3 Writing Essays

3a. Developing a Perspective on Essays

1. The Aims of Essays

Because reports and essays both deal with information, they may seem, except for their formats, to be pretty much the same. But remember that the word report comes from a Latin word meaning “to carry back.” As a reporter, you gather the “news” about a topic and bring it to waiting, interested readers. The word essay, on the other hand, comes from a French word meaning “a test, a trial, an attempt” and is related to the chemical term assay, referring to an analysis.

When you write an essay, you take a subject and break it down, examine it to see what it’s made of, and then explain your findings. Your aim is not only to collect information but to develop and convey your understanding. For example, if you write a report on air pollution in US national parks, you focus on facts and figures about pollution and present them to readers. If you write an essay about that pollution, however, you focus not only on facts and figures but also on your opinions about that pollution.

2. Assignments: Three Options

The thesis-support essay. In various forms, the thesis-support essay is one of the most frequent academic writing assignments, one you may already be familiar with as the “five-paragraph theme” written in high school. When you write a thesis-support essay, you aim to understand a topic, determine what’s true or plausible about it, and convey your opinions to readers in an appealing way. In form, the thesis-support essay consists of the two parts of its name: a thesis—a point or assertion about a topic—and the support for that thesis, consisting of information, explanation, or proof. Several versions of the thesis-support essay are illustrated throughout The Ready Reference Handbook:

- The expository essay explains an opinion in support of a topic. (See the essay on bicycle commuting in The Ready Reference Handbook, 4f.)

- The argumentative essay is a more formal expository essay, aiming to prove the truth or plausibility of an assertion. (See The Ready Reference Handbook, Chaps. 58 and 59, and the argumentative and persuasive essay in 59f.)

- The literary essay supports a reader/writer’s opinion about a literary work—a poem, novel, short story, drama, or movie. (See The Ready Reference Handbook, Chap. 60 and the sample essay in 60g.)
- **The research paper** assigned in liberal arts courses tends to be a thesis-support essay in which the writer gathers information from sources to understand a topic and to develop a position on that topic summed up in the thesis. (See *The Ready Reference Handbook*, Chaps. 47-51, and the example in Chap. 54.)

- **The essay exam** (see *The Ready Reference Handbook*, Chap. 61).

*The instructional or “how-to” essay.* This second kind of essay provides interested readers with instructions for doing something. It unfolds not in support of a thesis but as a series of step-by-step instructions or procedures, generally arranged in chronological order.

*The personal essay.* The personal essay, also referred to as the *informal essay*, contains a strong autobiographical component that makes it similar in form and style to the *personal experience essay* and the *memoir*. In it, a writer focuses on a topic outside him- or herself but aims to present this topic in personal terms, as he or she experiences and understands it. Personal essays are unified not so much by a thesis as by a main idea, dominant impression, or overall mood.
“Inventing” an Essay

1. Choosing a Topic and Expressing a Tentative Thesis or Purpose Statement

If a topic has not been assigned to you, brainstorm a list of possible topics: problems affecting you or people you know; solutions that you have for well-recognized but as-yet-unsolved problems; topics frequently misunderstood; things you know how to do well that others would like to learn. (See The Ready Reference Handbook, 2a2.) Then consider the most interesting topics from your list. Identify one that you could write about insightfully, freshly, or importantly. You don’t want to tell people what they already know or believe.

When you have a topic, free write about it to explore your knowledge and opinions, as well as to find an audience and a voice right for speaking to them.

- Speak directly to an audience (“you” or “we”) involved with your topic in some way or to one who doesn’t know about your subject. Refer to yourself where necessary (“I”).

- Tell your audience what you know about your topic. Or tell them what they don’t know or misunderstand; tell your opinions and, if possible, why you think as you do.

- Use definition, description, anecdote, example, and analogy in your explanations. (For examples of these and other forms of explanation, see The Ready Reference Handbook, 6b1-10.)

- Listen to your “writer’s voice” (persona). Do you sound like someone interesting to listen to?

Launch an investigation of your topic with a tentative thesis or purpose statement about it, an assertion of your central opinion, main idea, or reason for writing. Use these formulas to get started:

- My point is that . . . What I mean to say is that . . .

- My purpose in writing is to . . .

- Learning to . . . is/will . . .

Later, once you’re clear about what you want to say, cut these formulas from your polished statement. They will help get you started, but your readers won’t need them. If you’re writing a thesis-support essay, your thesis will look something like this example by student Eric Martínez:
Each US national park has its own “carrying capacity” and can accommodate only so many visitors before their pleasure and the environment are adversely affected. Such is often the case at many of the most popular parks, which receive the most destructive use. One reform to solve the problems created by overcrowding is a reservations system regulating access at the most crowded parks.

See how Martínez employs a key term, provides a clarifying definition, then makes an assertion about a problem affecting US national parks and poses a solution to it? He wants to be sure readers get his point. Like this example, your thesis will be the central, controlling assertion of your writing. (For more on thesis and purpose statements, see The Ready Reference Handbook, 2d.)

2. Gathering Materials for an Essay

Taking notes. If you’re writing a “how-to” essay, you’re probably something of an expert on your topic. But for a thesis-support essay, your preparation may be a process of self-education, as you acquire the knowledge to develop sound opinions. In either case, as you gather information, take notes. (Follow the guidelines in The Ready Reference Handbook, 49b, c, and d.)

Write down facts, figures, details, step-by-step procedures, eyewitness and expert testimony—whatever will support your thesis or fulfill your purposes for writing. Also gather visual materials to illustrate or explain. For guidelines to using visuals in your writing, see The Ready Reference Handbook, 46c and 51c. Throughout this process, evaluate the results of your investigation following the guidelines in Chap. 49a. If you borrow information from print, Internet, or eyewitness sources, keep a detailed record of your sources. (See The Ready Reference Handbook, 47e1.)

Adding understanding to your notes. To deepen your understanding and give yourself things to say in your writing, add to each note an explanation of why you’ve written that note, what it shows, or what you want readers to understand. As you write, look for words your readers will understand, listen for the sound of a voice that is right for teaching, think of illustrations to bring your ideas to life: example, anecdote, comparison, analogy, definition, description, and visual materials (see The Ready Reference Handbook, 6b1-10).

When possible, draw upon your own experiences and observations to illustrate ideas. Essayists often appear in their writing, an “I” speaking to readers. If you can show that you have first-hand experience with your subject, your ideas will gain in authority and liveliness. At the beginning of a project, it may be hard to explain in this vivid and personal way, but as you continue your preparation, you’ll gradually shift attention to your readers—and you’ll find the first draft of your assignment easier to write.
3. Focusing on an Essay

**Profiling your audience.** “Real-world” readers of instructional or thesis-support writing will almost always be people like you, with your background, interests, and outlook. They are willing to listen to you and learn what you have to teach, but often they won’t know, as they begin reading, that they have something to learn. And sometimes preconceptions about your subject may make them reluctant to accept your views. Help yourself speak to them by preparing an audience profile. Use the “How to Profile an Audience” box in 1d of *The Ready Reference Handbook*. Be sure to answer these questions:

- What general knowledge about your subject does your audience already have?
- What questions will they have about your subject?
- What will be difficult for them to understand?
- What key words will they know; which ones will you have to define?
- What opinions, doubts, or fears will make them resist learning more about your subject?
- What will interest them most about your subject and motivate them to learn more?
- What responses do you want them to have? What do you want them to do?

Academic readers--your instructors--may know more about your topics than you do, and they’ll respond to your ideas from the vantage point of their expertise. But they expect you to “teach” them your subject and your understanding of it as if they were “real-world” readers who wanted your knowledge.

**Revising your thesis or purpose statement.** As you gather your materials, rewrite your thesis or purpose statement in light of your growing knowledge of your topic and your awareness of your audience. Rewrite these central, controlling statements until they make sense of your materials and express what you want to say. (See *The Ready Reference Handbook*, 2d1.)

**Listing your credentials.** If you’re doing instructional writing or addressing a thesis-support essay to a “real-world” audience, list your qualifications (knowledge, accomplishments, study, or experience) for writing about your topic. You’ll work these qualifications into your essay without seeming to brag about them. You want readers to know you’re someone worth listening to. If you’re writing to an academic audience, your “qualifications” will be the quality of your information and reasoning and the list of your sources accompanying your essay.
1. Organizing a Thesis-Support Essay

**Rhetorical modes.** You’ll organize a thesis-support essay in a way appropriate to your topic but also appropriate to your audience’s knowledge or desire for understanding. Thesis-support designs frequently reflect basic methods of explanation. Referred to as “rhetorical modes” or “modes of discourse,” these patterns are:

- **Description:** a point-by-point explanation of the parts of a subject, its features or traits.
- **Classification:** a division of subjects into groups, one after the other, and a description of the key traits of each group.
- **Comparison:** an explanation of similarities and differences.
- **Process analysis:** the steps in a process.
- **Causal analysis:** a description of causes and their effects.

**Comment/response patterns.** Based on your audience or purpose, you may organize according to a “comment/response” pattern:

- **Problem/solution:** a pattern that unfolds by answering a series of questions. What is the problem? What caused it? What will be the effects of the problem if it remains unsolved? What is the solution? How can it be implemented?
- **Qualification of ideas:** organization by a “yes . . . but” or “not only . . . but also” pattern.

**Thesis patterns.** You may organize according to the order of ideas in your thesis, which provides a kind of blueprint for your essay. Consider a thesis by a student analyzing the failures of the US death penalty:

> The vast majority of those on America’s Death Rows may well deserve death for their crimes, but we, as citizens of a society that prizes justice, should not execute them. As an instrument of justice, the death penalty fails the very principles for which it is supposedly enforced. It does not protect citizens but may, in fact, incite further crime; it is disproportionally applied to minorities and the poor; it is more expensive than natural-life imprisonment; and, as it
is currently carried out, there is a strong likelihood that innocent men and women may be executed.  

--Fareed Zayed

Following a concession statement, Zayed gives his central opinion that the death penalty is unjust and follows it with a series of assertions that divide up his central opinion: that the death penalty does not make citizens safer, that it is unfairly applied, that it is expensive, and that innocent people risk execution. He’ll organize his essay, point by point, to explain each of these assertions.

**Outlining.** Whatever the design of your thesis or the essay itself, if your explanation is complex or you’re new to the topic, make an outline to arrange everything in a logical order (see *The Ready Reference Handbook*, 3c).

2. **Organizing an Instructional Essay**

If your instructions involve special tools, measurements, or ingredients, list them early in your essay, all at once, immediately following your introduction. Be specific. Organize the body of your essay step by step, to teach what you want readers to learn.

If the steps are long, group them into modules. If the instructions you give are especially complex, pause to describe tools, materials, alternative procedures (“if . . . then”), or the right and wrong ways of doing things. When you first use a technical term, define it in words readers will know. To be clear, you may have to provide visual illustrations.

3. **Planning an Introduction and Conclusion**

**Thesis-support essays.** *Introductions* to thesis-support essays are often challenging to write because you have to do several things at once, usually in the space of only a paragraph or two: attract readers’ attention, show them that your writing is intended for them, and, if necessary, give your credentials for teaching.

One way to accomplish all this is to begin with something familiar--to put your readers at ease and show that your writing is for them--but then, by dramatic detail or direct statement in your thesis, show that the familiar is not so familiar. Prompt your readers to ask questions that your thesis will answer. Making the familiar seem strange, even upsetting, creates the curiosity necessary to turn readers into interested students, ready to be taught. Listen to student John Chen open an essay on bicycle commuting:

For most residents of America’s cities and suburbs, the worst part of any weekday is the excruciating time spent trapped in rush-hour traffic. Morning, night, and sometimes even at noon, I watch my fellow commuters lined up, scowling, inching, and honking their way to work or school. I used to share their fender benders, foul air, fouler tempers, frazzled nerves, clenched jaws, high blood pressure, higher insurance premiums, the same old tunes on the radio, the wasted time, and boredom. But no more. Not since I parked my car and began commuting by bicycle. What
I’ve discovered in the process is that bicycle commuting is a safe, practical, and enjoyable alternative to short-trip car travel. If other motorists joined me, we could bring an end to this commuting misery.

In just a few sentences, Chen shows himself familiar with the world of his automobile-driving audience, establishes his credentials as someone who knows his subject well, introduces his topic, and states his thesis, that bicycle commuting is a viable transportation alternative for many motorists.

The conclusions of thesis-support essays often reaffirm the central point of the thesis, evaluate the topic, or propose action based on explanation in the body of the essay. Here, for example, John Chen concludes his essay on bicycle commuting by dramatizing the benefits of bicycle commuting.

Imagine a morning or afternoon when the sky is not brown with smog. Imagine broad, open streets easy and safe to travel any time of day. Imagine the scent of flowers and trees instead of gasoline and rubber. Imagine the songs of birds instead of the blare of horns, the rumble of engines, the screech of tires. Imagine feeling relaxed and exhilarated at the end of a commute, instead of frustrated, tense, angry. This is what a bicycle rush hour would be like. Instead of the worst part of the day, it just might be the best.

Instructional essays. Begin with an introduction that dramatizes the importance, pleasures, or results of learning what you’re about to teach and, if necessary, that describes your qualifications. Conclude briefly and in the expected way, by describing the results or benefits of your instructions or by telling where and when they’re useful.

For more on introductions and conclusions, see The Ready Reference Handbook, 6c and d.
1. Creating Your Persona

As you draft an essay, listen to your words. Do you hear the encouraging voice characteristic of good guides and teachers? Aim to sound like a friend or colleague. Often you’ll address readers directly, as “you.” Listen to an essayist addressing fellow college students about the effects of binge drinking:

If you’re an American college student, chances are pretty good that you have a problem with alcohol. According to a recent Harvard University study, nearly fifty percent of you are binge drinkers, knocking back five or more drinks in a row at least once during the last two weeks. The percentages are even higher if you’re a white male living in a fraternity or involved with athletics. Nearly twenty-five percent of you have driven drunk recently; 500,000 of you have been injured under the influence; and 600,000 have been assaulted by another student who has been drinking. Surprisingly—and ironically—few of you think you have a problem with alcohol.

--Joseph Carrier

Or you may also address your readers as “we,” uniting yourself with them in a community of shared perspectives, opinions, or problems. Here student John Chen describes typical journeys made by him and his fellow commuters:

Most of the trips we take by car are less than ten miles. Most of the routes we drive are bicycle accessible. These are trips we could take most of the time in most weather by bicycle. Many of us already own bicycles. A call to our local government or a visit to a bike shop will give us routes and maybe even maps.

