts, yet knowing that doing so would impede their growth into productive adults. The basic plot and voice of "One" remained relatively constant over the years of revisions, but the setting and characters changed. The original story took place in a park, with the main character having a solitary picnic lunch; though I thought I had a workable story, something I couldn't define wasn't quite working. I later often used my own bathroom as a retreat and when I saw a magazine picture of a woman in a bubble bath staring contemplatively ahead, I decided that "One" worked much better in a bathroom setting. In addition, in the original version, the young girls were not named and were identified only by age. I decided to subtly clue the reader by naming them all derivatives of "Elizabeth." I believe that this story, maybe more than any other included here, reflects my development as both writer and woman because its changes and development so mirrored my personal change and development.

"Flesh Wounds" was one of those rare stories that writers tend to view as gifts. Dr. Terry Sosnowski, director of this portfolio, had asked that I write a new story. I had no idea what I was going to write about and spent a week forming and then rejecting several ideas. One Saturday afternoon, I sat playing cards with my husband and children. I happened to glance up and notice scars on my daughter's upper arm, scars from wounds that were self-inflicted as my daughter engaged in the latest teen craze of self-mutilation. I spent that Saturday evening and all day Sunday in a writing frenzy. After I finished the story, I went to bed by six in the evening and slept for thirteen hours, taking the story to class the following Tuesday to workshop it. "Flesh Wounds" in its current state is largely unchanged from the version that originally came out on my computer. However, the ease with which "Flesh Wounds" appears to have been written does not mean that there was no sense of craft involved. I chose the viewpoint—first person/second person—in part because someone had said she'd never seen a story written in second person and didn't think it could be done. The rebel in me found that a challenge!

Furthermore, "Flesh Wounds" deviates from my other first person stories in that the narrator is male. Though I made an attempt to write from female first person, the story just didn't work; I believe, in part anyway, because that's not the kind of story I wanted to tell. I truly wanted a story from a male's point of view, and I wanted to write a story with a narrator who was affected by the action, though not necessarily directly involved. The male voice of "Flesh Wounds," then, demonstrates how people who seem comparatively detached from a situation can still be injured or affected. In addition, one version of the story is written as straight first person because someone told me that first person/second person was "too experimental." Again, the story just didn't work in straight first person. The story isn't about only the daughter; the story is about a family, and possibly a marriage, in crisis; the narrator addresses his thoughts to the wife he cannot confront in person. Furthermore, using straight first person seemed to shift the narrator to the fringes of the story rather than in the midst of it. As in "Saying Goodbye," removing the narrator from the action lessens the story's impact, so I reverted to the original viewpoint.

Finally, "Water Dancing" was a difficult story for me. Of all the stories here, "Water Dancing" is the most 'fictional.' There are few elements in this story that reflect my true life: I am fond of dolphins and the story started as a dream I'd had several nights, which is described in the opening paragraphs. When writing a story that is largely autobiographical, a writer has something to draw from; "Water Dancing" did not have that emotional launching pad. Initially, all I had was the dream image at the beginning. Next came the character of the little boy; I knew the boy had some physical impairment, but it took another two weeks before I honed in on deafness. I initially balked at the deafness because I knew little about it, but the more I tried to force the boy to have a different impairment, the harder the story became. It took me nine months to write this story—I won't even begin to expound on the similarity between this and giving birth—and, oddly enough, the story was not written in linear fashion. After the initial dream image, I wrote the ending; the rest of the story came, painfully, in exhaustive stints of writing and rewriting as I experimented with scenarios that could logically lead to the conclusion I'd already written for the story. Initially, I used a parental kidnapping theme to complicate the story; however, that theme didn't work. The father had no logical reason to kidnap the child. The more I fought to make the kidnapping theme fit, the harder the story was to finish. Once I allowed the story to be more about the mother, however, the process accelerated considerably. Despite the difficulty of writing this story, I think this story
pushed my growth as a writer. This was the first time I'd ever really had such difficulty writing, and this story taught me to push through the haze toward the finished product. Furthermore, "Water Dancing" destroyed the myth that stories—or anything for that matter—absolutely must be written in linear or chronological fashion.

Each of these stories manifested differently; each of these stories has its own unique voice. Startlingly, each of the divergent voices in the stories is mine. In fact, I once joked to a professor that fiction writing was a form of legitimized schizophrenia. Writing fiction has been, to me, an exploration of myself, a creative way to experiment with my own beliefs and opinions. Writing fiction is often a cathartic process that alleviates the stresses of my everyday life. But in addition to being cathartic, fiction writing often leads me to solutions that have, through the compass of everyday logic, eluded me.
I was an average high school student. My father had died when I was ten, and my mother, sister, and I didn’t have the most money in the world. We weren’t poor, but we certainly were not rich. I didn’t get the best grades, or the worst. My freshman year I took the average schedule of classes, English I, Spanish I, Typing, Algebra I, Biology I, and Physical Education. I followed that year up with my sophomore year of English II, Geometry, Physical Education, and History. It was at the end of my sophomore year that I took the detour.

