

Hot Papers 2005

The Best Academic Writing
at Wayne State College

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Preface

The 2005 *Hot Papers* contest was a very competitive one indeed. The judges' close scoring of five papers made it impossible to follow the tradition of casting first, second and third place rankings. Read the *Top Papers* and you will understand the judges' quandary; they are all exemplars of quality writing in their academic domains.

It would be difficult to overstate the prodigious writing skill of Chad Wall. He offers an insightful literary analysis of homosexuality in "'Wouldn't it be funny if it was true?' Tennessee Williams and the Politics of Homosexual Desire"; a spiritual geography of home in "Back to All That"; and a captivating portrayal of David Lee's poetic voice in "Flying Pontiacs, Miracle Cures, Killer Chihuahuas, and Land Barons." Lisa Nelson and Arturo Villarreal, Jr., match Wall in their own realms. Nelson, a renowned lover of questions, wonders whether chimpanzee brains really are different from human ones ("Chimpanzee Linguistics"). And Villarreal, in "Paradigm Shifting: Effects of Outdoor Recreation on Environmental Attitudes," adds his own brick to the scholarly foundation by fashioning an original study to explore local environmental attitudes.

Both *Top Papers* and *Honorable Mention* award winners exhibit unusual creativity. How did each of these papers begin? A required assignment? A scribble on the back of a phone bill? Whatever their primary source, student authors nurtured fleeting ideas to mature prose and their professors rewarded their inventiveness with a nomination to *Hot Papers*. Because the papers originate from different disciplines, a variety of format and citation styles are reflected in this volume. Although no attempt was made to standardize these styles, some changes were made to save printing costs (single-spacing block quotations, for example).

On behalf of a grateful reading community, I would like to thank all the professors and students who braved this year's competition and encourage them, as well as the uninitiated, to continue sending their best productions to the *Hot Papers* journal. Special thanks to Professors Andrew Alexander, Kent Blaser and JoAnn Bondhus for judging this year's competition and to Eddie Elfers for contributing his considerable layout, design and editing skills to the production phase of this project.

Maureen Kingston, Editor

Back to All That

Chad Wall

Professor: Lisa Sandlin

Balsey-Whitmore New York Essay Contest

I have to try to get this exactly right. You see, I have never really written about the place where my heart lives other than to use it as a location, a backdrop, so I can't fuck this up, I have to get it right. Okay, I would never say "the place where my heart lives," that is just not me. Sentimentality: it is the most egregious of human emotions, a conversation stopper, a literary bump in the road, a bore on a perfect day. That is the trouble with New York and me. It is the place where I live (no matter where I am or where I am going or who I am talking to, in my head there I am, surreptitiously checking to see if I look fat in one of Ralph Lauren's windows on Madison before running off to meet Ian downtown) and home is always a sentimental minefield.

I became a person in New York. I moved there as a twenty-two year-old in the summer of 1984 after taking a less than stellar one-semester run at Wayne State College immediately following my high school graduation and then spending a couple of years in North Carolina checking out the beach. I was the kind of wide-eyed dope that I now jokingly despise. I tried not to stare. I tried to restrain my Nebraska friendliness. I did not make eye contact on the subway and I quit smoking pot to toughen myself up. Everything was new, beautiful, and man-made. No messy wilderness, just lovely concrete, steel, and the orderly, controlled design of the parks. It is the place where I first fell in love. Real love, in all of its thorny, bloody, thrilling and complicated incarnations, with a man who I have not been able to shake. It is the city where I became me: eggheaded, opinionated, difficult, brusque, arty, crazy gay party-boy, movie nut, jazz enthusiast, serious, political, can't-be-seen-without-a-book, me. See, I am already fucking this up, but that is what it was to me in the beginning; before AIDS ate up the world and I went to too many funerals, before Ian began living at the office to avoid seeing what was happening outside his predictable world of numbers. And still, there was no place that was more alive even in the middle of all that.

Joan Didion penned what is perhaps the best essay ever written about being young in New York. In "Goodbye to All That" she writes:

In retrospect it seems to me that those days before I knew the names of all the bridges were happier than the ones that came later, but perhaps you will see that as we go along. Part of what I want to tell you is what it was like to be young in New York, how six months can become eight years with the deceptive ease of a film dissolve, for that is how those years appear to me now, in a long sequence of sentimental dissolves and old-fashioned trick shots—the Seagram Building fountains dissolve into snowflakes, I enter a revolving door at twenty and come out a good deal older, and on a different street. It is often said that New York is a city only for the very rich or the very poor. It is less often said that New York is also, at least for those of us who came there from somewhere else, a city for the very young. (227)

I first read this essay on a cold Saturday morning while Ian was out getting the *Times* to plan our day, occasionally looking up from the book at our two dogs that were making the living room windows frost up with their breath, patiently waiting to see Ian turn the corner fourteen stories below. A wave of sadness moved over me when I read that paragraph, a momentary mourning for that silly little twenty-two-year-old me who got such a bang out of the fountains in the Seagram plaza. A place I now passed on my way to lunch nearly every day, no longer noticing the fountains or the handsome building in front of which their waters dance. Once, in that very building, I actually sat two tables away from the author of that paragraph, as impressed and giddy as Ma and Pa Kettle seeing Bing Crosby outside the Empire State Building.

As a young child I held a romantic view of New York, the New York of the movies. Movies that I watched with my modern aunt Vicki who drove a sports car, a career girl who lived alone and dressed like Audrey Hepburn, an aunt who probably recognized that I could have been a card-carrying member of the Mattachine Society when I was five. She introduced me to the New York of Rock Hudson in *Pillow Talk*, where one could manipulate anything in the apartment from electric switches built into the arm of a couch; the New York of “Auntie Mame” and her Beekman Place apartment, the design of which changed every decade, each incarnation more fabulous than the last. I found this New York too: a city not only full of beautiful apartments but inhabited by wonderfully sophisticated people who talked of books as if they were

friends, people who knew trumpet players and actors, people to whom ideas mattered, where everyday life was entwined with knowledge, all right outside my front door. The New York of Dorothy Parker, Mary McCarthy, Edmund Wilson, Frank O'Hara, John Cheever, Langston Hughes, Dawn Powell.

I have avoided visiting the city for nearly ten years and have lived instead in my old city of memory where it is safe and everything is always new. For the last seven years I have watched Carrie amble her way through the Manhattan of *Sex and the City*, a rather accurate portrait of New York despite the fantasy of a middle class woman's endless access to designer clothing that she cannot possibly afford (actually a rather nice Joan Crawford Manhattan shop-girl with a fabulous Park Avenue apartment movie touch). I will go out on a limb here: the best television treatment of life in New York after 9/11 appeared in a *Sex and the City* episode. No mention of the Trade Center was made in "I Heart New York" but it was autumn and Carrie was watching the leaves fall outside her brownstone and she was feeling lonely for an old lover whom she soon discovered was moving to California. I won't get into the rest of the story but the feeling, that unwritten, unspoken thing that grabs us as former New Yorkers, is most powerful when she leaves Big's apartment with an old LP copy of "Moon River." She pauses before crossing Fifth Avenue in a beautiful coat in that late-September sunlight, a woman in a hurry, beautiful, a little wounded but in a hurry, disappearing into the crowd, becoming one again with the city.

I won't get into why I left. Temporary insanity? But I will get into why I would like to return after ten years. I am a couple months away from graduating from Wayne State, completing a circle that was interrupted by my desire to get out into the world, to make my own way. In January, I will be starting a new life in Los Angeles and I would like to begin this life by taking a peek at the old. Returning to New York, accompanied by people who may be seeing this place that is so much a part of me for the first time, will be a unique experience; not to be the guide, not to say to my companions "Let's go here, I know this place," but to step back and see the city through their eyes. A chance to see myself as I was nearly twenty years ago, trying to make my way through a new place without calling attention to the straw between my teeth; a fitting end to a long deferred journey and, perhaps, a way to recover something of what I was like at that age, to reacquaint myself with someone I've missed, that twenty-two-year old dope.

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New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968.

“Wouldn’t it be funny if that was true?” Tennessee Williams and the Politics of Homosexual Desire

Chad Wall

Professor: Katja Hawlitschka

ENG 480 Senior Seminar

*The god is shrouded because his marble blinds. Fortune's
Hand over my eyes. Weightless, not a man at all...*

—Reginald Shepherd

Brick Pollitt, the god-like, alcoholic ex-athlete of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* may well be, outside of Blanche DuBois, Tennessee Williams’s most controversial character. Brick’s sexual orientation, as a latent homosexual, a virulent homophobe or otherwise, has been the subject of intellectual debate since *Cat*’s first run on Broadway in 1955. Yet, despite all of the attention paid to Brick’s sexuality, critics like John C. Clum, while observing that Williams wrote candidly of homosexuality in his short stories, have refused to credit Williams with authoring a play that explores the political implications of homosocial behavior and homosexual desire in the face of a Cold War American society that was dangerously, if not murderously, homophobic. This is a criticism based largely upon a critique of the content of Williams’s character, seen through the lens of modern discourse as internalized homophobia, rather than the content of his work. With the exception of David Savran, many critics like Clum and C.W.E. Bigsby, find that Williams’s own internalized homophobia prevented him from using his art to express his discontent with the “mendacity” of society. This essay disagrees with that assessment. Those who are forced to hide their identity become inarticulate in speaking of their own lives, especially a writer like Williams who desired commercial success.

While one cannot solely rely on Williams’s voice in his memoirs or his many interviews as proof that he had no interest in advancing the idea of a society free of homophobia, it is equally true that there are elements that exist in these resources that also advance the theory that Williams was writing about the restrictions society placed on homosexuals. Tennessee Williams found his voice in his work. His themes and

arguments scream from the page for attention. Many critics nuance the scream to a whimper, effectively silencing Williams as society has silenced homosexuals.

This essay will argue that Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is the result of a dialogue that Williams began with the 1941 publication of his short story "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio." Williams continued to revisit and reshape this dialogue in his short stories and plays throughout the late 1940's and early 1950's, creating his most effective comment on homosexuality and society in the tortured psyche of Brick Pollitt.

John C. Clum, in his essay "‘Something Cloudy, Something Clear’: Homophobic Discourse in Tennessee Williams," declares that Williams is possessed of a "split vision" which disallows Williams to write clearly of homosexuality:

The outward gaze becomes linked to an automatic, impersonal homosexual advance while the inward gaze signifies the writer's now uncontrollable withdrawals into memory, which form the basis of his autobiographical work which, paradoxically, depicts his split vision and at the same time demonstrates the loss his work suffered when he blurred the public/private split which was essential to his control over memory and craft.

Williams's split vision, then, defines the internal conflict that compelled him to write of his homosexuality and, in doing so, to rely on the language of indirection and homophobic discourse. It signified a cloudy sense of his own sexual identity, but it enabled him to write clearly. On the other hand, as the sexual self became clearer, and the plays became more autobiographical, the writing became murkier. (165)

This "split vision" problem is a common critical mode used to attack Williams's writing. Generally, as in the above example, Williams is accused of dropping a veil over the references to homosexuality in his work. It is assumed that Williams uses this veil as a means of "indirection," evasions that mirror Williams's internalized homophobia. A close examination of Williams's short stories reveals another possibility; that this seeming "indirection" is a comment or, even more boldly, a statement against, a homophobic society that requires homosexuals to occupy the backrooms and the shadows, effectively erased from the collective

consciousness.

Williams's 1941 short story (published in 1954) "The Mysteries of the Joy Rio" offers, as the critic David Savran acknowledges in his book *Communists, Cowboys and Queers: The Politics of Masculinity in the Work of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams*, "what is probably his first homosexual protagonist, Pablo Gonzales, a searcher after the furtive pleasures in the balcony of the Joy Rio, a derelict movie theater" (76). Pablo Gonzales, an aging homosexual and an illegal immigrant from Mexico who, in his youth, was not subject to the homophobia of American society, has, twenty years ago, suffered the loss of his protector and lover, Emiel Kroger to cancer. Pablo now haunts the decrepit Joy Rio in search of sexual encounters. Pablo Gonzales, like his dead lover, is a repairer of watches and clocks. As such, he has a unique, almost otherworldly, interpretation of time. Pablo has become indifferent to time, living amongst his clocks, "as a gem loses its value when there are too many just like it which are too easily or cheaply obtainable" (99). What matters to Pablo, now that he is alone, dying, and lost without the love of Emiel, are the rare sexual encounters at the Joy Rio, so rare in comparison to the ticking of seconds recorded by the ubiquitous clocks and watches in his shop. Williams goes on to compare the infrequency of satisfying sexual encounters at the Joy Rio with the rarity of the relationship realized between Pablo and his dead lover:

Mr. Kroger had taken the animated allure of his young protégé, the flickering lights in his eyes and his quick, nervous movements, his very grace and slimness, as meaning something difficult to keep hold of. And as the old gentleman declined in health, as he did quite steadily during the three years that Pablo lived with him, he was never certain that the incalculably precious bird flown into his nest was not one of a sudden passage but rather the kind that prefers to keep a faithful commitment to a single place, the nest-building kind, and not only that, but the very-rare-indeed-kind that gives love back as generously as he takes it. The long-ago Mr. Kroger had paid little attention to his illness, even when it entered the stage of acute pain, so intense was his absorption in what he thought was the tricky business of holding Pablo close to him. If only he had known that for all of this time after his decease the boy would still be in the watch shop, how it might have relieved him! But on the other hand, maybe this anxiety,

mixed as it was with so much tenderness and saddelight, was actually a blessing, standing as it did between the dying old man and his concern with death. (Williams 100-101)

In the first three pages, before the reader is introduced to the clandestine encounters Pablo seeks out at the Joy Rio, Williams establishes, then shatters, the stereotypes associated in the culture with homosexual men which defines homosexuals, by nature, as promiscuous, and preferring the clandestine encounters found in places such as the Joy Rio. Pablo, as clearly stated in the passage above, preferred the companionship of one man, Emiel Kroger. Kroger, in turn, was unable to believe that Pablo's one desire is to build a home with him. Kroger had been subject to the homophobia of a society that requires secretiveness and disallows the type of relationship that he truly desired. The narrator describes Kroger as a "fat and strange man." A description that appears, on the surface to mimic society's view of men like Kroger as the other, "queers" or "strange [men]" who search for sexual encounters in alleys, parks, and men's restrooms. Williams reinforces this as a stereotype through the narrator's voice and then reflects on the damage caused by this labeling by examining its effect on Mr. Kroger: the condemnation of homosexuality by society has removed from Kroger's sensibilities the possibility of finding another man who would willingly share his life.

Pablo runs headlong into society's homophobia in the form of a theater usher named George (who also has sex at the ruined theater, but with his girlfriend Gladys) at the Joy Rio:

George also knew about Mr. Gonzales; he knew why Mr. Gonzales gave him a fifty cent tip every time he inquired his way to the men's room upstairs, each time as if he had never gone upstairs before. Sometimes George muttered something under his breath, but the tributes collected from patrons like Mr. Gonzales had so far ensured his complicity in their venal practices. But then one day in August, on one of the very hottest and blindingly bright afternoons, George was so absorbed in the delights of Gladys that Mr. Gonzales had arrived at the top of the stairs to the balcony before George heard his footsteps. Then he heard them and he clamped a sweating palm over the mouth of Gladys which was full of the stammerings of his name and the name of God. He waited, but Mr. Gonzales also waited. Mr.

Gonzales was actually waiting at the top of the stairs to recover his breath from the climb, but George, who could see him, now, through the door kept slightly ajar, suspected that he was waiting to catch him coming out of his secret place. A fury burst in the boy. He thrust Gladys violently back against the washbasin and charged out of the room without even bothering to button his fly. He rushed up to the slight figure waiting near the top of the stairs and began to shout a dreadful word at Mr. Gonzales, the word "morphodite." His voice as shrill as a jungle bird's, shouting this word "morphodite." (108)

George, though engaged in clandestine sexual activity in a women's restroom, refuses to see his sexual desire and practices as anything like that of Pablo Gonzales's. George's sexual practices cannot be named in his lexicon, as they are "natural," following the hegemonic ideology of society. Pablo's desires occupy a distinct entry in George's catalog of deviance, that of the "morphodite," the other. Whatever shame George may feel for having sex with his girlfriend in a public place can be masked by his outrage over Pablo's sexual practices. John C. Clum and C.W.E. Bigsby insist that "he [Williams] does not challenge the binary structure [of society's attitudes to sexuality] itself," (Savran 80). Rather than reinforcing heterosexual stereotypes of homosexual behavior, Williams, by parroting society's language of deviance, is commenting on heterosexual society's refusal to acknowledge a correlation between heterosexual and homosexual desire. Williams reworks this theme in his next "gay" story, "One Arm."

Williams wrote "One Arm," according to his *Memoirs*, in 1945 in Mexico City during a short, intense affair with a Mexican student (93). "One Arm" is the story of a male prostitute, Oliver Winemiller, who, when we first meet him, is hustling men on the sidewalks of the French Quarter in 1939 New Orleans, a career he has practiced from New York to Miami. Oliver is a former "light heavyweight champion boxer of the Pacific fleet" whose career ended with the loss of his arm in a car accident (Williams 175). With the loss of his arm, Oliver has lost his ability to feel emotion for anyone, including his clients and himself. Oliver is beautiful, in spite of or perhaps because of, his missing arm, to his clients; he is the "broken statue of Apollo" (175).

Oliver drifts to New Orleans where he is picked up by the police for the murder of a stockbroker on a yacht off Palm Beach. Oliver's confession to that murder obscures the true nature of his presence on the

yacht as he claims that he has been hired to appear in a “blue movie” with a woman (177). In truth, Oliver was drunk and cannot remember why he killed the broker. Oliver does not tell the police that while he was in Florida “he made the acquaintance of some wealthy sportsmen and all that season he passed from one to another with money that piled up faster than he could spend on clothes and amusement” (177). Oliver does tell the police that the making of the blue movie upset him and that he broke up the production when he “struck the girl and kicked the camera over and fled to the upper deck” (177). When the other guests returned to shore, Oliver stayed aboard because the broker “had wheedled him with money and the promise of more” (177). He then informs the detectives, “I knew if they left him alone with me that he would be sorry” (178). With this statement, the prosecutors charge Oliver with premeditated murder and at his trial, he is condemned to death.

Oliver obscures the truth regarding his presence on the yacht. In the process of deleting his homosexual behavior, a lie that society has forced Oliver to tell, he has signed his own death warrant. Oliver’s case and his impending execution become national news:

The arrest of the broker’s killer was given space in the papers all over the country. The face of the one-armed youth was shot from newspapers into the startled eyes of men who had known him in all of those places Oliver had passed through in his aimless travels. None of these men who had known him had found his image one that faded readily out of mind. The great blond youth who had been a boxer until he had lost an arm stood as a planet among the moons of their longing, fixed in his orbit while they circled about him. Now he was caught somewhere, he had crashed into ruin. And in a sense this ruin had returned him to them. He was no longer on the highways or tracks going further, but penned in a corner and waiting only for death.