2. Paragraphing in Essays

Even the basic design of informative paragraphs can help you find a voice right for reaching readers: assertion, information, explanation, and illustration. This is the pattern of readers’ growing understanding. Consider this paragraph explaining how innocent people in the US can find themselves under a sentence of death:

How is it that in the United States, a country that prizes fairness and justice, innocent people can find themselves condemned to die? One answer lies in the victim’s
ethnicity. Most of those wrongly convicted and later released from America’s Death Rows in the past few years have been members of ethnic minorities. Numerous studies have shown that ethnic prejudice continues to operate throughout the process of criminal investigations, the work of prosecuting attorneys, and the decisions of judges and juries. Another answer lies in the economics of American justice. The poor, more likely than the affluent, are likely to be charged with violent crimes but lack the money to mount an effective legal defense. Worse, the US Congress has in the last decade reduced funding for lawyers willing to represent the poor. And still worse, judges in many states routinely appoint the least-competent attorneys to represent those charged with capital crimes who are eligible for court-appointed attorneys.

--Fareed Zayed

This writer opens, as essayists often do, with a question that anticipates his readers’ question; then the body of the paragraph explains his multi-part answer. (For more on informative paragraphs, see The Ready Reference Handbook, Chap. 5.)

3. Quoting for Support

Quotation of expert or eyewitness testimony will contribute powerfully to the explanation of complex topics or the support for controversial statements. Here, for example, student Eric Martínez quotes a researcher and an environmentalist and summarizes a National Park Service official in support of his opinion that visitors are transforming national parks in harmful ways:

To meet the needs of the increasing numbers of national parks visitors, argues Alan Ewert, more and more “natural landscapes are being turned into theme parks” (64), no longer nature preserves but “destination resorts” like Disney World. They are becoming what Rob Smith, representative for the Sierra Club, calls “a venue for entertainment” (Graham 2), filled with stores, hotels, fast food, groomed trails, and other amusements—“manicured, manipulated, and increasingly regimented” (Ewert 64). Increasingly, park rangers report vacationers more interested in park services and amenities than the natural environments surrounding them.

Note how Martínez writes signal statements to introduce one source and to connect it to another. Also, see how he quotes briefly, borrowing others’ words only enough to support his opinion. Quoting at length might obscure his point.

4. A Revision Checklist
Be clear about your thesis. First drafts are often a time for making up your mind about your subject. Do you know what your point really is? Is it the same when you finish as when you began, or have you grown in understanding? Will readers get your point? Is it at an obvious place, near the beginning or end of your essay, and easy to spot? (See The Ready Reference Handbook, 2d.)

Be sure you’ve provided sufficient illustration, explanation, and definition to instruct readers. Look closely at the ends of paragraphs, where readers will look to see what you mean.

Be sure your introduction shows why your subject is worth learning about.

Be sure your paragraphs follow each other in a systematic order. If readers won’t see this order, provide introductory/transitional sentences to show how far you’ve come in the process of your explanation. Ask questions that readers will want answered.

Consider your vocabulary. In first drafts on difficult subjects, you’re likely to write theoretically, abstractly, and generally--teaching yourself more than your readers. When you finish revising, you should be able to point to the concrete and specific words and to the definitions of specialized words that “show” your subject to your readers. For “how-to” or instructional writing, use “command language”: “do this,” “place this,” “measure that,” and so forth.

Document information and opinions you have borrowed. Your instructor will give you the correct format. (For the Modern Language Association’s documentation style, see The Ready Reference Handbook, Chaps. 52 and 53. For other styles, see The Ready Reference Handbook, Chaps. 55, 56, and 57.)

Check your persona. Do you sound friendly, concerned about reader understanding and welfare, like someone speaking directly to your audience? If the topic requires, be sure to include your credentials for teaching.
5. Questions for Peer Reviewers of Essays

**Writers:** If you’re passing out copies of your writing for peer reviewers to read, number your paragraphs to make your essay easy to discuss. Then make a brief introduction:

1. Identify your audience--your intended readers.
2. Identify the kind of essay you’ve written: thesis-support (expository, argumentative, research), instructional (how-to), or personal.
3. Describe your intentions. “In my essay I’m trying to tell/show. . . .”
4. Tell your peer reviewers about the feedback you want from them. Ask questions, describe problems, or pose alternative solutions for which you want opinions. Then take notes as you listen to this feedback. Use the your reviewers’ suggestions where they’re helpful, but remember, this is your essay. It should say what you want.

1. The Unpleasant Dilemma of Suburban Deer (a thesis-support essay)

ASSIGNMENT: To write a thesis-support essay that could appear on the editorial page of a serious and influential newspaper or magazine aimed at readers identifiable by age, political outlook, economic/educational level, and (if applicable) sex.

The Unpleasant Dilemma of Suburban Deer

by Pat Kirkham

Take a moment and think of the white-tail deer. What image comes to mind? Is it one of a stately buck, poised by a woodland stream, or possibly a doe and her fawn grazing near the edge of a prairie? Unfortunately, in many suburban areas of the United States a controversy is brewing which centers around this gentle herbivore. Take, for example, Schuylkill Center in suburban Philadelphia. Schuylkill is a five-hundred-acre environmental park which shelters many endangered species of wild-flowers and trees. Schuylkill is also home to almost four-hundred white-tails which are decimating the center’s botanical collection. Richard James, executive director at Schuylkill estimates that a maximum deer population of no more than twenty-five animals would be the proper natural balance. In the last fifteen years, suburban development has claimed huge tracts of land, creating a patchwork of land use patterns and drastically shrinking the white-tails’ natural habitat. The remaining open land is being put under extreme stress by the growing population of deer that have no natural predators left except man. At Schuylkill, as well as many other suburban sites, the need to reduce white-tail deer populations to more manageable levels is painfully evident. The controversy lies in the methods being proposed to reduce suburban deer populations to more manageable levels.

Politicians and citizens groups, as well as environmentalists, animal-rights activists and land-management professionals, have been bitterly debating which methods to employ in order
to stabilize current deer populations and reduce future herds. Politicians are wary of taking any stand for fear of being labeled Bambi killers. Citizens groups are generally well-meaning but often too disorganized to accomplish any specific goals. Animal-rights activists and environmentalists run the gamut from constructive criticism to outright guerilla tactics. For example, the Sierra club is currently suing the U.S. Forest Service for allowing the deer population to become so large that it threatens the botanical and biological diversity of Wisconsin’s Nicolet National Forest. At the other end of the spectrum, the Humane Society of the United States has charged that any method used to reduce deer population is nothing more than a charade to cover up the willful abuse of animals. Many land-management professionals, such as Richard James at Schuylkill, are desperate and willing to go to any lengths to rid their land of the white-tail. James asserts, “We’re going to nail these deer. I do not consider them to be wildlife anymore. I push them out of my way to get to work. They are unrestrained urban cows.”

The only thing all these groups agree on is that there are four feasible methods and their variations both to stabilize current deer populations and reduce future herds. The options are relocation, sterilization, culling, and hunting. Even to the casual observer, none of these methods represents a perfect solution; however, some appear more ridiculous than others. In my opinion, the best solution lies in a combination of these methods coupled with a large dose of common sense, cooperation, and above all, education.

On the surface, relocation seems to be the fairest and most humane method. Many citizens groups, such as the one connected with the Ryerson Conservation Area in suburban Chicago, feel this is the only method to pursue. On closer examination, this plan is unworkable and in fact inhumane to the deer. Simply redistributing the population from suburban to rural areas will not work for several reasons. First, most rural areas are also experiencing an over-abundance of deer. This makes it very difficult to find a rural area willing to accept large
quantities of them. Also, past experience with deer relocation has taught us that many white-tails later die from the stress induced by the trip. Game biologists emphasize this reality—the white-tail deer are extremely stress-prone and, therefore, poor candidates for relocation. Aside from these facts, which in themselves doom relocation as an option, the cost must be considered. Unfortunately, the cost in tax dollars is prohibitive in today’s economy.

Sterilizing white-tail deer is a real paradox. Many land-management professionals, such as Mr. James at Schuylkill, believe this method to be so totally unworkable that it borders on the ridiculous. James cannot see how sterilizing his current population of white-tails will help save his botanical collection. The paradox lies in the fact that sterilization will prove to be the best option for saving both the natural environment and the deer in the future. The use of dart-gun contraceptives to prevent white-tail doe from conceiving is a cost-effective, viable method of population control. The key to its development lies in securing adequate public funding. We have the technology; we need the funding to further develop the drug and experiment with it on a large-scale basis. Unfortunately, killing excess deer in places like Schuylkill will have to continue for some time in order to control the present herds. However, future emphasis ultimately lies on sterilization as the best option for a long-term solution. With proper funding, a good beginning could be made at Schuylkill.

In reality, culling, or baiting the deer into a small enclosed area and allowing professional marksmen to make short work of them, is a humane form of population control. But culling the herd is by far the most unpopular method of controlling white-tail. Animal-rights activists and citizens groups in particular find culling abhorrent. Wildlife activists connected with the Ryerson Conservation Area, for example, set up picket lines and physically tried to prevent deer culling when it was first attempted there by forest preserve officials. Culling draws so much public outcry and emotion that even experienced wildlife managers are reluctant to try it.
Shooting deer involves one quick shot through the brain, with presumably little pain or anxiety to the deer. The consequences of not shooting excess white-tails are varied, but often include slow starvation or physical trauma. Is watching a bloody and broken deer drag itself away from an encounter with a plateglass window more humane than culling? These scenarios happen with greater frequency every year. The inhumanity lies in the fact that animal-rights activists, among others, choose to ignore these scenarios and unjustly focus their attention on abolishing a humane form of controlling the excess white-tail population.

Other benefits of culling which are often overlooked include a resulting white-tail herd that fits the natural balance—a proportional ratio of male to female and young to old. The venison, which is a by-product of culling, can be used to augment public food pantries in low-income areas. This is generally why most culling is done by marksmen and not by lethal injection. Both the white-tail and the environment will be better served when opponents to the culling process overcome their emotion and understand that culling is indeed a cost-effective and, above all, humane effort to curb the deer population.

Hunting is almost as unpopular as culling. For example, the Fund for Animals publicly opposes sport-hunting for any purpose, deriding attempts to portray recreational hunting as a legitimate deer-control tool. Increasingly, hunting is seen as a socially unacceptable activity, especially by younger suburbanites who have never been exposed to recreational hunting. On opening day of deer season in Madison, Wisconsin, for instance, animal-rights activists and university students strap mannequins in blaze-orange hunting gear to their car fenders and drive in a honking procession around the state capitol. This annual activity is a serious effort to dissuade recreational hunting.

Sadly, these anti-hunting activists are just one more example of man’s disconnection with nature. Their misguided attempts to ban hunting in reality do disservice both to the white-tail and the environment in general. We need to encourage deer-hunting as a means of responsibly
reducing deer population and go one step further by allowing hunters to bag does as well as bucks. Shooting both sexes during the fall rutting season will not endanger offspring as opponents predict, simply because yearlings born the previous spring are already weaned and capable of survival without their mothers. White-tail have no natural predators left, except man; by shooting both sexes, hunters are simulating the natural order. Is putting a bullet in the head of a deer that has been hit by a car more humane than shooting it for sport? Recreational hunting is one very necessary management technique, which, carried out responsibly, is capable of curbing the white-tail population in a very humane way. It should be tolerated, even encouraged, for the sake of the environment and deer.

In the final analysis, we have some difficult, unpleasant choices to make. As citizens, we need to better accommodate deer and other wildlife that share space with our expanding human population. We need to deal more responsibly and less emotionally with the excess population of deer as well as other wildlife. Above all, we need to educate ourselves to the true needs of our natural environment. As taxpayers, we need to set aside more open space for wildlife habitat and, once that is done, support it with our tax dollars. If we are able to make the right choices now, both our generation and future generations will benefit from a more wholesome natural environment in which to live. If, on the other hand, we ignore this very real problem, both our quality of life and our environment will suffer. The choice is ours to make. Let’s make the right one.

*Harrowsmith Country Life*: specialty magazine which devotes itself, in part, to environmental concerns.

**Age range:** adult

**Political outlook:** liberal to moderate

**Economic/Educational:** middle to upper-middle categories.

SOURCES

Two articles concerning Ryerson Conservation Area. Daily Herald [Arlington Heights, IL].
2. In Defense of “That Jazz Crap” (a thesis-support essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Write an essay in which you explain something that many people misunderstand or misperceive. Use information, explanation, and argument to correct their misunderstanding.

In Defense of “That Jazz Crap”

by Becky Klosowski

The arguments between my siblings and me over the radio in my mother’s minivan are enormously vicious. When forced to ride somewhere together, we tear one another’s throats out over who gets her pick of the music we all must listen to and—in all honesty—survive: my brother’s classic rock and alternative, my sister’s rap and the latest number one on MTV’s Total Request, and my jazz. “How can you listen to that crap?” my sister moans when I win the front seat and control of the station. “Turn that crap off!” my brother shouts. “We don’t have to listen to anything; let’s just talk…” (“That Crap” has become the working title of my music within my family, and so accustomed to this title am I that I find myself calling jazz “that crap” when talking to other people as well, even fellow jazz fans. Oops.) On one such occasion, I granted my brother’s wish, turning the radio off and the conversation on to jazz to compensate. “Why do you guys hate this stuff so much?” I asked. “Why do you have any opinion at all?”

“Why do you care?” my brother returned. “Why do you always try to force that crap on us?”

“You do force,” my mother added. Thanks, mom.

It was the conversation that followed that inspired me to consider my opinion: Why do I care? I’d never really thought about it before. I suppose I’ve always been offended by people who make such quick judgments: I knew my brother and sister never really listened to jazz; they simply whined the moment it came on and lived through it by entertaining themselves in some other way, usually by attacking me for choosing it. I want others to understand my point of view, but also—since jazz has become my career choice and main love in life—I want to share with
others its impact on me as well. Perhaps you don’t believe any music could have that much impact on a person’s life, but perhaps that’s because you’ve never really listened to jazz. Before jumping to the conclusion that it’s just “crap,” you have to understand what jazz is, what is true as opposed to what is myth, and what makes jazz unique among popular styles of music.

It has been my experience that jazz has a relatively small audience. Obviously, I’ve lived most of my life with a household of people who dislike my music. In the many part-time jobs I’ve held, I’ve worked with people who told me to “turn that crap off.” In high school, I played in a jazz band in which people who didn’t like jazz comprised the overwhelming majority of the members. I began to feel that everyone I came in contact with must hate jazz. However, I realize most of you aren’t so strongly opinionated as my siblings are, and that most of you have had less exposure to jazz than even they. You don’t know what you’re missing.

As someone who has listened to jazz for many years, I can tell you that you’re missing out on a deeply interesting and stimulating music. For example, improvisation is one of the defining factors and most exciting aspects of jazz. When musicians improvise, they play with the melody and chords of a song; they create music spontaneously, completely from their heads; they strive to portray their emotions with their notes. Great soloists can play sorrow, anger, joy; they can create and expand on ideas as though speaking in their own language. Wynton Marsalis, a jazz trumpeter and composer as well as respected jazz educator, explains, “It’s just like when we talk. We invent what we’re going to say right in the moment, and we try to organize our thoughts as we go along.”