The vocational department at the school worked very hard to promote their programs to me through speaking in classes, flyers, morning announcements, and mailing a brochure to my home. Some vocational programs had specific standards and even “auditions” to get into the program. They mentioned standards they had set as they presented an image of challenge, knowledge, and sacrifice for those who entered one of their programs. At the end of their promotion, they mentioned one last sacrifice. This was the hardest to swallow. They presented to us a chart depicting a road that came to a point; we had to choose one that veered to the left or one that veered to the right. There were no other side streets, just the two options. To enter any of the programs, I would have to choose the road to the right. This was the road to vocational programs and at the end of the road were jobs, preparation for the real world, life long skills, and future opportunities. At the end of the road to the left, the “college prep” road, there was more school, a longer wait for earning money, and a longer wait for entering the real world. That is how it was presented. We were also told that in choosing the vocational road, we could still take college preparatory classes.

I chose the vocational road because more school and a delay in earning money were the last two obstacles I wanted. Plus, I felt after the presentations that I could still be prepared for college by taking some college preparatory classes, more English, Math, and Science. It was after this decision that I auditioned for the broadcast arts vocational program. I met the high school English prerequisites and was accepted into the program. The curriculum taught me the ins and outs of radio and television broadcasting. My junior year, I attended regular classes in the morning for three periods and then spent the next seven periods in the Broadcast Arts class. We began learning about radio stations, mixer boards, annunciation, technical aspects of radio, and audio production. Later in the year we began learning the basics of television broadcasting. My senior year, we focused more on the television broadcasting, performing news shows each day from the school’s announcements. In this class, we spent the first eight periods of the day in the vocational program and the last two in regular classes. We made music videos, mock television commercials, interviews, and even went out of town for a week to do an actual production of a conference in Kentucky.

I couldn’t wait to get out into the real world with all of these skills and begin my job in radio or television. At the end of my senior year, we began putting a resume together that the vocational department called a career passport. This was my ticket to a job, success, wealth, and popularity. All I had to do was interview at the radio or television station of my choice, hand them the passport, and wait for my high-paying, successful career to begin. It didn’t get any better than that, or so I thought.

I figured that with this passport and all of the training I had received, I could
go anywhere I wanted to live and get a high paying job in radio or television. I decided to move to Atlantic Beach, North Carolina, right out of high school. "With my passport, why not live somewhere tropical and exciting and accept a job offer there," I thought to myself. So off I went. I applied at every television and radio station in the area. Only one returned my phone call. I went to that station for an interview and got a job, but not the wonderful high-paying job I expected. It wasn't even full time. Over time I worked very hard to get my pay raised from the minimum wage I started at, but never made more than $7 per hour before the station was sold and I was laid off. Jobless, I moved back to Ohio to try my luck closer to home. I again applied at every radio and television station in the area and again received one phone call. I interviewed and was offered another part time job, but I declined realizing that my vocational education and my passport were getting me nowhere. I worked odd jobs for about five years after that, none of which were related to radio or television broadcasting.

Finally, I realized what I needed to do — go to college. I took the placement test at Kent State University's Stark Campus. The English skills that I had continued throughout the broadcast arts vocational program helped me to get higher scores on the English portion, but I scored low in all other sections of the exam. These scores necessitated my repeating courses taken in high school as well as taking new classes I needed to be prepared for college.

Between the time I took that exam and started college, I had time to reflect on the choices I had made my sophomore year in high school. I began to wonder how I could have been so blind towards taking the road to college. I thought about my training, my classes, and the long road that followed. It took a while, but it all came to me one afternoon while I was choosing classes for my first semester of college.

While I was taking vocational education, college prep students were taking their fourth year of a foreign language. While I was taking public speaking, college prep students were taking English IV. When college prep students were in Calculus and Trigonometry, I was placed in a study hall. While I was operating a camera for commencement, college prep students crossed the stage having completed chemistry. When the college prep students went to halls they rented and country clubs after graduation for a party, I went to my grandparents' house. I was not alone. I found myself in the company of other students like me throughout my vocational education. Out of the eight other students in my Broadcast Arts class, only one student went home to a mother and father at the end of the school day; he was African American. None of us lived in the newer housing developments where the higher-class students lived.

I didn't have a chance to make it to college. If I did, it was slim. The armed guards of segregation based on social and financial class set up an impassible roadblock. "Join a vocational program," they told me. "You can still take some college preparatory classes." The key word that did not stick out then was "some." "Some" is nowhere near what is needed to give someone a fighting chance at a decent continuing education. Instead, the school day for vocational students is consumed by preparation for a job, which will never let them get to the social and financial status, that high schools don't want them to reach. Vocational programs were created to have a place to segregate lower class students from upper class students, so as not to interrupt the upper class journey to wealth and success.

