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First Class: 2019

A Journal of First-Year Composition



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First Class.

A Journal of First-Year Composition

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

By Tom Kinnahan

In the following pages you'll find wonderful examples of many different kinds of writing: persuasive essays, literary and cultural analyses, and studies of problems facing our communities today. While their topics and aims differ, they are alike in their excellence. These eight essays were produced by students in Duquesne University's First-Year Writing program, and they won top honors in our annual competition. Of the many outstanding essays submitted to this competition, these were deemed to be the finest—and they truly are excellent examples of what motivated, talented, hard-working students can produce.

The faculty and graduate students of the English Department teach the first-year writing classes (UCOR 101: Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum, UCOR 102: Imaginative Literature and Critical Writing, and HONR 104: Honors Inquiry I), but the students in the classes come from across the university. This year the prizewinners represent four of the University's nine undergraduate schools: Education, Liberal Arts, Nursing, and Pharmacy. Our goal for first-year writing classes is to provide a space where Duquesne's diverse students come together and have a common intellectual experience. The students here examine everything from improving campus and community health, to the role of racism in the work of Pittsburgh playwright August Wilson, to what Bram Stoker's *Dracula* can teach us about the problem of addiction. Our students are engaging with the world, with creative texts, and with the conditions of their own lives. They are doing what students in a first-year writing class are supposed to do, and doing it impressively.

Although excellent, these essays are not *perfect*; with only a few minor exceptions, I have declined to line-edit them because I want the Duquesne community to see what its first-year writers are actually doing—and to show our incoming freshmen what they can realistically aspire to produce. These essays show minds struggling with complicated issues; they are a snapshot of a process of thinking.

I'd like to thank all of the faculty who undertook the task of judging these essays and selecting winners from the many fine entries we received. This year, our judges were Jim Purdy, Erin Speese, Matt Ussia, Rebecca Cepek and Gregory Specter. Thanks to all of them for their hard work, and additional thanks to Shawntaye Sledge and Hannah Muczynski in the English Department office for their admirable administrative work. As ever, I'd also like to thank the Office of the Provost, whose support keeps this contest and journal going; Gina O'Malley and the staff of the Marketing and Communications office, who design and produce this journal; and of course all of the magnificent instructors in the First-Year Writing program.

Spring 2019 First Prize Essay

“THE EVILS OF THIS TOWN:” *DRACULA*, VAMPIRISM, AND ADDICTION

By Tom Conroy, School of Education
Instructor: Dr. Rebecca Maatta

Bram Stoker’s revolutionary 1897 novel “*Dracula*” stands as a cornerstone of gothic literature, spawning a movement that has, in the many forms it has taken, infiltrated society so deeply that vampires are a standard part of our cultural lexicon. There are myriad conclusions that scholars have put forth on the subtext of the novel. In my personal reading of the text, I’d argue that “*Dracula*,” and its description of vampirism, is a perfect analogue for addiction, and the titular monster is by extension emblematic of illicit substances. When we look at *Dracula* and the monsters of horror as symbols of human vulnerability and moral dangers, we must look to the monsters plaguing our society. Addiction, and its hold over people, is a nightmarish force of its own. “Heroin,” by the Velvet Underground off their 1967 debut album, describes addiction in ways that parallel those featured in “*Dracula*,” and provides an addict’s insight to the argument in how it describes the hopelessness and monstrosity of addiction, detailing with evocative earnestness the mental state of a drug addict. Direct comparison to Stoker’s vampires can be seen in the following lyrics: “Because a mainline to my brain/Leads to a center in my head/And then I’m better off than dead” (Reed 33-35). Addiction is directly compared to un-death. An addict is alive in the sense that they are active and engaging in the world like a vampire does, feeling mentally stronger to reflect the vampire’s superhuman physical strength. However, they are also dead in the behavior patterns they shun that make them less human, just as a vampire no longer needs to eat or drink. They are no longer alive, in a manner of speaking, but they are better than dead as they pursue what their curse demands of them. I interpret “*Dracula*” through this lens, in particular focusing on Count Dracula’s drug-like qualities and the instances of explicit drug use by the Crew of Light, but predominantly I focus on the ways vampirism affects Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker: both experience withdrawal, mental anguish, and personal transformation. Finally, I examine the role the Crew of Light plays in Lucy’s failed recovery, and Mina’s successful recovery.

Drugs were a socially acceptable staple of Victorian society, ranging from opium to cannabis to morphine to heroin, which is a far cry from popular perceptions of the prudish Victorian gentleman or lady stereotype (Crane). In Stoker’s novel, drugs are used casually by the Crew of Light. Dr Seward, ruminating on his rejection from Lucy, states, “Choral, the modern Morpheus... I must be careful not to let it grow into a habit” (Stoker 124-125). While Seward chooses not to use the choral hydrate in this scene, he is implying that he has used it before. He treats his use of the drug flippantly; the only thing stopping him is his repulsion at mixing the drug with his lovelorn thoughts. Later in the novel, Mina also has trouble sleeping, and her response is to go to Seward: “I asked Dr. Seward to give me a little opiate of some kind... he very kindly made me up a sleeping draught, which he gave to me, telling me that it would do me no harm, as it was very mild” (Stoker 307). This shows that Seward is not isolated in reaching out to drugs for relief. These instances reflect Victorian England’s lax attitude towards drugs. Finally, as drugs were prevalent in Victorian society, so was addiction. Addiction has been addressed as a health issue since the middle of the 19th century (Crane). Thus, there is precedent in the social climate of the time to support the claim that vampirism could be analogous to addiction. Going from there, we can use our modern

understanding of drugs and their dangers to create a much richer interpretation of the novel.

Dracula's physical features reflect methods of drug use and his ability to put victims into a trance clearly parallels the effect of drugs on an addict. His fangs are sharp and pointed, not unlike hypodermic needles. He needs to be invited into one's house to have any power to attack them; just as an addict must consciously choose to begin using a drug. He has an intense presence, as described in the logs of the *Demeter*: "On 14 July was somewhat anxious about crew... Mate could not make out what was wrong; they only told him there was something, and crossed themselves" (Stoker 102). Despite not being physically noticed yet, Dracula has a pervasive aura that takes over the rational senses of the *Demeter's* crew. Illegal drugs are so taboo in 21st century society, and their influence on the human brain so intense, that we can compare the two through the way they evoke similar feelings of awe. We see Dracula the seducer throughout the novel, and what he promises his victims certainly seems appealing, but those promises are just as incorporeal as his reflection. Dracula is the overbearing force; not an equal. His three brides cry out: "You yourself never loved; you never love!" (Stoker 50). Dracula's devotion to his victims is a manifestation of manipulation and power. As his three vampire women say, he never loves; he only takes, just as drugs whittle away at the addict's mind and body. To conclude the comparison, Dracula's coming to England is not unlike the way drugs have infiltrated lower income communities across America; starting from one point and festering through the community, passing the curse onto victim upon victim.

One of Dracula's first and most noteworthy victims is Lucy, and with her we see how an addict begins their drug use. In her earliest correspondence with Mina, we can tell that she already questions the social constructs of her era. She writes, "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as she wants, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy, and I must not say it" (Stoker 73). The very idea of a woman sharing her mind and body with more than one man in Victorian England was blasphemous. While this quote doesn't speak to addiction, it does speak to Lucy's wild nature, suppressed by social constructs. She is depicted as susceptible to moral corruption, making her easy prey for Dracula. His empty promises are enough to spark a wild passion in her brain for liberation. The fact she points out the apostasy of her polygamous belief is also indicative of the addict's intentional ignorance. A prospective addict isn't an idiot; they know the well-documented dangers of drug use. However, in their quest for transcendence, they flirt with those dangers, just as Lucy acknowledges her desires and their conflict with society.

The vampirism that takes hold of Lucy and alters her personality is not different from how the addict changes themselves as drug use escalates. Her appearance changes when she becomes a vampire: "showed in startling prominence a dark-haired woman, dressed in the ceremonies of the grave..., as we recognised the features of Lucy Westenra. Lucy Westenra, but yet how changed. The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness" (Stoker 251). The blonde and chaste beauty of pre-vampirism Lucy has twisted into something hard and cruel. The shadowy, dark-haired seductress she becomes physically represents the change in her personality. She's opened up to all sorts of depravity in the pursuit of her poison, and thus the image of a fair-haired wide-eyed innocent young lady is no longer fitting. By looking at the report of the Bloofer Lady, we see just how her personality has changed. Lucy leads off children playing at night, leaving them, "slightly torn or wounded in the throat" (Stoker 212). She perverts the idea of women as compassionate mothers and caretakers, just as the addict, as their illness escalates, indulges in socially unacceptable behaviors, such as lying, explosive aggression, and criminal activity. Both Lucy and an addict would view these actions as abhorrent before their transformations, but their priorities have shifted so much that they no longer even consider morality. "Thank God that I'm as good as dead" (Reed 46); as the song states, Lucy and the addict both believe they are already forsaken, and thus their actions have no bearings on anything that isn't a means to satiate their hunger. To expand upon this point, Lucy embraces her id and chases after her desires wildly. Her earlier musings on romance manifest with sexual intensity. When the Crew of Light returns to Lucy's resting place to kill her permanently,

she attempts to seduce Arthur. "Come to me, Arthur. Leave these others and come to me. My arms are hungry for you. Come, and we can rest together. Come, my husband, come!" (Stoker 251). Lucy's quote is full of licentious euphemisms- I find it doubtful that it's her arms that are hungry. There is a definite link between drug use and sex, as being under the influence leads to impulsive behavior. Vampire-Lucy has no qualms about shunning social norms and embracing her desire for sex, nor does she shy away from using sex to get what she wants. Lucy, to use Stoker's favorite word when he wants to demonize a female character, is voluptuous; a trait of her personality that she previously held at bay.