As I have so far spent nearly four years trying to learn this art of improvisation, I can tell you that learning it is a life-long process. Improvising demands talent; respected jazz musicians study their whole lives to constantly improve: to learn the music and its history. Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Charlie Parker, Benny Goodman—these jazz greats played as long as they were able. Joshua Redman, Leon Parker, Wynton Marsalis —though still young, these
highly respected players have devoted their lives to learning from jazz greats. Jazz is a long story of both tradition and growth. But popular music lasts a short while and is replaced by the next number one on MTV’s Total Request.

Because most people are uninformed about jazz, they hold many misconceptions. One of these myths is that jazz is “old people’s music.” I’ll admit that some styles of jazz could be considered “old people’s music,” swing for instance, since swing was the popular music when these “old people” were our age. But that is not to say, however, that only the “old people” should get the fun of listening (and dancing!) to swing. Ever see the movie “Swing Kids”? (If not, I highly recommend you rent it.) According to the biography Swing, Swing, Swing: The Life and Times of Benny Goodman, swing was a thrilling music. Whenever the big band up front would kick off a hot tune, all the kids would jump up and dance! Everyone knew how to jitterbug in the 30s and 40s: men would spin their ladies around, toss them into the air, catch them deftly; people would bounce and fly across the dance floor. Were these kids all that much different from us? Did they not want to have fun? The fiery music I would expect to have that kind of effect on people does not sound like what I would call “old people’s music.”

Another myth is that jazz is “elevator music.” Let me set the record straight. “Smooth jazz” is elevator music, not jazz; the two should not be confused. For those of you who are fans of Kenny G and the like, I pity you. You have put your faith in a music that is a child’s attempt at drawing a crayon masterpiece, with its circular trees, pentagon houses, stick character families, and strip of blue sky at the top. This “masterpiece” is certainly not a fair representation of the world, as this so called “jazz” is in no way representative of what true jazz is. They may have their similarities, but smooth jazz is only an amateur pretending to be a professional. Most smooth jazz tunes are merely unobtrusive arrangements of popular melodies, played by “musicians” with little or no talent. While they do improvise, this lack of talent stands out clearly when compared to “real” jazz improvisation. Their ideas are repetitive and
unimaginative. It’s a shame smooth jazz is allowed to be called “jazz” at all, as this confusion of titles is usually the source of people’s misconceptions.

A popular myth drawn from that confusion is that all jazz is mellow and relaxing. This belief is often the reason many people say they like jazz. I always cringe in response to that opinion. What people don’t realize is that most of these “mellow and relaxing” songs are not trying to be mellow or relaxing. True jazz isn’t meant to be background music. People who find slow, emotional ballads with gorgeous melodies and harmonies relaxing are missing the point, often because they are not really listening. Unlike smooth jazz, real jazz is not meant to relax, but to stimulate, both emotionally and intellectually. For example, the range of emotions in Ken Stanton’s arrangement of “My Funny Valentine” is staggering. The piece builds from a warm, whispering, trombone opening to a screaming, dissonant, trumpet climax, but with the volume turned down low, someone who doesn’t know what he’s listening to could call it “relaxing.”

On the other hand, many people I have talked to tell me they don’t like jazz for the same reason: it’s too mellow; it doesn’t have the excitement of popular music—namely, the beat. On the contrary! Listen to Buddy Rich or John Fedchock’s new big band or the old Count Basie Orchestra: jazz is defined by its rousing and exciting beat. According to Ron Carter, director of the top jazz band at Northern Illinois University, “If it don’t swing, it ain’t jazz!” The swing feel is unique to jazz: a driving rhythm that both leans forward and lays back the solid beat at the same time. Most popular music simply offers the solid beat monotonously and mind-numbingly.

I hope you are now starting to see what jazz is and isn’t. Jazz is obviously very different from most types of popular music, and some believe jazz is not as good for this reason, but these differences can actually help show how interesting and unique jazz is. For example, while most jazz is purely instrumental, and most lyrics in jazz lack the depth of those in more musically mature popular songs, this lack of emotional words is more than compensated for by the rich emotional language of improvised jazz solos. When you understand jazz, you begin to
understand this language as you understand your spoken vocabulary. Because soloists create music based on their own feelings, you can learn how to translate these ideas to fit their meaning to you: much like hearing someone speak. You find with some surprise that musical ideas can make you feel certain ways: some make you laugh; others remind you of a sad time in your life.

Another way jazz is distinct from popular music is that a particular song can be played for decades and never get old; each performance of any jazz song is unique. Many of these songs, called “standards,” have been around for over half a century. The reason for this longevity is also one of the main reasons jazz still attracts young people today, despite its general unpopularity: jazz is constantly growing while staying true to its history. Different arrangements of an old standard can give it a fresh feel, sound, or style. Different groups always strive to have their own original style, so playing old tunes doesn’t mean they have to sound old. Also even if the same band plays the same arrangement of the same tune many, many times, the different improvised solos of the different musicians in that band will make it a different song every time. For example, Benny Goodman’s band was best known for the song “Sing, Sing, Sing,” a tune the group must have played several times a night at various concerts and gigs. (You may have heard this song in the old “Chips Ahoy” commercial with the dancing exclamation point.) The members of the band often claimed to be sick of hearing it; however, the crowds they played for always voiced their opinion, and the song continued to be played, night after night. Night after night, the performers produced fresh solos that made the tune swing harder than ever (Firestone). No other form of music is quite like jazz in that way.

If you open your ears, your heart, and your mind, you too can discover this amazing music called jazz. When musicians of any genre write music, they do so to express and share their emotions with those who listen to their music. This is something that is often overlooked by fans of popular music who listen to the music for its “beat” or simply its popularity. However, when you really listen to jazz, it is almost impossible to miss this true intent. Jazz is
not only an emotional roller coaster, a thrilling and engaging music, but it’s also deep and intellectual, a music with a history and language all its own. One of these days, when you’re driving in silence, try flipping on 90.9 FM (College of DuPage’s radio station, which plays mostly jazz). Perhaps you’ll catch some big band jazz on “The Saturday Swing Shift,” maybe some fusion on “Acid Jazz by Moonlight,” or perhaps even one of the shows in which people—often famous musicians—discuss how jazz works, how to listen to it, and what makes it so exciting. See if you notice any of the things I’ve mentioned: the intoxicating swing feel, the intense emotions of improvised solos, the heart and head of the music. It’s almost impossible for anyone to really listen to and understand jazz without being affected by it. At the very least, you learn to appreciate it. At the very most, you come to love and respect it. As well, you begin to hear all music in a deeper way: the way it was meant to be heard.
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3. Greek Philosophy and the Art of Century Riding (a how-to essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Write a “how-to” essay teaching a clearly defined audience how to do something interesting, important, or pleasurable.

Greek Philosophy and the Art of Century Riding

by John Chen

Okay. This is the summer. You’ve been cycling for a few years now, long enough and often enough that you no longer consider yourself merely a recreational or weekend rider. You may not compare yourself with criterium racers, triathletes, or long-distance cyclo-tourists, but you’ve become involved enough with the sport that cycling has become, well, serious pleasure. And you’ve decided that you’re ready for one of the most serious pleasures of all, bicycling’s extra-innings, overtime rite of passage: the century, one hundred miles, the aim of nearly every serious cyclist at some time in his or her cycling career.

At least you’re ready to get ready to ride a century. But if you’re like me when the idea first occurred, the thought is more than a little daunting. Part of it is the distance, of course. One hundred miles is a trip--even in a car. But on a bike? How will it hold up over those long miles? Forget the bike—how will I hold up? you wonder. Your doubts are made even more acute by the fitness fanatics you sometimes ride with. “No pain, no gain!” “Train till you’re drained!” “Go for the burn!” “Hit the wall!” “Bonk!” they groan. For these sado-masochists, the aim of every century ride, it seems, is the tight-lipped ecstasy of “my personal best,” by which they mean horror-movie agonies of the most intense sort compressed into the shortest period of time. “Five hours twelve minutes!” mumbles a spent rider as he weaves across a century finish line, punches his cycling computer with quavering finger, and collapses over his handlebars. This is pleasure?

I don’t think so. I know of a better way to prepare for and ride a century. It came to me last summer in the middle of a summer-school philosophy course during the week and half a dozen centuries on the weekends. All that my “Better Century” method takes is a little common
sense, a little good information, and an appetite for real pleasure. The ancient Greek philosophers I studied in class may have lived a few years before the invention of the bicycle, but they understood what it takes to cycle a century with ease and enjoyment. For these Greeks, all matter exists in harmony, as one delicately balanced whole. And we mortals had better not upset this balance. Then tragedy ensues. This understanding led them to the cardinal virtue of sophrosyne, which means a sense of balance, temperance, and moderation. It is the poise that energizes all graceful action. And bicycling at its best is nothing if not graceful action. So, if you want to complete your first century—and enjoy the miles that precede and include it—forget the exercise fanatics’ religion of pain. Join me, instead, and develop the virtue of sophrosyne.

Sophrosyne begins with your bike. Those hundred miles won’t give much pleasure if you and your bike aren’t in harmony. These days, however, you can scarcely find a bicycle that’s not a mountain or racing bike—neither much good for long-distance riding. Because it is often heavy and its straight handlebars don’t allow you to change position much as you ride, a mountain bike may carry you to early fatigue. Because of its stiff frame and skinny, hard racing saddle, a racing bike will telegraph every pebble, crack, and frost heave from your butt up your spine to your neck. You’ll be in aspirin-chewing agony by fifty miles. If you look around a little bit, however, you can find the right bike for century-riding—the comfortable type, a road bike built to absorb the road surface and lap the miles. Its frame will be stretched out just a little bit in chain stays and fork rake and be built of energy absorbing tubing, such as Reynolds 531 steel. Its saddle will give comfortably under you, and its handlebar stem will be a little shorter than you’d normally select. The shorter stem will sit you a little higher and distribute your weight evenly among hands, shoulders, back, seat, and legs. If you don’t enjoy sitting on your bike, how will you enjoy your first century?

Don’t forget the virtue of sophrosyne as you train for your century. You may be riding for pleasure, but you’re still aiming to ride one hundred miles, and that takes some preparation.
Bicycling Magazine publishes an annual century training table in a summer issue and maintains the table on its Web site (http://www.bicycling.com/home/fitness/training/century). Follow the plan described there, and you’ll put in the miles necessary to prepare yourself. To enjoy those training miles nearly as much as the century itself, remember: temperance and balance.

Depending on your level of conditioning, give yourself four to eight weeks to train. If you’re able, ride five or six days a week, varying the distance, terrain, and pace of your rides. On two or three days ride at your normal pedal cadence until you know it’s time to quit. On two other days, push yourself to ride a little faster than you normally would.

Don’t let yourself shift to bigger gears to increase your speed—you’ll stress your knees that way. The bigger gears and higher speeds will come as your conditioning improves. Instead of the bigger gears, spin the pedals a little faster. And be sure you’re spinning, moving your legs through the entire pedal cycle, not pumping. Pumping is for pain freaks. Save the fifth or sixth days of each training week for a longer ride to build endurance, half again as long as your regular rides. Look for weekend club rides posted in bike shops. They’ll give you the distance you want and introduce you to new cycling companions. When these long rides increase to seventy-five to eighty miles, you’re ready for a century. Find the one you want to ride advertised in the newspaper, at your local bike shop, or on the Web (again, check out Bicycling’s Web site).

The day of your century, think sophrosyne, think harmony, think comfort, think fun. Dress comfortably. Chaffed legs or sore feet at fifty miles are no fun. Don’t let your cadence get thrown off by the pace lines of racers flashing by you, their chains and derailleurs whirring like angry bees. Your heart may pound, and you may want to give chase, but they may only be racing forty or fifty miles, not a century, so let them go. If they’re going the whole distance, you might just pass them collapsed at a rest stop at about the seventy-five mile mark. If you’re riding one of the hundreds of organized centuries that occur across the nation each year, you’re sure to meet someone whose pace matches yours. Strike up a conversation. Together you’ll sustain yourselves
through the curve of your journey: the exhilarating encounters of the first miles, the
contemplative stretches of the middle third, the short gauntlet of fatigue that looms for many
riders between sixty and seventy-five miles, and the reinvigoration of the final ten or fifteen
miles.

Be sure to eat, eat, eat, drink, drink, drink. Remember, you’re burning at least six- to
eight-hundred calories an hour. You’ve got to fuel your legs and quench your thirst. Don’t stuff
yourself—sophrosyne, remember—but do eat and drink enough. I love pancakes before a ride;
bananas, oranges, and oatmeal cookies during a ride; and lots of pasta afterward. Yes, some
people eat meat in the course of a long ride, and I’ve watched cyclists down half a pound of
catsup-drenched fries coming from a bag so greasy it was transparent, but meat and junk food are
hard to digest, especially when most of your energy is needed not for digesting food but for
getting you down the road. High carbohydrate foods will give you energy and keep your blood
sugar level up, the fuel for the pleasure you feel.

As you ride, sophrosyne will bring you into harmony with the elements and the terrain.
Spin into a headwind until you turn and receive the blessed boost of a tailwind. Ease up the hills,
bouncing on your pedals until you crest the top, and relax into the descent of the downhill. If you
ride in this way, in harmony with yourself, your bike, your partners, and the world around you,
you’re sure to experience something else the ancient Greek philosophers know about. It’s a
“personal best” that has little to do with speed and time. The Greeks called it an “epiphany,” a
shining forth. It refers to those moments in life when we experience with special clarity and
insight.

These have given me the keenest pleasures of cycling—odd moments and small scenes
that remain vivid in memory: the roof line of an unpainted barn in Michigan, hundreds of cyclists
gliding before me down an Ohio hillside, sunlight dancing off the sand and ocean of a New
Jersey beach, the neon green of maple trees on Long Island, the rush of lilac scent on a curve in
Illinois, the rustle of about-to-be-harvested corn in a Wisconsin valley, two strangers coming abreast of each other on an Indiana back road, their bicycles drifting toward each other in a ballet of first acquaintance. In these moments of high intensity and high energy, with endorphins flowing, absorbed by the rhythms of effort, I feel my senses blend. Eyes feel like fingers, and seeing old pine siding on a barn two hundred yards away, I can feel its grain. Wind acquires color, sound has its smell, taste becomes texture. These are experiences I’ve had nowhere else but in cycling, and especially on centuries. They are the rewards of sophrosyne, the fruits of my “Better Century” method. They could be yours, too.
ASSIGNMENT: Write a problem-solution essay. Research and present a current issue or problem facing a Latin-American country today. Propose a course of action for solving this problem.

Economically Feasible Methods of Protecting Brazil’s Amazon Rainforest

By Kevin Farrell

In recent years, the destruction of tropical rainforests has received a great public outcry. Brazil’s Amazon, the largest such forest in the world, has received the vast majority of attention. The existence of the Amazon rainforest is of tremendous importance to Brazil—and, ironically enough, to its economy—which makes the issue of deforestation all the more pressing. The Brazilian government should recognize once and for all that the Amazon is essential to the national welfare. By the same token, it must implement a series of ecological policies that acknowledge the economic factors that drive deforestation and reconcile the need for protecting the rainforest with the needs of capitalist development. Should the government impose a carbon tax, replace destructive subsidies with ecologically sustainable but nevertheless profitable ones, and protect as national forest the entirety of the Amazon rainforest, it can succeed in balancing environmental and economic concerns.