High schools have a way of subconsciously separating those students they feel should go to college from the ones they feel should not. This separation takes place each time a student presents a free lunch pass. It takes place when students cannot attend field trips. It takes place when the clothing students wear is not up to socially acceptable standards. It takes place when students cannot afford to pay library fines or buy school supplies. Even more importantly, this separation happens each time a parent donates large sums of money to schools and athletic programs so as to separate themselves from the riff raff. It takes place when a student's last name doesn't match the name given to an athletic complex, library, or other school structure. For families in the upper class, a large enough donation is equivalent to educational insurance guaranteeing an education better than that of students without enough money to make it to college.

High schools separate the students who they feel should further their education from the ones who they feel should join the lower ranks of blue-collar workers. They do this based on social class, income, and family situations. It is those students who have parents in influential community roles based on financial support that are kept on the road to further education. It is those students who have a "functional family structure" based on income that is not only
encouraged to go to college, but are given the proper guidance along the way. The students who do not have a stable family structure based on financial stability are steered towards blue-collar training. Those who do not enter the vocational blue-collar trap are left on the side of the road to fend for themselves, only to get hit by a busload of students coming from "Upper-Class High." It is inevitable that in the end, the traffic cops of high school dictatorship will send students down the road that is chosen for them, no matter how much the choice seems to be left up to the lower class students. This leaves only the feeling of taking the right path in their minds, almost as to silence them forever of the great injustice that occurs before their very being.

When all is said and done, and the opportunity for clear, uninhibited reflection is possible, the light will come on. The light will come on and it will shine brightly on a sign that says to all who see it, no matter how determined upper class citizens do not want it to be seen, high school vocational programs detour lower class students from going on to college.
States' Rights vs. Federal Rights: The Fight for Cherokee Land in Georgia
Thomas White

As a student in Dr. Leslie Heaphy's U.S. Formative (HIST 12070) class, Thomas White was asked to show the correlation between states' rights and federal rights in the U.S. during the 1800's. White investigates how the state of Georgia challenged federal authority by claiming ownership over Cherokee lands. Also, this essay looks at the famous Cherokee Nation v. Georgia Supreme Court case, and comments on the implications it had on U.S. policy in regard to Native Americans and their territory.

During the early 1800's, the United States government was struggling with many different issues as they were attempting to gain credibility as an international power in the world. The ability to keep the nation progressing forward as a political power fell squarely on the shoulders of its early leaders. Two of the more important domestic issues that this new nation was facing were the ideas of states' rights vs. federal rights and the Indian Removal Act. By the late 1820's, the state of Georgia became a major factor in how both of these issues would be debated and resolved. In 1829 and 1830, the Georgia General Assembly enacted legislation that, in essence, stripped the Cherokee Nation in Georgia of sovereign rights it was granted by the federal government in the late 1700's (62). This would be one of the first, and certainly the most controversial to date, challenges to the powers of the federal government of the United States by one of its states. This essay will uncover how the actions and reactions of President Andrew Jackson, Congress, The Supreme Court, and the Georgia General Assembly shaped the course of development of federal and state governing powers in the United States.

Un the early 1800's "[n]o state agitated more consistently or aggressively for the expulsion of Native people from its borders" (58), than the state of Georgia. This stems from an agreement, known as the Compact of 1802, that the United States federal government made with Georgia. In essence, the agreement stated that Georgia would surrender its claims from their original colonial charter, to the territories of Alabama and Mississippi in exchange for $1.25 million in cash and a congressional pledge that they would acquire all Indian held lands, in the boundaries of the state of Georgia, and turn them over to the state of Georgia (58). Because the federal government officially recognized the Indian nations as sovereign, this promise that was made to Georgia became impossible for them to fulfill. The sovereign status allowed the Creeks and Cherokees to refuse to sell, and the federal government was unable to force them to sell. By the mid 1820's, political leaders in Georgia began to take matters into their own hands, as they felt that the federal government "was worse than irresponsible," and that "it was actually impeding the fulfillment of the compact" (59). They were able to force the Creeks to sell them millions of acres of their lands along the Chattahoochee River by creating a hostile and threatening atmosphere. The success of these tactics, and the fact that the Georgia General Assembly was giving the land away through a lottery, made the current governing body, led by Gov. Troup, very popular among the residents of Georgia. Realizing these political opportunities, the legislature turned its attention to the Cherokee. Aside from the discovery of gold on some of the Cherokee land, there was also another tract of land that blocked access to the Tennessee River. Access to the Tennessee River would open a whole new trade market with inland states and territories that Georgia never had before. The struggle for land between the sovereign Cherokee Nation and the state of Georgia was about to heat up.