He began to receive letters from them. Each morning the jailor thrust more envelopes through the bars of his cell... The messages were similarly phrased. All of them spoke of their shock at his dilemma, they couldn’t believe it was true, it was like a bad dream, and so forth. They made allusions to the nights which he had spent with them, or the few hours which they almost invariably pronounced to be the richest of their entire experience. There was something about him, they wrote, not only the physical thing,

important as that was, which had made him haunt their minds since. What they were alluding to was the charm of the defeated which inflamed nerves of those who are still in active contention. (178)

As Oliver reads the letters from these men, which seem, at first, merely the breathless desires of former tricks, he begins to experience a transformation. Edward A. Sklepowich, in his essay "In Pursuit of the Lyric Quarry" explains Oliver's transformation in this way:

These letters from his disciples are instrumental in the reestablishment of Ollie's pride; his self-conception begins to change and to unfold like an opening flower. Previously unmoved by either homosexual or heterosexual sex, in the characteristically self-assured manner of the hustler, Ollie now masturbates with a sense of joyless wonder, his masturbatory acts resembling the understandably selfish rights of a god. Through autoeroticism and fantasy Ollie reawakens his emotional life, his "rainbows of the flesh" torments as much as it enraptures him because his confinement and impending death impose obvious limits on his behavior and continued development. (527-528)

Oliver comes into his own, accepting his sexuality through the emotional outpourings of the men who write to him. Oliver responds to one of the letter writers: "If I had known then, I mean when I was outside, that such true feelings could even be found in strangers, I mean of the kind I picked up for a living, I guess I might have felt there was more to live for" (Williams 181). Oliver has awakened to the possibility that homosexual desire also includes the opportunity for love, kindness, and compassion. Possibilities that society erases, believing that "deviants" cannot possess these qualities.

Oliver has one final visitor before his scheduled execution, a Lutheran minister who has seen Oliver's picture in the papers and is driven by his latent homosexuality to visit the prisoner: "From the moment that he had seen this photograph the Lutheran minister had been following out a series of compulsions so strong that he appeared to himself to be surrendering to an outside power" (182). The minister is stirred by Oliver's appearance, clad only in shorts, "his sweating body radiated a warmth that struck the visitor like a powerful spotlight. The appearance

of the boy had not been exaggerated” (184). The minister fights his desire for Oliver by speaking to him of God. Oliver rebukes the minister’s talk of redemption and attempts to give them what they both want, sexual contact. Oliver asks the minister to rub his sweaty back with a towel; the minister complies, his heart racing with excitement which he tries to fight by taking a sedative, only to discover that his own sweat has congealed the tablets to paste. Oliver ups the ante by lowering his shorts and exposing his “narrow and sculptural flanks” (187). The minister pulls back and Oliver grabs his wrist:

You see that pile of letters on the shelf? They’re bills from people I owe. Not money, but feelings. For three whole years I went all over the country stirring up feelings without feeling nothing myself. Now that’s all changed and I have feelings, too. I am lonely and bottled up the same as you are. I know your type. Everything is artistic or else it’s religious, but that’s all a bunch of bullshit and I don’t buy it. All that you need’s to be given a push on the head!” (187)

Oliver, when led to the death chamber, asks to carry his letters with him. He places the letters between his legs and dies with them. Sklepowich analyzes this last scene in Oliver’s life:

The true prison is that of self, and the minister is unable to break out as Ollie is gradually learning—or relearning—to do. That the only repository of grace and perhaps of salvation in the story is a hustler is most significant. Ollie becomes a force of good in a world usually too blind or too fearful to recognize, acknowledge, or accept that good when its epiphany occurs in an unorthodox form or context. (529)

Williams makes the case in Oliver’s story that redemption comes from understanding the impact one has on those one comes into contact with throughout the course of a lifetime. Sexuality is an important component of who we are and a part of us that is ignored or repressed at our peril.

In the winter of 1951-1952 (published 1954), Williams composed an exuberant story of a homosexual male and heterosexual female who team up to cruise men. “Two on a Party” recounts the sexual exploits of Billy

and Cora who meet in a Broadway bar and become cruising buddies who travel the country by train and by car seeking “trade” wherever it may be. Cora possesses no reservations about homosexuality: “You see, she would tell him [Billy], I’m really a queen myself. I mean it’s the same difference honey, I like and do the same things, sometimes I think in bed if they’re drunk enough they don’t even know I’m a woman, at least they don’t act like they do, and I don’t blame them” (285). Billy and Cora begin to frequent the Broadway bars where they can both pursue men:

They would have had one or two promising encounters which had fizzled out, coming to a big fat zero at three A.M. In the game they played, the true refinement of torture is to almost pull in a catch and then the line breaks, and when that happens, each not pitying himself as much as he did the other, they would sit out the final hour before closing, talking about the wicked things time had done to them, the gradual loss of his hearing and his hair, the fatty expansion of her breasts and buttocks, forgetting that they were still fairly attractive people and still not old. Actually, in the long run their luck broke about fifty-fifty. Just about every other night one or the other of them would be successful in the pursuit of what Billy called “the lyric quarry.” One or the other or both might be successful on the good nights, and if it were a really good night, then both would be. (Williams 286)

Here, Williams has presented us with a team. A homosexual man and a heterosexual woman who have teamed up in pursuit of the same end, “the lyric quarry,” the sexual pleasure and presence of a man for the evening. Their goal is shared and does not incite outrage but rather highlights, as Cora states above, that “I like and do the same things.” Williams uses this story to illustrate that desire does not have borders, homosexual and heterosexual desire boil down to the same chemical core, desire:

They [are] two on a party which has made a departure and a rather wide one.
Into brutality? No. It’s not that simple.
Into vice? No, it isn’t nearly that simple.
Into what, then?

Into something unlawful? Yes, of course?
But in the night, hands clasping and no questions asked.
In the morning, a sense of being together no matter what comes,
and the knowledge of not having struck, nor lied, nor stolen.
A female lush and a fairy who travel together, who are two on a
party, and the rush continues...Off they go, from Miami to
Jacksonville, from Jacksonville, to Savannah or Norfolk, all
winter shuttling about the Dixie circuit, in spring going back to
Manhattan, two birds flying together against the wind, nothing
real but the party, and even that sort of dreamy. (302)

“Two on a Party” appeared in print at the beginning of a revolution in prosperity and cultural changes that arose from the ashes of the Second World War. Homosexuals were beginning to create an identity. John D’Emilio records the changes brought about by the war:

The war severely disrupted traditional patterns of gender relations and sexuality, and temporarily created a new erotic situation conducive to homosexual expression. It plucked millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming, out of their homes, out of towns and small cities, out of the heterosexual environment of the family, and dropped them into sex-segregated situations—as GIs, as WACs, and WAVEs, in same-sex rooming houses for women workers who relocated to seek employment. The war freed millions of men and women from the setting where heterosexuality was normally imposed. For men and women already gay, it provided an opportunity to meet people like themselves. Others could become gay because of the temporary freedom to explore sexuality that the war provided. (472)

The historian Charles Kaiser in his history of gay post-World War Two America, *The Gay Metropolis*, writes: “[A] book published at the beginning of 1948— a giant scientific treatise—sparked a huge debate about sex in America” (52). This book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* by Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, and Clyde E. Martin, in Kaiser’s words “did more to promote sexual liberation in general and gay liberation in particular than anything previously published between hard covers” (52). The sheer numbers of men who reported the experience

of orgasm with another male shattered the belief that homosexuality was rare. Kinsey reported:

The data in the present study indicate that at least 37 percent of the male population has some homosexual experience between the beginning of adolescence and old age. This is more than one male in three of the persons that one may meet as he passes along a city street. Among the males who remain unmarried until the age of 35, almost exactly 50 per cent have homosexual experience between the beginning of adolescence and that age. Some of the persons have but a single experience, and some of them have much more or even a lifetime of experience; but all of them at least have some experience to the point of orgasm. (Kinsey 623)

The Kinsey report was remarkable for its attempt to debunk homosexuality as a sickness and for its promotion of tolerance:

In view of the data which we now have on the incidence and frequency of the homosexual, and in particular on its co-existence with the heterosexual in the lives of a considerable portion of the male population, it is difficult to maintain the view that psychosexual reactions between individuals of the same sex are rare and therefore abnormal or unnatural, or that they constitute within themselves evidence of neuroses or even psychoses. If homosexual activity persists on as large a scale as it does, in the face of the very considerable public sentiment against it and in spite of the severity of the penalties that our Anglo-American culture has placed upon it through the centuries, there seems some reason for believing that such activity would appear in the histories of a much larger portion of the population if there were no social restraints. (659)

Kinsey also advocated for a change in the way homosexuals were treated:

The judge who is considering the case of the male who has been arrested for homosexual activity should keep in mind that nearly 40 percent of all the other males in town could be arrested at some time in their lives for similar activity, and that 20 to 30

percent of the unmarried males in town could have been arrested for homosexual activity that had taken place within that same year...The difficulty of the situation becomes still more apparent when it is realized that these generalizations concerning the incidence and frequency of homosexual activity apply in varying degrees to every social level, to persons in every occupation, and of every age in the community...It is not a matter of individual hypocrisy which leads officials with homosexual histories to become prosecutors of the homosexual activity in the community. They themselves are the victims of mores, and the public demand that they protect those mores. As long as there are such gaps between the traditional custom and the actual behavior of the population, such inconsistencies will continue to exist. (665)

Another development was the founding of the Mattachine Foundation by Harry Hay and a group of male homosexuals in Los Angeles, California, in 1950. Hay and the other members of the group, "former members of or sympathizers with the American Communist party...created the organization with the intention of fostering self-esteem, equal rights, and group consciousness among gay men and women" (Meeker 82). Martin Meeker, in his essay "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s" records the shaping of the society:

The Foundation's original statement of purpose, drawn up in 1951, included three organizational goals: to unify homosexuals as a group *and* [Meeker's emphasis] with the "dominant culture"; to educate both homosexuals and heterosexuals because "the total of information available on the subject of homosexuality is woefully meager and utterly inconclusive"; and "to lead forward into the realm of political action".... The praxis of the Foundation, "founded upon the highest ethical and social principles," was to provide "a dignified standard upon which the rest of society may base a more intelligent and accurate picture of the nature of homosexuality than currently obtains in the public mind." According to a 1952 promotional letter, the Foundation proposed "to sponsor, supervise and conduct educational programs for the aid and benefit of all social and emotional variants and to promote among the general public an interest, knowledge and

understanding of the problem of such persons.” Through the Foundation’s incipient public relations work and its semipublic forums came a significant dialogue in which silence was replaced with an alternative voice. (83, 84)

The hopeful outlook of the Mattachine Society and Kinsey’s plea for better treatment and understanding did not reflect the realities homosexuals faced in the United States when *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* first made its appearance on Broadway on March 24, 1955. The persecution of homosexuals in government service began in 1950 with the passage of the Internal Security Act which spawned the creation of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations whose duty it was to investigate the pervert problem amongst federal employees. In 1953, Senator Joseph McCarthy assumed the chairmanship of the subcommittee and ran it like its famous sister organization in the House of Representatives—the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). The senate committee found that homosexuals in sensitive government service could be construed as security risks: “Aside from the criminality and immorality involved in sex perversion such behavior is so contrary to the normal accepted standards of social behavior that persons who engage in such activity are looked upon as outcasts by society...” (Kaiser 79) The committee’s report found its way into the newspapers through the Hearst reporter Lee Mortimer. Mortimer “combined Kinsey’s statistics with the senate’s conclusions” and reported: “10,000 faggots had avoided detection by the FBI and that the government was honeycombed in high places with the people that you wouldn’t let into your garbage-wagons” (Kaiser 79). President Eisenhower, in 1953, signed an executive order in which, “for the first time, ‘sexual perversion’ was listed as sufficient evidence and necessary ground for disbarment from federal jobs” (Kaiser 80). Never mind that two of the chief persecutors of homosexuals, Joseph McCarthy and J. Edgar Hoover, were most likely homosexual themselves (a fact that makes Kinsey’s remarks all the more prescient).

Through 1955, 640 government employees, all male, were removed from their jobs under this new presidential order. As Kaiser notes, “That number probably understates the real figure because many were allowed to resign without being forced to disclose their sexuality.” *The New York Times* also did its level best to keep homosexuality equated with criminal activity. Headlines from this period cover everything from: “Perverts

Called Government Peril,” to “23 More Undesirables Are Seized in Times Square as Round-Up Spreads” (Kaiser 80). Washington and New York were not the only cities seized by homosexual panic. Miami, in 1954, was in the thrall of a homosexual panic resulting from the murder of a male airline steward by two “teenage hustlers” (Fejes 306). Fred Fejes, in his essay “Murder, Perversion, and Moral Panic: The 1954 Media Campaign Against Miami’s Homosexuals and the Discourse of Civic Betterment” finds that before the murder, homosexuals in Miami “were regarded with an attitude of discreet tolerance—official permissiveness and public silence, they were now treated with an attitude of stigmatized tolerance—official permissiveness and public condemnation” (307).

In an interview with Arthur B. Waters in *Theatre Arts* in July 1955, Tennessee Williams stated that “Brick is definitely not a homosexual...Brick’s self-pity and recourse to the bottle are not the result of a guilty conscience in that regard. When he speaks of ‘self disgust,’ he is talking in the same vein as that which finds him complaining about having had to live so long with ‘mendacity’” (Devlin 35). In a very real sense, Williams is not just playing a game of semantics. He speaks of Brick’s disgust with “mendacity.” “Mendacity” comes in many forms in Brick Pollitt’s world. There is the lie that Big Daddy will recover from his illness; the meanness embodied in Brick’s brother Gooper and his sister-in-law Mae; the lie of the happiness of Big Daddy and Big Mama’s marriage, a lie that only Big Mama believes; most importantly, the “mendacity” that cripples Brick Pollitt is homophobia, of which he is the principal cause and sufferer in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Brick’s homophobia is destroying his life as it destroyed the life of his best friend Skipper. Brick’s inability to admit that, perhaps, his attraction to Skipper may have been sexual and that shared desire leads him to reject Skipper’s plea for help, for release. This is the crime that keeps Brick Pollitt looking into his glass of Echo Spring, hoping for the “click” in his head that will release him from pain.

Evidence of Brick’s crime has to be gleaned from hearsay as the object of his torment, Skipper, has died before the raising of the curtain on the first act. The other two homosexuals who inhabit the space of the play are also dead, although their relationship is also at the center of Brick’s struggle. Big Daddy’s predecessors, the former owners of the plantation Peter Ochello and Jack Straw, haunt the bedroom in which Brick and Maggie now live. These two men happily shared the bed that Brick and Maggie now pretend to share, a fact that Big Momma

inadvertently stumbles across in the first act, pointing at the bed: “When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!”

Williams builds *Cat*'s narrative around the prevailing culture's notion that homosexual and heterosexual relationships occupy different planes. Homosexual relationships are “perverted” and rooted in promiscuity, while heterosexual relationships center on love and child-bearing. Mark Royden Winchell in “Come Back to the Locker Room Ag'in, Brick Honey!” writes.

The most conventional interpretation of Brick's relationship with Skipper is rendered by Mae and Gooper. They see these two gridiron heroes as examples of arrested development. In the original version of the third act, Mae says: “Brick kept living in his past glory at college! Still a football player at twenty-seven!” In the Broadway version of the play, these observations are split between Mae and Gooper. In both versions, the brother and sister-in-law try to convince Big Daddy and Big Mama that Brick is a sexual deviate...they are probably delighted by the thought that Brick is the antithesis of the all-American male everyone believes him to be. (702)

Winchell further states that Mae and Gooper are not “essentially homophobic” but rather they use homophobia to reinforce their claim to the family fortune (702). Not only is homophobia a means to control sexual behavior, it is also a way to ensure the economic security of the nuclear family. If Mae and Gooper represent a cynical homophobia, used to insure economic security, it is Brick who is tortured by society's definition of masculinity. John Bak, in “‘sneakin' and spyin'” from Broadway to the Beltway: Cold War masculinity, Brick, and Homosexual Existentialism,” locates Brick's emotional crisis in Cold War society's characterization of homosexuality:

Constructed homosexual identity based uniquely on gender and sexual inversion allowed for masculinist male-male desire, whether homosocial or not, to persist free from suspicion. Even communities of gay men themselves formulated such a distinction. As George Chauncey Jr. describes in *Gay New York*, the gay world divided itself between the fairies (a gay identity) and the queers (a gay act), with gender inversion effectuating

that distinction. While the queer male—the homosexual male who maintained the gender constructs of heteromascularity—despised the fairy for conjoining homosexuality to effeminacy, he also privately lauded him/her for giving him the closet space in which to practice his homosexual tastes among heteromascularity, middle-class culture. Thus, if Cold War heteromascularity had responded to its crisis of masculinity by extracting homosexuality from sexual performativity alone and relocating it instead in an effeminate identity, then Cold War homomascularity had effectively done the same. But with the fairy safely catalogued as the (homo)sexual Other, what distinguished the two forms of masculinity from each other? (243)

Brick's crisis lies in the fact that he cannot separate his love, or if not exactly love—his heightened emotional involvement—with Skipper from society's definition of masculinity. Brick's feelings for Skipper, and Skipper's as well, must be buried in the camaraderie shared between professional athletes, the arena of perpetual youth, where emotions between men are safely above suspicion, devoid of any hint of sexuality. Brick uses homophobia as cynically as Mae and Gooper: "By systematically defaming all the gay men in the play, Brick enacts homophobia as unimpeachable proof of his heterosexuality...for Brick, what separates him and Skipper from them is that he and Skipper had never slept together, with Brick still insisting on the primacy of the homosexual act over the identity because it is tangentially more viable as proof and also consistent with his existential nature" (Bak 243).

Williams work has been viewed as the voice of the closet, a door half opened, half closed, limited in its possibilities by internalized homophobia and a need for commercial success. But what do we take with us when we put down a story by Williams or walk out of the theater? Who do we see when we look at Pablo Gonzales, Oliver Winemiller, Billy, or Brick Pollitt? We see men whose lives have been damaged by homophobia. Pablo Gonzales desires the comfort of sex and companionship with one man. That possibility ended with the death of his lover. Still, after the death, he sought that companionship in fleeting moments in the balcony of a movie theater, an establishment whose very existence depends, and is founded upon, a need for relief from the mundanity of everyday life. Pablo's respite came in those flickering moments of contact between

himself and other patrons who were looking for the same form of release, as surely as those who came for respite in the flickering whites and grays emanating from the movie screen. Oliver Winemiller, the heartless hustler, goes to the death chamber days after realizing that he has found love hundreds of times but he did not have the knowledge that is required to recognize it; a knowledge that society, in its prohibition of the expression of love between men, denied him. Oliver's empowerment comes too late and his last chance to express empowerment through sexuality is thwarted by a man, the minister, who cannot separate his own desires from society's pressure to conform. Billy, the male component of "Two on a Party," has found the companionship that Pablo seeks, in the form of fellow traveler, Cora. Cora is the antithesis of homophobia, a woman who sees Billy's sexual desire for men as she sees her own: an attempt to fill the void, to pass the time. Between Billy and Cora, there is no politicalization of desire, it is not a commodity. Billy and Cora see themselves as equals, their sexual desires are the same, the search for the never ending party does not divide them into homosexual and heterosexual, it is merely desire, a "party." Brick Pollitt incorporates all of these characteristics. Brick desires the "innocent" companionship of his dead friend Skipper; a lifelong friendship that was effectively killed by Brick's view of proper masculinity. Homophobia, in Brick Pollitt's case, allows him to be a "man." Homophobia has robbed each of these men of the possibility of happiness. Pablo Gonzales dies from fright after his confrontation with George, the homophobic theater usher, who, blinded by the other, cannot equate his sexual practices with Pablo's. Oliver dies with his letters, the avenue of his awakening, in the electric chair, denied one last chance at giving comfort, love, and enjoyment through sex. Brick, deprived of his alcohol, may impregnate his wife and inherit the largest plantation in Louisiana. He will never again experience the "purity" of his love for Skipper. The golden age of his youth and Skipper are gone, and as a homophobe, he will only see its reflection in the bottom of his bottle.