The number of species living in tropical rainforests like the Amazon has never been established because many of these species have yet to be discovered; however, 2-3 million, or two-thirds of the earth’s species, may be an underestimation (Whitmore 58). A more conservative estimate suggests that the rainforests, which cover only a twentieth of the earth’s surface, are home to over 50 percent of all living organisms (Lewis 14). The plants and animals in the rainforest play a crucial role in the world’s biodiversity. This biodiversity does more than create a tingly feeling in the hearts of environmentalists. The Economist explains some of the more tangible reasons for promoting biodiversity:

The strongest argument for conserving biodiversity is to protect the “ecosystems” on which humanity itself depends. Diversified ecosystems protect watersheds, local rainfall, food supply, and soil. The Amazon ecosystem is so vast that it creates its own climate. Most rainfall is recycled,
and the forest affects light reflection, cloud formation, regional rainfall and temperature. ("Saving the Rainforest")

Even if the Brazilian government does not care about the long-term threat of global warming, which the Amazon also keeps in check, these other domestic concerns pose a real threat to the country. Uncontrolled flooding, irregular rainfall, and soil erosion will cause billions of dollars in damage, to say nothing of the human anguish and disruption to everyday living. Thus, a foresighted Amazon policy must include ways of dealing with deforestation, which results in the loss of species diversity. Only biodiversity can preserve a stable and healthy ecosystem.

There is a second reason—with its own economic bent—for supporting the biodiversity of the rainforest. It is related to the pharmaceutical and agricultural industries. Mac Margolis explains,

> Once a species is eliminated, no laboratory can conjure it back again. And as tropical forests contain so much of the gene stuff that is vital for our own lives—curare for anesthesia, the rose periwinkle for leukemia or Hodgkin’s disease, quinine for malaria, and a dozen analgesics, not to mention the possible keys to pest and disease controls for agriculture—depleting the species pool is lighting the long fuse of a time bomb for humanity. (140)

The value of the Amazon rainforest, much like the number of species living within it, cannot even be assessed at this time. Unless the forest is protected, Brazil may miss out on a golden opportunity to supply the world with cures for its diseases. Moreover, as The Economist argues, there are agricultural consequences to extinction: “All crops, garden plants, and domestic animals have wild ancestors. . . Their continued viability depends on the maintenance of the genetic diversity of their ancestors, which alone makes possible the breeding of new strains” (“Saving”).

Brazilian environmentalists must appeal to the economic effects of deforestation in order to have any hope of stopping it. Therein lies the current dilemma. Brazil’s economy depends on the products of deforestation, especially timber and cattle. Tree cutting and burning results in the destruction of far more Amazon rainforest than all other factors combined (Coffee). There has always been a demand for Brazilian hardwoods, which
explains why such enormous tracts of land have long been deforested. In more recent years government subsidies have encouraged vast projects that clear the forest to open grazing land for cattle. These two industries have supplied jobs for hundreds of thousands of Brazilians, but they have come at a terrible price. Although the worst deforestation in the Amazon’s history has ended, the rainforest continues to be depleted at the steady rate of about 12 percent annually.

One of Brazil’s continual problems is that it benefits from development at the expense of the rainforest. On the one hand, Brazil cannot afford to resist the economic opportunities presented. On the other hand, it has failed to impose regulations on the destruction of its forests or, in some cases, simply does not have the resources to enforce them. The government needs to search for innovative methods of raising revenue while still protecting the land. A particularly effective way of doing this would involve carbon credits. Since the world must decrease carbon emissions in order to combat global warming, and developers inject tremendous amounts of carbon into the atmosphere when they destroy the rainforests in the course of their development, the Brazilian government could charge nations and companies for the right to emit carbon under the condition that they discontinue their plans elsewhere. These carbon credits might provide Brazil with $2 billion per year and simultaneously keep the Amazon rainforest intact (“Is it Possible to Save the Brazilian Amazon?”).

In addition to charging for development and pollution on its land, the Brazilian government must change its economic policies. It must pay special attention to the items that it subsidizes because, The Economist observes, “deforestation has been as much an economic as an environmental disaster” (“Managing the Rainforests”). This may seem hard to believe, but it is true. In the past several decades, loggers have ripped out a stretch of forest and then burned the rest of the land, thinking that agricultural potential would make the land worth more cleared than as untouched forest. Farming turned out to be unprofitable, and many people committed fraud or used their new “farms” as tax shelters for other businesses
“Managing”). Hundreds of thousands of square kilometers now lay abandoned in Amazonia with nothing to show for the deforestation.

In the last few years, the government has reduced these subsidies and closed some of the loopholes. Good-quality forested land can be worth 40% more than cleared land. Unharmed woodland can yield a profit indefinitely. Using reduced-impact logging, companies can divide a forested area into 30 blocks, one of which is exploited each year, before being left alone for 29 years. This method provides enough time to re-grow the lost forest. It can even be more profitable than traditional, reckless logging because it leaves the oldest trees, which would otherwise be cut down, to re-seed the block with new trees.

The government, if it subsidizes anything, should subsidize reduced-impact logging. Ecologist Robin Chazdon discovered that “in secondary forests that are 15 to 20 years old, the overall abundance of species that have medicinal uses is higher compared to the older forests” (“Shaky science behind save-rainforest effort”). Furthermore, younger forests consume more carbon dioxide than older forests, which makes careful deforestation more effective in fighting global warming than leaving the rainforest alone (“Shaky science”). And as far as illegal logging is concerned, an increasing number of foreign and domestic consumers of hardwoods are demanding that timber be independently certified as the product of reduced-impact logging, which has reduced the amount of illegal logging (“Managing”).

Another threat to rainforest destruction is the increase in population. With Amazonia’s population on the rise, there is a need to find ways to support these new inhabitants. Various projects have employed locals as fruit and plant collectors, and projects are underway to train villagers to grow trees and fruits on their own small plot of land. They can realize a decent living with such techniques (“Managing”).

Not to be overlooked is the idea of placing the entire Amazon rainforest under government protection. Some of it could be designated a national park and be deemed untouchable. Most of it could be made into a national forest and placed under strict regulation for cutting, which would be conducted under reduced-impact guidelines. The
enforcement for the government’s mandate must be stronger than it currently is. This will require money that Brazil does not have at the moment, but carbon credits could provide the revenue needed to run a national forestry service equipped with satellite imaging. According to *The Economist*, “Combined with better land registration, improved satellite imaging should help to monitor, and thus prevent, deforestation. . . . A state laboratory is downloading satellite images and comparing them with a computerized land register to spot breaches of the often-flouted national forest code” (“Managing”). Enforcement of responsible rainforest protection policies is a realistic expectation, especially as Brazil’s government cleans up some of its historical corruption.

A combination of carbon credits, economically enticing subsidies for reduced-impact logging, and federal protection of Brazil’s Amazon rainforest can make possible the preservation of the environment without compromising the country’s economic needs. It is only when the economic and environmental needs are unified and seen as compatible that the problem of deforestation will be resolved. “Eco-agriculture,” the set of strategies being devised to minimize conflicts between agriculture and biodiversity, is slowly producing results.
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5. Sick Building Syndrome (research essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Research, define, and explain “sick building syndrome.” Explain why interior designers should be concerned about this topic.

Sick Building Syndrome

By MaryJo Franciskovich

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

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

Sick building syndrome and building-related illnesses were the environmental buzzwords of the 1990’s. For a chemically-sensitive segment of the society, education and research on these subjects can hold possible explanations for the chronic discomfort plaguing them. Since Americans spend an average of ninety percent of their time indoors, whether at home, in the workplace, or at an entertainment spot, perhaps even the less chemically sensitive are affected by this syndrome.

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

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

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

**Common Contaminants**

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

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

**Volatile Organic Compounds.** Volatile organic compounds (VOCs) are emitted as gasses at room temperature and at extreme temperatures from certain solids and liquids. Some of these include formaldehyde, methelyne chloride, pesticides, solvents, cleaning chemicals, benzene, perchloroethylene. Some indoor concentrations of VOC’s can be ten times greater than those found outdoors.

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

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

**Solutions**

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

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

The removal or modification of the pollutant or its source is the most effective way to solve a known indoor air problem, when this solution is practicable. This can be accomplished by replacing water-stained ceiling tiles and carpets, banning smoking or providing a separate, ventilated room, venting the contaminant to the outside, using and storing paints, solvents, pesticides, and adhesives in closed containers, in well-ventilated areas, or in low- or no-occupancy locations, and allowing time for new building materials or newly remodeled areas to gas-off before occupancy.

Also, air cleaning can be a useful addition to source control and ventilation. Air filters are effective at removing some, but not all of the pollution. Furthermore, with humidity regulated between thirty and fifty percent, molds cannot grow.
New construction areas and remodeled areas can be kept healthy with the following actions:

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

**Conclusion**

There are very few tests to evaluate the possible synergistic effects that occur when we combine chemicals in our food and water and when we allow them to be emitted into the air we breathe. The few studies that have been done show that such effects dramatically increase the risks to us of sickness and disease. Scientists do not yet understand enough to recommend solutions so that regulations can be formed to guide us. We are, at the present time, still involved in finding ways to measure, test, and supply by trial and error some possible solutions to correct the problems with the air that surrounds us, in any space we occupy. When professionals use and test chemicals in industrial settings, they are subject to strict health and safety codes, yet we use these same chemicals at home without guidance or restriction. As further research is done, we are learning that many of the household products we use and believe safe are actually considered toxic. At this time in our lives, it is necessary for us to research for ourselves and continue to learn all that we can as we decide to build, remodel, or refurnish our living spaces.
WORKS CONSULTED


1. Natural Abundance of Country Life as Shown by Willa Cather’s “Neighbour Rosicky” (a thesis-support essay of analysis and interpretation)

ASSIGNMENT: Write an interpretive essay on Willa Cather’s “Neighbour Rosicky”

Natural Abundance of Country Life
as Shown by Willa Cather’s “Neighbour Rosicky”

by Amy Richter

Anton Rosicky believes the country is the best place to raise a happy family, because of its natural abundance. Though the fairy-tale city life of Castle Garden, New York, satisfies Rosicky for 5 years or so, the fantasy fades as his desire for real fulfillment in a more bucolic setting increases. “That was why he drank too much; to get a temporary illusion of freedom and wide horizons” (87). Rosicky realizes that although city life is appealing, it leaves an empty feeling in the end. Both country and city settings described in “Neighbour Rosicky” by Willa Cather illustrate the benefits of country living.

Rosicky’s love for the land began at a young age, when he was sent to live with his grandparents following the death of his mother. “He stayed with them until he was twelve, and formed those ties with the earth and the farm animals and growing things which are never made at all unless they are made early” (88). Rosicky’s childhood marks the start of a lifelong companionship between him and the open land.

The city, on the other hand, is disconnected from him because of its abundance of cement. While sitting in the park in New York City, Rosicky observes “so much stone and asphalt with nothing going on, so many empty windows” (88). Rosicky finds the isolation of the
city to be exhausting, because the cement denies him contact with the nourishing land. Rosicky desires to move away from the city and get back to the country where his roots are.

Rosicky’s decision to head west and “buy his liberty” (89) occurs on a significant holiday, Independence Day. Although he can’t afford one of the finer farms in High Prairie, he does purchase property, and he enjoys the fact that he owns any land at all. This is an important accomplishment for Rosicky because he becomes the first person in the family to own land. For Rosicky, “To be a landless man was to be a wage-earner, a slave, all your life; to have nothing, to be nothing” (93). Rosicky fears that Rudolph will give up the farming gamble and sacrifice his freedom for guaranteed money made slaving at a factory job in the city. Rosicky compares these blank buildings to “empty jails” (88), which represent the lack of freedom associated with city life. Rosicky wants his son to understand that in the country, “what you had was your own. You didn’t have to choose between bosses and strikers, and go wrong either way” (104). As Rosicky’s health deteriorates, his concerns for his family’s welfare increase. He wants not only freedom for himself, but for his family as well. It’s comforting for Rosicky to know that his family will be together on the land long after he’s gone.

Rosicky’s heart may be failing, but he’s not in the ground yet. In the meantime, Rosicky is encouraged by Doctor Burleigh to spend some quality time with his family. Dr. Ed advises, “My Lord, Rosicky, you are one of the few men I know who has a family he can get some comfort out of; happy dispositions, never quarrel among themselves, and they treat you right” (74). Rosicky feels blessed to have such a wonderful family as he recalls the types of families which inhabit the city. He remembers angry families arguing among themselves in dirty, overcrowded kitchens. Rosicky believes that “the worst things he has come upon in his journey through the world were human—depraved and poisonous specimens of life” (104). He doesn’t think his children are prepared to understand the harshness and cruelty of human beings existing in the city. Rosicky is not naïve to the fact that mean people live in the country as well. He feels
the advantage to living in the country is that such neighbors can be avoided by separation of the land. But in the city, “all the foulness and misery and brutality of your neighbors was part of your life” (104). There is no escaping the company of unwanted dishonesty.

The city also represents poverty and hunger for Rosicky. Rosicky remembers a special Christmas in London. Christmas is thought to be a joyous occasion, the season of giving. Rosicky describes an entirely different scenario. “All de windows is full of good t’ings to eat, an’ all de pushcarts in de streets is full, an’ you smell ‘em all de time, a’ you ain’t got no money,—not a damn bit” (99). He understands that although the city is a great place to live if you’re rich, it’s not an easy environment for the poor and hungry to survive in.

Rosicky counts his blessings for the opportunity to cultivate crops with which to feed and nourish his family. After all these years in the country, Rosicky “had never had to take a cent from anyone in bitter need,—never had to look at the face of a woman become like a wolf’s from struggle and famine” (105). Rosicky knows that planting seasons are not consistent and stresses the importance of adaptation to the uncertain. Regardless of the success of each year’s crops, the Rosicky family celebrates life together. The family picnic is an important event showing the strong bond uniting his family. Rosicky recalls a Fourth of July that was so hot, the intensity of the heat ruined the entire crop of corn. He did not let this catastrophe ruin him as it did his neighbors. Rosicky says, “An’ we enjoyed ourselves that year, poor as we was, an’ our neighbours wasn’t a bit better off for bein’ miserable. Some of ’em grieved till they got poor digestions and couldn’t relish what they did have” (98).

To Rosicky, happiness doesn’t come from having money but from enjoyment of his loving family. Neighbors wonder why Rosicky doesn’t get ahead in life. “Maybe . . . people as generous and warm-hearted and affectionate as the Rosikys never got ahead much; maybe you couldn’t enjoy your life and put money in the bank” (84). The influence of money is not a
temptation for Rosicky because the satisfaction of being part of a family gives him all the wealth he desires.