Before Lucy fully transforms into a vampire, we can draw connections between how the Crew of Light treats her- from their perspective, mysterious illness- to modern day addiction treatments. Methadone is a synthetic opioid that mimics the effects of heroin on the brain, without intoxication (Tackett). It is often used in treating opiate withdrawal. Lucy's vampirism essentially makes her addicted to blood. Van Helsing, in his attempt to cure her anemia, turns to a parallel of methadone treatment: blood transfusions; these transfusions sate the sickness but are not quite what her brain and body convinces her she needs. Stoker writes, "As the transfusion went on something like life seemed to come back to poor Lucy's cheeks" (Stoker 148). Methadone, like the transfusions, is not a panacea; it must be paired with other forms of treatment. The Crew of Light fails Lucy in narrowly focusing on only one method, displaying an arrogance that they know best. After all, are they treating Lucy for her benefit, or for theirs? It is from a place of love, but Lucy never has any say in her treatment, nor does she get the opportunity to explain what is happening to her. In a way, the Crew of Light, through their ignorance, enables Lucy's transformation into an un-dead being. Then even inject her with a narcotic (Stoker 148), and while it is so she is asleep for the transfusion, it is representative of selfish dehumanization. Lucy is seen as a delicate flower that must be protected, just as an addict can be seen as weak-willed and feeble-minded. In viewing treatment from this angle, we fail the addict, just as the Crew of Light fails Lucy. Lucy's story ends in tragedy, which is unfortunately the case for many addicts. When we turn our attention to Mina and her experiences with Dracula, we see a new perspective on the matter, as Mina goes through similar experiences.

Dracula's feeding on Mina is a perfect isolated scene that covers a range of feelings and experiences of addiction. We can draw another connection to "Heroin" here. "Cause I feel like a man/When I put a spike into my veins" (Reed 3-4). Lou Reed, singer-songwriter of the Velvet Underground, was a heroin addict at the time he penned this song; through his perspective, we see the enlightenment that an addict believes their demon of choice will bring them. It also plays on the gender dynamic that is so heavily engraved into the novel, and Mina's character in particular. Dracula details an outcome that would grant Mina great power and equal opportunity. He seduces her with visions of what is to come should she indulge in him. Dracula, as previously mentioned, is making empty promises just as any drug does, but that allure is enough to draw Mina in. The ensuing rape scene hammers home the one road that addiction leads to: "With his left hand he held both Mrs. Harker's hands... his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down to his bosom" (Stoker 333). Addiction's grip is just as unforgiving as Dracula's. At this point, Mina knows she is in over her head, but can no longer turn back.

There is a road to recovery in Mina's character arc, but it is marked by turbulence and pain. When Van Helsing uses the Sacred Wafer to purify Mina, a very clear-cut similarity to rehab and withdrawal is displayed. "As he had placed the Wafer on Mina's forehead, it had seared it- had burned into the flesh as though it had been a piece of white-hot metal" (Stoker 349). Withdrawal is a painful process; poison has rewritten brain chemistry to such a high degree that the body cannot healthily function without it. Obviously, this presents great physical and emotional tolls through the treatment process, or, in this example, the Wafer. Later down the page, we see the emotional impact of withdrawal as Mina cries out, "Unclean! Unclean! Even the Almighty shuns my polluted flesh!" (Stoker 349). Addiction and mental illness go hand in hand, and in this heart-wrenching display of anguish, we get a tangible feeling for how hopeless

the addict feels. Kicking addiction is an uphill battle, and the things it has made them do, as well as the person it has made them become, instills a sense of futility. As Mina references God, she speaks to the concept that as the addict is receiving treatment, they are undeserving of salvation. It's terrifying to the addict, but also indicative of a fate they believe to have brought upon themselves. In the end, Mina does not suffer the same fate we see with Lucy. She recovers and carries on. Touchingly, it is through the help of her devoted friends who change their ways that she overcomes the sickness. On the road to Dracula's castle, Van Helsing surrounds her with a circle of holy Wafers, protecting her from both herself and the forces outside of her. Or, her desire for drugs and the drugs themselves, respectively. Then, Dracula's three brides arrive: the three women are examples of so-called-friends who enable an addict, and just like Dracula they do their best to seduce her. As they attempt to do so, Van Helsing comes to Mina's aid. "I seized some of the firewood which was by me, and holding out some of the Wafer, advanced on them towards the fire" (Stoker 431). The Crew of Light never give up on Mina. They failed Lucy and will not make the same mistake again. So, when Dracula is slain, it is a group effort that removes the curse from Mina, but as we can see, it demands a cost. Quincy dies of his wounds with his last words directly addressing Mina: "The snow is no more stainless than her forehead! The curse has passed away!" (Stoker 443). Of course, it is highly unlikely that any member of an addict's support system would die during of the treatment process, but Quincey's passing symbolizes the hardships of potential relapses, withdrawal induced physical and mental illness, and constant hopes that a cure is in sight that the support system suffers from just as the addict does. However, the last words on his lips were rejoices that it was not all in vain. Mina's treatment is complete, signified by the fact that her forehead is clean of the Wafer's scar.

The nature of Mina's child at the ending of the story is circumspect after her interactions with Dracula. The rape analogue is clear, and because he fed on her multiple times, a sexual aspect is possible. In his death scene he is described unusually before the final blows are struck. "As I looked, the eyes saw the sinking sun, and the look of hate in them turned to triumph" (Stoker 442). A triumphant look on the face of a megalomaniac upon his own demise is blatantly suspicious. I propose that while the baby does contain Dracula's blood, he is not the product of sexual assault. As Dracula is in effect Mina's drug, that fact that her child carries the same mark not only is a commentary on how addiction is oftentimes genetic, but also on the fact that Mina will never truly be free. Her child is a constant reminder of the bleakest period of her life. This sounds remarkably dark, but that doesn't mean that Mina will become a hateful mother. Quite the opposite, actually: "His mother holds, I know, the secret belief that some of {Quincey's} spirit has passed onto him" (Stoker 443). Following both ideas that her child has Dracula's blood and that Dracula is analogous to addictive drugs, Mina has chosen not to ignore nor hate the person she once was. Rather, she has embraced it and loves in spite of her ordeal.

"Dracula" is a harrowing novel no matter how it is interpreted. When we look at it through the mindset of addiction, we unveil another layer that holds much more emotional impact. Our modern society fears foreign "invaders," promiscuity, and female empowerment; rational minds reject the foolish idea that they present any real danger to us. That being said, addiction is still an epidemic we have not come to terms with. Despite the plethora of information we have on drug abuse, it is still present today with the serious examples this paper draws inspiration from, and the minute ones that go unquestioned; our culture celebrates binge drinking and excessive caffeine intake. It is important to clarify that the fault of addiction does not rest on the shoulders of an addict. While they did choose to use drugs, there are a countless factors that contribute: Sexual or domestic abuse, mental illness, economic disadvantage, etc. The addict is certainly not proud of what their life has come to, which we see described in "Heroin": "I wish I was born a thousand years ago... away from the big city/where a man cannot be free" (Reed 20 & 26). Where a simple fix available, the addict would surely take it, but trauma and an altered brain chemistry perpetuates the illness and puts up barriers to their hopes of changing. We see two sides of society

in Lucy and Mina's character arcs: One which negligently fails the addict resulting in their death, and one in which the addict is embraced and shown compassion to help them overcome their illness. It should be very clear which path is the correct one our society should take in combating addiction. It is human empathy that overcomes a struggle, especially addiction, and defeats society's vampires just as surely as a stake through the heart.

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Fall 2018 First Prize Essay

RENOVATION OF DUQUESNE DINING: CREATION OF A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALLERGEN STUDENTS

*By Amanda Kearns, School of Pharmacy
Instructor: Shubham Maini*

In some way, shape, or form, everyone has been affected by a food allergy or a dietary restriction. Approximately 15 million Americans have food allergies (*FARE*). Of these suffering Americans, 5.9 million are kids (*FARE*). Many of these children grow aware of their allergy and become accustomed to a dietary routine. They quickly learn where is safe to eat and where is not. As these children continue to progress through life and reach a point when they are on their own, things change. For many kids and young adults, college is that change. Not only do these young adults need to consider a school that satisfies their academic needs, they also need to find one that fits their dietary restrictions. Many schools state that they create allergy friendly zones and safe spaces to eat for their students with allergies, yet in reality they are not as safe as they are made to appear. Duquesne University is no exception to this predicament. The efforts the University puts forth appear to be reasonable, however they are deeply flawed and can be unsafe for students with allergies to rely on. In order to increase student safety and appeal to collegiate prospects, the University should implement a new allergen-free dining space within Duquesne's dining options for students with allergies. This implementation would both benefit the University and its students, thus it is a win-win situation for everyone involved.