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**Flying Pontiacs, Miracle Cures,
Killer Chihuahuas, and Land Barons:
David Lee's Small Town Epics and Elegies**

Chad Wall

Professor: Neil Harrison

ENG 415 Neihardt Seminar

I grew up in a little Nebraska town situated on the flattest, most productive farmland in the state. From time to time my paternal grandfather and I would walk out to a small rise on his farm, a hump in the land imperceptible to the travelers sealed in their cars miles away on Interstate 80. In late spring, before the corn grew above my head, I felt that I could see the ends of the earth. On our island mound in a sea of corn, my grandfather would take my hand and stare out over that vast expanse cooled by the humidity rising from the irrigation pipes and boast, quite incorrectly, that the land in any direction you cared to look belonged to us. This land had sent his four children to college and would probably help send his twelve grandchildren to college as well. This land provided us an anchor, he said, the place we could always call home. I would look up into my grandfather's face, feel his heartbeat coursing through his large hand into my palm, and then look out at the kingdom that he and my great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather had managed to hem together, and my heartbeat would fall into rhythm with his.

Life has changed, and was rapidly changing when I was a small boy growing up in the sixties and seventies. My father became an engineer and even though we lived in close proximity to the family farm, we were "town people" who lived in a modern all-electric house in a subdivision complete with entrance gates and restrictive covenants. We shopped in Lincoln instead of on Main Street in York. My mother and her sisters thought nothing of driving for an hour to buy a purse or a new pair of shoes. My aunts and uncles also chose other careers. Cars, planes, and television were making the world less vast. Our little town was no longer small, that sea of corn was easily traversed, easily forgotten. Our neighbors were no longer the Goertzens seven miles down the Blue River Road but instead the populaces of Chicago and Kansas City. We all wear the same clothes and buy the same books. The farm is gone, sold off to

second cousins and unrelated parties. The house that “we could always call home,” built by my great-grandfather, was pulled down a few years after my grandparents moved in town to Pursey Street. I seldom see the cousins that I grew up with and rarely visit that place where I first became acquainted with the world. I have not recovered my earlier rural enthusiasms and after spending nearly fifteen years in the east and later a vastly changed Lincoln, Nebraska (where you now have to go to the observation platform at the capitol building and squint to see a corn field). That life seems irretrievable if not unthinkable.

David Lee’s narrative poetry invokes that world bordered by the lush fields of high summer and the expanse of its stubbled winter counterpart; a town small enough that one can take in its entirety from a rise in the land. His town is populated with the faces and peccadillo-riddled personalities that are as familiar to those of us who grew up in these places huddled on the plains as our own families. The poems found in *My Town, Day’s Work* and the long poem “Incident at Thompson Slough” are reminders of and elegies for a way of life. The poems are epic in nature, at once overwhelmingly sad and outright hilarious. The denizens of Lee’s small Texas town tell a collective story and like Chaucer’s pilgrims they present us with a snapshot of a moment in time. These are the descendants of the pioneers, caught on a nearly barren plain that their ancestors presumed a paradise. The men are alternately crotchety and joyful; the women have the same fierce vitality of Chaucer’s Wife of Bath as they face the world with an inner glee and a healthy dose of sarcasm. A preacher, who reminds us of the Pardoner, uses his position as a man of God to wring extra “considerations” from his parishioners as well as the townsfolk at large. Chaucer’s gentle, pious priest is found in the janitor/healer Mr. Cummings who comes whenever he is called and requires nothing in return. John Milton’s rebelliousness, found in his finest character, the Satan of the first four books of *Paradise Lost*, is seen here in the delightfully incorrigible Kay Stokes. Here we can also find the central tenet of Milton’s poetry, the devotion to a single ideal. Milton built his epics around the conceit that man’s singular devotion to God, above all earthly pleasures, was the highest human achievement. Lee distills this ideal to a devotion to place, delivered with a wink and a nod, that what is important is remembering and keeping the place that made us who we are.

Lee opens the collection found in *My Town* with the poem “Prelude.” The poem contemplates the ability to reconnect with humbler origins.

“Prelude” begins with a pair of epigraphs that serve as an exchange of ideas about one’s ability to truly return home. The first, “You can’t go home again” taken from the Thomas Wolfe novel, is a line that has become an adage for those who no longer feel they have a place in the world of their childhood. The second epigraph answers this old saw with a voice that one assumes is a real acquaintance of Lee’s, Bill Holm, who replies, “That’s shit” (3). The poem is as much an earnest reinforcement of the belief that one cannot return home and find meaning due to education and experience found in the outside world, as it is a polemic against that view. Bill Holm, the speaker and the most pragmatic of the two voices, refutes Wolfe’s view:

Who sed that?
Did somebody say that
or was it in one of them dam books you read?

It don’t matter
it’s a pile of crap
I go home ever day
don’t matter where I am
I’m the prodigal son coming back
I don’t even need a Greyhound bus (3)

The separation that we feel is a construct, a castle that we have haughtily built in our own minds to separate ourselves from a place that no longer fits our refined, educated minds. Bill Holm is standing there with a reminder:

I can go to my town right now
right here talking to you
because this
is everywhere
I’ve ever been (3)

So much for the tortures of modernism. As Bill Holm says, “That’s shit.” We cannot escape the place that made us. It is as deeply ingrained in our psyche as any book we have read or lecture we have attended that has, as we sometimes disingenuously say, “changed our lives.” Nothing we have learned or experienced in other places will wash our early

experience from us and nothing is essentially new or different. We may return anytime as long as we return honestly. Lee follows "Prelude" with a poem that does just that.

In "Terrace Mound" the narrator guides us through a remembered view of his hometown. We travel from the grocery store operated by a failed farmer to the place where an immigrant family lived (whom the narrator now realizes is no more foreign to this country than his own family): "they's immigrants/spoze most of us are/they took a later boat" (4). Then we swing by the rich part of town to the Stokes' and the Patricks': "them's the expensive people" (4). A flat part of town with less money and more sun: "in the sun is Ellis Britton/should have planted a tree there/be shade for the whole block." A Gypsy who brought a carnival to town and stayed because he: "got in a knife fight/over one of the women." And finally Mr. Cummings: "and acrost that street/right down there, see/was a man I loved" (5), Mr. Cummings, a janitor and a healer who was much respected for his compassion. Mr. Cummings along with Kay Stokes and the others appear as central figures in many of the volume's longer poems. "Prelude" and "Terrace Mound" become the work's central conceit. It *is* possible to return home even though we look at that place from an elevated position, as if from a rise on a terraced field. The only thing we can hope for is that the view is clear.

The reader is brought closer to Lee's early experiences by his use of the idiomatic speech. Said becomes "sed," can't becomes "caint." Grammar is turned inside out by inverting the conventional notions of structure by placing verb phrases before noun phrases and adjective phrases that are colloquialisms of rural America: "Kay Stokes had more money than God" (64). Lee has been compared to Twain in his use of idiomatic speech but Lee is perhaps more honest in his usage than Twain. Twain used colloquialisms and idiomatic speech to indicate, through a satirical usage, a deeply native stupidity. Lee's effective use of these elements, often enough, delivers a belly laugh but the technique also illuminates his subject's humanity. Twain left Missouri and lived the larger part of his life in the northeast. David Lee has remained in the vicinity of his youth.

Lee's gift, and the core of his art, is found in the deeply textured portraits of his small town characters. The reader is introduced to each of the peculiar denizens of the town, much as my grandparents used to tell me the stories of their friends and neighbors. The poems are intertextual; people come and go, only to re-appear in another poem as a

supporting character or the star of their own show. There are echoes of Chaucer here in Lee's ability to find the humanity, or lack thereof, his characters have hidden under their odd little exteriors. "Ugly," for example, tells the story of Raphael Martinez who, after years of trouble, woke up one day in horrible pain caused by a kidney stone. Martinez tries to relieve himself of this pain by placing a pistol in his mouth and pulling the trigger. In lieu of a quick death, Martinez only manages to blow a hole in his cheekbone and remove "half of his ear" (6). As he has no more bullets for the pistol and "he couldn't get to the rifle," Martinez employs various methods of suicide to end his predicament including cutting his own throat, jumping into the fireplace, braining himself with a hammer and finally trying to get himself thrown from his meanest mule, who, instead, takes his master to town. After all of this hard work, Martinez is still among the living and discovers that he has been suffering from a kidney stone. His suicide attempts have given his face the countenance of a monster. Years later, when Martinez discovers that he is going to die of cancer, he

started laughing and bawling
did the cross thing
sed oh thank god goddam thank god
I's afraid it'd be the kidney stone again
he's so happy they sed
it almost looked like that face
would of busted like a balloon
sed he wasn't afraid of no cancer
or dying cause he been there before
but with the kidney stone
it wasn't no way he could find out
how to not be there when it happened
and that's just too ugly
for him to think about (10, 11)

"Preacher" concerns itself with a Baptist minister, Reverend Brother Strayhand, who uses his pulpit to impress his congregation with his calling:

he loved to preach on how
he got calt by the Lard to be his servant
when he's only 16 years old

met his lovely wife that same summer
my mama sez she figgered he's right
all boys that age get calt
some of them on the telephone
but she thought the Lard
got a wrong number that time
we all scrut up now and then (14, 15)

Brother Strayhan, with his family of nine children, frequently finds himself short of cash and "ever 3rd Sunday the sermon/was on the collection plate" (15). The preacher demands discounts from the local merchants, those who will not accede to his demands will receive hellfire from his pulpit. Brother Strayhan manages to terrorize most of the merchants into compliance until he walks into Lela's café. Lela, a Presbyterian, is not intimidated by the Baptist minister. She listens to his demands, offers him a one-time discount and upgrades the meager order he has made for his wife and children. Lela throws the preacher's smug request for his steak to be prepared "Scriptural" back in his face while she shouts his order to the cook:

put him a steak on
from the bottom of the pile
I'll pay the different
cook sez how he want that steak?
she yelled Scriptural
burn the sonofabitch to hell
he never did come back there
to eat again after that
and it never hurt Lela's business
not even one bit (17, 18)

Lee turns from the Reverend Strayhan to the town's only doctor, Doc Kitchens, who performs an appendectomy on a kitchen table and saves an ornery man's life. The doctor provides good and adequate care for the town while persistent rumors suggest that he "got his degree out of the back/of a funny book they sed" (27). A good man, who is not really missed until a new doctor arrives in town and Doc Kitchens, retires to veterinary medicine.

The portraits continue in this fashion, elegies for sons of bitches and

determined women: Bryant Williamson, who is not prone to lie about the reliability of his new Ford, unwittingly finds himself on a radio show promoting the dealership where he purchased his lemon; a man who cantankerously blows up his own stock tanks so that no one may fish out of them; Mrs. Bullard, who every Thursday does the wash and cleans the house, including the cat; and Faith Tittle, a woman who doesn't trust her doctor (who wants her to have a hysterectomy) because he played piano music in his office. After Faith acquires a second opinion, she has the operation and it is discovered that she has been carrying an absorbed twin. News, which when the town gossips spread across town, forces Faith to leave:

She's ruint
all over town they's talking about it
her business was everybody's
and down in the flats
they's scairt to death of her
says her name out loud
their eyes swelt up like a coffeecup
they sez she been with the devil (42)

Faith Tittle and her womb become the stuff of village legend.

"Lazy" introduces us to the town invalid, Floyd Scott, who is so lazy he drives to the grocery store to buy a beer and ends up with the added bonus of rolling the car and achieving handicapped status. Just what Floyd was looking for. Lee then segues to the wealthiest man in town, Kay Stokes, a man even more temperamental than the hilariously crabby Bryant Williamson: "Kay Stokes had more money than God" (64) and he isn't afraid to let you know it. Stokes has two interests: keeping people off of his land and watching his grandson play football:

besides having money
and ordering people around
and making sure nobody
ever set foot on his private property
without his permission which he wouldn't give
to the President of the United States
or the Catholic Pope if he was a Englishman
the only thing he ever took a inarrest in

was watching that boy play football (65)

Kay Stokes is one of Lee's most memorable characters and appears in many of his poems. He influences every aspect of the town's life and does not expect to be trifled with:

his hired hands
would rather had the burning bush
tell them they castrated the wrong bull
than have Kay Stokes get out the rag on them
his word was the Law
and if he fired them they might as well
leave the country
if they committed suicide
wouldn't nobody bury them
they'd feed them to Wesley Steven's hogs

Kay Stokes's ban on fishing on his ranch survived him in death. When a group of townsfolk petition his daughter, Ruby Patrick, to open up the ranch to fishing she replies:

she sed as long as it is one drop
of her daddy's blood
alive in anybody's veins
for as long as it takes
or that family sold that ranch
or until they could get
bananas to grow in the pastures
and teach the cows to peel them and eat them
them signs her daddy put up
would stay right there (71, 72)

Lee introduces us to a few more characters: "Curley," the town drunk who passes out in his shed after a mishap in brewing beer. "Vera," the county treasurer finds herself caught in the middle of a nearly apoplectic catfight in her own bed (and halfway up her nightgown) while she is dying of cancer. "Vera" is simultaneously hilarious and almost overwhelmingly sad; I became sad enough at the aspect of Vera's cancer that I chided myself for laughing at the Stooze-like comedy of the catfight.

Lee's earlier book *Day's Work* also includes a few of these lovely and comedic portraits as does the long poem "Incident at Thompson Slough." I will make a brief detour into *Day's Work* and "Incident" before returning to the concluding poem in *My Town*.

"Arthritis" features Ruby Patrick, the strong-minded daughter of the irascible Kay Stokes and her Chihuahua. The narrator begins the poem by discussing his bad case of "arthritis" and wishing that he had:

a copper bracelet
they say helps out when you got it on
or one of them Mexican chinchilla dogs
you can set with it in your lap
and watch T.V. and it keeps
the arthritis away (47)

The poem quickly breaks away from the subject of its title and drifts into a narrative of the relationship between Ruby and her father, hard work and indolence, the rich and poor; delivered with Lee's singular ability to wrap all of this up in slapstick humor. Ruby buys a Chihuahua on the advice of Mr. Cummings, the town healer, only after she has consulted several arthritis specialists:

he sez get you one of them Meskin
dogs without no hair on it that can fit
in a teacup they advertise in *Grit*
and the funny books and set with it
in your lap a hour a day
and it'll be a whole lot better
but it won't never go away
you might as well get a marriage license
to it so she did (48)

Ruby paid \$100 for her dog Carlos and her father launches into her wondering what has possessed her to spend money on a worthless dog: "can it bring a duck or a quail?/that sonofabitch cain't even set up/in the front seat of a pickup/and see out the winder" (Lee 48).

Kay Stokes goes on to argue with his daughter over the wasting of money (they both have "more money than God") which he believed could have been better spent in town, eventually becoming part of his bank

account. The dog is mean as hell, mean as Kay Stokes, and loves no one but Ruby. Ruby returns the dog's affections and she believes that it helps her arthritis. The poem then shifts, becomes a comic argument as to how the poor should respond to charity. A poor man arrives in town with his family in tow and appears at the church looking for help in feeding his family. The church takes up a meager collection and it is decided that the way to help these people is to bring them food at that evening's prayer meeting. Ruby Patrick brings twelve quart-jars of peaches to the family. When the man returns the jars, unwashed, the next day, he hangs about Ruby's front door asking for a cigarette and not offering to help Ruby return the jars inside or thanking her for the food. Ruby marks him as a professional con man who would wait her out for another donation of food. Ruby lets him sit in the sun and then sets Carlos on him. A dog the size of a large cat chased poverty from Ruby's door, chased poverty out of town. Kay Stokes later had to admit that the dog lowered Ruby's doctor bills, a sidelong way of saying that he admired the dog's ability to eradicate deadbeats.

"Edna Mae" concerns a woman who helped her undertaker husband bury the town's dead. Everyone knew someone had died when she appeared in her funeral outfit and "her golden slippers." Edna Mae took her job seriously, she and her husband worked hard to make sure that bodies were viewable and that the funerals were proper. Edna Mae died from cancer and the townspeople wondered who would provide the same service for her. As it turns out, Edna Mae provided the same service for herself as she had provided for others:

the preacher sez she'd don
wrote out all the plans
for her funeral
and the sermon and the prayers
and the singers and the songs
and before we could even wonder
about it they had the first song
and if I live to be a hundred
I'll never forget it
them singing *oh them golden slippers*
at her funeral
and everybody who was there'll swear
to this day when they went by

her box at the end
she's smiling. (80, 81)

"Incident at Thompson Slough," a poem in nine sections reaching 350 lines, is a snapshot of a small town on a rather extraordinary afternoon. I laughed so hard as I read "Incident" that I woke my dog from her mid-afternoon nap. She immediately gave me a Carlos-like look of irritation and then went back to sleep, leaving me to my laughter. "Incident" begins innocently enough with an old man, Ollie McDougald, who finds his car will not start on S & H Green Stamps day. His nephew-by-marriage convinces him to ride his bicycle to the grocery store. On the way, Ollie comes across Coach Bingham, who offers to hook Ollie's bike up to his new Pontiac and tow him into town. Ollie reluctantly accepts and Coach Bingham gives him a whistle to blow if he gets into trouble. Meanwhile, Clarence Ivey is late getting some Meadowlark butter home to his wife. He has wasted the afternoon talking to fish down at the lake. As he realizes his tardiness, he gets in his truck and finds that it will not start; a fuse is blown. Clarence replaces the fuse with a .22 bullet, starts the truck and he and his son head to town for the butter. Here is where the fun begins. Clarence comes across Coach Bingham towing Ollie on his bicycle. Clarence "racked his cherry bomb mufflers" at Coach Bingham and encourages his son Jerry Don to flick a booger at the coach's car. Jerry Don does this and Clarence takes off with Coach Bingham in hot pursuit. Clarence and Coach Bingham pass Deputy Sheriff Junior Shepherd "showing Maudie Fay Rayburn how the inside/of the new two year old patrol car looked" (6). Sheriff Shepherd looks up and sees Clarence passing him, then Coach Bingham and finally Ollie McDougald behind the Pontiac, all of them going by at 90 miles an hour. The sheriff joins the race with Maudie in tow. Suddenly, the .22 fuse goes off in Clarence's truck and he is shot into his left testicle. Clarence goes off the road and high centers "cherry bomb mufflers backfiring/ like the 4th of July" (9). Coach Bingham's new Pontiac swerves and then flies off the road into Thompson Slough, up to its doors in muck. Ollie McDougald arrives next:

Ollie McDougald's red bicycle
turned into a launched sky rocket
over Coach Bingham's Bonneville Pontiac
fifty feet out into muck

before they ceased partnership
that whistle blowing so hard
his face looked like two half muskmelons
stuck on his cheeks
bicycle landed upside down in a juniper
front wheel a windmill spinning
like an Olympic champion
Ollie bellyflopped in gumbo
slid twenty more feet up onto tule grass
rolled over thinking he was blind for life
or dead in black hell
until he wiped off the mud
not a single bone broken
or a bloody nose for a souvenir
said he had to pull the whistle back up
by the string from where he swallowed it (9)

Deputy Sheriff Shepherd's patrol car also screams into the slough. As he is digging his way out he is hollering, "Yall all under arrest." Everyone is shook up, but no one is seriously hurt, not even Clarence Ivey.