Part of being in a successful family includes struggling together through the best and worst of times. The drought brings hard time to the country, which is a concern for Rudolph. Rosicky replies, “You don’t know what hard times is. You don’t owe anybody, you got plenty to eat an’ keep warm, an’ plenty water to keep clean. When you got them, you can’t have it very hard” (96). The country offers feelings of comfort and companionship to Rosicky and his family. Rosicky hopes his son Rudolph will not give up after one bad season of crops but instead continue to work freely and live off the land.

The planting season is symbolic of reproduction, the cycle of continuous life and death. Rosicky appreciates the beauty of snow falling over the open pastures and the nice graveyard which lies nearby. “It was a nice graveyard, Rosicky reflected, sort of snug and homelike, not cramped and mournful,—a big sweep all around it” (81). Rosicky is awfully fond of his farm and isn’t anxious to leave it, but in the event of his death, he won’t have to go far at all. “The snow, falling over his barnyard and the graveyard, seemed to draw things together like. And they were all old neighbours in the graveyard, most of them friends” (81). The country graveyard is much more comforting than cemeteries found in the city. He thinks of city cemeteries as “arranged and lonely” (110) and considers them to be “cities of the dead . . . of the forgotten” (111). These city cemeteries are not open and free like the little graveyard at the edge of Rosicky’s farm.

And so, the time comes for Rosicky to return to his roots, the country, for the final time. The condition of Rosicky’s heart deteriorates, and a heart attack is inevitable. Even though Rosicky is dying, he celebrates the miraculous news of a future grandchild to be born to his son Rudolph and his wife, Polly. Doctor Burleigh, a lifelong friend of Anton, comes back to the country to visit the Rosicky family. As he drives past the graveyard, he notices the beauty. The
Doctor reflects, “nothing could be more undeathlike than his place; nothing could be more right for a man who had helped to do the work of great cities and had always longed for the open country and had got to it at last. Rosicky’s life seemed to him complete and beautiful” (111). Though Rosicky’s life seemed to him complete and beautiful (111). Though Rosicky’s physical body is buried in the ground, his spirit freely lives through his family’s enjoyment of the country’s natural abundance, thus ensuring the infinite cycle of life.

WORKS CITED

2. The Truth about White Lies (a personal response essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Write a “responsive essay” in which you present your personal response to a work of literature. In the course of your essay, answer these questions:

1. What in the literary work prompts my response?
2. What are my feelings, memories, or associations?
3. What experiences, observations, or beliefs explain my responses?

Cheryl has chosen to respond to Ernest Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants,” a very short story in which two characters, Jig, a young woman, and her unnamed American lover discuss whether she should have an abortion, which the American wants and Jig does not. For whatever reasons, Jig is unable to express her feelings or desires directly.

The Truth about White Lies

by Cheryl Vaccarello

As I browsed through the literary pieces looking for the perfect work to focus my essay on, I kept coming back to Ernest Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants.” I recalled many conversations in my life where, like Jig, I would say, “I’m fine,” when I really wasn’t, or “that’s okay,” when the situation really wasn’t okay with me. While reading this story, I was annoyed with Jig for not being honest with her lover, and I was also sad for her, because it seemed that she wasn’t able to be honest. She was putting the man’s feelings and wants before hers. I, too, have been in situations when I have used the white lie to avoid confrontation.

The most recent telling of this little “white lie” happened just a month ago. My oldest niece is getting married in Wisconsin on September 23rd. My husband Al and I were discussing the details of the trip, trying to decide when we would leave for Wisconsin and where we would stay. At that time, Al informed me that he could not leave on Friday morning because he had a band job Friday night (he plays in a wedding band). Inside, I was steaming, but all I said to him was that it was fine with me, and he could come on Saturday. There was an edge to my voice that he must have picked up on, and so he pushed me further. Like Jig, I said I didn’t want to discuss it anymore. The situation was the way it would be. I would be going alone, and he would come the next day. I was very angry but could not express my anger.
It’s always been difficult for me to express anger. I am still trying to find why, but I think part of the reason is that I am afraid of losing control. Hurtful words are said in anger, and I am afraid of saying something that can’t be taken back and would be really hurtful. I try to see the other point of view of the situation before getting angry. I understood Al’s side of the situation, which was that he had the opportunity to play music. To Al, music is a top priority. The wedding was on Saturday, so he could just drive up Saturday morning. My side was that this was a family wedding, a time for all of us to be together. I felt it was essential that I be there early for my niece Sarah, because she doesn’t have a mom to help her with those last minute details. Instead of telling him all the reasons I was upset, I just said, “Okay, come up Saturday. It’s okay.” I don’t know why I couldn’t explain to him my reasons for wanting to go to Wisconsin as a family.

“Hills Like White Elephants” made me examine the use of the white lie. What exactly is a white lie? It is a phrase such as “I don’t care,” “I’m fine,” or “okay.” Sometimes the use of the white lie is good. The white lie can be used to be polite or when you want to avoid hurting someone’s feelings. But at what point is the “self” lost after constant telling of the white lie? When do you begin to ignore your own feelings and only give in to what others want of you? Reading this story made me stop and look at why I tell those white lies and what effect the telling of the lies has on me.

I think I learned to say those white lies when I was very young. An older couple, Mr. And Mrs. Henry, baby sat for my sister Bonnie and me when we were young because my mom worked full time outside the home. My sister was 5 and I was 3 when this couple began watching us. They lived a few blocks away from our house, so sometimes we would go to their house for the day. As far as I can remember, they baby sat for us for about one year. A year of abuse and neglect. There were days when lunch (if we got any) consisted of hot water. We were locked in dark closets or kept outside on the back porch for many hours. Many days we were
forced to wear only our underwear so that we would stay clean for when mom got home. You see, Mrs. Henry could then boast about how well she could take care of us. We could not play games; we could not make noise. I don’t know how many hours I sat with my hands folded on my lap, just sitting. Every day when mom came home from work, she would ask, “How was your day today?” I would always say, “It was okay. It was fine.” We never told mom what was really going on because we were the ones that were bad. We made Mrs. Henry do the things to us that she did. Mom knew that, too. Why don’t you think she stopped Mrs. Henry? Mrs. Henry said those things to us so many times that we believed her. As young as we were, we knew Mom had to work and we didn’t want her to worry; therefore, the white lie.

Well, one summer day came the breaking point. I stopped saying everything was fine. I stopped smiling and started screaming. Mrs. Henry had gone out and we were left with Don, her husband. He was downstairs in the basement and called to us to go into the bathroom and look at him through the vent in the bathroom floor. When we did, he exposed himself to us. I ran out of the house screaming, while my sister stayed inside. The neighbor, a policeman, was home and I ran to him. I kept pointing at the house and crying. The words would not come. He went into the house and saw Don. When Don was arrested and the story of the abuse came tumbling out, my mom was devastated. We had to go to court and testify against him. Convicted for his exhibitionism, Don was sent to jail, and Mrs. Henry was sent to Elgin State Mental Hospital. Finally, they were out of our lives.

As I brought this memory forward, I asked myself, at what point does the telling of the white lie become harmful? I told my mom that everything was fine for different reasons. As I look back on this painful time, the foremost reason was probably that I was afraid. Mrs. Henry made me believe I was bad and that I was at fault. She was the adult, and my mom wasn’t making her stop, so she must have had my mom’s approval. That was the thinking of a 3-year-old. I also believe that I told those white lies because I didn’t want my mom to worry. She had
to work, and in my way, I was trying to help make it easier for her. A part of me also believed that my mom should have known what was happening, so when I said everything was fine, it was what I thought she wanted to hear. Jig used the same white lie, “everything’s fine,” when she told the American man what she thought he wanted to hear.

In both episodes from my life, the outcome would have been different had I not told the white lie. Had I told my husband how I really felt, I probably would be traveling to Wisconsin with my family as a whole. Had I put my needs before what I thought were my mother’s, I would not have to contend with the memory of that year in my life. Most specifically, I would not carry the picture of that old man exposing himself to my sister and me.

White lies allow people to hide their feelings. Sometimes feelings are too painful to speak about. Maybe the time is not right. Well, it is now the time in my life to take a stand. I am really pushing myself to stop the white lies before they stop me. I can understand why I felt such a pull to “Hills Like White Elephants.” I related strongly to Jig. I know I don’t want to be like her and say, “I feel fine. There’s nothing wrong with me. I feel fine.” It is time to stop the white lies and find the truth.

I hope Jig finds whatever she has inside to stand up for what she wants and needs, as I am trying to do.
3. The Stranger: Epilogue (a creative response essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Dramatize your understanding of a literary work by writing an imaginative recreation of all or part of it. You become the artist and “extend” a work by adding to it in some way that reflects your feelings about your subject.

Bill Mihalik has chosen to dramatize an episode that takes place immediately after the end of Albert Camus’ novel The Stranger. This novel tells the story of Monsieur Meursault, a man capable of rich sensory experience but indifferent to the conventional sentiments that too often pass for human emotions. Almost by accident, Meursault kills a man and is arrested for his crime. At his trial, his refusal to lie to save himself and his refusal to utter any expression of remorse earn him a sentence of death by the guillotine. In his epilogue, created to follow the actual last lines of the novel, Bill reveals Meursault’s final thoughts and experiences as he is led to his death.

The Stranger: Epilogue

by Bill Mihalik

The sky turned red and the stars faded away. The red was the red of the rusty hinges on my cell door. I thought I heard footsteps. But maybe that was my heart pounding. I stopped breathing. Yes, those were footsteps echoing down the cold stone corridor. I listened as hard as I could, as if my body were one giant ear and the footsteps were the pounding of a stone heart. I pressed my body to the wooden door. There were many heavy footsteps. They sounded like a company of guards. Perhaps the footsteps would stop before they came to my cell. The footsteps became louder. Perhaps the footsteps would go past my cell. But the footsteps stopped in front of my door. Maybe I had been pardoned.

“Meursault?” It was Edmund, the Sergeant of the Guard. I wanted to answer, but I couldn’t breathe. “Meursault, we’re going to open the door. Are you ready?”

I croaked “Yes” in a voice so hoarse I didn’t recognize it as my own. The wooden door creaked open on rusty hinges that hadn’t been oiled since I had been there. I saw Edmund’s face. Next to him was the commandant of the prison. Behind them I saw more guards standing at attention. They held their rifles motionless. It was as if time had stopped.

The commandant’s head was entirely bald. The morning sun glinted off the top of his head. His eyes were light gray, like the light gray of fine dust. He had small wrinkles around the
corners of both eyes. He neither smiled nor frowned. A thin black moustache curled above each end of his small mouth. He was taller than I, but not by much. He was heavier than Edmund. He could have been forty or sixty. Six medals hung limply on his dress uniform. In a toneless bass that echoed down the corridor like a church bell he began, “Patrice Meursault, your appeal has been denied. It is my responsibility to carry out the sentence ordered by the high court of the French people. You will be taken to the courtyard and executed by guillotine for the murder of Ali ben Hassan. That is all.”

The head guard spoke. “Meursault, you will be escorted to the courtyard. Come with us.” Of course, what else could I do? I did not want to cause trouble for Edmund. He had been my only friend these past few months. Two guards came into the cell. They crouched under the low arch of the doorway and faced me. They looked at me with a curious stare of pity and hardness as if I were already a headless corpse. I walked out of the cell. My legs felt like rubber. The two guards followed me. More guards were ahead of me. Our footsteps echoed down the stone corridor. As we turned the corner and entered another corridor, I saw an open door at the end. The light was growing brighter and brighter as we approached the door.

Almost blinded by the morning sun as I walked out into a prison yard, I felt dizzy, shaded my eyes, and looked around. Onward we marched until we passed outside the prison gates and into a courtyard. I was surrounded by many faces. The priest held his book by his chest. A string of beads dangled in his left hand. The magistrate rubbed his cross in the fingers of his right hand. The old reporter with the little mouth wrote furiously in his notebook. And then there was the mob. The French stared quietly at me. Their eyes accused me. The Arabs shouted curses at me. What had I done to any of them? I knew none of them. And none of them knew me. I was the stranger. I turned around and saw the instrument of death. The sun gleamed off the blade. I closed my eyes.
The commandant asked, “Meursault, do you want the priest to say a prayer?” The priest started to move forward.

I shot a hot, angry look at the commandant. “No. I see no use for it!” The priest flinched and moved back next to the magistrate. The magistrate blinked and his tongue licked his dry, straight, thin lips.

“Meursault, do you have a last request?”

I thought for a moment. I thought of Marie swimming in the ocean and having lunch at Celeste’s. I thought about the Sundays when I sat and watched people walking up and down the street. “I’d like to smoke.” Edmund came up to me and offered me one of his cigarettes. They were American, Lucky Strikes. I put the cigarette in my mouth. He struck a match. The acrid phosphorus smelled like a woman’s perfume to me. The flame flickered toward me as I inhaled. He waved the match twice and threw it on the dirt. The little blue and yellow flame flickered and died. A wisp of smoke rose from the matchstick and curled up into the cool summer morning air. There was no wind. I took a long puff. What could be better than relaxing on the balcony with a cigarette and seeing Marie walking up the street to my apartment? The match stopped smoking. The last wisps rose skyward. The cigarette tasted stronger than my regular brand.

The commandant’s voice rang out, “Meursault, are you ready?”

Ready? Who is ever ready? Was he ready? Was the magistrate ready? Was the priest ready? No, none of them were ready. I may have no choice, but I was not ready. I took one last puff and savored the taste. I blew out the smoke through my nose and moth and watched the smoke rise up in small wisps. I threw the cigarette on the ground and stamped it out.

“We will put a cloth around your head,” said Edmund.
“I don’t need it, and I don’t want it. I want to watch every last moment.” The guard holding the cloth stopped. The cloth hung limply in midair like the tricolors on the prison towers.

Edmund hesitated. Then in a lowered voice he continued, “It is more convenient for us. It will be easier for the guards to collect your head after the execution.”

I thought about that for a moment. I had to agree that it was a perfectly reasonable request. I nodded. The guard pulled the cloth like a sack over my head and darkness descended on my eyes.

The guard touched my arms gently and led me. “Please bow down.”

I hadn’t bowed to anyone or anything since I had been a little boy. I didn’t want to bow down now. I knew I would never again stand up straight. I would never again see the sea or sky. I would never again know a woman. A hand gently pushed my head down on the wood. My neck brushed the smooth wood. I listened for the blade to rush down the arms of the guillotine. My muscles relaxed. I felt at one with the uncaring universe. I was alone no more.
4. Cup of Sorrow (a literary research paper)

ASSIGNMENT: Write a literary research paper.