As prospective students and newly admitted students tour and go through the orientation process, Duquesne University displays the series of "measures" they take in ensuring allergen safety. Such measures include an app which will label certain foods that you can or cannot eat in the dining hall each day. In addition, a GroupMe group chat with the chefs can be set up through a personal meeting with the chefs themselves. The chat is designed to have a chef personally and readily answer any questions regarding what foods are allergen-safe and which are not. However, both attempts have been proven to be flawed in their efforts. There has been a plethora of incidents where what has been listed on the menu has not been what was served. Similarly, things that have been labeled allergen-free have not been. A conversation through the GroupMe chat between Ashley, a freshman who is intolerant to dairy, and a Duquesne chef highlights one example of this incident:

Ashley: Is the chicken minestrone okay to eat?

Chef: It is a tasty soup, however the pasta that's in it contains dairy so I would not be comfortable if you ate it. Can we do something else for you instead?

Ashley: Okay I just had some because it didn't show up on my app that I couldn't eat it.

If Ashley didn't notice the pasta that was in her soup and hadn't questioned the validity of the app's labeling, she would have been sicker than she already was later that day. Although an alternative was later offered, the damage had already been done and Ashley still got sick. Senseless mishaps such as this can cause allergic reactions to take place. This is a very dangerous situation that could be deadly for some students with allergies, for "about 40 percent of children with food allergies have experienced a severe allergic reaction such as anaphylaxis" (*FARE*). Anaphylaxis is a potentially fatal reaction to certain allergens and can only be treated with an injection of epinephrine (*Anaphylaxis*). For most, the reaction results in a closing of the throat, vomiting, diarrhea, low blood pressure, rashes, the inability to breathe, etc (*Anaphylaxis*).

If this occurred to a student with this sort of allergy, the consequences would have been deadly.

In a similar situation, Hannah, a freshman who has Celiac Disease (which doesn't allow her to have gluten), questioned whether or not a soup was safe for her to eat:

Hannah: is the cheesy lentil soup gluten free? it is not on the app

Chef: I didn't make it this morning and I'm not comfortable saying that it's gluten free.

Hannah: okay also the tofu is labeled as gluten free but had noodles

Once again, a miscommunication between the staff and a miscommunication between the staff and the app. Had Hannah eaten the soup because the app did not state whether or not the food was safe to eat, she would have gone through a reaction and gotten sick.

The miscommunication between the staff and the app is not the only factor in this overarching problem. Another factor is inadequate awareness and understanding of the fear and consequences students with allergies go through on a daily basis. In an interview with Ashley, she expressed her frustration with the dining system's need for greater comprehension, "I think that some of the dining staff tries to care about me. However, it's really hard for them to do so when they don't completely understand the potential consequences I face when they change the menu without expressing so on the app or ingredient information." Ashley has to manage this problem regarding food allergies on a daily basis. The responsibility of finding food that is safe for food-allergy students to eat should not lie completely on the shoulders of the students. Duquesne University as a whole should also feel responsible for the health and well-being of their students and provide both accurate and tasty meal options for all food allergy students. A major cause for the misconception of what the dining deems as "allergen-free" could be that the dining executives and chefs do not have personal experience with food allergies. Without this personal experience, they might not completely understand the fear that lies within someone with one of these allergies. Food allergies have risen about "50 percent between 1997 and 2011" (*FARE*). As time continues to progress, the severity and commonness of food allergies continues to progress with it (Gupta). Thus, there needs to be an up keep of increased awareness of the severity of allergies, starting with where students can eat. However as of now, Duquesne University is lacking in this understanding. Not only is their understanding minimum, their care for their allergy students needs to be improved. In another GroupMe interaction a chef from Duquesne's Hogan dining center, wrote "...we cannot guarantee nut free for anything because they are processed in the same kitchen in the other building." This statement implies that there is no food in the dining halls that is safe for peanut and tree nut allergy students. How can it be expected for a student to live on campus and eat when they are supplied with food not knowing if they will have a reaction or not? This is unacceptable and puts many students at risk of a reaction. Students not only have to stress about their grades and extracurriculars, but now also have to worry about their food being safe to eat. It is an unnecessary stress put on the students due to the University's inadequate attention to allergy impacts. Students come to Duquesne believing the few accommodations the University offers to make for them will be beneficial, yet they actually are not.

Often college meal plans are quite expensive, and students pay a lot of money to eat food which they are supposed to enjoy. Duquesne is no exception to this, as students at Duquesne students pay up to \$2,834 a semester to eat on campus at the various dining locations (*Duquesne University*). Of course, it is something that must be paid for and would be worth it if all students were able to get a good meal for the money they spend. As this may be the case for non-allergen sensitive kids, it is not the case for allergy students. Hannah expresses her irritation with the expenses in her interview, "It enrages me because my parents are paying all of this money for me to eat here and I have to end up eating 2 of my 3 meals a day in my room rather than the dining hall. Not only that, but I also have to find time to go to the grocery store and the limited money I have here on food that the dining hall should be accommodating me with." Food allergy students pay a lot of money for food that they are not even sure is completely safe to consume. It is an unequal trade-off between the University and its students with no forgiveness. There is no problem in paying this hefty price if you are able to reap in the overall benefits of it, which students with food allergies are not able to do.

As a way to both appeal to prospective college students and accommodate the dietary restrictions of the

students they already have, a new allergen-free dining hall should be implemented into Duquesne's dining options. Even if a whole new dining hall cannot be implemented, at least a room within Hogan should be transformed into an allergy safe space. Approximately \$45 million dollars is being used to renovate the AJ Palumbo Center and transform it into the UPMC Cooper Fieldhouse this year (*Pittsburgh Action 4 News*).¹ Duquesne has the money available to go through such a complicated and expensive renovation, so money should also be available to put this proposal into action. Rather than solely focusing on sports entertainment, the University should also be attentive to problems that affect the health and well-being of its students. Duquesne states that its mission is, "Duquesne serves God by serving students..." (Duquesne University), yet they have allowed students with food allergies to suffer while thinking they are doing a good job of helping. However, they need to try harder, and the implementation of an allergen-free dining hall would prove that they are following their mission statement and serving students in an efficient manner.

Many Universities, such as Stanford and Dayton, have implemented rooms and dining situations similar to this one. It is an achievable task as other schools have also taken such measures. The University of Dayton in Ohio has created an allergy friendly room dubbed the "A+ Room" (University of Dayton). The A+ Room allows for students with allergies to "acquire something to eat if they have a food allergy or intolerance" (University of Dayton). In order to eat there, access is approved by authorities and it is well regulated. This shows the courtesy and care Dayton has for its students and the extents to which they go to benefit them. The school even has appliances such as microwaves, toasters, and toaster ovens in the room to prevent cross contamination (University of Dayton). Similarly, Stanford University has implemented a dining hall to provide a safe place for tree-nut and peanut allergy students. The dining facility is called Ricker Dining. Ricker, which provides a safe dining option for people with nut allergies, also serves those students without any nut allergies (*Residential Dining Enterprises*). Stanford University explains on its website that, "Ricker Dining (is) the first on-campus dining facility in the country to designate itself a peanut and tree nut sensitive environment" (*Residential Dining Enterprises*). The University goes on to state that they hope to inspire other schools to do the same. A school that could follow this inspiration is Duquesne. University of Dayton and Stanford University are not the only schools that have created these safe spaces, and Duquesne should follow the lead of these schools. Doing so would provide a better dining experience for students with allergies. Also, doing so would boost the University's publicity as being an allergy friendly school that cares about its students. It would also deepen the appeal to prospective students and cause more students to want to apply and attend Duquesne.

Food allergy severity and the predominance of it on college campuses is exponentially growing. It has been referred to as the allergy epidemic of the last 10 years, and it has no sign of stopping (Greenhawt). Duquesne and other colleges are not necessarily prepared for what needs to be done in order to safely and correctly feed college students with food allergies (Greenhawt). As stated in "Food allergy and food allergy attitudes among college students," by Matthew Greenhawt, "universities are in potential need of education, advocacy, and protection and has made educational materials available on their Web site" (Greenhawt). There is no slowing down the rate of food allergy growth as the years pass by. Therefore, an allergen-free dining space will not go unnoticed or unused at Duquesne. It will constantly be beneficial for both the students and the University. Students will also feel much safer about consuming the food they are served.

¹Editor's note: According to the university administration, costs will be covered by external fundraising and sponsorships rather than tuition dollars.

Editor's note: The Hogan Dining Center recently announced that it is moving its allergy-free center to a new room as a further precaution against cross-contamination, according to the September 5 Duquesne Duke.