The pain these people experience, as in our day-to-day lives, lays beneath the events of the day, even events as incredibly slapstick as Lee's "Incident." Clarence Ivey has an airless marriage as we learn when his wife arrives at the scene. She wonders where her Meadowlark butter is rather than the condition of her husband and son. Ollie McDougald is a lonely old man who is not offered a ride to the grocery store. Sheriff Shepherd is giving Maudie a tour of the police car, a tour his wife is most likely unaware of, and Coach Bingham is so proud of his car that he will risk lives to defend the Pontiac's honor. Sadness and loss disguised by humor, David Lee writes in the language of the Plains.

The second-to-last poem in *My Town* is "Postlude" which recalls the death of Mr. Cummings, the much-loved retired grade school janitor/town healer mentioned in the opening poem "Prelude." Mr. Cummings was a man who could do for people when Doc Kitchens could not. In the earlier poem "The Wart" we learn that Mr. Cummings could not only cure warts, cure a child's thrush, he could stop a person from bleeding to death. Mr. Cummings would not accept money for his labors. The townspeople considered Mr. Cummings a mystery, but a welcome one and his services were used by everyone in town, rich or poor, believer or

non-believer. The narrator describes Mr. Cummings's last few minutes:

And then it was like he looked right past me
like it was others in that room besides me
he stopped whispering and looked where they were
then he sez Well hello
it's sure nice of you to come
I swear that room turned warm like summertime
you'd think you could smell clover hay in there
when I looked at him again he was smiling
I could tell he done gone and left (134)

Rationally, or scientifically, we know that the mind chemically eases us into death by imagining loved ones who have preceded us in death helping us out of the world. My grandmother started talking to the ceiling two days before she died of cancer (as did one of her daughters, my Aunt Nancy, when she died of the same disease). Lee's observation of this phenomenon in the above passage reflects my experience with my grandmother and my aunt. At first, one is overwhelmed by the psychological aspect of it, and then the sadness that the person they love is starting to turn away from them forever, and then a brief flash of relief that the dying have departed in the good company of those they have loved. It is an experience that is nearly impossible to adequately put into words, especially for someone like myself who does not believe in an afterlife. Lee manages to put it on the page:

they all talked about it for days and years
we should of built him a statue
but those of us who'd thought of it wasn't expensive people
so he's just buried instead
some sed it was his wife come for him that day
some sed his boy Eugene must have been there too
the elders and deacons sed it was Jesust for sure with the angels
Billy Bob never sed nothing else about it
and neither did I
there wasn't nobody for me to tell
but when I close my eyes and think about it even now
I can hear that sound I heard back then
of some silver bells jinglejangling in the wind (134)

David Lee is a great poet, a poet who knows and uses his voice to bring back a world that is increasingly treated as irrelevant in the national consciousness, lightly tossed off as “Red States,” a land of hicks that vote outside of their own self-interest, misread and mistreated by the powers that be. Who remembers that the Progressive movement was born among the people of the Great Plains? We are left with a world that is, in reality, quickly fading from existence; Nebraska alone has nearly 10,000 abandoned farmhouses. My grandparents would not recognize the town in which they spent the majority of their lives. Lee’s characters are alternately or simultaneously cantankerous, fiercely independent, meek, god-fearing, rich or poor, complex and simple. They are the people who make up any small town or any neighborhood. I have known and been horrified by the visage of a failed suicide like Ralph Martinez (a friend of my grandfather’s who also missed the mark with his pistol). I have also known overly opinionated, miserly rich men like Kay Stokes. I have heard people talk in my parents’ church, people like Ruby Stokes, who were disappointed in the responses of the poor to their “gifts” of charity. I have known unmarried women who are surrounded by rumors and suspicion like poor Faith Tittle. Lee’s poetry is the voice of identity, knowing who you are is the direct result of remembering where you started from. The small town that lives in the back of your mind returns when you pick up one of David Lee’s books, and, like the narrator in “Prelude,” you can sit on a small rise and watch those lost people re-materialize, going about their business on the streets of your childhood.

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Chimpanzee Linguistics: The Contributing Research of Roger S. Fouts

Lisa Nelson

Professor: Daniel Miller

PSY 470 History and Systems

Individuals set out each day with or without a plan. Regardless of this, events occur that one is not expecting; some of these events are devastating, and some are what make dreams come true. Some individuals would say these events are random, and others believe that every event is part of a master plan. Whatever the nature, these events determine and change lives. For some individuals, these changes are the instruments they use to benefit not only themselves, but all life on earth. Dr. Roger S. Fouts, Professor of Psychology at Central Washington University, is one of these individuals.

Early Years

In the late 1960's, Roger Fouts experienced a life-changing event. He was accepted into the graduate program in Experimental Psychology at the University of Nevada. With a wife and a young child to support, Fouts applied for a graduate assistantship under Allen and Beatrix Gardner, faculty scientists. The Gardners were raising and teaching an infant chimpanzee American Sign Language (ASL) in a cross-fostering atmosphere. They named the young female chimpanzee Washoe, which means "people." They were using Washoe's natural powers of observation as the medium to instruct her in ASL and did not use any form of conditioning. The introductory interview with Allen Gardner wasn't going all that well, when, suddenly, Washoe spontaneously jumped into Roger's arms. Being personally handpicked by Washoe clinched the deal. Fouts secured the research assistantship. Fouts recalled that "thanks to a two-year old chimpanzee I was going to be a psychologist, not a plumber" (Fouts & Mills 1998, p. 15).

From September 1967 to October 1970, Fouts and a few other students spent time working with the Gardners and Washoe. They all took a vow of silence and used only ASL in the presence of Washoe. Fouts (1998) is

Careful to show that the Gardners did a thorough job of reviewing all the previous cross-fostering studies and noticed that each had a common error: the previous studies had equated language and speech. The Gardners made sure that their research with Washoe would not repeat this error (p. 25). During Fouts's time on the project, he was instrumental in developing the guidance method of ASL instruction that enabled Washoe to learn efficiently (p. 80). This marked the beginning of the life-long research of Fouts in language acquisition and development in chimpanzees, our closest living relatives.

Research

In 1972, Fouts conducted experiments with four young chimpanzees, two male and two females approximately eighteen months to two years in age. Fouts taught the chimpanzees ASL with a molding method, which he described: "the experimenter physically molded the chimpanzees' hands into the correct position for that particular sign in the presence of an exemplar of that sign" (p. 978). Fouts wanted to determine if other chimpanzees could be taught ASL, indicating that Washoe was not unique in her abilities. Fouts taught the four chimps ten signs and then tested for accuracy in a double-blind procedure. The double-blind procedure is so named because the researcher asking the questions and the researcher recording are both unable to see the item that the chimpanzee is viewing thereby eliminating the possibility of cuing. All of the students were able to perform at above a chance level, and all four learned the ten signs. The experiment showed that Washoe was not just an exceptional chimpanzee and that the capability for language must be present in all chimpanzees. In addition, the study gave the experimenters insight into the differences each chimpanzee had in acquiring ASL based on individual traits, similar to the way human children learn in personal differentiated steps.

Fouts and Krause (1997) also studied gestures and eye contact communication skills. They demonstrated that like humans, chimpanzees use eye contact and hand pointing as a method of communication. In the experiment, the researchers noted that two chimpanzee test participants, Moja and Tatu, were solely responsible for initiating the communication interaction. The chimpanzees captured the experimenters' attention in varying ways, such as hand clapping, foot stomping, and hitting enclosure fences. Once they had the experimenters' attention, the chimpanzees

made eye contact and then pointed to what they wanted. They used index finger extension the most frequently; this ability often develops in home-raised and laboratory chimpanzees where no language training is presented, but is not seen in the wild. The chimpanzees also alternated their gaze between the desired object and the experimenter in conjunction with the pointing. According to the experimenters, this demonstrated that the pointing was communicative. The study showed that the chimpanzees used referential pointing to name objects, show objects, and request them as a function of a gestural language. This type of communication is similarly seen in early human development, typical of infants “during the first year but does not become fully mature until 18 to 24 months of age” (p. 330). Experimenters Krause and Fouts (1997) suggest that comparative research between chimpanzees and children should be done to potentially indicate the development of similar cognitive abilities.

As indicated, gesturing is also a major component of human communication. Water and Fouts (2002) stated that a gradualist hypothesis of the origin of human speech proposes a step-by-step type of progression of language development; one that includes a gestural stage (p. 174). Once humans incorporate the gestures, they continue to help facilitate verbal breakdowns; even today they are important in those tip-of-the-tongue memory lapses individuals experience. Water and Fouts (2002) state that there is a “natural connection between mouth and hand” (p. 175) and give the example of Babkin’s reflex in newborns. When pressure is applied to a newborn’s palm, the newborn opens its mouth.

Fulwiler and Fouts (1976) also found that after training a non-communicating autistic child ASL, the child began having spontaneous speech production. According to their research, areas of the brain that are essential for the production of speech are also essential for fine-motor movements of the hand. They examined the presence of sympathetic mouth movements in five chimpanzees when accompanied by fine motor movements of the hand. The researchers videotaped the chimpanzees using gross and fine motor movements of the hand. The experimenters taped each chimpanzee each day for two weeks, but never when they ate. The experimenters looked for four variables: behavioral context, facial expression, mouth movement, and type of grip configuration (hand movement). Mouth movements consisted of any movement of the lips or tongue, and the hand configurations consisted of precision, side opposition, palm opposition, and gross motor. Overwhelmingly, the five

chimpanzees each showed more mouth movement during fine motor manipulation of objects. The results support the hypothesis that a gestural language may have preceded a vocal language; in fact, might even be responsible for its development thereby explaining why sympathetic mouth movements and fine motor hand movements accompany one another. Water and Fouts (2002) conclude:

The ontogeny of human infants as they develop both communicative and motor skills supports such a view. Infants prior to two months synchronize the movements of their hands and arms with movements of their head and mouth. Later when exploring their environment both the mouth and hands serve as important devices for such exploration and often do so in coordination. This coordination is likely the reason for the prevalence of language. (p. 179)

Fouts did more than train and test chimpanzees; he found another practical application for his work with ASL acquisition. Fulwiler and Fouts (1976) worked with a five-year-old autistic child. The boy's mother reported that he was hyperactive and demonstrated strange behaviors, such as uncontrollable emotional fits of laughing or crying. He was also frequently destructive and violent and had unintelligible language. After twenty hours of ASL training, using the total communication method (where the experimenter spoke the word while molding the child's hands), the child used several signs appropriately. Fulwiler and Fouts (1976) stated that "the most interesting result was that as the use of signed speech increased, the use of vocal speech increased in both amount and appropriateness" (p. 46). The study showed that training in ASL is an important medium to develop communication abilities in autistic children and that through ASL training, the child also acquired a working knowledge of English syntax. Fulwiler and Fouts (1976) also reported that after the training, the boy was more attentive, initiated contact with others, was toilet trained, and became more manageable overall. Fulwiler and Fouts (1976) stated that this demonstrated that the ability to develop a means of communication "had rewards beyond the mere acquisition of words" (p. 50).

Fouts and Mills (1998) noted that when the Gardners started teaching Washoe ASL, their goal was for her to have "true two-way communication with humans" (p. 29), which involved initiating conversation, asking

questions, and making comments. One of the hallmarks of true communication according to Bronowski and Bellugi (1970, as cited in Fouts & Mellgren, 1976), is to have reconstitution, the act of combining words or signs so they form new words, meanings, or messages. Experimenters Fouts and Mellgren (1976) showed that the chimpanzees often combined signs to create words to describe or name items for which they do not possess an ASL sign. For example, the chimpanzees called watermelon *candy drink* (p. 329). This ability to combine signs showed that the signs were not static symbols, but could be used to produce novel forms of communication, indicating a high level of cognition. The experimenters also showed that the chimpanzees had a level of comprehension beyond the familiar and understood signed commands or requests that they had never seen before. Their experiment used a double blind condition to eliminate human prompting or cuing. They then asked the chimpanzee participants to place new items in a specific location or old items in a new location. The chimpanzees performed well above the chance level. Fouts and Mellgren (1976) stated that “the results of this experiment show that a chimpanzee can comprehend signed commands that he has never seen before” (p. 333), reaffirming the key component of production, or reconstitution, as present and functioning in the chimpanzees’ language use.

Naturally, humans use word combinations to create new and novel meanings, and they also pass on their gestural and verbal production of language to their offspring. Fouts, Hirsch, and Fouts (1982) discovered that given the same opportunity, chimpanzees will do the same thing. Fouts et al. (1982) state that “in higher primates with a long childhood, communication is critical not only for breeding, but also for the establishment of healthy bonds between mother and infant” (p. 160). Therefore, the ability to successfully communicate predicts the likelihood of survival.

In 1979, Washoe gave birth to a baby boy, Sequoyah. Unfortunately, because of the very poor conditions at the University of Oklahoma primate studies lab, Sequoyah fell ill and died. Fouts recalls that he held Sequoyah’s tiny hand while he “silently begged God to save his life” (Fouts & Mills, 1998, p. 230). After Sequoyah’s death, Washoe became very depressed and withdrawn. Fouts worried about her and feared that she, too, might become ill. He began looking for an adoptive chimpanzee infant for Washoe to raise. Two months after his search began, in March of 1979, the Yerkes Regional Primate Center at Emory University agreed

to give Washoe an adoptive baby boy named Loulis. Fouts et al. (1982) decided that this was the perfect time to conduct an experiment to determine if an infant chimpanzee could be taught ASL from his mother. Loulis actively acquired ASL by imitating his mother and by observing the other signing chimpanzees housed with them. Washoe proved to be an excellent instructor. On occasion she actually molded Loulis's hands into the correct ASL sign. In addition to ASL, Washoe also taught Loulis games that her human researchers had taught her. She also actively disciplined him when he behaved poorly. This study showed that language and other behaviors are a process of cultural transmission, and certainly not unique to human beings.

Although Dr. Fouts's research work was widely known in scientific fields, in 1997 he published the book *Next of Kin: My Conversations with Chimpanzees* so the general reading population could learn about the abilities of chimpanzees. The book was so well received that it was rated one of the best one hundred books of 1997 by the *Los Angeles Times* and *Publisher's Weekly*. The book summarizes the work of other historical research conducted with primates, his work teaching the chimpanzees ASL, and enlightens others regarding the responsibilities of animal testing.

Fouts and Mills (1998) carefully explain to the reader that humans and chimpanzees are different in the degree of intelligence each possesses, but not in the kind of processes the brains of each possess. Fouts states that "after thirty years of conversing with and observing them, I'm more convinced than ever that the chimpanzee mind and the human mind are fundamentally alike" (p. 344). Although our brains are alike, they do differ in degree of specialization. This difference occurs because socialization requires particular environmental adaptation. Fouts explains that "chimps are not as intelligent as humans when it comes to sequential thinking" (p. 350). However, they are far more intelligent compared to humans when thinking simultaneously. Although simultaneous and sequential thought processes are inseparable, the human brain has come to rely more on sequential thought—the type used for long trains of thought, logic, and planning. Simultaneous thought is used when reading another person's body language, or for practiced motions such as driving a car or playing a sport. Individuals just know what to do and do not really have to concentrate on what they are doing (pp. 346-350). According to Fouts (1998), chimpanzees are "absolute geniuses at reading and exploiting body language" (p. 350).

However, this difference in sequential and simultaneous abilities does not discount that each species' brains still share common ancestry. This belief is what leads Fouts away from just doing research with chimpanzees and spending more of his time and effort educating others about the humane and ethical treatment of captive chimpanzees. Fouts states that “[b]y the time I turned fifty, I knew I wanted to be judged not by what I wrote in scientific journals about chimpanzees but by what I did for them” (Fouts & Mills 1998, p. 344).

Ethical Issues

In recent years, Fouts's work has focused on improving the lives of captive chimpanzees and other great apes. Jensvold, Sanz, Fouts, and Fouts (2001) conducted research as to the effects of enclosure size and enclosure complexity on the behaviors of chimpanzees held in captivity. This research was done in an effort to improve the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) regulatory dimensions for primates housed in zoos and biomedical labs. Their study examined the differences in species-typical behaviors in primates when their enclosure area was increased in size and incorporated design complexities providing climbable, above-ground space.

Jensvold et al. (2001) found that when the five chimpanzees, Washoe, Moja, Tatu, Dar, and Loulis, were moved from their enclosed space on the third floor of the Psychology Building Facility (PBF) at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington, to the Chimpanzee and Human Communication Institute (CHCI), also in Ellensburg, all five chimpanzees showed an increase in species-typical behaviors. The PBF had 27.87 m² of indoor space with no access to the outdoors or direct sunshine; the walls and ceiling were covered in a woven wire surface that was climbable. The CHCI, which opened in May 1993, had 587 m² of space, with indoor and outdoor enclosures. The outdoor enclosure had a vast array of climbable surfaces and included plant life. The research provided behavior data collected at both sites. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated to determine the transformation of frequency for species-typical behaviors in each enclosure area. The study found that travel (running, leaping, and climbing) nearly doubled, feeding decreased, and resting increased in the larger CHCI enclosure. Jensvold et al. (2001) discovered that the chimpanzees spent 73.40% of their time above the ground making good use of their vertical space. The

chimpanzees also showed improved strength and agility. This research clearly demonstrates the importance of enclosure design and additionally indicates that the USDA minimum standards for enclosure size (2.33 m² of floor space for an adult chimpanzee) and complexity design were not sufficient for insuring a quality of life that a captive animal should be afforded.

In 1981, Dr. Fouts and his wife founded the Friends of Washoe, a non-profit organization dedicated to the welfare of chimpanzees. They have also established a conservation project in Ngotto Forest in Central Africa to protect primates and were active participants in changing the status of chimpanzees in Africa from *threatened* to *endangered*. The Fouts actively support providing sanctuary for chimpanzees that have been retired from biomedical research and the Air Force Space program. In addition, they are founding members of the Great Ape Project, a group of scientists and scholars that advocate offering captive apes the same basic moral and legal protections that humans enjoy. Fouts (1998) states, “Now that the chimps are grown and more independent, my fondest goal is to make our Institute eventually obsolete. I believe that any research, including my own, that depends on captivity ought to be phased out” (p. 381).