Cup of Sorrow

by Sheri A. Luzzi

Most young people struggle to emerge from their parents’ shadow while fashioning ways of expressing their own identities. In the normal course of events, sometimes after a few tumultuous years, they cast off parental guidance and begin to navigate their own passages through life. But some are caught like branches between the rocks that obstruct the water of a rushing river. Feeling victimized, they remain immobilized behind masks of pride carefully crafted to hide their fear. Looking for a scapegoat to bear their suns, they lash out at those closest to them.

Julian Chestny, the protagonist in Flannery O’Connor’s “Everything That Rises Must Converge,” is a tortured young man who blames his mother for his failures. A closer look into Julian’s troubled mind, however, reveals that his indignation is not the result of an imperfect mother; rather, it is the cry of someone who is unable to reconcile his true identity with reality. It takes an act of grace in the form of violent aggression to shake Julian from his ivory tower of intellectual superiority and make him see himself for who he really is.

Julian is among the first generation of an aristocratic Southern family to live without benefit of wealth or standing in a newly integrated South. He is desperately struggling to come to terms with his identity under the formidable shadow of a mother defined by the South and what he considers its outdated mannerisms. He is the great-grandson of a slave owner and former governor of the southern state in which he and his mother live, and he is the grandson of a wealthy landowner and a grandmother who was a Godhigh. Mrs. Chestny has lost her wealth and aristocratic position. She is reduced to living a life of simple means in a world she defines as a “mess” (O’Connor 407). What enables her to be civil in the integrated society she despises is her
unwavering belief in the manners and cultures of her upbringing (Bloom 47). Her “ardent faith in the primacy of manners” is, according to Harold Bloom, a major schism in Julian’s relationship with her (47). She tells Julian, “I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am,” to which Julian replies, “they don’t give a damn for your graciousness. Knowing who you are is good for one generation only” (407).

Contributing to their fractured relationship is Mrs. Chestny’s habit of mouthing “self-righteous moral platitudes,” indicating her probable perception of herself as a “good Christian” (Walters 127). Mrs. Chestny’s behavior likely stems from the predominant belief in the old South that Christianity is a birthright and not something someone consciously chooses as a personal act of faith. His mother’s extravagant display of hypocritical Christianity may be why Julian appears to have “lost his faith” (407). In addition to preaching a homespun version of morality, Mrs. Chestny consistently oversimplifies difficult issues, making her appear ignorant to Julian. He responds to such hypocrisy by cultivating his intellect and ignoring his spirit. Through the character of Julian, O’Connor illustrates her belief that there are certain things in this world that cannot be explained outside of God, “where God is present to men and faith is never ‘mastered by human intelligence’” (True 272). Julian’s indifference to spiritual matters while worshipping intellect will eventually bring him precariously close to the precipice of self-destruction.

Mrs. Chestny’s perception of religion is repugnant to Julian, but what offends him most is his mother’s persistence in behaving like an aristocrat when in reality she is just a simple woman of simple means (Grimshaw 59). “They argue about true culture, which for Julian is only in the mind, [but] for his mother it is in the heart” (Grimshaw 59). Refusing to relinquish her aristocratic identity, Mrs. Chestny insists, “If you know who you are you can go anywhere” even if it is only to the local Y to mix with people who are not her kind (407). His mother’s sense of identity is lost on Julian, who believes himself to be “more broadminded than his mother”
(Martin 13). Julian sanctimoniously believes that his mother, who lived the life he only
“dreams” of (408), couldn’t possibly appreciate it as he could.

Julian claims he detests his mother’s heritage, but secretly he relishes it. He uses it to
fabricate an identity within his own reality. “Though outwardly he scoffs at her claims of
aristocratic connections, inwardly he treasures the knowledge of his own superior heritage”
(Walters 128). Julian feels conflicted when he envisions the mansion because it always remains
“in his mind as his mother had known it” (408). He believes his mother is out of touch with
reality and unenlightened, but fails to recognize his own phantom retreat into his mother’s past
(Desmond 3).

Julian wants desperately to distinguish himself from everything in the South
which he finds morally, intellectually, and aesthetically repugnant: its racism,
its nostalgia for the glorious past; its (to him) petty concern with manners; its
barren intellectual life; its insufferably banal social intercourse. (Bloom 46)

His retreat from the world is to no other than the mansion his mother grew up in (Walters
128). But the image of the irreclaimable plantation provokes such conflict for Julian that he
never speaks about it “without contempt or . . . [thinks] of it without longing” (O’Connor 408).
He is unconfined within his own imagination, yet he envisions the mansion not as an enlightened
individual might, but with slaves living in it (408). Certainly it would be difficult for a
progressive like Julian to admit that he is not different from his mother or his forefathers who
saw nothing wrong with owning slaves. In this way he betrays himself. “He uses liberalism
simply as a means of revenge against a past he both falsely idealized and nostalgically admires,”
and like his mother, he lives in his own reality (Denham 2).

Unable to express his contempt for the society he feels alienated from, Julian takes aim at
his mother. She is a constant reminder that his desired reality is nothing more than a dream.
Perhaps this is why Julian contemptuously refers to his mother as a child whenever he is upset
with her. Like a jealous sibling, he offends her by remind her of what she can no longer have.
Julian is one of certain other O’Connor characters who are “caught in ‘late adolescence’ impotence so acute that they can direct hostility only against their protective, and often times patronizing and controlling mothers” (Bloom 46-7). Julian doesn’t realize that “what he thinks he detests, he also loves and longs for” and “what Julian believes he is totally free of, he is, in fact, fearfully dependent upon,” which is his mother (Bloom 47). As “one of O’Connor’s ignorant intellectuals” who is educated but can’t make a living, Julian is dependent on his mother to take care of him, blind to his own “intellectual arrogance and savagery” and doesn’t see his total reliance on his mother (Baumgaertner 108). He doesn’t understand that his mother has sacrificed everything to ensure his success, yet he ends up selling typewriters for a living (Denham 2). Mrs. Chestny struggled to give Julian all the advantages she believed he should have as a Chestny, and yet Julian “could not forgive her that she had enjoyed the struggle and that she thought she had won” (411). He mistakenly believes he has been martyred on her behalf and insists that he alone was responsible for raising himself out of their dismal circumstances (McFarland 2). But “his is a martyrdom without spiritual content (Baumgaertner 108). It exists only in his mind.

Julian’s behavior is that of a child who expects his mother to service his needs without having to give anything in return. His reliance on her is based on his refusal to group up. Julian wants to be taken care of. His mother’s heritage represents a prefabricated, supposedly secure existence that he feels robbed of, thus leaving him to forge his own way in society, but he knows that he will never be able to make a living (406) so he acts like a spoiled child, transferring his resentment to his mother, who has become his caretaker. Like a bird high in his perch, Julian views his mother from a position of moral and intellectual superiority, smugly believing he can “see her with absolute clarity” (411).

Julian not only resents his mother, but anyone he regards as his intellectual inferior. “Playing the intellectual sophisticate, he sees his task as instructing the unenlightened, especially
his mother, in the ways of true culture which he believes are always defined in terms of the mind” (Denham 2). However, Julian’s intellectualism is “shallowness and pretension” (Denham 3). He smugly ordains himself above his surroundings while evading his racial duplicity by avoiding people or using them as pawns in his infantile game to annoy his mother (O’Connor 412). To her credit, Mrs. Chestny at least tries to live within her surroundings even though she is uncomfortable with the people who inhabit them. In contrast, Julian favors living “three miles” from the nearest neighbor. He isn’t really offended by his mother’s racial prejudice because he isn’t capable of feeling compassion for people (Denham 3). He doesn’t much like people nor does he have much regard for their mental capacity. He spends most of his time within the inner sanctum of his mind. It is “the only place where he felt free of the general idiocy of his fellows” (411). It is easy for Julian to measure himself against the shortcomings of others because he never risks emotional failure himself. Instead, he withdraws into a “kind of mental bubble” whenever he is uncomfortable with his surroundings (411). In his sanctuary, he is safe from “any kind of penetration from without” (411) and is able to single-handly judge “the intellectual bankruptcy of the rest of mankind (Browning 103).

However, Julian’s flight from humanity is futile because his intellectualism is simply the way in which he escapes the reality of himself (McDermott 3). In a letter to author John F. Desmond in December 1963, Flannery O’Connor wrote that her characters retreat into “abstract intellectualism” and isolation to avoid growth and union with others (Desmond 2). The result is a person who isolates himself from all he detests until he has only himself (McDermott 2). Jill Baumgaertner relates Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s supposition that if we isolate ourselves, we lose ourselves, and to find ourselves we must move toward one another. According to de Chardin, it is our “originality” and not our “individuality” that defines who we are, and in order to find ourselves, we must unite with others (qtd. in Baumgaertner 110). Due to his immaturity, Julian doesn’t trust or understand his uniqueness as an individual. Instead of expressing himself
within a society he doesn’t like, he loses himself as an individual apart from society. He hides behind a mask of indifference and intellectualism in the safety of his own reality.

Unfortunately for Julian, his reality is not impenetrable. His dependence on his mother is a piercing reminder that he is not who he envisions himself to be. Consequently, Mrs. Chestny, by default, bears the brunt of her son’s utter contempt for mankind. Author Dorothy Walters suggests a person’s angst about society begins initially when he is a baby dependent upon his authoritarian mother. The mother is the first in society to tell the child what he can or can’t do. When the child grows up and can no longer tolerate society’s rules, he retaliates. He now wants the mother punished for how he believes society has failed him. But Walters points out that because children are so closely linked with their parents, an attack on the mother is not only an attack against society but also an attack against the self. A child’s desire to injure his mother is evidence of deeply buried hostilities.” The child either harms the parent or harms himself through “spiritual withdrawal” (Walters 143-44). Julian contemplates harming his mother, thinking he could “with pleasure have slapped her [his mother] as he would have slapped a particularly obnoxious child in his charge” (414). As it turns out, Julian doesn’t physically harm his mother, but he does cause her great emotional trauma that indirectly leads to her death.

Throughout the story, Julian imagines ways he can teach his mother a lesson through what she would consider unacceptable interaction with African-Americans 9414). All the delusive scenarios are concocted to provoke his mother to anger. Julian acts out the behavior of young progressives who “seek to expiate the sins of the parents by openly accepting [what Mrs. Chestny believes are] their inferiors” (Walter 128). When a well-dressed, obviously professional black man takes a seat across from Julian, Julian purposefully gets up and sits down next to him not so much to declare allegiance to the black race as to “declare war” on his mother (McDermott 50). But Julian’s attempt to engage the black man in an intellectual conversation “about art or politics or any subject that would be above the comprehension of those around
them” is met with indifference and finally annoyance (412-13). That particular opportunity to enlighten his mother fails. However, when a rancorous black woman and her young boy board the bus, Julian smiles at the situation that is rife with possibilities to teach his mother a lesson. Unbeknownst to Julian, the outcome will shock him to his core.

Julian wants to see housemother punished but is unable to execute this except through verbal attacks on her or inept interactions with people of the black race. When the black woman boards the bus, Julian notices she is wearing the same hat as his mother. His reaction is like that of a mischievous child who has just hatched an impish scheme. He revels in the irony of the situation and flashes his mother a smile that bespeaks: “Your punishment exactly fits your pettiness. This should teach you a permanent lesson” (416).

The black woman reminds Julian of his mother, but the woman bears similarities to Julian as well. The woman “personifies the insidious gradations of his angry mind” (McDermott 3). Unexpectedly, Julian’s neurotic fantasy with his mother lying desperately ill (416) becomes a reality, and he gleefully seizes the opportunity to knock his mother once and for all from her aristocratic pedestal.

Nothing illustrates Julian’s callous insouciance more than the way he treats his elderly mother, who has just suffered a violent attack. Incredibly, as she sits wounded and disoriented on the sidewalk, Julian insolently launches into a bitter diatribe ordering her to face the reality of a “new world and telling her to “buck up . . . It won’t kill you” (419). Her physical well being is of no concern to Julian as his thoughts selfishly play back to the “house that had been lost for him” (419). It’s the moment he has been waiting for, when he exacts retribution on his mother and the society he believes has failed him.

The son Mrs. Chestny raised so sacrificially has become a total stranger to her. Instead of giving her the comfort she so desperately searches his face for in her final moments on earth, Julian completes the violent attack she suffered only moments before. McDermott contends it
isn’t the attack on Mrs. Chestny that kills her. Rather, he says, she died from looking into her son’s face and seeing nothing (4). The “nothing” that she sees as her eyes “rake” her son’s soul is “the equivalent of the total absence of goodness in Julian’s now vacuous spirit” (McDermott 2). Pride killed his humanity and his ability to feel compassion. Julian resembles Satan more than God, pouring salt in his mother’s physical wounds with angry taunts instead of words of mercy, admonishing her like a child and saying, “I hope this teaches you a lesson” (O’Connor 419). However, it is Julian who is about to learn a lesson of tragic proportions.

A rush of sorrow engulfs Julian as the gravity of the situation suddenly dawns on him. He is beside himself with anguish as his mother crumples on the sidewalk and falls “at her side crying ‘Mamma, Mamma!’” (420). But he is like a child unable to offer his mother any consolation, in need of consolation himself. Everything he has believed in and relied on as a source of identity fails him in this moment of greatest need. “Julian’s perverse intellectualism suddenly pales before the stark reality of his mother’s death” and his belief that “he had cut himself emotionally free from her and could see her with complete objectivity” is nothing but a sham (Denham 3). Julian now recognizes his dependence on his mother.

He has been sheltered from convergence with the world by his mother, who has been willing to deflect his pathos and foster the belief that he will eventually become something. Mrs. Chestny’s attribution of Julian’s dour attitude to his immaturity and inexperience only serves to contribute to his dependence on her. Absolved of accountability, Julian is free to hide behind the masks of pride and intellectualism in order to remain detached from society. O’Connor believed people resist convergence and that it takes a tragedy to force them out of isolation and into the light of their true identity (Desmond 2). The tragedy that forces Julian’s convergence is his mother’s death. Some critics speculate that Mrs. Chestny doesn’t die at the end of the story, but if that were true, then the point of the story would be lost. Julian gets his wish to see his mother punished, but it is Julian who “enters the world of guilt and sorrow” (Denham 4).
Mrs. Chestny experiences her own convergence as she struggles to find solace in a familiar face. Not finding it in her son, she must resort to memories of the “Negro” nurse of her childhood. The fact that she has to summon a memory from as far back as her childhood suggests that she has led somewhat of an isolated life herself. But it is Julian, not his mother, who has shirked the responsibility of forging survival for the self. “His perversions of her [his mother’s] real values and his own prideful isolation have fostered a moral adolescence in which he has no mature spiritual identity” (Denham 4). When his mother dies, Julian must face his own true self. “He must face the void alone” (Denham 4).