It is not being proposed that the dining options be changed in totality for allergen-free students, rather, that another establishment all together is organized. Doing so would provide allergy students with the same or at least comparable options as their peers, and non-allergy students can also enjoy dining at the allergen-free spaces. College is a time where students are stressed from head to toe with schoolwork in preparation for the rest of their lives. Schoolwork should be the only stress factor that Duquesne students endure. However, the system in which Duquesne dining serves its food allergy students adds additional, unnecessary stress which could be avoided with the creation of an allergen-free dining option. Duquesne says how they care for their students, but as Hannah states: "... it feels as though they don't care about us students as individuals because they just care about producing the mass quantity of food at the lowest money value. They make it seem like we (food allergy students) are an inconvenience to dining" Students should come to college feeling wanted and valued by their school, for it is their new home. The current dining system for students with allergies is unacceptable and should be renovated. The implementation of an allergen-free dining space would provide students to feel safe with the food options provided on campus and open the appeal of Duquesne to prospective students with food allergies. It has been done at other Universities and there is no reason it cannot be done at Duquesne. In order to fully follow the mission statement of serving God through serving students, Duquesne must make this change (Duquesne University).

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Honors Program First Prize Essay

ETHNOCENTRICITY AND ETHICAL AUTONOMY IN AUGUST WILSON'S *RADIO GOLF*

By Haley Radcliffe, School of Education
Instructor: Becky Cepek

Set in Pittsburgh's Hill District in the late 1990s, August Wilson's drama, *Radio Golf*, follows the story of Harmond Wilks, an African American man who is running for mayor. His major campaign strategy involves redeveloping the Hill District through an urban renewal project; he plans to build an apartment building as well as multiple chain-stores. However, problems arise when Harmond realizes that a home that is supposed to be demolished to make room for the apartment building was acquired illegally. Saving the house would set the project off-course, and Harmond disagrees with his wife, Mame, and closest friend, Roosevelt, about how to handle the situation. Both Roosevelt and Mame have made great investments in the project: Mame's involvement helps her to be chosen for a high-ranking governmental job and Roosevelt's participation requires a significant financial contribution. Because of this, the two are in support of demolishing the house, since only they and Harmond know that it was acquired illegally. Harmond, on the other hand, thinks that it should be saved, an unpopular judgement that loses Mame her job offer, severs his relationship with Roosevelt, and essentially ruins his chance at his run for mayor. At the end of the drama, Harmond goes to protest the demolition that Roosevelt has set back into motion. In *Radio Golf*, playwright August Wilson suggests that ethical autonomy is impossible for main character Harmond Wilks because of the systemic racism of the society in which he resides. This is evident through the challengers and reinforcers of ethnocentricity in the play.

In arguing that ethical autonomy is impossible for Harmond, one must outline what such a state of power consists of and what its associations are in the context of the play. In *Radio Golf*, Wilson suggests that one's autonomy is only ethical in the sense that it serves a social purpose, reconciling the needs of the individual with those of the community. In the context of Harmond's candidacy for mayor, an ethical autonomy would consist of both his success in gaining a governmental leadership position while simultaneously catering to the needs of the community he represents, namely, the Hill District. In accordance with this model, it becomes clear that an unethical autonomy could also potentially exist, where the leader would acquire the position of power but fail to use it for the communal good. However, it is unfeasible to lack autonomy completely while still significantly fulfilling the needs of the community, through sort of ethical subordination. With that said, it is important to note that the autonomy Wilson advocates for in *Radio Golf* is indeed an ethical one, even though it seems to be impossible because of systemic racism. Critic Harry Elam agrees, stating that Wilson urges people of color to exemplify an ethical autonomy through a type of "black pragmatism, or the belief that an ethical commitment to act against conditions of injustice and oppression should always trump political expediency," and self-interest (190). Wilson's advocacy for people of color's ethical autonomy is motivational; however, because of his main character's existence in a systemically racist society, it is impossible.

Race theory and ethnic studies each help to identify and explain the factors that contribute to the aforementioned systemically racist society which rejects the successful, ethical autonomy of blacks such as Harmond. One contributing feature of this type of society is ethnocentrism, a term defined by Julian

Wolfreys as the “cultural analytic by which other cultures are judged, read or interpreted according to the implicit or explicit assumption of the centrality, superiority, or primacy of one’s own culture” (40). Since *Radio Golf* takes place in a white-dominated society, black culture and initiatives are deemed acceptable so long as they do not threaten white centrality. This concept is illustrated through multiple characters who both do and do not threaten the ethnocentricity of the white-dominated society in which they reside. The characters who take up an ethical autonomy are seen as threats to white centrality and are consequentially rejected by the social order, while the characters who take up an unethical autonomy and reinforce white dominance are left alone. Because of ethnocentricity, Harmond fails to obtain the power to decentralize whiteness while supporting characters unknowingly reinforce white centrality, which makes it impossible for him to secure an ethical autonomy, or to improve the state of the community from a position of power.

Mame makes Harmond’s role as a character who does indeed challenge white centrality and superiority evident in multiple instances during his campaign. For example, in order to win the election, Harmond must secure a voting bloc that includes both whites and blacks in Pittsburgh. While he decides to open his campaign office in the “all-black, impoverished Hill District” in an attempt to affiliate himself with “black empowerment,” Mame tries to persuade him to instead choose a space in Shadyside, a predominantly white area (Elam 190, 189). She explains that “You don’t want to start out your campaign excluding people,” fearing that by merely associating himself with blackness and black positions through the placement of his office, Harmond will drive away potential white voters (Wilson 8). Mame’s fear arises out the awareness that the society in which she and Harmond reside in is an ethnocentric one that rejects any possible displacement of white centrality, even through minor adjustments such as the intentional designation of a black neighborhood as a potential place of power instead of a white one. Mame’s assertion is ironic, as it is vastly more likely that the residents of the Hill District are the ones currently being excluded from representation, which highlights the situation’s ethical dilemma. Nonetheless, her comment brings up an interesting point: because acting in accordance with his campaign’s objective, namely, the improvement of the community through black autonomy, will put him at a disadvantage in the election, it is impossible for Harmond to act authentically while also securing the votes needed to put his objective into action by winning the election. Thus, the ethical autonomy which he aspires to exemplify becomes impossible because of the ethnocentrism of the systemically racist society in which his campaign takes place.

In another instance that takes place during his campaign, Harmond must decide if he will run a section of a speech in the newspaper that criticizes the city’s police commissioner because of a recent case of police brutality—an additional action that could alienate potential voters—or if he will cut the seditious, but morally imperative part out. Mame begs him to cut the segment, fearing that it could cost him the election, and she clarifies her worry by stating that “Nobody’s going to vote for an angry mayor” (Wilson 30). Again, Mame’s worry is reasonable in this instance: ethnocentric voters who would reject a displacement of their dominate culture will likely reject the power of someone who is indeed trying to displace it. By imploring Harmond to focus on securing voters instead of acting ethically toward the black community, Mame illustrates the very real chance that any denial of white superiority will be rejected by the dominant culture and thus thwart his chance at winning the election and becoming mayor. In choosing to run the speech in its entirety, Harmond’s ethics make his autonomy impossible.

Characters who unknowingly reinforce ethnocentricity also contribute to the systemically racist society that is responsible for Harmond’s failure to realize an ethical autonomy. Functioning as a foil to the main character, Harmond’s friend Roosevelt fails to directly challenge white centrality and superiority and instead reinforces the model of an unethical autonomy, making his individual needs ones of top

priority while ignoring the needs of the community. For example, while talking to Sterling, a working-class man and Harmond's friend, Roosevelt separates himself from the black community as a whole, claiming that "It's not my fault if your daddy's in jail, your mama's on drugs, your little sister's pregnant and the kids don't have any food because the welfare cut off the money. Roosevelt Hicks ain't holding nobody back" (Wilson 77). In this instance, Roosevelt "obscures the historic conditions of neglect, job loss, and racism that contributed to the current crises' conditions," and thus fails to use his capitalistic autonomy in a way that is meaningful for the community, instead using it to justify his own self-serving interests (Elam 200). Critic Anthony Stewart agrees that loyalties toward certain interests tend to "justify behaving unacceptably toward individuals or groups whose loyalties reside with another club" (174). In this instance, Roosevelt's loyalty to his own power through capital justifies his unacceptable behavior toward those whose loyalties reside with the larger community. This unethical use of power erases black history and makes it harder for Harmond, a character who wishes to "be the mayor of all the people," to legitimize his position as an ethical one that supports black people and in doing so, threatens to displace whiteness from its established centrality (Wilson 56).