Forty-four years ago, in 1960, when Roger Fouts enrolled in his first required animal psychology course, he did not realize that this life-changing event would eventually lead him to his position today as professor, researcher, caregiver, and defender of our genetic cousins, the chimpanzees. He did not know the influence his chimpanzee research would play in understanding human cognitive abilities, specifically in language acquisition, or the importance such research would have vis-à-vis the ethical treatment of captive animals. Fouts (1998) suggests that viewing chimpanzees as “them” versus “us” is what causes moral and ethical problems in research (p. 371). This attitude stems from not having the opportunity to get to know chimpanzees as well as humans know their human relatives. Fouts’s research has demonstrated that arrogance and ignorance are the two most destructive weapons humans possess and that personhood should go beyond species classifications.

One of Fouts’s dreams is realized every Saturday morning in Ellensburg, Washington, when the public is invited to attend a Chimposium workshop. The visitors learn about chimpanzee culture, the history of Project Washoe, and chimpanzee etiquette and then go to the observation area to view the chimpanzees in their environment. Fouts (1998) states that “[o]f all the people who visit Washoe’s family, deaf

children are the first to recognize the chimpanzee as our next of kin (p. 353). He continues by saying that his fondest hope is that “one day, every scientist will see as clearly” (p. 353).

Dr. Fouts continues to try to make a paradigm shift away from captive animal research by teaching psychology at Central Washington University and by being a voice for the ethical treatment of all captive animals through his research and publications. His research has given the scientific field helpful insights into the origins of human speech. He has also enabled others the opportunity to get to know their next of kin, the chimpanzee, as well as the peoples of West Africa, who have lived among the chimpanzees for centuries and refer to them as “beloved brother” (p. 48).

Though the difference between man and the other animals is enormous, yet one might say reasonably that this is little less than the difference among men themselves.

Galileo, 1630

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Paradigm Shifting: Effects of Outdoor Recreation on Environmental Attitudes

Arturo Villarreal, Jr.

Professor: Monica Snowden

SOC 420 Environmental Sociology

Introduction

Many scholars have attributed the beginnings of contemporary environmentalism to the Earth Day held in 1970. This momentous event brought together hundreds of thousands of people with environmental concerns who were in part inspired by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962), which detailed the environmental and health risks associated with the production and use of synthetic chemicals. After the first Earth Day, the environmental movement saw many successes, such as the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which led to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Environmentalists had a lot of hope at this time that the general public was becoming more environmentally concerned and could begin to support policies that would protect the natural environment even at the expense of economic growth. As environmentalism spread, people became increasingly aware of environmental issues that needed attention, such as air pollution and deforestation. Furthermore, the environmental problems produced by modern industry, especially after the explosion of the petrochemical industry, were making it increasingly difficult for people to ignore problems such as air pollution and deforestation. The risks to human health and the scarcity of resources for human use were also becoming more obvious. As a result of these changes some believed that individuals in the U.S. were beginning to shift their view of the human relationship to the natural world (Dunlap et al., 2000).

This paper reviews the literature of changing environmental attitudes. It begins with an analysis of traditionally held beliefs about the human relationship to the natural environment. Then it looks at how those beliefs may be changing today. For example, it explores the influence of outdoor recreation as well as traditionally accepted socio-demographic factors on environmental attitudes. It argues that individuals are changing their

environmental attitudes, but it is variable based on socio-demographic factors and behaviors.

Paradigm Shifting and the Emergence of a New Ecological Paradigm

Drawing on the work of Thomas Kuhn, M.E. Olsen et al. (1992) defined a social paradigm as a broadly accepted and shared mental model by people in a society about how the world works. They elaborated further by explaining that a social paradigm was not an ideology or as broad as a worldview, which is a total cultural belief system shared by people about the world. It is, they argued, a logic or frame of mind used by people to analyze both problems and facts. This paper focused on the Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) which describes the mental model held by people in industrialized societies about their relationship with the natural environment. Olsen et al. (1992) described the DSP as having eight different dimensions:

1. Faith in the efficacy of material abundance
2. Support for economic growth
3. Faith in material abundance
4. Faith in future prosperity
5. Support for laissez-faire government
6. Support for the status quo
7. Support for private property rights
8. Support for individual rights

As a result of the DSP, the natural environment and its species came to be viewed as a resource base to be consumed and manipulated for human gratification. Olsen et al. (1992) argued that as environmental problems became more pervasive and severe it became increasingly difficult for people to accept the DSP's authority. Consequently, the worldview held by people in industrialized nations like the U.S. began to crack and shift.

A great deal of research has been done to examine the emergence of a new ecological paradigm. It was thought that when experiences both internally and externally conflict with the DSP the process of paradigm rejection, replacement, and adoption may begin (Olsen et al., 1992). Internal and external conflicts take place when what a person sees or

experiences no longer coincides or confirms what he or she believes to be true. Thus, as people started to understand that the environment was no longer an endless supplier of resources and that it was not capable of absorbing all the by-products of industrial production, their beliefs and ideas were not as easily supported. When the discrepancies became increasingly difficult to ignore, the possibility to change or replace the DSP started to exist (Olsen et al., 1992).

Consequently, researchers have been exploring the possible emergence of a New Ecological Paradigm (NEP) that would replace the DSP. Dunlap and Van Liere (1978) began to explore a potential shift in paradigms from the DSP to a NEP by constructing a NEP scale that would measure changes in environmental consciousness. The original conceptualization of the NEP was based on a 12 item scale that sought to measure three broad constructs: 1) acceptance of the human capacity to disturb the balance of nature; 2) the recognition that there were limits to human societal growth; and 3) the rejection of the belief that humans have the right to govern or dominate nature (Dunlap et al., 2000).

Subsequently, Olsen et al. (1992) explored the possibility that Americans were starting to change their views about the human role in the natural environment and embracing a NEP. They first began to examine the possibility of paradigm shifting in the state of Washington. The data were drawn from a survey conducted in 1982 of Washington state residents. The survey consisted of DSP and NEP oriented statements on which respondents would indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale. The study found that there was increasing agreement with the NEP and weak support of a DSP. After this study and many years of empirical testing, a new NEP scale was produced by Dunlap et al. (2000). This new scale differs in many ways from the old scale because it added new constructs and measuring them resulted in a 15 item scale (see appendix A). The new scale has five constructs:

1. The acceptance of limits to growth
2. The rejection of anthropocentrism
3. The fragileness of the balance in nature
4. The rejection of human exemptionalism
5. The possibility of an ecocrisis

Numerous studies found the existence of these dimensions to be valid as well as the likelihood of some samples to adhere to some of these

dimensions and not to others. Along with the addition of constructs came the modification of outmoded sexist terminology (“mankind”) that was present in some of the old items and the inclusion of an “unsure” category in order to avoid a large amount of nonresponse as a result of the lack of a midpoint.

Interestingly, after many years of testing the scale it proved to have high predictive validity. In order to test the scales predictive validity it would have to be shown that people known to be more environmentally conscious would score higher on the NEP scale. For example, other researchers studying interest groups found that their samples of environmental organizations and environmentalists scored higher on the NEP scale than the general public or members of non-environmental interest groups (Dunlap et al., 2000). Furthermore, it was also found that students enrolled in the recreation and park management program of a university scored higher on the new NEP scale than did students enrolled in two other programs at that same university (Thapa, 2001).

Outdoor Recreation Participation and Demographics

For the last 25 years many researchers have been interested in the relationship between environmental concern and participation in outdoor recreation, and the development of the NEP scale made their research easier. This same relationship between environmental attitudes and participation in outdoor recreation has also been studied from several different theoretical perspectives.

Johnson et al. (1997) used the symbolic interactionist model in their study of the relationship between participation in unstructured outdoor recreation and race, and found that the meanings that people of different sociocultural groups give to wildlands affect the individual’s interaction with the natural environment. In addition, they suggested that more developed outdoor settings were not only preferred by African-Americans, but by females and the elderly as well because respondents from these groups felt safer and less vulnerable.

The meanings that people or groups give to outdoor recreation were not always dependent on cultural values, but also on the form of interaction that individuals have with the natural environment. A study done by Tiesl et al. (2003) tested the hypotheses proposed by Dunlap and Hefferman (1975) that there was a positive association between participation in outdoor recreation and environmental concerns and,

second, that this association was different depending on the types of outdoor recreation. They placed outdoor activities in two distinct and opposite categories: consumptive and appreciative. Consumptive activities were those that require or cause something to be taken away from the environment. Fishing and hunting were both examples of activities that were classified as consumptive. Appreciative were those activities that actually involved the enjoyment of the environment without having to amend anything in it. Bird watching, swimming, and walking were some of the activities that were classified as appreciative.

Tiesl et al. (2003) expected that activities classified as consumptive would be performed by people whose environmental interest, opinions, and behaviors were lacking and that activities classified as appreciative would be performed by people whose environmental interest, opinions, and behaviors were abundant. Tiesl et al. (2003) found that there was in fact a relationship between the level of environmental concern, types of recreational activities, and behavior. However, it was not as they had previously predicted when using the two categories of consumptive and appreciative. They found that those who participated in some consumptive activities showed as much concern for the environment as those who participated in some appreciative activities. In contrast, other people who had some form of interaction with the environment showed just as much or little ecological concern as those who had not participated in any outdoor activities at all.

There were some researchers who found that the type of outdoor activity being performed was not necessarily what determined a pro-ecological view. Tarrant and Green (1999) found that any form of outdoor recreation was instrumental in predicting pro-ecological attitudes and behavior. Tarrant and Green (1999) looked at the consistency between attitudes and behavior. Since they found that there was a rise in pro-ecological attitudes in the 1990s they wanted to know why there was not an equal rise in pro-ecological behavior. They were more interested in understanding the relationship between attitudes and behavior; they wanted to know what caused people to change their behaviors. They argued that participation in outdoor recreation was an important factor that caused pro-ecological behavior changes. Tarrant and Green (1999) showed that attitudes have a mediating effect on behaviors and not a moderating one. In fact they found that outdoor recreation was a more accurate predictor of pro-ecological attitudes than socio-demographic factors. However, they still found that socio-demographic factors helped

to explain how attitudes caused the behaviors.

Socio-demographic factors influenced the types of outdoor activities individuals were involved in. Cordell et al.'s (2002) study examined the socio-demographic factors that could influence recreational choices and environmental opinions. They found that pro-environmental attitudes were most prominent among white and Native Americans in the U.S. They also argued that as diversity increases in America, as a result of immigration, there will be a negative change in the country's attitude. This was supported by their findings that showed individuals who were born outside of the country tended to feel that humans had a right to manipulate and control the natural environment more than those who were U.S.-born.

Cordell et al. (2002) also found that urban dwellers were overrepresented in outdoor recreation and that since previous studies had shown that involvement in outdoor recreation did affect attitudes (Teisl and O'Brien, 2003; Tarrant and Green, 1999; Johnson et al., 1997; Cordell et al., 2002), it could be assumed that growth in the urban population would cause a growth in pro-ecological attitudes and behaviors. However, they were also quick to point out that the rural population was growing as well. Along with the growth in rural population came the growth in their beliefs that human skill would ensure the earth's livability and that humans were meant to rule over the environment. Although the rural population is growing, the urban population is growing at a much faster rate. Furthermore, it was not anticipated that the increase in pro-ecological attitudes, caused by the growth of urban populations, would be mediated by the increase in rural population growth and their belief that technological innovation can rescue humans from an ecocrisis.

In conclusion, Tarrant and Green's (1999) argument that it was more important to understand the attitude-behavior relationship than the predictive validity of attitudes was the most important argument in this literature. From their research they showed a clear relationship between outdoor recreation and pro-ecological attitudes and these two combined have an effect on pro-ecological behavior. Consequently, it was possible that people's awareness about environmental problems could be increased when they were more involved in outdoor recreation activities.

Methods

This study seeks to examine the relationship between environmental

attitudes and outdoor recreation. In this study outdoor recreation was operationalized by using bicycling. Bicycling was classified as an appreciative outdoor recreation activity. The study hypothesis was that individuals involved in outdoor recreation would have a higher ecological consciousness than those who were not. Ecological consciousness was measured using the fifteen item NEP scale of environmental attitudes revised by Dunlap et al. (2000) (See Appendix A). The scores that could be obtained ranged from a minimum of fifteen to a maximum of seventy-five points. A low score on the scale was associated with negative environmental attitudes and a high score was associated with positive environmental attitudes.

To test for ecological consciousness, a survey was administered to a group of bicyclists and a population of college students. The student sample was drawn from a small midwestern college; a bicycling group sample derived from a neighboring city. Faculty members from the college were asked if they would allow their classes to be surveyed. Once the classes were identified students were randomly selected resulting in a total of 117 students completing the survey. Although a few students were involved in some bicycle riding, the bicyclist group showed a greater frequency of riding and farther riding distances. As a result the student sample obtained from the college was identified as the non-bicyclist group.

The bicyclist sample was drawn from an e-mail list of 45 self-identified bicyclists obtained from a bike shop in the neighboring city, and 48 from another e-mail list obtained from a local trails network in that same neighboring city. There were 73 successfully delivered e-mails resulting in 20 completed surveys.

In addition, traditionally used socio-demographic variables associated with environmental attitudes were tested. The socio-demographic variables included education, gender, age and class (see appendix B for operationalization of variables).

Results

Mean scores on the NEP scale were compared between bicyclists and non-bicyclists as well as for the other demographic variables, sex, education, and class. In order to compare the demographic variables of sex, education, and class the bicyclist and non-bicyclist groups were combined. The sample could have been more representative of the population from which it was drawn. The sample yielded a higher

proportion of males (67.9 males to 32.1 females). The sample also yielded a higher proportion of individuals with some college education between the ages of 19 and 24.

Table 1 shows the results of a two-tailed independent samples t-test used to compare the mean scores of bicyclists and non-bicyclists. Interestingly, the scores were quite similar and were mid-range indicating some agreement with the NEP; however, the scores did not prove to be statistically significant.

Table 1.

Bicyclist/Non-Bicyclist	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	t	p value
Bicyclist	20	50.95	9.822	.269	.788
Non-Bicyclist	117	50.37	8.793		

Table 2 shows the results of a two-tailed independent samples t-test used to compare the mean scores of males and females. There was a noticeable difference in mean scores between males and females that was found to be statistically significant. Females scored higher, indicating greater agreement with the NEP and a higher ecological consciousness. To find out how big an effect gender had on environmental attitudes, an effect test was calculated using the following formula: $d = t[(N1+N2)/(N1N2)]$ (Green et al., 2000). Green et al. (2000) argued that a small effect size indicated by the value of d would be .2, while .5 would be considered a medium effect, and .8 would be considered a large effect. The calculated effect size was .471 which indicated that gender had a close to medium effect on environmental attitudes.

Table 2.

Gender	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	t	p value
Female	44	53.20	5.612	2.576	.011
Male	93	48.90	9.769		

Table 3 shows the results of a two-tailed independent samples t-test used to compare the mean scores for self-identified class. There was a significant difference of nearly 2 1/2 points with the working class scoring higher than the middle class. However, the difference in means was not statistically significant.

Table 3.

Class	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	t	p value
Working Class	52	52.06	9.230	1.553	.123
Middle Class	81	49.69	8.133		

Table 4 shows the results of a One-Way ANOVA done to compare the mean scores for education. There was a very small difference in mean scores that did not prove to be statistically significant.

Table 4.

Education	N	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	F	p value
HS/Some College	89	50.57	8.885	.104	.901
AA Degree	23	49.61	7.402		
4+ Years of College	21	50.43	11.205		

Discussion and Conclusion

Participation in bicycling appears to have had very little effect on environmental attitudes in this study. When reviewing the results of the mean scores between bicyclists and non-bicyclists and socio-demographic factors, they ranged within about five points of one another and were all slightly midrange. These results suggest some acceptance of a NEP. Gender proved to be the most significant of these with females having a greater ecological consciousness than males. Class self-identification also proved to be important when comparing mean scores. Individuals who identified themselves as working class were shown to have a higher ecological consciousness than those who identified themselves as middle class. In this particular study, age had no effect on ecological attitudes which may have been a result of the little variance of age in the sample. It would be interesting to compare mean scores for two or more of the subscales that measure distinct dimensions of the NEP as Dunlap et al. (2000) suggested could be useful. For example, a population may react more strongly to one or more constructs due to other social structural factors.

Furthermore, the region in which this research was done could have played a significant role in the results. This study did not test for rural or urban differences among the sample population so it was not possible to explore rural/urban environmental attitudes. Since the sample was drawn

from a rural area and one that is typically identified as politically conservative as well as quite religious, other social factors could have influenced the level of ecological consciousness than those that this study examined. There is a need for more research in this particular subject matter.

This paper has reviewed the literature on changing environmental attitudes. It explored the influence of outdoor recreation, as well as traditionally accepted socio-demographic factors, on environmental attitudes. This study did not find that individuals involved in outdoor recreation had a higher ecological consciousness than those who were not. However, contemporary environmentalism is still an issue today and it is a topic that should be given close attention. The environmental and health risks associated with aggressive industrial development have become almost impossible to ignore. The general public has been showing a greater interest in the natural environment and indicating a willingness to protect it. As a result, people are closer to shifting their view of the human relationship to the natural environment.

Appendix A.

For each statement indicate by circling whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Mildly Agree (MA), are Unsure (U), Mildly Disagree (MD), or Strongly Disagree (SD) with it.

- | | | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|----|----|
| 1.) We are approaching the limit of the number of people the earth can support | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 2.) Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 3.) When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 4.) Human ingenuity will insure that we do NOT make the earth unlivable | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 5.) Humans are severely abusing the environment | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 6.) The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 7.) Plants and animals have as much right as humans to exist | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 8.) The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 9.) Despite our special abilities humans are still subject to the laws of nature | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 10.) The so-called “ecological crisis” facing humankind has been greatly exaggerated | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|----|---|----|----|
| 11.) The earth is like a spaceship with very limited room and resources | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 12.) Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 13.) The balance of nature is very delicate and easily upset | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 14.) Humans will eventually learn enough about how nature works to be able to control it | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |
| 15.) If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe | SA | MA | U | MD | SD |

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For Their Own Good

Tracy Pierson

Professor: Siobhan Kelly

ENG 384 World Literature

Mothers want the best for their children, hoping that what they instill in them will result in their adult children leading happy and fulfilling lives. However, the journey up to that point is often painful and confusing. I identify with the pain of both the mothers and the daughters in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and how, through that pain, knowledge is imparted, lessons are learned, and life's gifts are handed down through generations – all culminating in the unbreakable bond of the mother-daughter relationship.

In "Two Kinds," Jing-mei's mother knows her daughter is a talented piano player. She wants Jing-mei to succeed in this area. But success to Suyuan is not being a genius or a child prodigy; it is simply trying one's best. In attempting to convey this to Jing-mei, Suyuan is not subtle. Her critical approach is bothersome to me because I know that I, too, can be a bit harsh with my daughters as they practice their French horns and piano.