Julian reaches a crisis as he loses the one person on earth he depends on. He experiences an epiphany of life-altering proportions that will force him to connect with the rest of humanity, to rise and converge. O’Connor referred to the one thing that stops people from rising as sin (McFarland 2). Julian had led a life of one or all of the following: “entrenched pride; willful sin; deliberate rejection of God, or possibly all three!” (Martin 120). He is “the personification of pride” as evidenced by his treatment of his mother. Julian’s pride has been “so consuming” that he hasn’t even been aware of how it has been changing him. The tragic violence against his mother brusquely opens his eyes to his true self, and that is what traumatizes him (McDermott 2). Julian’s pride has caused him to lose his faith, but his moment of greatest sorrow is about to become his moment of greatest grace.

Many of O’Connor’s stories concern God’s love and man’s ability to save his soul as he receives the love as a gift of grace. Before the tragic loss of his mother, Julian had difficulty accepting Christianity and the principle of divine grace as a result of his modern, rationalistic intellect (Drake 273). After his mother’s death, Julian becomes one of O’Connor’s characters who “are clearly in acceptance of grace after having lived insensitive to it” (Martin 133). Part of God’s love is helping man to recognize His love (84). Mrs. Chestny’s death forces Julian to confront “his betrayals and denials of love” (McFarland 3). At the end of the story, Julian is seen
running toward the lights, but “the tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow” (420). The lights might be seen as the salvation of Christ. The “guilt and sorrow” indicate the inevitable struggle Julian will face as he struggles to live less selfishly and more transparently, sharing the sufferings of Christ.

Julian’s excessive pride causes him to lose all touch with reality and subsequently destroys his spirit (McDermott 2). Too proud to admit that he is bitter at having lost his heritage, Julian hides behind a mask of intellectual superiority in order to isolate himself from human connections. The consequence is total dependence on his mother, causing him further bitterness and ultimately preventing his entrance to adulthood and his convergence with humanity. The violence he witnesses is a result of his unwillingness to accept his true identity within “the corporate unity” (Desmond 68-9). The death of Julian’s mother is the “terrible means by which he can grow towards maturity” (Denham 5-6). It is, for Julian, a moment of grace. It is the moment he “crosses over into maturity and knowledge” (Martin 132). It is the moment he finally breaks loose from the tethers of deception and makes the choice to be a victor and not a victim—to become the captain of his own soul in the sea of humanity. Exactly how Julian navigates that sea remains a mystery to the reader except to know that he will, by choosing grace, inevitably partake of the cup of sorrow that accompanies the circle of love.

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Looking for the Good Man in Flannery O’Connor’s “A Good Man Is Hard To Find”

by Bob Brown

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

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

Another aspect of the grandmother’s personality is her self-centeredness. As the story opens, she is resisting the family’s plans for a vacation to Florida. “She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Baily’s mind” (405). The word *seizing* implies more than a casual attempt. It shows that the grandmother is exerting all her energy in a forceful, almost militant action to manipulate the situation and get her own way. The primary reason that she brings up the newspaper article about the Misfit is to attempt to change Baily’s mind about the family’s destination rather than as a serious concern about the family’s safety. This demonstrates the grandmother’s selfish focus and her willingness to manipulate others to achieve her own ends. Preston Browning says it well when he observes, “The grandmother . . . displays a soul so empty that it seems to reverberate with the echoes of her own incessant chatter. . . . [she is] smug [and] self-willed” (54). The center of the grandmother’s soul is not filled with God but with herself and her own interests. This is an ungodly, sinful condition.

A further aspect of her pride and self-focus is her obsession with her outward appearance. She takes great effort to look well dressed despite the casual attire of the rest of the family. She wore “A navy blue straw sailor hat with a bunch of white violets on the brim and a navy blue dress with a small white dot in the print…In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady” (406). She is dressed in her Sunday best, as if she were going to the Lord’s house. This is ironic because before the day is out she will meet Jesus and go to His real house. As Miles Orvell observes, “she is somewhat prescient in this regard, for if she is not precisely dressed to kill, this remnant of Southern gentility is, as it turns out, dressed to be killed” (131). Having a proper and ladylike appearance, even in death, is critical to the grandmother’s sense of self-worth. Appearance mattered to her above all else, even her life.
Despite her orderly external appearance, the grandmother has some important internal inconsistencies within her character. Due to her references to the Bible, Jesus, and praying, she apparently views herself as a Christian lady, but she displays some very un-Christian values while in the car. She tells the children, “Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!…Wouldn’t that make a picture, now?” (406). These are racist words, coming from someone who believes in Jesus. She is also good at lying and being manipulative. When she is losing the battle about taking a side trip to visit the old plantation house, she has no hesitation in resorting to dishonesty. “‘There was a secret panel in this house,’ she said craftily, not telling the truth but wishing that she were, ‘and the story went that all the family silver was hidden in it when Sherman came through but it was never found…’” (409). The word crafty shows how carefully the grandmother is choosing her words to have the most powerful effect on the children. As much as she may have wished for it to be the truth, it is a lie and she knows it. She is again making a great effort to manipulate those around her. The allure of hidden treasure is sure to get the children on her side. But for a woman who views herself as a Christian, and who wants to project just the right appearance, it’s clear that the grandmother is a hypocrite who is really far from living life as Jesus would want. The grandmother is a picture of anyone who doesn’t really know Jesus and who goes through life giving the outward appearance of being good while her inner life is full of inconsistencies. Something has to occur in a person’s life to jolt him/her out of their self-absorbed world and enlighten them about what’s really important. For the grandmother, this is about to happen.

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

Violence is a very powerful jolt to someone’s beliefs. The coming violence removes the grandmother from her world of self-absorption and gives her the opportunity to find true redemption and grace. The first hint of the violence to come occurs when the family catches sight of the Misfit’s car. “The car continued to come on slowly…it was a black battered hearse-like automobile” (411). The Misfit, like the grandmother, goes by a title rather than a name. Being nameless, the Misfit is not just one man but represents a personification of evil in this world. The title of Misfit accurately portrays evil’s relationship to God. Evil isn’t a part of God’s plan for creation; therefore it doesn’t fit. The car that is used by the Misfit and his gang represents mortality. The incessant pounding of the destruction that evil creates gives the car its battered appearance. Evil brings death into this world just as the Misfit brings this symbol of death into the grandmother’s presence. Like many people, the grandmother doesn’t leave her world of hypocritical self-absorption until she is faced with her own mortality.

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

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

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

Knowing facts about God doesn’t save a person; it takes a personal relationship with Him. God must be let inside a life for that life to be saved. With everything external and internal stripped away from her life, the grandmother finally finds redemption and enters into a real relationship with Jesus. “The grandmother’s head cleared for an instant. She saw the man’s
face twisted close to her own as if he were going to cry and she murmured, ‘Why you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!’ She reached out and touched him on the shoulder” (415). Paulson says that now the grandmother, realizing that all people, regardless of their deeds, are related to one another, experiences her epiphany (91). God created everyone; therefore all people without regard to their actions or breeding are His children. This is a Christian belief, one very different from the grandmother’s view of people earlier in this story. A further interpretation of this line comes from Margaret Whitt: “The grandmother, to this point in the story, has not said anything that could be mistaken as seriously thoughtful. One reading of this moment is that the grandmother sees the charade that her own life has been in this split second before her existence is blown away” (47). The grandmother sees the fact that she and the Misfit are fellow creatures of God, and she finally sees that external appearances are meaningless. She has finally met the real Jesus. As even the Misfit says about Jesus, “If He did what He said, than it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can…” (415). Until this point, the grandmother has been living the latter, living life the best way that she could, which included manipulating others to achieve her own ends. It takes the extreme violence brought by the Misfit to wake her up from her self-absorption. Now that she has really met Jesus, she, in her spirit, throws away everything else that has previously been important to her and is now following Jesus. She has dropped her attempts to manipulate and control and can finally express real love. She is facing an evil man who, with his gang, has brutally murdered her family, and she is now able to show him tenderness, love, and grace. Her ability to love her enemy is one of the truest signs that she has really met Jesus.

Jesus repels evil, and the reaction of the Misfit to the grandmother’s love and grace is another proof that she now knows the Lord. As soon as she shows Christian grace and love, “The Misfit sprang back as if a snake had bitten him and shot her three times through the chest” (415). Evil can’t accept Christian love and therefore must escape from it. The Misfit escapes it by killing the grandmother.
There is symbolism in the grandmother’s death. The three bullets fired from the Misfit’s gun represent the Holy Trinity. The three bullets were truly inside of her just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were now truly living inside of her. The grandmother is shot through the chest, which is where her heart is. God has penetrated her heart as the bullets penetrated her chest, and God is having a life changing impact on her soul as the bullets have a life ending impact on her body. When the Misfit says, “She would have been a good woman…if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life” (416), he explains that receiving Christ is not a one-time event. A person must continually seek to have his or her heart filled with God every day. The posture of the Grandmother after her death is also symbolic. “Hiram and Bobby Lee [were]…looking down at the grandmother who half sat and half lay in a puddle of blood with her legs crossed under her like a child’s and her face smiling up at the cloudless sky” (416). Her legs are crossed, referring to the cross of Jesus. She is lying in her own blood, symbolizing how her spirit is now resting in the sacrificial blood of Jesus. Now that her spirit has been freed from her body she has gone to join her Lord in heaven. The comparison of her posture to a child’s is significant because Jesus said that to be a follower of His, you have to have the faith of a child (Matthew 18:2-4). Now that all adult pretense and externalities are gone, the grandmother has finally gotten to the deep level of true faith. She has the faith of a child. The final symbolism of her death scene is that she is smiling up at the cloudless sky. As her spirit is ascending to God in heaven, her face can finally smile. The fact that she finds salvation and that there is no reference to her family being saved is also Biblical. The Gospel writer Matthew observes, “But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14). The grandmother is one of the few who responds to the pressure of crisis by receiving the Lord’s salvation. Her family also dies, but apparently without finding God.

With the grandmother’s death, it is possible to identify the real focus of this story. What is the identity of the “Good Man” who is allegedly hard to find? The answer is found by following the path of the grandmother on her faith journey. The exploration of the consequences of her prideful, selfish, manipulative, and empty life demonstrates that the good man is not
anyone like the grandmother. The good man is certainly not like the Misfit, his men, or any of the other people in this story. In the end, the grandmother discovers that the only real Good Man is Jesus\(^2\). It is, indeed, possible to find Him, but it takes a journey of faith. The grandmother must abandon all of her manipulative self-absorption, her focus on class and her external show of Christianity. In exchange for her sinfulness, she is given the Grace of God, forgiveness and the hope of Paradise. In the end, she finally meets Jesus and is transformed by the Grace of God. This enables her to show love and grace towards the Misfit, who has just had her family brutally murdered. For the grandmother it is hard to find the Good Man, but at the end of her journey she finally finds Him and is now with Him in Paradise.

\(^2\) During my research for this paper I ran across the concept of the Good Man in this story being Jesus. I cannot find the specific reference for this concept but I believe that it came from one of the books in either my Works Cited or Works Consulted lists.
WORKS CITED


WORKS CONSULTED


6. Masculinity and Money: Glengarry Glen Ross (a literary essay)

ASSIGNMENT: Write an essay explaining how the scenes added or deleted from the film version of Glengarry Glen Ross reinforce the concept of masculinity found in the screenplay.

Masculinity and Money: Glengarry Glen Ross
by Helen Johnson

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

George Aaronow’s character in both the play and movie embodies exactly what all of the others are afraid of becoming: perpetually unsuccessful. Aaronow is not “always closing.” In fact for the past few months, at least, he is never closing; therefore, he and his colleagues are unable to consider him as masculine. In the film, Aaronow is more than an ineffective salesman; he is hopelessly and helplessly effeminate. While the play does not show Aaronow even attempting a sale, the movie reveals severe incompetence in his trade despite his best efforts. Several times in the film, attempting to find a willing party, Aaronow places phone calls to his “leads,” but his efforts are exhausted and he resorts to accompanying Moss on a sit. While the character’s dialogue remains mostly unaltered from the play, except for his added phone conversations, the ride with Moss, and participation in the meeting with Barker, the portrayal of Aaronow in the
film stresses that if a salesman cannot close a deal then he is incapable of being a man. In the play and even more so in the film, Aaronow stutters and roughs his way through conversations, implying a less masculine character. His speech and mannerisms create a character almost entirely feminine. The audience’s impression of him, however, is challenged by his choice not to burglarize the office. While Moss tries desperately to convince him that this is his last chance at manhood, Aaronow chooses morality. He is not hailed as masculine by the characters in the story, but in the world outside of the film morality, he is widely perceived as the better, if not more masculine, choice.

Aaronow’s character most often directly contrasts that of David Moss. The two characters share a lengthy exchange in the play, and two in the film. Moss acts like a man: he uses profanity, he yells, he imposes his physical and mental power over anyone who shows him a weakness. However, Moss sells far less land than his demeanor implies. In fact, Roma even comments on his lack of any “good” sales in the recent past. In the added scene with Baker, Moss endures a berating that shakes his confidence to the point that, as the viewer can see on his face, his masculine façade cracks. This addition to the storyline provides a motivation for the Moss conversation with Aaronow in his car—also an added scene—and for his plan to burglarize the office. Rejected by yet another potential buyer, Moss and Aaronow discuss Mitch and Murray’s business philosophy. The two distraught salesmen conclude that the blame for their inability belongs to the policymakers because they created a slave mentality and destroyed the confidence of their employees. Moss uses this blame to escape his own culpability and retain what little masculinity his delusions allow. However, his inability to amass sufficient confidence drives him to find an accomplice to robbery. The audience recognizes that if Moss were truly the “man” he attempted to be, he would break into the office, steal the leads, and disappear without any help. Yet terrified of the consequences of such actions, Moss seeks help from his co-workers. While he utilizes Aaronow’s and, later we discover, Levene’s, perception of his masculinity to undermine their better judgment, Moss’s real motivation—fear—fails to fulfill the prevalent concept of masculinity.
Much like Moss, Shelly Levene uses most of his energy attempting to maintain his masculinity. More so in the film than in the play, the audience sees his artifice vacillate between varying degrees of strength and plausibility. Viewers are privy to a side of Levene hidden in the play: While his reactions to Barker are strong and forceful—he is easily perceived as a man standing up for himself and his peers—the film opens with Levene talking on the phone about his hospital-laden daughter. In this conversation, and the others added in the film about his daughter, Levene embodies many of the traits excluded from the definition of masculinity in both the film and play. Out of desperation, Levene begs Williamson for “the premium leads.” Instead of conversing in the restaurant, as originally set in the manuscript, in the film Levene chases Williamson outside in the rain and then into his car begging to make a deal for more promising sales contacts. Levene lives in his past successes, and uses them as an unspoken promise to Williamson that he is capable of “closing a deal,” and therefore capable of being a man. However, in his film visit to the Spano residence, Levene’s failure is only perpetuated as he attempts to assert his contrived, masculine power and is forcefully rejected yet again. Levene’s reaction to incessant failure slowly appears on his face, as the image of a once-feigned confidence gives way to that of a distraught and desperate person. According to the standards of the play, he cannot even be considered a man because of his inability to close.