The most apparent example of Roosevelt's reinforcement of ethnocentricity through an unethical autonomy comes when he decides to force a buyout of the Bedford Hills Redevelopment Project in order to "protect the company's financing structure," by going through with the plan to raze the home that was purchased illegally (Wilson 79). In this decision, Roosevelt uses his unethical autonomy to re-center white dominance by giving his white business partner Bernie Smith control over the redevelopment plan that initially belonged to Harmond. Not only does Roosevelt use the capital he has gained in acting as a puppet for Smith to protect his financial stake in the project, but he also uses it to ignore the obvious illegality of moving forward with the destruction of the home. In this instance, Roosevelt uses his capitalistic autonomy to act in pure self-interest, which in turn hurts the community he should be serving. Critic Nathan Grant agrees that Roosevelt's actions are unethical, describing how "the demands of capital...are forever shackled to the severe human cost of acquiring and securing it" (161). In this case, the cost of capital is evident through the injustice of the situation. However, because Roosevelt acquires an autonomy through capital that Harmond seems to lack, the imbalance of power allows him to control Harmond and make the realization of an ethical autonomy impossible.

Ultimately, despite Harmond's profound concern for ethical autonomy and his best efforts in actualizing it through his mayoral campaign, the systemically racist society in which he resides makes the realization of such a power unfeasible. Wilson's portrayal of such a dilemma through *Radio Golf* illustrates an even more disturbing truth: the power to be autonomous in a systemically racist society comes at the cost of denouncing one's ethical responsibility toward the community in which he or she comes from.

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Spring 2019 Second Prize Essay

A STUDY OF *ODALISQUE IN PIECES*: THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUITY IN A COMPILATION PIECE

By *Evan Fortunato, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts*
Instructor: *Dr. Erin Speese*

Many writing pieces that are a compilation of poems, short stories, or any other method of storytelling are not designed to be only understandable if read in order, but such is not the case for the poem compilation by Carmen Giménez Smith. Smith's *Odalisque in Pieces* contains poems about womanhood, understanding new things, accepting things that cannot be changed, etc. This is not a particularly revolutionary concept in its own right, but these poems are not meant to be read one at a time. There are four separate sections, each one dealing with progressively more mature themes. Book I expresses feelings of wonder, the desire to understand the world around as it can be seen, and struggling to accept things that cannot be changed, which are very childlike concepts. Book II discusses similar themes with a more mature approach. In this book the narrator shows feelings of wanting to make a change in her life but feeling constricted by society, and the early stages of encountering boys and love. These feelings are associated with adolescence. There is a major tone shift in book III. The narrator conveys a negative view on larger topics such as economics, the city structure, and a "he" character with an implied romantic relationship. This book represents the narrator's adulthood. Book IV shows themes of old age, such as an introspective view of the world, dwelling on the past, and physical aging. The continuity between each poem is the essence of the storytelling itself. Smith's purpose for writing this poetry collection is to illustrate the lives of Latin American women that are predestined by the gender roles imposed on them, and she does this by structuring the poems in *Odalisque in Pieces* to sum up to one unique and individual story about a woman going through the stages of life: from childhood, to adolescence, to adulthood, to death.

Carmen Gimenez Smith is of Latin American decent, and Latin American culture and themes attached to it are prevalent in *Odalisque in Pieces*, such as marriage and death. Marriage is important in Latin American culture, and the idea is imposed onto young Latin American girls from a young age. Marital satisfaction is often heavily correlated with a woman's worth, which leads to women over exerting themselves to keep their husbands content, whether it is domestic, sexual, or both (Helms 1). The narrator reflects on these cultural themes in books II and III, in the sense that she does not want to totally devote herself to a husband, but rather live her life by her own guidelines. It also implies the severity of failing to keep a husband happy or ending a marriage on bad terms. The way the narrator speaks of her supposed marriage shows that she keeps such an idea in mind. In some poems, she uses the term "husband" to be a symbol for things she has committed herself to. Another respected and celebrated concept in Latin American culture that is very symbolic is the concept of death. This is represented by the Mexican holiday *Dia de Muertos*, which means "Day of the Dead." There are a lot of ideas surrounding death in Latin American culture. One popular idea is that death is a symbol of equality that was used during times of Spanish conquest. No matter how poorly natives were treated, they recognized the one thing that made them equal to the conquistadors; they all would die. Death is not seen as an honorable military virtue as it is in most cultures, but rather something everyone experiences because they are hu-

man (Glenn 2). It is not as serious of an event in Latin American culture as in most, which is why it is not looked at so grimly. In the end of book IV, the narrator does not lose sleep over the event that will be her death, but rather takes the time to think about the life she has lived, similar how in Dia de Muertos, the lives of those who died are celebrated, rather than mourning over their death in the first place. Throughout *Odalisque in Pieces*, Smith makes it clear not only how prevalent these cultural norms are in her life, but also how profoundly they shape her life, and in some cases she goes as far as to challenge them.

The poems in book I of *Odalisque in Pieces* represent the feelings and emotions of a child. The opening poem, "Photo of a Girl on a Beach" is an introspective piece filled with symbolism and metaphor. The title itself functions as an indicator of the theme. The imagery of looking back on old photos is usually associated with reminiscing about one's childhood. The first stanza of the poem reads, "Once when I was harmless/ and didn't know any better" (Smith 1-2). These words have connotations of innocence and feeling small in the grand scheme of things, which are qualities that are associated with childhood. Being that this is a retrospective reading, the reader will be able to look back at this line after reading the story and understand why the narrator looks back so fondly on her lost innocence and childlike insignificance. The entry "Tree Tree Tree" uses the frame of childish games to speak of how children learn about the world as they grow up. The narrator tells of a game she plays called tree tree tree, where she "repeats a word until it ceases to mean" (Smith 2). The act of playing games like this is a childlike act in itself, but the deeper meaning of the poem has themes of being able to learn about the effect of words, which is a lesson people learn during childhood. Smith writes "Trees give nothing, not even a sound,// Our tongue made branches move" (Smith 8-9). The narrator learns that the effect of words is strong enough to shake even a tree. Later in the story, when the narrator desires such strength, the reader will see the narrator resorting to the use of words to give her the feeling of power. Unfortunately, the childhood that Smith portrays is not all fond memories and useful life lessons.

As *Odalisque in Pieces* develops past book I, it becomes evident that the themes are generally dark and negative, but the root of these themes lie in the narrator's childhood. The narrator talks about her father, and alcoholism. The entry "How It's Told" portrays the narrator in her bed trying to sleep, but staying awake because her drunken father is up late making a ruckus. The narrator says from her bed, "I saw my father stop,/ empty his gut/ next to the open door" (Smith 6-8). The narrator describes what is happening in basic language, which enforces the fact that she is a child. Describing vomiting as "emptying the gut" is a juvenile way of doing so, but her mundane attitude towards this event is very telling of the situation. It suggests that she knows exactly what is going on, which indicates that her father has a history of alcoholism. Any type of neglect or abuse of children, from simple family dysfunctionality to physical abuse affect the psychological development of children for their years of growing up and even into adulthood. These issues include failure to develop sufficient self esteem and the lack of ability to form trustworthy bonds with men (Natarajan 221). Readers can speculate the lack of distrust towards men will deeply affect the narrator's search for a husband. We can see these affects starting to work very quickly as Smith goes on in Book II to speak of her adolescence.

The themes and feelings expressed in book II are similar to the themes in book I, but more evolved and viewed from a different perspective, as if these thoughts were thought by the same person at different stages of life. The first four poems of book II share a motif of moths, and uses imagery of them floating around, sitting still the way they do, and dying. Within the first poem, "Girl Moth," there is another title, **Handmaid Moth**. This implies the content of this poem is a poem itself; a poem written by the narrator. The moth poems seem like an odd shift in focus before it returns to the narrative of the girl's life, but the idea that they were written by the narrator explains the subsection of poems and how they fit into the timeline. Adolescence is a time when people start to find hobbies they are passionate about

and start practicing them, and poetry is a common outlet for young people to express strong feelings or to speak on their trauma. It is understandable that the narrator would look to poetry, the artistic use of words, for such an outlet, being that she learned the strength of words in her childhood, and she wants to feel power over her past. Trauma and generally negative emotions are prevalent in the moth poems. For example, in "Luna Moth," the narrator says, "Frog, vanity, automobile, flattened palm, pinch, and water.// I was death to begin with" (Smith 5-7). Frogs, cars, water, and the other things she mentions earlier in the poems like newspapers and pesticide are things that kill moths, which is why she states she was "dead to begin with." Feelings of being insignificant and mundanely put down by things that are bigger, like a person from a moth's perspective or society from a teenager's perspective, are common emotions that adolescents experience. Another thing that the narrator could be feeling constantly put down by is the memories of her father. Victims of any type of domestic abuse suffer from long-lasting psychological effects rooted in feeling like their freedom and integrity are taken away (Natarajan 457). A person's feelings of being trapped in society and having minimal control over her life are tied to their sense of freedom and integrity. As book II progresses from the subset of poems written by the narrator back to the narrative of her life, the narrator's experience through adolescence are shown in a different way.