I, like Suyuan, don't want my daughters to think I expect them to be perfect. I want them to just give it their all; to *really try* is what I expect. I know there are times when they don't do their best. I know what they are capable of. I truly believe that when I push them it is for their own good. My mother did exactly the same thing when listening to me practice my clarinet and piano while growing up. I know now that she wasn't expecting me to be perfect, she just wanted me to play the best I could.

At one point in *The Joy Luck Club*, Jing-mei and her mother watch a little girl play the piano on television. Suyuan makes comments about the girl's playing, and Jing-mei's reaction and comments back to her mother are immediate: " 'What are you picking on her for? I said carelessly. 'She's pretty good. Maybe she's not the best, but she's trying hard.' I knew almost immediately I would be sorry I said that. 'Just like you,' she said. 'Not the best. Because you not trying' " (136).

Later on in the story, Suyuan slaps Jing-mei and says, Who ask you be genius? Only ask you be your best. For you sake. You think I want you be genius? Hnnh! What for! Who ask you! (136). Although I've

never slapped my daughters, and my mother didn't ever slap me when we discussed practicing my musical instruments, I completely identify with this part of the story. I know what Suyuan wants for Jing-mei, just as my mother knew what she wanted for me. And I know what I want for my daughters. In the midst of these painful situations, daughters say they don't understand, but deep down there is a part of them that knows their mothers are trying to teach them important lessons.

I was an excellent clarinet player in junior high and high school. However, after I mangled a very important clarinet solo at a concert during my senior year, I remember putting my clarinet in the case vowing never to open the case again. I saw the pain on my mother's face, and she saw my pain. Suyuan and Jing-mei felt each other's pain. And I see my daughters' pain in certain things they attempt to do in school and at home. They also see my disappointment. But in the end, out of that pain, comes growth and meaning for everyone.

I didn't open my clarinet case until I was 40 years old, and now I'm thinking of playing again, just as Jing-mei played her piano. My daughters continue to play their French horns and piano. Someday they may quit. However, I hope that if they do they know they can always begin again. Not being perfect is okay.

I also identify with parts of the stories "Half and Half" and "Without Wood." Rose realizes that her mother, An-mei, wants to convey to her the importance of paying attention to one's life, to anticipate the consequences of one's actions, and to realize that life's fate is determined partially by expectations and partially by inattentiveness. This is clear after Rose watches her little brother fall into the water and drown, and how she half expected it but didn't do anything about it. Later, she reflects on that incident, as well as on her troubled marriage: "I know now that I had never expected to find Bing, just as I know now I will never find a way to save my marriage. My mother tells me, though, that I should still try" (130). An-mei isn't necessarily telling Rose that if she tries to save her marriage she should expect it will be saved, but rather she should express her feelings to her husband. An-mei wants Rose to know that she can stand up for herself. Fate will determine what will happen to the marriage, but what ultimately happens to Rose can partially be determined by Rose herself.

This is revealed in "Without Wood" when Rose eventually hears her mother instead of listening to everyone else around her. When she refuses to sign the divorce papers and tells her husband she is staying in the

house, she realizes that by letting go of expectations, and, instead, paying attention (and listening to her mother) she got what she wanted: “I saw what I wanted: his eyes, confused, then scared. He was *hulihudu*. The power of my words was that strong” (196). She and her mother had to go through so much pain with the death of Bing and Rose’s troubled marriage, but out of that pain Rose, as well as her mother, are empowered.

I also believe in the story “Half and Half,” where a message is given about hope when Rose is talking about An-mei writing in her Bible: “On the page before the New Testament begins, there’s a section called ‘Deaths,’ and that’s where she wrote ‘Bing Hsu’ lightly, in erasable pencil” (131). Bing’s body was never found. An-mei can still hope, and that is why she wrote his name in pencil, just in case he came back someday; she could then erase his name from the “Deaths” page.

This parallels my life and my mother’s life after my brother died. Even though there was horrendous pain, which we expected, I paid attention to what my mother taught me about my brother’s death. It was very similar to when Rose talked about her mother’s story about tree wood:

A girl is like a young tree. . . . You must stand tall and listen to your mother standing next to you. That is the only way to grow strong and straight. But if you bend to listen to other people, you will grow crooked and weak. You will fall to the ground with the first strong wind. And then you will be like a weed, growing wild in any direction, running along the ground until someone pulls you and throws you away. (191)

Since my brother’s death, tremendous good has come out of the tragedy. And although I heard what other people were telling me after Dennis died, I ultimately listened to my mother, followed my own heart, and grew stronger. I try to gently remind my daughters that many times I know what is best for them and they should listen to me. They don’t always believe me at the time, but eventually, after some time passes, they understand I was correct all along.

Lena St. Clair believes that her mother has the ability to predict the future, as well as the ability to know everything there is to know about Lena herself. I have always had this sense with my own mother – that she can see right into me, and that she knows almost everything there is to know about me, even if I don’t want her to, and even when I don’t tell

her certain things about myself. In “Rice Husband,” Ying-ying wants Lena to understand that if she sees things wrong in her marriage she should take note and do something about them, before everything builds and the marriage ends in divorce. Her comments about the unsteady table in the guest room serve as a caution for Lena: “‘What use for?’ asks my mother, jiggling the table with her hand. ‘You put something else on top, everything fall down. *Chunwang chihan*’” (163). This comment signifies Lena’s marriage, and the fact that it wasn’t based on a good foundation. Ying-ying wants Lena to realize that as issues continue to pile up between her and her husband, the marriage won’t be able to withstand the weight, just like the weight of the heavy marble top, along with the vase, resting precariously on the table’s spindly legs. And, sure enough, after the table in the bedroom collapses and the vase crashes to the floor, Lena comes to investigate. Her mother speaks first: “‘Fallen down,’ she says simply. She doesn’t apologize. ‘It doesn’t matter [...] I knew it would happen.’ ‘Then why don’t you stop it?’ asks my mother. And it’s such a simple question” (165).

I think the story above truly captures how easy it is to prevent certain unfortunate events from happening. My mother, just as Ying-ying did with Lena, used to warn me, in subtle ways, about the potentially negative consequences of my behavior. Although it probably wasn’t all that subtle, I still remember early in my marriage, when my daughters were babies, my mom saying, “I wonder if some marriages end in divorce when the wife decides to go back to college.” She didn’t come right out and say it, but I knew that after I had been talking about finishing college some day, she was concerned I would enroll, try to work part-time, and also try to take care of my family. She knew me, and she knew I wouldn’t be able to juggle all of it. I knew myself well enough not to attempt it; however, I also took note of her indirect warning which was, “Don’t bite off more than you can chew, or it could end in disaster.” It is painful for mothers to watch their children suffer. They will, most of the time, try to teach their children how to avoid risky behavior and hope their children will listen.

Ying-ying’s wish, that Lena truly hears and understands what she is about to tell her, is evident in “Waiting Between the Trees” when Ying-ying makes the decision to examine her life and tell Lena about her past. She wants Lena to have spirit; she doesn’t want her to sit idly by in a marriage where she feels no connection with her husband. She wants her to know true love – the same true love Ying-ying felt with her first

husband, who abandoned her. Ying-ying aches for her daughter: “I hear my daughter speaking to her husband downstairs. They say words that mean nothing. They sit in a room with no life in it. I know a thing before it happens. She will hear the vase and table crashing to the floor [...], her eyes will see nothing in the darkness, where I am waiting between the trees” (252).

After reading “Waiting Between the Trees,” I recalled my first serious boyfriend. My parents didn’t care for him at all, believing he wasn’t good enough for me. My mother began talking one day about what makes a relationship strong – things like trust, respect, and honesty. A part of me knew she was trying to say that I didn’t have these things with my current boyfriend, and that our relationship wouldn’t last. I didn’t pay attention to her and he left me one day, without so much as a simple good-bye.

My mother knew I learned from the situation. Because of that very hurtful experience, as well as the conversations my mother and I have had since then, I was determined to make sure my next boyfriend had the aforementioned qualities. My husband, who, of course, was once my boyfriend, possesses all those particular qualities, and we have a very solid, wonderful marriage.

The union of mothers and daughters is complex, and although there are many joyous moments in the lives of both, it seems as if those moments aren’t given much thought. It is the heart-wrenching, teachable, pain-filled moments that are pondered, analyzed to death, and thought for sure to contain hidden meaning. Meaning that, if fully understood, holds the keys to acquiring strength, perseverance, and courage in life. This knowledge can then be passed from one generation to the next. The ultimate aim being to raise intelligent, considerate human beings who won’t forget where they came from and who will make the world a better place for themselves and for others.

The Joy Luck Club was difficult for me to read at times not only because of its detail, and the intricacies throughout each story, but how I saw myself as a daughter and as a mother reflected in so many of the stories. I also saw my mother and my grandmother. The painful parallels serve as reminders of how far my mother, her mother, my daughters, and I have come in life, and that there is still so much to experience. The novel is complex, but its message is, at the same time, simple – very similar to life itself. After reading *The Joy Luck Club*, I know that the grievous moments I share with my mother and with my daughters are

continually woven together, strengthening the bond between those of us living and the children yet to be part of our family's future.

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The River

Tara Hillman

Professor: Lisa Sandlin

ENG 200 Expository Writing

The house was old, two stories of wood that housed the family of six. The bedroom was cluttered with the collections of two teenage girls. I lived out of the top bunk, a symbol of my imaginary hierarchy over my younger sister. I could only imagine the claustrophobia she endured, being forced not only to walk in the hand-me down lifestyle, but then being cramped underneath every night she went to bed. Because of the snug atmosphere and poor ventilation, the weathered storm window always remained open, exposing us to the elements of the outside world as we slept. In some ways it was refreshing; some nights, though, it was a nuisance.

This happened to be one of those nights. The black sky was bombing and the pounding spring rain kept me awake. I kept adjusting and readjusting, slithering farther under my bedding, trying to escape the loud thunder and flashes that lit up the room. By the time the storm passed only a few hours remained before sunrise. The precious time was again interrupted by the eerie shriek of the small town's emergency siren. Remembering past childhood experiences, I hopped from the top bunk without bothering to fumble with the wooden ladder. I felt my way in the dark, stumbling out of my room and into the hallway that led to my parents' room.

I whispered loudly, not wanting to startle them. As they began coming to and shuffling together any mismatched outfit, the pager on my dad's end table began to talk within a mess of chaotic static. They both stopped to listen to the cracked voice while I ran downstairs to the kitchen where the other pager lay on the antique cookstove. I listened as well as I could while searching Dad's upside down baseball cap for his truck keys.

Out of the urgent message the most troubling words came through: young adults...missing...and the river.

My parents came chasing one another through the house. With one swift motion my dad dumped the remaining contents of change and knickknacks out of his cap, threw it on his unruly hair, and grasped the keys from my hand as he ran out the door. As the light screen door flung

back I gasped a breath of the crisp, early morning, spring air. The frosty air choked me for a second and goose bumps prickled my arms. With the roar of the old Chevy engine I knew I could only wait.

While this routine was rather common in our house (late night calls for EMTs or firefighters), today it was one of those haunting calls. It wasn't an old lady falling, or a barn in flames. This was a call I knew my mom wouldn't sleep well after.

I slowly walked to the dining room and picked up the hooded sweatshirt I had left there the night before. Making my way into the kitchen, I slid my bare feet into a pair of my father's shoes and flopped my way out the screen door onto our back porch. In my pocket I fingered a cigarette out of a hidden pack. Generally, standing in the open, lighting up in a town this size would have meant trouble for a seventeen-year-old. It was early though, the sun barely peeking out over the horizon, and it was Sunday. Even the busybodies took a break till after Sunday services, as though a few hours of goodness might save them from a lifetime of idle gossip.

The events of the Saturday night before played out in my mind. I tried to recall where all my friends were going after I had left them. The conversations were blurry and I couldn't force myself into concentration. The reality of life in a small town on the Missouri River was all I could focus on. It was certainly not uncommon to go joyriding, have a few drinks, and with that extra boost of confidence decide to take a late night swim.

I bent down to rest my elbows on the wood railing of the porch. The dampness left from the storm just hours before soaked through my sleeves and hit the pit of my stomach. After that showing from Mother Nature, the river would be in a particularly bad mood.

Footsteps coming from inside the house made my heart jump. I chucked my smoke into one of my mother's untamed bushes. The screen door opened and my sister walked out with a blank expression and a stale doughnut. She carelessly sat on the porch step and gnawed at the tough pastry. I gave her a disbelieving look. She really was generally clueless.

"Kinda wet out here, huh," she mumbled through a half-full mouth. "What was the sirens for?"

"Someone's in the river."

Her eyebrows rose a bit. "That sucks." Then refocusing on her wet pants she looked up at me. "It rained last night too."

I nodded at her and turned to walk back inside. My youngest brother

was standing in the kitchen looking blankly through the screen door at the two of us. I gave him a slight grin.

“You don’t have to go to church today,” I assured him. He smiled back and hurried through the house. As I started toward the refrigerator I heard the television blare the sound of an organ playing religious chords. I smiled to myself. There was no cable in our little town yet. My brother’s excitement would soon be dwindled by the televised preaching service.

The shrill of the phone’s ring startled me. I stood motionless staring at the receiver. The screen door opened. My sister stepped in and stopped, her eyes directed at me. I breathed out heavily and reached for the phone. It was my mother. She and the other emergency workers were down at a river dock that we all knew well. They anticipated the day would be long and some reinforcements would be needed. I hung up the phone and started preparing the items my mother had wanted. A few thermoses of coffee, orange juice, and some extra clothing were gathered. My sister and I left while my younger brother flipped through the channels and my other brother slept.

We made one more quick stop at the town bar. There was no grocery store, so the bar was the best place to purchase any last minute provisions. We finally left town. The driving was slow on the graveled, curvy river roads. The storm had left its impression on them as well. The tires sank into the muddy roads and pulled the car from side to side as it willed. A ride that generally took a few minutes seemed to last hours. The lush river area passed slowly. It was pretty this time of year with the dancing emerald leaves engulfing the roadside, but that really didn’t occur to us as we impatiently drove to our destination.

When we finally neared the river bottom, we could see the speckling of small fishing boats across the muddy water. I figured the incident that had occurred that morning happened a few miles upriver. We turned onto a road that ran parallel to the river and drove upstream. Soon an ambulance and a few emergency workers were in sight. The cops had arrived too. They stood helpless, gazing into the thick water as it whipped about.

A handful of people with grey blankets draped over their shoulders stood farther back from the bank. Although their hair had started to dry, it was damp enough to give away what part of the event they were involved in.

We drove up to the docking area. I parked the car and we gathered the requested items. In silence we walked side by side up to the group of

EMTs. My mother was there, her legs covered in mud and weeds. Streaks of dry mud painted her face. When she saw us she forced a tired grin.

“It’s no one you know,” she assured us. “Thanks for bringing this down. We’ll be home later, after the divers come.”

My sister started to question her, but my mother just shook her head. “Now’s not the time. Get back home.”

I nodded. As I turned to head back to my car I glanced down the river. The water was crazy that morning. Farther downstream, the angry water bent north around a shallow sandbar. It appeared to be smiling, a greedy, vengeful smile.

War: Justified or Just an Abomination?

Fran Cassell

Professor: Andrew Alexander

PHI 300 Ethics and Values

In the 21st century the world will no longer tolerate nations who spill the blood of their citizens with as little thought as a schoolchild might give a playground fight. In terms of large-scale conflict between states, the modern era has brought about an increased ability of those dwelling on planet Earth to voice their objections to unjust war. Contrarily, however, modern weaponry has increased the risk to those traditionally marked as non-combatants. It is necessary, then, to assess the underpinnings of the current system, to ask if our ancient doctrine of “just war” is able to deal with the varying aspects of modern conflict.

O’Brien indicates in his essay that there are two parts to just war theory. The first, *jus ad bellum*, requires a state to provide its justification for entering into conflict. Intermingled with this is the concept of *jus in bello*, which guides the behavior of the nation during the conflict (594).

The *jus ad bellum* requires five conditions to be met for a conflict to be considered just. The question is, Do these conditions still define what a just conflict is? Legitimacy of authority, the first of these conditions, is not as problematic in the modern era as it has been in history. We now have mechanisms for recognition of authority, such as the UN, regional unions (like the European Union and the African Union), as well as democratic processes in many countries, which can define who is truly legitimate. Not to mention, as O’Brien points out, generally the only states that are capable of sustained modern conflict are those which have the recognition of the world and their citizens (594).

O’Brien places the other four conditions for just war under the banner of “just cause.” Just cause requires substantial reasons for war, the prior utilization of every peaceful means of resolving the conflict, just intentions in the cause, and a proportionate balance between the ends and the means. According to just war doctrine, the killing of innocents or combatants is not to be taken lightly, thus there are only a few instances during which there is reason to go to war. These include: fighting off unjust attacks, restoration of rights, and putting an end to chaotic circumstance (594).

One would assume that the anti-war pacifist argument would be the

exact opposite of the just war doctrine. But in fact they are the same argument. The heart of just war is that the ends must justify the means. The only difference between one who believes in the justification of some conflicts and one who believes in the justification of none is the level of the standard applied. As Lackey indicates, anti-war pacifists simply believe that the inevitable threat to innocent civilian lives is too high a price to pay for whatever justification is provided (589). It is not that the only moral path that the world can take is the pacifistic one, it is just that the world is no longer willing to die for the whims of a few despots. Nor will humanity allow for the senseless slaughter of an unjust war. In this sense, just war doctrine is being followed more now than it ever has been.

A major difference hitherto not discussed is the modern reality of terrorism. Terrorism, and the fight against it, has not been subject to a standard system of morality. Much like revolution, terrorism has been viewed as a special case (O'Brien, 595). The danger of this kind of *ad hoc* morality is that it is almost always possible to justify any action taken in the fight against terrorism, and nations are not subject to the kind of rules provided in the just war doctrine. Terrorist groups are not going to limit themselves based upon any concept of morality. It is frightening to imagine what the world would be like if countries, instead of using their own moral systems, adopted the standards of those who have absolutely no regard for life.

So what standard, then, are we to apply to nations battling terrorism? Just war doctrine's standard of just cause can actually easily accommodate small-scale conflict with non-state based belligerents. The change of thought required is in reality just an expansion of what we view as war, as well as an expansion of the just war doctrine.

Modern just war doctrine must also include the realities of contemporary military and diplomatic capabilities. Just war doctrine, as stated earlier, requires that all peaceful avenues be exhausted before confrontation commences. What we need to do is reassess what we view as all possible peaceful means. There must be much more emphasis placed on exhausting all of these means, rather than just paying homage to them on the path to war. Economic controls, criminal investigations, special ops teams, and even assassination and espionage must all be tried or discarded before one pursues mass conflict. Terrorist groups must have money to operate and technology to communicate; they must have countries to harbor them and bodies to operate their schemes. If a country

battling terrorism attacks these assets instead of other countries, conflict can more easily be avoided.