Act two, the day after the robbery in the film, reveals a completely changed Levene. He brings an $82,000 signed contract into the office along with renewed self-confidence. His “manhood” affirmed by the check in his pocket, he no longer begs or attempts to ingratiate himself with Williamson. Instead, he is belligerent and openly shares his thoughts on the malevolent office manager. While these scenes are relatively unaltered from the original script, Jack Lemmon’s characterization of Levene by a tremendous inflation of his ego and confidence reveals in words, tone, and action exactly what masculinity is to the employees at Premiere Properties. Shelly Levene made a sale and he brought in money; therefore he must be a man. Then, when he realizes that his contract means nothing, he almost immediately admits to his own guilt.
Money creating masculinity appears as a common theme in *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Richard (Ricky) Roma sells the most land for the never-seen Mitch and Murray. His character epitomizes masculinity as defined by this play. In fact, his character is excused from the calumnious meeting with Barker in the film. His abilities exceed those of his peers exponentially, and the added scenes in the film only confirm his “manhood.” However, during his conversation with Lingk, Roma’s position slowly changes from one of power to one that appears submissive. In fact, when Roma opens the brochure for land in Florida, he slides underneath Lingk’s resting arm before making any detectable sales pitch. With this subtle action, Roma instantly put himself in a typically docile, or feminine, position. His tactic, while carefully planned to give Lingk the illusion of power, highlights the irony present in the entire film. This minute piece of visual information increases the viewer’s skepticism about the concept of masculinity presented by the characters.

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

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

Barker clearly believes that his victims in the office are incapable of fulfilling his challenge, and will all lose their jobs; still he attacks their pride and their confidence with unrelenting ferocity. However, a crack in his own façade appears with one question from Moss: “So, why are you here?” Beneath his profanity and sheer force of speech, the audience can see that Barker, too, must submit to someone. He came “as a favor” to Mitch and Murray. Truly, though, if Barker were as confident and capable as he portrayed, he would not be working for
them, nor would he be indebted to them or even obliged to do them any favors. The only logical reason he traveled to the run-down office to castigate a group of men whom he deemed “worthless” is that in order to maintain confidence in his own masculinity he needed to exert power over someone else. This classic insecurity elucidates the clash that Mamet intends.

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

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ASSIGNMENT: Write a literary research paper in the MLA style. Draw from at least five sources, including a scholarly book, an article from a scholarly periodical, and an Internet source.

“Such a Mad Marriage Never was Before:”
Kate and Petruchio in The Taming of the Shrew

By Rachel Natale

Many plays have created controversy, and The Taming of the Shrew is no exception. People have debated such things as Petruchio’s methods of “taming” and Kate’s speech at the end of the play. Many think that Petruchio’s methods are harsh and Kate’s final speech contrived. Neither of these opinions are accurate, however. To tame Kate, Petruchio uses psychological methods, not aggressive or barbaric ones, that allow her to still be witty and intellectual, but also happily married, at the end of the play. In the course of The Taming of the Shrew, Kate and Petruchio’s relationship grows from one of verbal sparring and disagreement to one of peace and balance.

Kate, called “Katherine the curst” (I, ii, 127, 29) by just about everyone, “wants admiration--in fact, she wants a husband; but she feels that her lack of self-command has become an insuperable obstacle to marriage” (Snider 3). Kate’s actions and speech do not help her in attracting a husband, but it is really no wonder Kate acts the way she does. Hortensio and Gremio make fun of her, and her father favors Bianca over her. As Velvet D. Pearson points out, “[Kate] is surrounded by men who want to buy and sell her. Baptista, like any smart merchant, wants to get rid of his unpopular goods before selling his prize, Bianca, off to the highest bidder. He even stands by and allows Gremio and Hortensio to insult Kate and doesn’t deign to reply to her ‘I pray you sir, is it your will/To make a stale of me amongst these mates?’ (1.1.57-58)” (232). The assumption that the insults don’t bother Kate because she is a shrew is incorrect. “The fact that she is a shrew does not mean that she cannot have hurt feelings . . . , indeed a shrew may be defined--once she develops beyond a mere stereotype--as a person who has an excess of hurt feelings and is taking revenge on the world for them” (Heilman lxxviii). Kate’s
shrewishness leads to taunting from other people, but their taunting leads her to become more shrewish—a vicious cycle that can only be broken by someone willing to tame her.

Petruchio, “a mad man in his senses; a very honest fellow, who hardly speaks a word of truth, and succeeds in all his tricks and impostures” (Hazlitt 1), comes into town “to see [his] friends in Padua” (I, ii, 2, 24), but also “to wive it wealthily in Padua; If wealthily, then happily in Padua” (I, ii, 74-5, 27). As a suitor of Bianca, Hortensio sees Petruchio as an opportunity to marry off Kate in order to free Bianca for marriage. Although Hortensio tries to warn Petruchio about Kate (“[h]er only fault—and that is faults enough—Is that she is intolerable curst/And shrewd and froward” [I, ii, 87-89, 28]), “Petruchio, apparently experienced in battle, is not deterred by her reputation” (Shirley 2). He assumes, because he has “heard lions roar,” “heard the sea, puffed up with winds,” and “heard great ordinance in the field” (I, ii, 200-3, 31-2), that Kate will be no match for him. Without so much as meeting Kate, Petruchio decides to woo her—-with excitement even. Later, when Hortensio explains that Kate “broke the lute to” him (II, i, 148, 41), Petruchio exclaims, “I love her ten times more than e’er I did. O how I long to have some chat with her!” (II, i, 161-62, 42). Petruchio is anxious to meet the woman who will turn out to be his match, and he already has plans working in his head for their first meeting (II, i, 170-80, 42). As it turns out, “[h]is experience prepares him well for the task; he can meet caprice with caprice, and if need be, blow with blow” (Snider 6).

When Kate and Petruchio first meet, they immediately begin to match wits and play off of each other’s comments. Kate matches Petruchio’s greeting of “Good Morrow, Kate, for that’s your name, I hear” (II, i, 182, 43, emphasis added) with “Well you have heard, but something hard of hearing. They call me Katherine that do talk of me” (II, i, 183-84, 43, emphasis added). Right from the beginning, Kate shows Petruchio two things: she is quick witted, and she will not be wooed easily. From this first meeting, the reader gets a glimpse into what future exchanges between Kate and Petruchio will be like. Kate plays off of Petruchio’s word “hear” by using it twice in her reply. Going against what Kate has just said, Petruchio calls her “Kate” instead of Katherine ten times in his reply passage (II, i, 185-90, 43) and confesses that he is “moved to
woo thee for my wife” (II, i, 194, 43). Petruchio’s “moved” turns into Kate’s “moveable,” “a joint stool,” to which Petruchio replies, “[t]hou hast it, come sit on me” (II, i, 194-8, 43). In this meeting, Petruchio sees Kate for who she really is--an intellectual, witty woman--and is excited to pull her out from her defenses. Kate and Petruchio continue to play this verbal ping-pong game for four more pages. Even though Kate objects to marrying Petruchio, and as much as she may deny it, there is no doubt from this first encounter that Kate enjoys this verbal sparring and that she has met her match.

Peter F. Heaney seems to think of this first exchange as “an act of terrorism,” an “immediate assault,” and, most absurdly, “a form of verbal rape” by Petruchio (6). All of these accusations are false. Petruchio is most assuredly testing the waters with Kate, having her prove herself intellectually before he decides to marry her. Judging by Petruchio’s character thus far, he would not be content with a wife like Bianca who cannot hold her own verbally or have her own thoughts. As Pearson points out, “[h]e serves as a mirror in the games they play; [Kate] perceives his ‘insane’ behavior in the same manner in which men see her ‘insane’ behavior. Yet Petruchio, unlike the other men in the play, enjoy his wife’s intelligence and wit, and expends much time and effort encouraging her how to use them in a challenging way” (240). The same goes for Kate; she would not be happy with a man who would be scared off by her opinions and confidence to speak them. The very fact that Kate stays to talk to Petruchio shows some interest on her part. “Kate must ultimately submit to a male if her life is to be tolerable, and part of her wants to be tamed. Petruchio’s masterfulness undermines her pride in her own aggressiveness, awakens her self-effacing side, and promises to relieve her of the burden of her wildness, which makes her an anomalous figure in her society” (Paris 341). For Kate to be tamed and get married is a good thing, as long as she finds the right man. She, like Petruchio, wants to make sure that she embarks on the journey with someone worthy of her. Petruchio and Kate may have enjoyed their first encounter with each other, but it is during and after the wedding that the real fun begins.
All of Petruchio’s actions towards Kate are intended to mirror her behavior and, in turn, tame her. Denton J. Snider has this feeling about Petruchio: “The course of drama will reveal the true impelling power of his conduct--it is the pleasure which he takes in taming just such a shrew by means of her own shrewishness. . . . His method is clear and logical; serve up her own character to her . . .” (6). First, Petruchio “disappoints [Kate] by not returning at the time he has promised to wed her, and when he returns, creates no small consternation by the oddity of his dress and equipage” (Hazlitt 3). The way Petruchio dresses at his wedding is just the first example of how he uses unconventional ways of taming Kate. Biondello describes Petruchio’s inappropriate clothing to Tranio and Baptista, “Petruchio is coming in a new hat and an old jerkin; a pair of old breeches thrice turned; a pair of boots that have been candle-cases; one buckled, another laced; an old rusty sword ta’en out of the town armory, with a broken hilt and chapeless; with two broken points . . .” (III, ii, 43-8, 57). It appears to everyone that it is very odd for Petruchio to be dressed like this on his wedding day, “[b]ut as Tranio observes he ‘has some meaning in his mad attire.’ His dress is a parallel to Kate’s equally ‘mad’ attitude that only Petruchio sees as being something which is donned but not so easily doffed as his outlandish garb” (Sanders 2). To everyone else, Petruchio’s clothes seem out of place, but to him, they are the perfect way to begin taming Kate.

Petruchio’s second display of taming genius occurs at his house, during his and Kate’s first meal together, “a travesty of a feast” (Sanders 1). Before the meal begins, Grumio describes to Curtis Petruchio’s behavior on the trip back from Baptista’s (IV, i, 68-80, 68-69) to which Curtis replies, “[b]y this reck’ning he is more shrew than she” (IV, i, 81, 69). In this one line, Curtis sums up Petruchio’s plans and the object of his behavior at the coming meal. “Barking correctives about everything from his slippers to the meat, Petruchio here intentionally mimics Katherine’s shrewishness, admitting later that the faults he finds are ‘undeserved’ (4.1.186)” (Christensen 32). Petruchio and Kate arrive, and Petruchio begins his performance immediately by yelling at his servants for not being at the door when he arrived (IV, i, 119-21, 70). When the food is served, Petruchio yells at Peter, “’tjis burnt, and so is all the meat. What dogs are these!
Where is the rascal cook? How durst you, villains, bring it from the dresser, And serve it thus to me that love it not?” and proceeds to throw the food and dishes at them (IV, i, 155-59, 72). Kate, probably surprised and uncomfortable by her new husband’s actions, is, for once and maybe the first time, the voice of reason and optimism, “I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet. The meat was well if you were so contented” (IV, i, 162-63, 72), when in the past she may have made such remarks herself.

Bernard J. Paris has commented that this scene shows Petruchio “capable of violence by capriciously beating his servants, with Kate vainly trying to intercede on their behalf” (342), but this is not altogether correct. Petruchio’s treatment of his servants is not a whim. They are helping him prove a point to Kate, and they are not unaware of the reasons behind his behavior. They live with Petruchio and no doubt know his everyday behavior to be contrary to his current behavior. Peter knows what is going on and says about Petruchio, “[h]e kills her in her own humor” (IV, i, 174, 72). Kate’s vain interception is also part of Petruchio’s plan. He’s helping her sympathetic side to come out and succeeds in doing so.

If it were not for the fact that Petruchio joins her in deprivation of food, Kate would become a woman completely defeated by a tyrant. Petruchio’s recognition that he is as volatile as she softens his behavior considerably: ‘And better ‘twere that both of us did fast,/Since of ourselves, ourselves are choleric,/Than feed it with such overroasted flesh’ (4.1.173-75). (Pearson 234)

Rather than eating in front of her, or making her leave while he stays to eat, Petruchio leaves the table with Kate, proving his behavior to be not selfish but selfless.

Though the explanation of the wedding night is short, it holds a great deal of meaning. If all of Petruchio’s behavior up to this point had been merely for his own amusement or without reason, he would surely choose to consummate the marriage on the wedding night. Instead, Petruchio chooses to “[make] a sermon of continency to [Kate]” (IV, i, 176, 73), showing that he is really interested in polishing her character rather than just making her a subordinate wife. He “has the decency to respect Kate’s person on the wedding night, choosing to lecture her on continence rather than enter the marriage bed. Surely this is an action from a many-faceted, sensitive character. Such kindness from a husband was not often the case in Elizabethan or later
times; many women were forced to perform in the bridal bed before they were ready (Dash 54-56)” (Pearson 234). This action alone defends Petruchio against accusations that he is a domineering man simply looking for superiority over his wife. Undoubtedly, if Petruchio had made a different choice on the wedding night, the play would not be the same.

Through all of his outrageous methods, Petruchio succeeds in taming Kate, and Kate “discover[s] love through the discovery of her own identity” (Bean 66). “In the process of the play, Petruchio has explained to Kate, with the same care and patience that he might have used in training his hawk, how to take her place in the harmony of human society” (Williams 21). Kate has changed due to Petruchio’s taming, and he is even willing to bet on it. At the banquet at the end of the play, Baptista says to Petruchio, “Now, in good sadness, son Petruchio, I think thou hast the veriest shrew of all” (V, ii, 63-4, 104) to which Petruchio responds, “Well, I say no” and suggests that each man send for his wife, and whoever’s wife comes first will win the bet (V, ii, 65, 104). Not only is Kate the only one who comes when sent for--winning the bet for Petruchio--but she proceeds to drag the other women into the room and scolds them for disrespecting their husbands. “Just as Petruchio enjoys making the bet, so Kate enjoys helping him win as the length and care of her performance demonstrate (Leggatt 61)” (Pearson 237-8). (In contrast, Bianca says to Lucentio after losing the bet for him, “The more fool you for laying on my duty” [V, ii, 129, 107].) If Kate were unhappy in her marriage or felt that she had to make a speech, she would have undoubtedly kept quiet instead of giving a speech praising marriage. It is in Kate’s final speech that the reader sees her at her finest: “[t]hy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, thy head, thy sovereign--one that cares for thee” (V, ii, 146-7, 108). Her speech is not that of an inferior wife, but of a woman who loves and respects her husband. This is the inner Kate that had been hiding all the time. Pearson points out that in her speech, Kate “chooses to emphasize positive aspects of woman in the context of marriage” (236), again showing her newfound ability to be optimistic. Kate has grown to love and respect Petruchio and has “achieve[d] a fullness of life that she could not have enjoyed as a conventional shrew” (Shirley
2). She can now be appreciated for who she is by someone who is willing to see her for what she is.

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