As book II continues, Smith continues to convey feelings of sadness, discontent with life, and more generally negative emotions, which plague many people throughout the entirety of adolescence. The approach to conveying these themes are different than the first part of book II as a result of the change in perspective, and are shown using similar means as book I. The poem "Pillow Talk" reads, "Listen, I got here/ the same way you did,// taking heart in a stranger/ who plucked music from my pudendum," (Smith 11-14). The first clause represents an existential on society. Everyone is brought into the world the same way, they are simply brought into existence with no explanation. In the midst of the existential confusion, others whom the narrator does not know or is not close takes advantage of some way, indicated by how she feels her body is open to strangers to freely exploit. Strangers need not be strangers in the traditional sense, but rather people that the narrator does not accept as positive important figures in her life, like greater society, or her father. These feelings of being thrown into the world and taken advantage of by others once again reinforces the idea of having no control over one's own life. While so far focusing inwardly on her sense of self, Smith changes to more outward feelings of adolescence. In the entry "Cities, I Still Love You," the evident themes are about fitting into society and exactly was society is in the grand scheme of things. Smith writes, "The monument: We cleaned ourselves in its genesis,/ and left it up because, come on, like it wasn't hollow, a spectacle not meant for the museums we start like families" (3-5). This speaks in the same existential tone prevalent in "Pillow Talk." This time it is in the sense that the city was nothing but a hollow patch of land until humans made it what they are today. Smith then writes, "O this pittsburgh, its hallucination of throwing a drink in the west's face. That's where I kept us," (Smith 6-7). The city of Pittsburgh is a lot further west than Smith's birthplace of New York City, both in a geographical sense and a personal sense. This line speaks to how small not only people, but also cities are in the grand scheme of things, as Pittsburgh is throwing a "drink in the west's face": a west that is an enormous vast ocean when compared the transition from the Mid-Atlantic cities of New York and Pittsburgh. As book III begins, the narrator demonstrates how the feelings of adolescence transform into broader topics with greater importance and how they are viewed with more mature a mind.

As adolescence turns into adulthood, some struggles are resolved and many are looked at through a different lens, which the narrator experiences throughout book III. Lack of control over her own life was one of the struggles the narrator described in her adolescence, and the opening poem of book III, "Fortune: A Conversation," is about how the narrator overcame that feeling. The poem reads "When you pause there to look in on you,// a discovery is made" (Smith 12-13). It goes further to say, "Take this hind-

sight like a wallet/ of cash, exchange it for the local currency,/ you endless inversion. You optimist" (17-19). The narrator finds the solution to her long standing issue of not having enough control over her life by looking in at herself, and uses that newly found solution to begin achieving her own goals. The control over life she sought for in adolescence can only be achieved by herself. Taking control of one's own life and living on one's own accord is the very essence of adulthood. The last words, "you optimist," is said in an almost mocking tone. In an otherwise uplifting poem, this line and the tone in which it is delivered points out the fact that only a fool would believe that taking one's life in their own hands will always yield positive results. The narrator is no fool though; she realizes that will the ability to take control of one's own life and improve it comes with the possibility of making one's own life worse. While this is mature and logical thinking rather than dramatic adolescent drivel, the narrator continues to never ignore the negative side of a positive situation. Many would consider this a useful life skill. Unfortunately for the narrator, not all of the problems stemming from her adolescence are resolved so cleanly in adulthood. The bulk of book III deals with one of the most important things in the lives of most people, which is their marriage. Throughout book II, in poems such as "Pillow Talk," the narrator makes a few subtle nods to sexuality and the rare acknowledgement of the role of boys in her life. Knowing that marriage is very major part of the life of Latin American women, and there is the expectation to keep their husband happy, the narrator starts to face these feelings in adulthood. Throughout book III, the narrator makes many remarks of wanting to feel good enough for a husband, such as the line in "Eyelashes," "Will someone write me a proper response?" (Smith 9), or the line in "Solve for N," "A field of husbands dithered and stammered/ outside of my head" (Smith 4-5). The narrator's unorganized, fast paced, and overwhelming thoughts shows her being swept up and intimidated by the thought of acquiring a husband. Later in book IV, we are introduced to an unnamed character, referred to as "you" or "he." The implication is that this character is the narrator's husband, as indicated in lines throughout book III. For example, in "Why I Left," the line, "But one night I awoke with pain/ that divided me. I whimpered quietly and with shame./ To need and to want such loneliness. But he heard and/ held my belly like a sorcerer would" (Smith 7-10). The imagery of sleeping in the same bed every night refers to marriage. The lack of a name suggests how distant she feels from him. Not only are women expected to be subservient to men, Latin American men are pressured by society, so far as to associate it with their self worth, to be overly manly, which is associated with lack of will to make emotional connections (French 212). Being that the narrator has gone through trauma and holds such a negative outlook on life, she needs someone to support her emotionally, but this is not what her husband gives to her. This leads her marriage to be one of the less fulfilling stages of her life, as she deems it not worthy to even name the character. With some positive things and some negative things, the narrator's adulthood teaches her a new outlook to have on life, which she demonstrates as she grows old in book IV.

Compared to the other books, Book IV is a very straightforward and simple depiction of the elderly years and end of life, leading it to be the shortest of the four books. Because the understanding of death in Latin American is less tragic than that of other cultures, the thought of the narrator not making a big deal of her death should not come as a surprise. The first poem of book IV, "Vacation as Prelude" uses imagery to depict a character at the beach. For example, Smith writes, "The amniotic Pacific, years ago,/ brittle and gray as I gulped it/ when a wave took me under" (1-3). This poem is the first time beach related imagery is used since the opening of book I, "Photo of a Girl on a Beach." Reminiscing about the past, namely childhood, is a common theme used when describing the elderly years, but the tone of this poem is different from "Photo of a Girl on a Beach." "Photo of a Girl on a Beach" was a happy and whimsical depiction of childhood, while the aforementioned stanza in "Vacation as Prelude" depicts a darker, more gloomy setting. The poem ends with "In drowning,/ literal, metaphorical,/ a friend said today,/ one lets go

of will,/ or becomes the shrapnel of it” (Smith 18-22). The reader is given the continued image of drowning and fate, both used to describe that which cannot be avoided; in this case, death. Book IV continues with similar imagery of death, the idea of leaving forever, and growing old until the change of pace that is seen in the final poem, called “Idea in a Ruinous State.” This poem opens up with, “Only the flutter of an idea./ Only an absolute that throws off the cloak of mooniness/ to reveal that she never was or never will be” (Smith 1-3). While existential in prose, this is the first time Smith has written with a somewhat happy tone since Book I. While book IV and most of *Odalisque in Pieces* is quite sad, someone calling themselves a flutter of an idea, or something that never existed to begin with is an oddly positive way to look at life. Perhaps at the very end, people get the sense of how small they are and their life is in the grand scheme of things. Either way, that is how the narrator described the peaceful end of her life.

The narrative that Carmen Giménez Smith leaves the reader with is filled with themes that heavily suggest chronology, but it goes even further to highlight how people who suffer hardships grow up and deal with those hardships. The reader sees how the narrator is able to deal with the negative relationship she has with her father and her disjointed marriage as she grows older. One of the major impressions this gives the reader is how outwardly evident it is that the narrator’s emotions become more grim as she stomachs all the events of her past. While it may seem that Smith has merely created a character and shares her story, this is not her intention. Observing the norms of Latin American culture that play a strong role in the narrator’s life, the life depicted in this collection is not meant to be Smith’s life herself, or a fictional character’s life, but rather the lives of countless women who are a part of Latin American culture. The importance of women’s subservience to men in marriage explains how the narrator’s father was able to continue his destructive ways, and it also explains how distant the narrator felt from her husband and how discontent with her marriage she was. Being that these norms are common across Latin American countries, Smith’s narrative shows the ways these social norms can cause unhealthy households and consequently emotionally damaged children, of which most are female. The phenomenon of social norms putting people down is not exclusive to Latin American women, but rather it can apply to all social norms. The fact that social norms that are held so strongly are not always wholesome cultural values, but can rather be primitive practices that were never improved as human society developed. Breaking down social norms like the gender roles Smith highlights in *Odalisque in Pieces* is a long fought uphill battle, but demonstrating the negative effects they can have on a person’s life is a sufficient start to doing so.

Fall 2018 Second Prize Essay

IMPROVING CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY HEALTH

*By Macy Zimmerman, School of Nursing
Instructor: Courtney Mullis*

University students are at a considerably higher risk for contracting virulent viruses and contagious diseases due to students' negative perceptions about vaccines and the high-density living environments on campuses, resulting in suboptimal vaccination rates. Universities can play a vital role in encouraging the student population to get vaccinated. By helping to further educate the student body, universities can help students to achieve health literacy, enabling students to make better decisions regarding their health. Research shows that vaccine-preventable diseases can have devastating impacts for college students, including lower academic performance, decreased attendance, and death (Potter); therefore, it is imperative that universities include mandated vaccinations as a part of admission requirements for all incoming freshman.