The nature of modern warfare must also be examined. Just war doctrine dictates that the means of wars must apply the principles of proportion and discrimination. Civilians must not be targeted, and the methods used during conflict must not cause greater harm than the resulting good (O'Brien, 599). Throughout history this has not been observed. The rape, pillage, and bondage of civilian populations have only been a few of the horrors faced by victims of war. Modern technology offers more exotic punishments to non-combatants. Landmines, which are used to create fields full of death traps, live on decades after conflict has subsided. Chemical weapons desecrate the very air, not differentiating between combatant and civilian. Depleted uranium shells are favored because of their armor piercing capabilities. Their effects on non-combatants, though, span for a much longer period of time and are much more horrendous than instantaneous death (Plett, 1). Other, more traditional, horrors are being used in new ways. The BBC has reported that systematic rape is used as a tool to keep civilian populations in line, or in some cases, to decimate a minority population by births from rape victims (Smith-Spark, 1).

Absolutely none of these measures is permissible under the concept of just war.

Kaldor offers a different perspective on ways to keep war under control, which falls directly in line with a strict just war doctrine. If the world adopts a humanitarian outlook, war can be minimized. This has been effective in fighting methods of war that do not fit the just perspective:

Recent efforts to limit or eliminate categories of weapons, like the Land Mines Convention or the protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, or the efforts to control small arms, are not based on the assumption of a balance between states. Rather they are the outcome of pressure by global civil society to uphold humanitarian norms and prevent indiscriminate harm to civilians.
(395)

Her humanitarian perspective also prevents a rush to war, and requires the world to take responsibility for all her citizens. An international court would be commissioned to try terrorists. States would bind together

to hunt terrorists and conduct criminal investigations of terrorism. The pressure of the world could force countries to relinquish terrorists. The moral outrage of the entire world would starve terrorist groups of recruits. Terrorists would also be unable to have justification for their activities because world standards would be applied fairly, and not on the basis of who is supportive of a few world powers.

Until we can live in a world without war, countries will be forced to make tough decisions. Just war doctrine is still a viable method for evaluating those decisions. Even if it is applied only by future generations, just war doctrine minimizes the physical and abstract casualties of war. The humanitarian approach is the just one, and, as long as it is not forgotten that in war people die, the world will continue to diminish the necessity for fatalities until one day we are free of conflict.

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Passion of a New Woman: Finding Identity in Life and *My Antonia*

Katharine Dowling
Professor: Katja Hawlitschka
ENG 480 Senior Seminar

Willa Cather wrote in the New Woman era, where neo-feminist women strove to free themselves from the oppression of the stereotypical, domesticated, feminine roles in a patriarchal society. As a fervent New Woman, she struggled to assert her own unique identity. Cather incorporated the same struggle and assertion into the identity of her characters in *My Antonia*. In Cather's search for identity, both in life and literature, she bravely defied society's norms and rebelled against her mother's expectations, and although plagued with resistance along the way, Cather ultimately became one of the nation's finest female authors in a field of masculinity.

Cather, the first of seven siblings, was born in Winchester, Virginia, on December 7, 1873, and when she was nine-years-old her family moved to Nebraska (Cox and MacDaniels 45). Cather and her siblings grew up under the domineering, heavy hand of their mother who ruled the house. Her mother, Jennie Cather, "exacted strict obedience to a domestic discipline, and punished disobedience with a rawhide whip" (Woodress, *Willa Cather* 20). Although her mother expected superb behavior and punished harshly if social norms were not followed, she "had the good sense to let her children develop their own personalities. [...] She cared for their bodies [but] kept her hands off their souls. Willa inherited her mother's [domineering] temperament, and the two often clashed" (20). To Cather, her mother represented the traditional conception of femininity and the oppression associated with that femininity. Cather wished to express her opposition to traditional roles while her mother wished her to do quite the opposite.

Even at a young age, Cather was anything but the traditional conception of femininity, and nearly the polar opposite of her mother. She enjoyed, and excelled at, male subjects such as Greek, Latin, and the sciences. After shadowing two local physicians and experimenting in a home laboratory, Cather even "began to aspire to be a doctor and

(notoriously) began signing her name William Cather, M.D.” (Stout 14). Although the first, it would not be the last time Cather would attempt to flow between genders to reach her goals. Later in her life, unbeknownst to the young Willa Cather, her signatures would lead to speculation about her true gender identity as biographers sifted through her remaining documentation. However, her act of signing William Cather, M.D. was also an important indication of her passion to achieve her goals.

Cather continued to assert herself against the traditional roles of women when she was appointed to her father’s newspaper staff of the Red Cloud *Republican Chief* as the editor and business manager (Cox and MacDaniels 45). Only fourteen-years-old, Cather was quick to notice that she enjoyed being in charge, and confessed in a letter to one of her mentors “that she was reluctant to leave the office because she held status.” But “Cather’s pleasure in reining [...] over her father’s office did not spring merely from self-importance. She preferred being in the place of the father” (Stout 29). Cather was comfortable playing the traditional male dominant role of a businessman and was not afraid to assert herself to anyone who stood in the way. Her actions, even as a young girl, revealed that the New Woman era played an important part of Cather’s formation of self-identity.

According to the online encyclopedia *Wikipedia*, the New Woman era is known as:

a feminist ideal which emerged in the final decades of the nineteenth century [...] the common aim was to encourage women to liberate themselves from male domination, manage their own lives, and leave behind anything that might restrict their pursuit of happiness and their self-realization. (“New Woman”)

As a young girl, Cather was exposed to the New Woman ideal through the national magazines that her family purchased and kept (Stout 30). The New Woman persona, from which Cather seemed to model her self-identity, would give her the freedom and motivation to attend college and accomplish all of her medicinal dreams, and she would be restricted only by herself.

However, the New Woman was not part of a special program and did not exempt herself from the traditional Victorian views of women. During the Victorian Era, women were to focus on the home life: bear and care for children, be domesticated angels who set a moral standard for children

to follow, and provide a loving home for their spouses to come home to. The New Woman ideal was the beginning of the larger feminist movements and was strongly opposed by conservatives (“New Woman”). Cather did not associate herself with the larger feminist movements for issues such as suffrage but she did align closely with New Woman characteristics (Stout 30). She received an adequate education and used the knowledge wisely; earned her own money and was financially independent; decided not to get married; showed outward signs of being different by wearing comfortable (often masculine) clothes; and, generally, defied society’s social norms (“New Woman”). Cather’s assimilation of the New Woman into her life was a stepping-stone for her career. Even as a young girl, she dreamed of pursuing the masculine goals of medicine and science. She wanted to be in charge, and she wanted a life that blatantly went against society’s norms.

Cather’s New Woman ideals were most apparent after she went to college. Throughout her college experience, she “was [...] branded an eccentric and a bit of a rebel by some of her classmates. She had her hair cut in a man’s fashion and wore above the waist, simple, quasi-mannish blouses and hats; below, lightweight flaring skirts that afforded freedom of movement” (Cox and MacDaniels 45). Cather’s attire fit perfectly the image of the New Woman. Some have chosen to identify Cather as a lesbian or cross-dresser because of her independence and masculine presentation. However, following the New Woman characteristics, Cather illustrates how gender roles are socially constructed.

As a female student in the late nineteenth century, Cather certainly would have been in the minority, and by modeling herself after the New Woman identity, she allowed herself to flow freely between gender identities: “For the most pragmatic of these female modernists, gender fluidity was the name of the game, and masculine dress was one way to usurp male privilege” (Doan 2). It was obvious she was a woman, but her male dressings gave her the freedom to look like a male and therefore partake in masculine identity. However, when she dressed as a man, Cather seemed to gain masculine privileges. Through the recollection of William Westermann, one of Cather’s college classmates, Woodress recounts Cather’s first day of Greek class:

While the students were awaiting the instructor, the door opened, and a head with short hair and a straw hat appeared. A masculine voice inquired if this were the beginning Greek class, and when

someone said it was, the body attached to the head and hat opened the door wider and came in. The masculine head and voice were attached to a girl's body and skirts. The entire class laughed, but Cather, apparently unperturbed, took her seat and joined the waiting students. (*Willa Cather* 69)

Cather understood that her medical career goal was not open to or accepting of women; therefore, she attempted to change her identity to fit into a gender role that allowed her to pursue her goals. Although Cather decided to grow her hair out, only after a friend's mother convinced her, she continued to wear clothes which "freed her from the restraints of clothes worn by most of the women of that day" (Woodress, *Willa Cather* 69-70). However, her outward appearance was only the surface level of her dreams and beliefs inside. Cather would diligently continue in college to achieve her dreams she initially set out to conquer, and as a New Woman, free of society's restrictions, she could achieve anything.

Her first year of college would prove to be one of the most influential. Cather had written an essay that impressed her teacher so greatly that he published it in the *Lincoln Journal*. Woodress quotes Cather on her recollection of the experience: "'Up to that time I had planned to specialize in science; I thought I would like to study medicine. But what youthful vanity can be unaffected by the sight of itself in print! It has a kind of hypnotic effect'" (73). One might be tempted to believe that when Cather changed her initial dream of science to journalism, she gave up part of her New Woman identity. Science was a notably male subject while women frequently chose journalism as a field of study in the late nineteenth century (39). However, Cather had already made great strides in her identity. For one, she was attending college, a non-traditional feat among most women of her time; two, she had decided at a young age that she was not going to marry, another peculiarity of her gender; and three, she was taking on non-traditional roles in her college career.

Just as when she was fourteen years old and playing "the role of father" at the Red Cloud *Republican Chief*, Cather once again yearned to be in control. She co-founded a short-lived literary magazine, and she joined the all-male staff of the *Hesperian* in the position of literary editor. Soon, she became the managing editor, "almost single-handedly raising its standards" (Stout 35). Cather enjoyed the life of a successful woman with power. However, although she was satisfied facing her life single, she was constantly concerned with her financial situation, and she began

to write reviews and literature for various columns.

It would be Cather's writing that would usurp the male privilege, which oppressed women of her time. After college, her most renowned employment was with *McClure's Magazine* where she served as the associate editor, while still publishing stories and sending columns back regularly (Cox and MacDaniels 46). Woodress summed up Cather's New Woman personality best when he described her appearance during her time as editor at *McClure's*: "She looked like a person used to getting things done, someone accustomed to giving orders; maybe was, a rarity in those days, a successful business woman" (3). Cather symbolized the dreams of women. She had become successful without male dependence and, therefore, had broken free from male domination.

Cather's writing, just as the rest of her life, was anything but common, and over time she developed her own style of writing. According to Schroeter at the time of Cather's *My Antonia* (1918), "[t]he American literary tone [...] was characterized by heavy attempts at refinement, uncritical loyalty to the prevailing business ethic, [and] a narrowly Protestant, Anglo-Saxon viewpoint, [which gave readers] a naive delight in stories with a 'well-made' plot [...]" (1). Cather developed her own unique style, and Schroeter eloquently assesses Cather's writing tone: "[she] objected to a certain staleness in the literary air and simply wanted to open the window, to hear a genuinely new accent and view a wider scene" (2). The "new accent and wider scene" which Cather incorporated into her works are her memories of the Nebraska range without a "well-made plot." For example, *My Antonia* is centered around the Nebraska prairie, not the business elite; and by recording "Jim's manuscript, substantially as he brought it to me" (Cather 3), Cather clearly dismisses the duty of a "well-made plot" because it was supposed to be a recollection not a professional literary work.

As a writer, Cather "clearly took inspiration from male writers. [...] The books that left the strongest imprint on her were those of Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Henry James" (Acocella 40). Each author also left a strong imprint on the literary canon in his own unique way. Cather was encouraged by one of her mentors, Sarah Orne Jewett, to avoid imitating the style of what had already been written. Orne Jewett told Cather to "'write it as it is, don't try to make it like this or that'—in other words, don't imitate Henry James" (40). Cather would take Orne Jewett's advice, and in turn, "[...] shift the geographic center of literature toward the heart of the continent [...]" (Schroeter 3)—a large feat for a woman writer

in the early twentieth century. She wrote about the Nebraska scene “which was still referred to in the Eastern magazines in 1913 as ‘the Great Steppes’ or ‘the American desert’” instead of the industrialized, business elite (Schroeter 3). Bravely writing in a tone and on topics unique to her time, Cather was able to create her own mark on the male dominated literary canon and assert herself once again as a New Woman.

Many feminists, however, have trouble with Cather inheriting literary tradition from males. What these feminists miss is that although male writers influenced Cather at a young age, she gained success because she did not attempt to reproduce their style and instead created her own, at the urge of a woman writer and mentor. Looking at Cather as a “foremother” of literature, a feminist would see that she broke free of the male dominated canon restrictions. She avoided any formal structuring of the novel; dwelled lightly on the incidents that were ordinarily emphasized by women writers, such as the melodrama between characters; and with her unique style, cleared the stale literary air (Woodress, *Willa Cather* 290). It would be erroneous not to include Cather in feminist studies because she clearly strived toward freedom from male restrictions by undermining the traditional literary style.

Cather’s new literary style was recognized and appreciated by her peers. Louise Bogan, who interviewed Cather in 1931, noted that Cather had succeeded in forming her own literary style:

When all the awards were going to writers of fiction who compromised with their talents and their material in order to amuse or soothe an American business culture, she, as one of her most intelligent critics has said, used her powers not in mimicking reality but in practicing fiction as one of the fine arts (126).

H.L. Mencken compared Cather’s novel *My Antonia* to Dr. William Allen White’s *In the Heart of a Fool*, giving Cather a wonderful review:

It is needless to add that Dr. White is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Nor is it necessary to add that Miss Cather is not. Invading the same Middle West that engages the Kansas tear-squeezer and academician, and dealing with almost the same people, she comes forward with a novel that is everything that his is not—sound, delicate, penetrating, brilliant,

charming. I do not push the comparison for the mere sake of antithesis. (8)

For a woman striving to achieve and assert her independence from the male dominated literary style, it seemed that Cather had, in fact, made an impression on her peers.

Cather would not only defy society's norms by becoming a successful writer, but she would also be the first woman to be awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from several universities, among them are Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Nebraska, and Michigan. A critic remarked that

Miss Cather, make no mistake, took [receiving her honorary Doctor of Letters degree] as a matter of course. [... She] would not be surprised at anything at all now. For she well knows that she has accomplished, in the last decade or so, a miracle which should cause any university now extant to forget and forgive her sex. (Bogan 126)

As a young girl, Cather struggled with her gender identity, attempting to change it so she could gain acceptance in a world she so desperately yearned to belong. However, ultimately her gender was forgiven because her artistic literary talent was unmatched by either sex. She had become a New Woman free from gender social restrictions that limited her writing to a specific set of topics and writing style.

An example of Cather freeing herself from gender social restrictions is her ghostwritten autobiography of S.S. McClure. She wrote so well from the male perspective that

Even Mrs. McClure and John Phillips, McClure's college classmate and former business partner, found the presentation completely convincing. [Cather] had been so successful in masquerading as McClure that she felt confident in doing an entire novel from a male perspective. (Woodress, *Willa Cather* 290)

Cather flowed freely between gender identities. All at once, she was a female writing about a male's life. She had proven through her New Woman identity and McClure's autobiography that gender restrictions

were constructed by society, and those restrictions were a fluid construct where she could move between the male and female genders.

In *My Antonia*, Cather illustrates her ability to defy gender social restrictions once again and flows freely between gender roles. Not only does she write successfully from a male perspective (with Jim Burden as the narrator) but also her two main characters, Antonia Shimerda and Jim Burden, are fluid in gender. Adhering to her unique literary style, Cather modeled *My Antonia* on the Nebraska range.

Obvious associations between the novel and her life can be asserted as true, but to go as far as claiming the story purely autobiographical may be too presumptuous. She said that her stories were based on her own experiences; however, she also purposely made it unclear as to what is fact and what is fiction in her life and literature (Woodress, *Writing...* 109). Unlike many authors, Cather went to great lengths before she died to keep a private life. She destroyed letters and unfinished manuscripts and created a will that prohibited quoting any surviving letters. When left with such a sketchy background, it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. One can, however, observe and defend the gender identity crossings in *My Antonia* without consulting Cather's autobiography.

Throughout the novel Cather "represents subjects culturally defined as female (such as Antonia) having access to masculine positions and subjects culturally defined as male (such as Jim) having access to feminine positions" (Hoffman). The idea of culturally defined genders having access to opposite roles represents Cather's gender fluidity as a New Woman. Her objective was not to become a man but to exercise the rights of both a male and a female and flow between the two.

Immediately, Cather exercises her ability to flow between genders by creating a male narrator, Jim Burden. He is a cross-gendered character who is culturally defined as male, but a female author ultimately controls his thoughts and feelings. Therefore, he has access to feminine positions. Although Jim is cross-gendered as the narrator, in the introduction Jim asserts his masculinity by changing the title of his memoir from "Antonia" to "My Antonia" (Cather 3) which portrays him as a masculine character who claims Antonia as a dependent.

Although the story may be centered on a male's view of Antonia, Jim is also a feminine character in his actions throughout the novel:

Though nominally male, Jim behaves in ways that mark him as female. On the farm, he rarely leaves the kitchen; he inhabits

women's space: 'When grandmother and I went into the Shimerda's house, we found the women-folk alone. ...The cold drove the women into the cave-house, and it was soon crowded.'
(Fetterley 155)

Throughout the novel, we do not see Jim as a strong masculine character. Masculine stories like *The Life of Jesse James*, the novel Jim read on his trip to Black Hawk, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* portray masculine characters partaking in explorations and dangerous adventures. Although Jim thoroughly enjoys *The Life of Jesse James*, it stands in sharp contrast to his role as a masculine character in *My Antonia*.

This is exemplified early in the novel, when "Antonia suggests that [they] stop at the prairie-dog town and dig into one of the holes" (Cather 24). Jim goes along with the adventure only after *Antonia* encourages him. In the scene of the snake slaying, Cather presents Jim as the masculine hero who protects women from danger (Hoffman). However, Jim narrates the adventure and admits his own shortcomings of bravery: "I didn't run because I didn't think of it—if my back had been against a stone wall I couldn't have felt more cornered" (Cather 25). He is portraying feminine emotions, and furthermore he does not even realize he is the masculine hero until after Antonia praises him for his heroic efforts and manly actions.

In this image of Jim, his masculinity is not formed by his own actions, but by the actions of Antonia. She is the person to suggest an adventure; she is the person who recognizes and reinforces his bravery and masculinity. It seems that Jim does not understand how to act as a male, and he fits more comfortably in a female position, "[y]et Cather can't have him doing women's work; thus Jim does virtually nothing" (Fetterley 155). When young boys would be out helping with chores and working the land, Jim Burden occupies the kitchen and women's spaces. He is happy when he is with his grandmother or the other women, and he is intrigued when Otto and Jake tell him stories about the "Wild West" because he has never truly experienced the "Wild West" as a masculine character. Jim probably has more understanding of the open range on his grandmother's wood stove than the open range of the "Wild West" the men talk about conquering.