In 1826 and 1827, the Georgia General Assembly passed resolutions that, in essence, stated their claim to sovereign rights to all lands within their borders, including the Cherokee Nation. They also claimed that because "the United States failed to acquire the Cherokee Nation for Georgia under the Compact of 1802, the state was within its sovereign rights simply to take it" (61). This was a major challenge to the powers of the federal government.
in relation to the powers of the state government. In 1827 the Cherokee Nation drew up a constitution that established its borders and made claim to the sovereign status that was awarded to them by the federal government. They also claimed their exclusive rights to govern all people within those set borders. This bold statement, coming on the heels of their own claim to sovereign rights to the lands within their borders, absolutely infuriated the Georgia General Assembly.

In 1828 "the [Georgia] General Assembly enacted legislation to attach the Cherokee Nation to five Georgia counties, thus putting the Cherokees and their land under state jurisdiction," effective June 1, 1830, and also disallowed all laws established by the Cherokee Nation (62). They further claimed that the Cherokee were merely tenants at the will of the state and that their tenancy may be forfeited and their land taken away any time that states wished to do so (61). These enactments carried huge implications in regard to the interpretation of the constitution and the rights of the state to ignore the decisions of the federal government. When President Andrew Jackson upheld the actions of the General Assembly, it led to even more legislation that took more rights away from the Cherokee, including certain citizenship rights. By 1830 they had passed legislation that did not allow the Cherokee government to act on any of their laws nor to even meet or they would be in violation of Georgia law, which they were now subject to.

In 1831, the Cherokee went before the Supreme Court (Cherokee Nation v. Georgia) to challenge the arrest of one of their own (George Tassel), who had committed a murder within the Nation yet was arrested by the Georgia Guard. The State executed Tassel before the Supreme Court could make a ruling. The Supreme Court later stated "the Cherokee Nation had no legal standing as a 'foreign nation' before the Court" (68). In 1832, Samuel Austin Worcester challenged his arrest by the Guard for not declaring an oath of allegiance to Georgia or to the Supreme Court (Worcester v. Georgia). He was a Christian missionary and felt that he was protected by the sovereign status of the Nation. His case was heard because he was a citizen of the United States, and the Court ruled in his favor, but the state of Georgia refused to recognize the ruling. In doing so, the state of Georgia had now challenged two of the three branches of the Federal Government (Legislative and Judicial) without any ramifications from the executive branch (the President).

President Jackson's plan was a simple one. Since he had no direct jurisdiction over the Indian Nations, because of the sovereign status awarded them by earlier administrations, he allowed the states to claim their sovereign rights. Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and South Carolina all followed Georgia's lead by "[nullifying] congressional law, as an expedient means to achieve removal" (93), forcing the Indians to negotiating tables where the Federal Government finished the procedures by "saving] them from state harassment." While there were many critics of this "callous, inhumane, unconstitutional, and illegal scheme" (93), a majority of Congress aligned with Jackson in support of Georgia's legislation. Because their was no precedence forcing the President or Congress to abide by the rulings of the Supreme Court, since the Court did not have jurisdiction over the Indian policy, they were able to accomplish "a dramatic restructuring of the relations among the Indians, the states in which they lived, and the federal government" (93).

Evidently, they two issues, states' rights vs. federal rights and the Indian removal, evolved almost hand in hand as the states challenges to federal jurisdiction not only shaped the relationship of state government to federal government but also the relationship of the nation of the United States to the Indian Nation. The bold steps taken by the General Assembly of Georgia, and the clear unequivocal backing of President Andrew Jackson, helped to shaped the future direction of this country's governing policies and their direct dealings with the Indian Nation.

Work Cited

Contributors

David Arn is an English major. He has lived in Ohio for all of his 22 years. Like everyone else, he loves music, movies, great food, and the general poetry of life. More especially, though, he loves language and a girl named Deeanna. Besides loving his girl and writing his poems, he has no definite plans.

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Alison Miltner, who designed the cover, is a senior studying Art Education at the Kent campus. Ali's artistic interests cover a broad spectrum: drawing, oil painting, watercolors, printmaking, and papermaking. She is happy that this is her third year of being involved in the Writing Center Review.
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Writing Center Review

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The Writing Center Review, a writing-across-the-curriculum journal that contains selected writing assignments by Kent State University, Stark Campus students, is published each spring under the direction of the Writing Center Staff. The purpose of the Review is to present excellence in writing representing various disciplines at Kent Stark, including Biology, Chemistry, Communications, Geology, History, Mathematics, Psychology, and Sociology, among others. These assignments then may be used in classrooms, in the Writing Center, and by individual students as guides for achieving excellence in writing.

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6. Fill out the form below completely. Submissions with incomplete forms will not be accepted.

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