Vaccines play a vital role in helping to protect against dangerous diseases. When a person is vaccinated, their body develops immunity to a disease ("Understanding How Vaccines Work"). Vaccines imitate an infection and cause the body to produce T-lymphocytes, defensive white blood cells ("Understanding How Vaccines Work"). The imitation infection can sometimes cause minor symptoms, but these are normal and expected ("Understanding How Vaccines Work"). After the imitation infection goes away, "the body is left with a supply of 'memory' T-lymphocytes, as well as B-lymphocytes that will remember how to fight that disease in the future" ("Understanding How Vaccines Work"). Many people may report that they contracted the disease after receiving the vaccination, but this is a misconception. It is possible for someone who has been vaccinated to contract the disease afterwards, however, this is because it takes time for the body to produce these defensive white blood cells, so during this period, a person could be infected with the disease because "the vaccine has not had enough time to provide protection" ("Understanding How Vaccines Work").

At Duquesne University, the Student Code of Conduct requires students to have the MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella) and meningitis (meningococcal quadrivalent) vaccines ("Required Vaccinations & Health Forms"). However, health professions students from the School of Pharmacy, School of Nursing, and Rangos School of Health Science are subject to additional vaccination requirements to meet pre-clinical requirements ("Required Vaccinations & Health Forms"). These requirements are more comprehensive to ensure that students are in compliance with state legislation and healthcare facility requirements when placed in clinicals. Additional vaccinations include Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria-acellular, and pertussis) vaccine within the past ten years, hepatitis B vaccination series, varicella/chickenpox vaccine, and influenza vaccine ("Required Vaccinations & Health Forms"). Duquesne University adheres to the immunization guidelines outlined by the American College Health Association, which was "developed from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommendations published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)" ("Required Vaccinations & Health Forms").

However, some universities require all students, including non-health professions students, to receive a more comprehensive list of vaccines before enrolling (New). And while Duquesne University adheres to the guidelines set forth by the American College Health Association, the American College Health Association still advises college students to receive more vaccinations against preventable disease that are not

mentioned in Duquesne University's Student Code of Conduct. While it is commendable that Duquesne University is attempting to prevent outbreaks, the campus would be much safer if Duquesne University had a more comprehensive prematriculation policy regarding mandated vaccinations to prevent against all diseases, given that the United States is experiencing a reemergence of many vaccine-preventable diseases ("Required Vaccinations & Health Forms").

The antivaccination movement has gained traction over recent years, which has created much unneeded controversy over vaccinations. One common misconception that has arisen from the increased popularity of the anti-vaccination movement is that vaccinations can cause autism. This idea was first introduced in the 1990s by a group of British researchers ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). In their cohort study published in *Lancet*, their research suggested that there was a correlation between the MMR vaccine and the likeliness of having bowel disease ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). The link between the MMR vaccine and bowel disease was then further explored by gastroenterologist, Andrew Wakefield, MD, who speculated that, "persistent infection with vaccine virus caused disruption of the intestinal tissue that in turn led to bowel disease and neuropsychiatric disease (specifically, autism)" ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). Later, Wakefield, along with 12 co-authors, published a case series study in *Lancet* providing evidence that supported Wakefield's speculation of children being more likely to exhibit autism symptoms after receiving the MMR vaccination ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). The publication received astounding media attention and following the news of this, the MMR vaccination rates in both Britain and the United States plummeted ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). However, over the next twelve years, many researchers would attempt to further study the correlation between autism and the MMR vaccine to no avail; none of the newer studies would be able to find evidence supporting Wakefield's claims. Wakefield's study would later be retracted as it was discovered that Wakefield was "paid by attorneys seeking to file lawsuits against vaccine manufacturers" and that he also "committed research fraud by falsifying data about the children's conditions" ("Do Vaccines Cause Autism?"). However, it is clear that despite the retraction of the study, the effects of it on public perception are remaining.

While the general public is becoming increasingly skeptical about the effectiveness and potential side effects of vaccinations, within the medical community, there is no doubt about the importance of vaccinations for community health. Vaccinations play a vital role in preventing major epidemics. Not only does getting vaccinated protect the individual, it also helps protect the community they live in because "when enough of the community is immunized against a contagious disease, most other members are protected from infection because there's little opportunity for the disease to spread" ("Community Immunity"). This concept is called "herd immunity" ("Community Immunity"). However, for a population to obtain "herd immunity", the immunization rate needs to be approximately 95 percent, however, "vaccination rates on college campuses are 'strikingly low' — as low as 8 percent and only as high as 39 percent, according to a 2016 report from the National Foundation of Infectious Diseases" (James; New).

Herd immunity is especially important in ensuring the safety of those who are unable to get vaccinated. People afflicted by weakened immune systems, such as "people who have cancer, HIV/AIDS, type 1 diabetes, or other health conditions and for the very small group of people who don't have a strong immune response from vaccines" ("Vaccines Protect Your Community"). Other groups of people who are unable to get vaccinated include newborns and pregnant women ("Community Immunity"). Herd immunity greatly benefits these people. If enough people get vaccinated, it is possible for infectious diseases to be completely eradicated. One example of contagious disease eradication due to vaccines is the *Hae-mophilus influenza* type b disease, which affected 1 out of every 200 children younger than age 5 and often left survivors with permanent brain damage and killed many others. After the introduction of the infant vaccination in the mid-19080s against the disease, the incidence of the disease dropped by 99% ("Com-

munity Immunity”). Another instance of herd immunity at work is the pneumococcal vaccines. The pneumococcal disease can “cause serious infections of the ears, lungs, blood, and brain” and while children are more likely to contract the disease, adults are more at risk for the serious pneumococcal infections (“Vaccines Protect Your Community”). When a pediatric pneumococcal vaccine was approved, the number of adults hospitalized for the disease drastically decrease, despite there being no vaccine approved for adults yet. This demonstrates causation; when more children received immunity from the disease, the adults in their community were protected. Universities should consider the implications of having such a low vaccination rate among their students and the risks it poses for faculty, staff, students, and nearby populations that cannot be vaccinated and will become more vulnerable due to the low immunization rate.

Transitioning from high school to college is hard for many students. This transition is often a time where students experience loneliness and make radical changes in their health behaviors, such as sleeping behaviors, alcohol consumption, exercise habits, smoking, etc. (Pressman, et al. 297) For many college freshmen, moving to college is the first time they are living away from home and along with that, it is the first time they are forced to make lifelong health decisions for themselves without assistance. This presents an issue that many universities struggle to tackle. Preventing the spread of infectious diseases poses a serious challenge for universities across the country. However, the most efficient way for universities to address this issue is by implementing policy changes that would require all incoming students to be vaccinated. Prevention has been proven far more effective and efficient, rather than treating an epidemic waiting to happen. It is far easier to take preventative measures against diseases, rather than attempt to treat a campus-wide outbreak. An outbreak that affects the majority of a student population would be sure to devastate and overwhelm campus resources; health promotion and disease prevention are far more practical in comparison.

Currently, there are 22 states that do not require students to be vaccinated (New). This is both alarming and frightening. College students are at a much greater risk of contracting vaccine-preventable illnesses and, once an outbreak occurs, it is hard to prevent the rapid spread of the disease, especially if the majority of students are not vaccinated. University students should be advised to take as many precautions as possible in preventing contagious diseases because illness represents a significant burden on students because it is capable of “affecting their health as well as academic and work performance” (Ratnapradipa, et al. 662). Princeton University’s serogroup B invasive meningococcal disease outbreak perfectly demonstrates the devastating effects of a disease outbreak on college campuses (“College Campus Outbreaks”). In 2014, “CDC officials reported the attack rate of disease on the Princeton campus to be 134 cases per 100,000 students — 1,400 times greater than the national average” (“College Campus Outbreaks”). Over 3 million people die every year from vaccine-preventable diseases and in the Princeton University outbreak, one student’s life was needlessly claimed (“Global Immunization”; “College Campus Outbreaks”). Since Princeton’s outbreak occurred, three other colleges have experienced serogroup B meningococcal disease outbreaks: “the University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), where five cases also occurred that year; and this year at Providence College in Rhode Island, where five cases were reported; and at the University of Oregon, where seven cases occurred” (“College Campus Outbreaks”). These universities experienced similarly frightening greater risks of attack rate on their campuses; “the attack rates... were 22.1 per 100,000 students at UCSB and 44 per 100,000 students at Providence; that was 234 times and 500 times, respectively, greater than the incidence rate for persons aged 17 to 22 years in the general U.S. population” (“College Campus Outbreaks”).

Lisette LeCorgne, a nurse practitioner at the University of Arizona Campus Health Services, equates college students living in dorms like “living in a petri dish” (“9 Health Hazards Hidden in College Dorms”). Despite this, vaccination rates are strikingly low on college campuses, with statistics ranging

from “as low as 8 percent and only as high as 39 percent, according to a 2016 report from the National Foundation of Infectious Diseases” (James). Once infected, it can devastate all aspects of their life: social, academic, spiritual, and physical. Colds and flu-like illnesses that are common in college students have been found to “negatively affect class work and work attendance and school performance” (Potter). Vaccination is associated with “significant reductions in... provider visits, antibiotic use, impaired school performance, and numbers of days of missed class, missed work, and illness during the influenza seasons” (Nichol et al. 1113). In both the interest of student health and productivity, Duquesne University should consider implementing more comprehensive vaccines in the Student Code of Conduct requirements for admission.