The conquering or working the land of the open range is the best example of Jim lacking in his masculinity. When a masculine character conquers or works the land, it is archetypically seen as a male conquering

virgin, female land. Throughout the novel, the reader never sees Jim Burden as the male conquering the virgin female land; however, the reverse is in effect: “Antonia [claims masculine power] when Jim encounters her working in the fields” (Hoffman). After her father dies, she helps harvest and takes care of the animals, but she scarcely knows how to keep a house. Antonia even declares to Jim, “‘Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house! [...] I not care that your grandmother say it makes me like a man. I like to be like a man.’ She would toss her head and ask me to feel the muscles swell in her brown arm” (Cather 68). Ironically, Jim Burden, the male character of the novel, would have no idea what it is like to work like a man. He instead concerns himself with the feminine daily household chores, where Antonia, the female character, is lacking.

Antonia continues to exercise her masculinity after the Burden’s move into town. “All through the wheat season, [...] Ambrosch hired [Antonia] out like a man, and she went from farm to farm, binding sheaves or working with the thrashers” (Cather 73). While Jim’s move into town takes him farther away from his masculine role in working the land, the same move to town ties Antonia even closer to the land. However, each character is happy with their reversed role. Because Jim’s grandmother knows that Antonia must be reformed into a more feminine person, she finds her a job in town where she will learn how to cook and clean like a proper lady.

While working in town for Mrs. Harling, Antonia is the image of a feminine character. She cooks, cleans, and even has a crush on a boy—Charley Harling. She suggests hopefully to Mrs. Burden “[m]aybe I be the kind of girl you like better, now I come to town” (Cather 76). With this suggestion, Antonia seems to be searching for a socially acceptable gender identity that she cannot find while she is working at the farm in a masculine role. Antonia proves while she is working in town that she is capable of fulfilling both the feminine and masculine roles extremely well.

Antonia seems to be content with the feminine identity she has acquired while working in town. She is socially accepted, she has friends, and enjoys being social. However, her social life soon gets her into trouble. She attends dances by sneaking out of the house, and when Mrs.

Harling asks her to quit going to the dances because girls who go there do not act the social role of a lady, Antonia defiantly rebels against the label imposed on her, and quits her job and goes to work for the evil

Wick Cutter. It is during her work with Wick Cutter that Jim Burden's masculinity is again tested due to Antonia.

Antonia fears that Wick is planning to rape her while she is sleeping, and so she can be safe, Jim consciously takes the masculine role of the protector. He agrees to stay at the Cutter house in Antonia's place while she safely stays at his house. In this agreement, Jim is once again cross-gendered because he is assuming Antonia's position. When Wick Cutter comes home during the night and attempts to rape Antonia, he finds Jim in her place.

Jim vividly recalls the incident: "[Wick Cutter] became insane; he stood over me, choking me with one fist and beating me in the face with the other, hissing and chuckling and letting out at flood of abuse" (Cather 120). Jim is once again not able to stand up to the masculine Wick Cutter, but instead runs away from the masculinity and passes out on his grandparents' parlor sofa. The next morning he has bruises and cuts all over his body, and sends Antonia away because "[s]he had let [him] in for all this disgustingness" (Cather 121). One must believe that because Jim accepted Antonia's role in Wick Cutter's home, that the disgustingness she let him in for is the rape—the ultimate defiling of either gender.

The next morning, Jim sends the feminine Antonia away and does not see her again until after he comes back from college. When he returns from college, he learns that Antonia has been used, been left, and bore an illegitimate child while he was away. While pregnant with her child, Antonia continues to plow the field like a man, and therefore simultaneously embodies the masculine and feminine gender roles. However, Antonia seems happiest when she is allowed to live life cross-gendered. The final chapter of the novel finds the feminine Antonia the mother of many children, but it is because of her hard masculine work that the farm is so successful.

Jim Burden and Antonia both move freely between genders throughout the novel, much like Willa Cather did throughout her life. Although the novel does not have to be seen as strictly autobiographical, overcoming the socially constructed gender roles is an apparent theme in Cather's life and the novel *My Antonia*. Ultimately the reader must understand that identity is not about labels like lesbian, homosexual, or cross-gendered, but it is more about fulfilling our dreams and being happy with who we are, no matter what society says is acceptable.

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Teenage Suicide

Tina Larsen

Professor: Tom Cook

PHI 300 Ethics and Values

Dad,

If you are reading this, it is already too late. I am alone and no one understands me. I have tried to talk to you about my problems, but you won't listen. I am just a big joke to you. Well, who's laughing now? You don't have to cry for me, either. It's too late for your sympathy. Where were you when I needed you? Too wrapped up in your own life, that's where you were. How selfish is that? Could you not see that I needed you? Did you not care enough to help me? Forget it. I don't need your help anymore. Now you'll be sorry.

Tracy laid the note down on her pillow and sat down at her desk. She stared at the gallon jug of vodka and the bottle of one hundred and twenty capsules of Extra-Strength Tylenol.

Will this be enough? I could always get the revolver out of Dad's desk. Or a knife from the kitchen. Or take a blade out of my razor.

Her mind turned to the term paper she had done last semester for English class. She had chosen "suicide" as her topic. Her teacher had given her an "A."

I bet now he'll be sorry that he didn't think anything more of that paper than it just being an assignment.

It was from her research on this topic that she had gotten ideas of how to kill herself. She liked the idea of using the revolver, especially since so many people who killed themselves used firearms. Just a few years ago, in 2001, over half of the people her age who killed themselves used some kind of firearm (Suicide: Fact sheet, 2003).

It's fast, and it probably won't even hurt. But it might be kind of messy. What if I miss? What if I don't miss but the shot doesn't kill me? Then I'll have to spend the rest of my life with the "crazies." I'd better just stick with the alcohol and pills. If I use enough in a short amount of time, it should do the job. Besides, Dad won't be home for a couple

more hours. By the time he's sober enough to wonder where I am and start looking for me, I should be....

She didn't like to use that word: "dead." It was too eerie. Too many hurtful feelings and morbid visions were connected with that word. "Dead." "Dying." "Death." These were all words that described her mother. She didn't like thinking about her mother either, though thoughts of her passed through her mind more often than she desired. It had not yet been quite six months since her mom had killed herself. Tracy had found her. In a pool of blood. Too much blood. Blood all over the bathtub. A utility knife beside her pale limp hand. Mangled wrists still oozing.

"I hate you, mom!" she yelled out loud. The memories were too painful. It was Tracy's fault that her mother was dead. Or so she thought.

Tracy's counselor disagreed with her self-diagnosis. *That dumb counselor doesn't know anything. Just last session she had come up with the idea to "think of a happy thought" every time I start to relive that horrible afternoon. As if some image of a flower will come and chase away all of Mom's blood from my memory. How dumb an idea is that? She doesn't even listen to me. All she cares about is her salary. No one cares about me.*

There were a few things that she and the counselor had talked about that had made some sense. There were lots of things that had changed since her mom passed away. She had become withdrawn from her friends. She didn't feel like hanging out with them and never had fun with them anymore. Her first boyfriend had broken up with her after a year because he "didn't know how to handle her anymore." Tracy used to enjoy school and was an "A" student. Now she hated school. She felt like everyone was staring at her all of the time. She was lucky to get "Ds" on her assignments. She also started taking alcohol from her dad, who had begun to drink heavily after his wife's death. She hated how it tasted, but loved how it made everything "disappear."

Although Tracy had talked to her counselor about these things, she didn't need help deciphering what they meant. Her research paper last year showed her that she had many of the classic signs of teenage depression: isolation from peers (Suicide: Fact sheet, 2003), traumatic changes in romantic relationships (Understanding depression, 2004), losing interest in activities that used to be enjoyable, poor school performance (Cowdry & Shaffer, 2004), abusing alcohol, and even the fact that a family member had committed suicide (Teen Suicide, 2004).

Her research also showed her that “the number one cause of teen suicide is untreated depression” (Understanding depression, 2004).

There was one thing from her research that just did not make sense: “Most teens respond positively to psychotherapy and medication” (Understanding depression, 2004). Tracy had been flushing her pills down the toilet for several months now, thinking that only insane people needed to take Paxil every day. The counselor wasn’t helping either. *How can someone who doesn’t listen to me, doesn’t care about me, and thinks I’m crazy help me? The only hope I have is to kill myself.*

And with that thought, Tracy took a draw out of the bottle, put six pills in her mouth, and washed them down with another chug. Within thirty minutes, she had downed one-eighth of the bottle of vodka and eighteen pills. She passed out on the floor, still alive, but only just.

Tracy began to become aware of her body. It felt extremely light, almost weightless. All around her was absolute silence. A sense of foreboding swept through her body. *Where am I? What is going on?* She began to feel very frightened and very alone. At that exact moment, intense, penetrating warmth captivated her body. She began to relax, and very slowly, she opened her eyes.

At first she was blinded by the white light radiating all around her. As her eyes became accustomed to it, the light softened. She saw a shape in the distance. It seemed to be coming nearer to her in a smooth, ghostly movement. Not until it was upon her did Tracy realize that it was the shape of a human.

“Mom?” she uttered into the silence.

The human figure stopped moving. Tracy realized it was a man, but somehow more than a man. The light appeared brighter around him, as though he was its source. There was a thin gold ring hovering over his head.

“My name is Immanuel Kant. I am here to help you think about your life and your decision whether or not to end it.”

Tracy’s first instinct was to protest: *I don’t need your help. No one can help me. No one understands. No one cares.* But the words never left her head. As quickly as they began to form, they disappeared. It was as though Kant reached into her head, turned off a switch, and inspired her to listen to what he had to say, regardless of the fact that she had never heard of him before.

“I will start by saying that I am not going to tell you what to do. This is a decision that only you can make. I am just stating my opinion on the

issue.”

As he spoke, Tracy listened intently.

“Always in my life, when I was alive, it was my duty to act with good will and respect towards all people, including myself” (Barcalow, 2003), Kant said. “Tracy, do you think that by killing yourself you would be treating yourself with kindness?”

“Well, killing is not kind. So, no, I would not be doing myself a kindness,” Tracy answered. “But I lost respect for myself a long time ago,” she said, anticipating Kant’s next move.

“So, by committing suicide, you would violate a duty to yourself. For this reason, suicide, in my opinion, is immoral” (Assisted suicide and active voluntary euthanasia, 1988). Tracy shook her head from side to side.

“If you are still not convinced, consider the main rule I follow in my life: The Categorical Imperative. The first part of this rule is to always follow rules that apply to everyone in every situation. This means that they are universalized (Barcalow, 2003). Tracy, do you think it is OK for you to kill someone else?”

“No, that’s murder,” she replied.

“What if someone else were to kill you? Would that be rational?” Kant inquired.

“No,” reasoned Tracy. “That is also murder.”

“So, is it ever OK to murder someone?”

“No,” Tracy answered decisively.

“So, what you are telling me is that one rule you have that governs your life is that you should never murder anyone.”

“Right,” Tracy replied.

“And murder is when a person kills a person?”

“Right again.”

“Is there any reason or situation when it would be OK to murder someone?” Kant asked.

“None that I can think of.”

“So, this rule of yours is universalized, meaning that it applies to everyone all of the time?”

“Yes,” Tracy answered impatiently.

“So, wouldn’t you be a murderer if you killed yourself? You’ve just told me that murder is when a person kills another person. You are a person, Tracy. You said that murder is wrong all of the time, in every situation.”

Tracy was silent.

Kant went on. "Now, let's consider the second part of my Categorical Imperative. This says that you should always show complete respect for yourself and other people. Tracy, do you think it is respectful to say bad things or think bad thoughts about other people?"

"No, I find that very disrespectful," Tracy answered.

"Have you said bad things or thought bad thoughts about yourself lately?"

"I have had a lot of negative thoughts about myself lately," Tracy answered sheepishly.

"So, you haven't been very respectful of yourself then, have you?" accused Kant.

Tracy began to cry. There were so many thoughts rolling around in her head. Everything Kant had said seemed to make perfect sense. What had she been thinking? Why would anyone want to do something as dumb as committing suicide?

As all of these thoughts tumbled around in her head, Kant began to disappear. Tracy thanked him as he receded slowly, smoothly, ghostly, into the distance. The further he receded, the darker it became around her.

Tracy once again found herself immersed in total darkness. Only this time, she was wide awake, her eyes wide open, and her mind dreadfully alert. Again, everything was deathly silent. She felt dozens of eyes on her, but could see nothing. She tried to look around, but couldn't even see her own hand in front of her face. Despite her temporary blindness, she became aware of a presence. Something was out there, out in the endless void.

Just as her anxiety heightened, an explosion erupted in front of her. It was so deafening she couldn't hear her own screams. Flames burst outward, creating a threshold through which a figure emerged.

As the figure came closer, a chill crept up Tracy's back. There was something she did not like about this being. The closer the figure got, the more fear she felt. Once again, the figure's shape began to resemble a human man. Tracy was too scared to speak.

The man began to speak as Tracy watched him, trembling.

"I am John Stuart Mill. I am going to talk to you about my opinion of suicide and offer you my suggestion of what you should do." Though the man didn't come across as being mean or evil, Tracy still felt apprehensive and intimidated by him.

“When I was living, I had one basic rule of life. I called it the ‘Greatest Happiness Principle.’ It is very simple to live by. All you have to do is act in ways that make the most people happy. It is called ‘Act Utilitarianism,’” (Barcalow, 2003), Mill explained with poise.

Tracy began to relax a little. “This rule seems quite straightforward,” she reasoned. She decided to be open-minded about this perspective.

“Let’s think about your situation for a minute. Who specifically are you making miserable right now by staying alive?” Mill asked.

“Well...,” Tracy began, “everyone that I am around lately seems depressed and unhappy with their lives, especially if their lives have anything to do with me. My friends, my ex-boyfriend, my classmates, my teachers, my dad...they are all acting this way around me. But, when they aren’t around me, they seem just fine. My friends laugh together and go out and have fun without me; my ex-boyfriend seems just fine with his friends; my teachers and classmates are positive and happy around each other when I’m not around. It just seems to be my presence that brings them all down,” Tracy explained.

“Uh-huh...,” answered Mill. “Is there anything that you can do to make them all happy again?”

“I thought so, but I don’t know if suicide is the right choice anymore.”

“Would these people have happier lives without you in the world?” Mill asked.

“I think so..., maybe..., probably..., yes...,” Tracy answered hesitantly.

“And would you be happier if you killed yourself?”

“Well, I wouldn’t have to see visions of finding my mom dead in the bathroom anymore. I wouldn’t have to see Dad drunk and hungover anymore. I wouldn’t feel like the black plague around my friends anymore. So yes, I would be happier and better off if I killed myself,” concluded Tracy.

“So, do you think it would make more people happy if you lived or if you died?”

“More people, including myself, would be happier if I killed myself,” Tracy answered.

“Now you know what you should do,” Mill answered simply. “But make sure you’ve carefully considered all the options before taking action. Have you done that yet?”

Mentally she started making a list of pros and cons. At least Mill got her wheels turning again. “Yeah,” Tracy said. “It makes more sense to

do what makes the most people happy. Thanks for setting my mind straight.”

Once again, the inferno flared, the flames engulfed Mill, and he was gone.

Tracy opened her eyes. She sat up and looked around. Everything looked normal. Straight ahead she saw her desk. On top of it lay the overturned bottle of Tylenol and the jug of vodka, over three-quarters of the way full.

Suddenly, everything came back to her in high-speed: taking the pills, chugging the liquor, passing out, the visits from Kant and Mill. “Did all of that really happen?” she wondered aloud as her head began to throb. “Which decision do I make?”

As if in answer to her question, she heard a voice. It was another man, but this one had an ancient-sounding accent.

“Wait! Tracy, before you do anything, you need to listen to my perspective on suicide.”

“Where are you?” Tracy questioned the voice.

“I am not going to materialize fully; there is no need for it. Besides, we don’t have much time. You need to make the biggest decision of your life!”

“Well, before I listen to you, I need to know who you are.”

“Oh! I am Aristotle. Consider me the peacekeeper between those other two, Kant and Mill.”

“What should I do? They both sounded believable. They both made good points, and they both convinced me to do what they told me. I am so confused!” Tracy wailed.

“First of all, take a deep breath and calm down. My philosophy will give you the best answer, the best of both worlds, the happy medium,” answered Aristotle.

“Well, what is it already!” Tracy exclaimed. “My head is about to explode!”

“It is really quite simple,” replied Aristotle. “All you have to do is be the best person you can be. Doing this will help you minimize your vices, maximize your virtues, and in the end, you will become a better citizen and a happier person” (Barcalow, 2003).

“So, which decision makes me a better person?” Tracy asked impatiently.

“Well, if you kill yourself, you are depriving society of one of its citizens. That wouldn’t make you a very good person” (Cholbi, 2004).

“So I shouldn’t kill myself? That means that I will continue living and making everyone around me miserable.”

“You are half right. No, you should not kill yourself. Suicide is only justified in extreme cases, such as heroic suicide or by an act of great courage. But you can live as a better person. Try to find some positive aspects about yourself. Build on them. Rebuild your life. You have barely begun to realize your full human potential.” Aristotle replied.

“But what good will it do if I don’t have any friends or people who support me?”

He answered, growing fainter with each word.

“Start small. Relationships will grow over time. In fact, I see someone coming up the road now, someone who seems to care for you very much. Good luck, Tracy! I know you will do the right thing!” And with that, he disappeared and the room became silent.

Suddenly, Tracy heard footsteps pounding up the stairs to her bedroom. She heard someone shouting her name. She rushed to the door and pulled it open. Standing there, panting was her best friend, Tina Beals.

Tracy pulled her into the room, wrapped her arms around her, and began to sob uncontrollably.

Tina guided her over to the bed and helped her to sit down. They held each other until Tracy was calm enough to talk.

Tracy told Tina everything that had happened since she got home from school. She explained why the alcohol and pills were on her desk; she described the hallucinations of Kant, Mill, and Aristotle (*Is that what they were, hallucinations?*); and finally collapsed onto her bed in a curled up ball of tears and sobbed again.

Tina was silent. She let Tracy cry for a while. Finally, Tina began to speak her mind.

“Tracy, I am going to be honest with you. I think suicide is wrong. It is something that lazy, cowardly people do, and you are not that kind of a person. I know you have been going through a lot lately, but that’s no excuse to want to take your own life. You have so much more ahead of you to look forward to. All you have to do is find someone who cares about you to talk over your feelings with. I have always been here for you and you can talk to me anytime you need to. I don’t know what I’d do without you. You mean the world to me. Please don’t do anything dumb to yourself.”

“I didn’t know how much I meant to you,” Tracy replied softly. “I

don't see how I could ever have thought of killing myself. You're right. There are lots of things in life to look forward to: prom, graduation, college, marriage, kids, and best of all, spending time with you. Thank you so much."

That was fifteen years ago. Tracy never contemplated suicide again. Instead, she became a public speaker on the topic, sharing her story at high schools around the nation. She is now married with two children. Tina and her family live next door. Tracy and Tina never lost touch of their friendship, and it continues growing each day.

Note to readers: I am not now, nor have I ever been suicidal. This is purely a written assignment. Do not read further into it than that. Thank you. –Tina Larsen

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