As mentioned previously, minor symptoms are normal and expected after being vaccinated. Though some people may experience a more mild or severe adverse reaction to vaccines, they are rare and “occur in less than one in every 100,000 doses administered” (Potter). This statistic further emphasizes the importance of herd immunity. While allergic reactions and poor antibody response to vaccines are rare and can prevent people from being vaccinated, these few people can still be protected and immune from disease if the majority of people in their community are vaccinated.

Research has shown that “vaccinations and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) were key strategies for mitigating the spread of influenza,” however, surveys show that universities’ educational campaigns did not lead to behavioral changes among the student population (Hashmi et al. 739-740). Given the extremely low campus vaccination rates mentioned previously, it is imperative for colleges to effectively implement preventative strategies and policies that will result in behavioral changes by examining the factors that influence students’ decision to receive the vaccines. Considering that colleges struggle to craft effective messages to encourage students to get vaccinated, implementing policy changes may be the needed action to protect the university campus and surrounding community.

Universities can play a large role in contributing to herd immunity and preventing the reemergence of vaccine-preventable diseases. It is well researched that vaccines are effective and carry minimal risks. While adverse reactions can happen, they rarely occur. Vaccine-preventable diseases claim the lives of millions around the world every year, and “approximately 1.5 million of these deaths are in children less than 5 years old.”?: In the interest of students’ physical and mental wellbeing, academic success, and social health, universities should consider implementing more comprehensive vaccination mandates in their policies.

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Honors Program Second Prize Essay

THE FEMINIST QUESTION: A CLOSE LOOK AT FEMINISM IN DAN BROWN'S *THE DA VINCI CODE*

By Marley Howell, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Erin Speese

Dan Brown's critically acclaimed best-selling book-turned-movie is an exciting mystery that follows symbologist Robert Langdon in the quest for the Holy Grail. Almost immediately, Langdon finds himself in trouble and is rescued by the beautiful, intelligent Sophie Neveu, and the two of them find themselves on a race to find the Holy Grail before the murderer of Sophie's grandfather does. Brown's Holy Grail, however, is not the usual image brought to mind, and instead it is the proof that Mary Magdalene was Jesus's wife, bore his child, and created a line of descendants that humanized Jesus rather than deifying him. The quest that Sophie and Robert find themselves on is marked by art and symbology of the sacred feminine and ties in the history of goddess worship. Sophie finds that her recently murdered grandfather was involved in a secret group that protected the secret of Mary Magdalene and celebrated the sacred feminine and the wholeness created in the union between men and women. Throughout the tale, Sophie proves herself to be key in solving the puzzle leading to the Holy Grail, in addition to the multitude of male experts on the subject, and gratuitously falls in love with Langdon by the end of the novel. I argue that Dan Brown illustrates the importance of women and femininity through his presentation of the sacred feminine and female protagonist, Sophie Neveu, as having critical importance to his exploration of the infamous quest for the Holy Grail. Ultimately, Brown suggests that balance in the male-female dichotomy is critical but also falls short of lofty feminist interpretations with a deeper analysis of goddess worship and Sophie Neveu demonstrating a reinforcement of gender roles.

Upon its release, *the Da Vinci Code* received a variety of reactions, ranging from love to hate, for reasons from feminism to sacrilege. Dan Brown's twisting trail that follows Sophie and Robert as they race to find the Holy Grail highlights the importance of women and elevates feminine sanctity. Due to the nature of Brown's Holy Grail and various secret societies, the novel has been touted as a great feminist work; however, many critics rightly disagree. While Brown works to uplift women and address the systematic oppression of women and their union with men, his writing remains trapped in internalized gender roles so that "the novel undercuts its feminist moves through its persistent recourse to the private sphere and its unremitting celebration of the biological. The narrative falls victim to the problem that commonly inheres in difference/ cultural feminism: it reifies the binary system of gender" (Maddux 225). By reinforcing the binary gender system, Brown also reinforces the traditional gender roles while simultaneously regulating ideas of female liberation to the privacy found behind closed doors, or rather in hidden underground bunkers. To add to Brown's struggle to create a feminist novel, he is forced to contend with historical women being sustained to "support ideological paradigms and subvert alternative interpretations... Despite Brown's intention to remember Magdalene in a new way, his contribution to public memory re-inscribes a gendered view that truncates her agency as a woman and leader in early Christianity" (Kennedy 120). History is written by the victors—a concept often mentioned by Brown to explain the erasure of Magdalene's importance—and historically, men have been the dominating power, minimizing women's power and impact through gender roles that regulate women to beauty and sweetness. Even as

Brown writes in appreciation of women and elevates their importance far beyond what is normally seen in history or literature, he still rewrites Mary Magdalene into yet another role that diminishes the impact she had.

Brown is heavily criticized for his novel due to its representation and idealization of goddess worship and the belief in the sacred feminine as he uses the goddess cult to rationalize and support the balance created in a male-female dichotomy. Addressing the sacredness of femininity adds to the wild popularity of the novel as one critic claims “This core motif of our missing maternal ground has touched people subliminally... and activates our hungry desire to reconnect with a sense of the soul and its capacity for the numinous feminine” (Giannini 65). Within today’s society the domination of men over women perpetuated by the Church has only continued so seemingly Brown’s commercial success in part can be credited to the lack of balance and femininity in modern society. The implication being that the sacred feminine fascinates people. As Langdon and Sophie follow the trail left by Sophie’s grandfather, Brown leads readers through an alternate view of history in which Mary Magdalene is Jesus’s wife and had His child after he was crucified. This alternate history of goddess worship and sacred union of men and women is a fascinating combination of feminism and ingrained gender roles.

Brown addresses the historical and religious basis for his fictional account of the Holy Grail quest by often decrying the oppression and erasure of women and female sanctity by the Church, adding to his feminist appeal. Historically, the Church has forced women out of the influence by deeming them weaker and over time “women became the more psychologically vulnerable sex, never to be trusted with matters of doctrine” (Bendroth 3). In modern times, however, women have begun to push back against the patriarchal tide. Studies have found that some women have been able to find a balance between their faith and feminism: “many of these participants have previously considered abandoning their faith, which suggests it is possible they may experience an interest in leaving the Church again in the future” (Pauly 43). The research demonstrates both past and present-day inability of Christianity to fully accept women as independent agents so that their strength and validity as women remains repressed. Brown notes the “belief that powerful men in the early Christian church ‘conned’ the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine... demoniz[ing] the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion” (Brown 124). Here, Brown illustrates fall of femininity from grace. He repeats how men ruined the sacred feminine and forced women far from equality in multiple ways, reinforcing both the idea that women were originally equal to men and that men caused this shift. Brown uses words with heavily negative connotations to convey the wrongness of this shift. Furthermore, Brown, through Langdon, asserts that “The power of the female and her ability to produce life was once very sacred, but it posed a threat to the rise of the predominantly male Church, and so the sacred feminine was demonized and called unclean” (238). This is a driving premise of the novel: man rewrote history to erase and demonize women and femininity. Brown connects religious treatment of women as inferior to the need of the Church for control over the people, again using strong adjectives to describe how the sacred feminine has been corrupted. He uses the conflict between women and the Church to exemplify one of the largest aggressors against women in history by embellishing a narrative of oppression of the sacred feminine. This oppression is epitomized by the historical rewriting of Mary Magdalene that minimizes her importance and strength.

Brown highlights the importance and power of women through Mary Magdalene as the Holy Grail, however even this radical theory falls short of feminism due to Magdalene’s importance being derived from her marriage to Jesus and the child she bore. While women can be important as wives and mothers, issue arises when their importance is derivative of their husbands’. As Brown tries “empowering her as a wife and mother... to remedy the stigma associated with her reputation as a prostitute, his contribution to public memory re-inscribes a traditional and explicitly heteronormative view of gender that trun-

cates her agency as a woman and leader in early Christianity” (Kennedy 123). Critical analysis of *The Da Vinci Code* demonstrates a failure to break from traditional gender roles within literature, reinforcing the loss of female sanctity. Brown elevates the importance of women through Magdalene by claiming “The Church needed to defame Mary Magdalene in order to cover up her dangerous secret—her role as the Holy Grail” (Brown 244). Magdalene’s importance is introduced dramatically, meant to shock the readers. Brown intentionally waits for the first half of the book to build the sacristy of the feminine and goddess worship before he finally reveals what the Holy Grail is. It is clear where the feminist title came from when Magdalene’s importance is introduced, adding to the elevation of femininity. With a closer look at Magdalene, however, it becomes clear that her importance is drawn from Jesus rather than from her own faculty: “Magdalene was recast as a whore to erase evidence... the greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father” (248). Mary’s existence as wife to Jesus and mother of His child threatens the ground upon which Christianity was built, hence the public memory is altered to overwrite female importance. The union between Jesus and Mary resulting in a child is demonstrative of the supernatural wholeness that Brown emphasizes between men and women throughout the text in his recurring mentions of the goddess cult. Unfortunately, Magdalene’s importance is often reduced to her child-bearing faculty: “Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. She was the womb that bore the lineage, and the vine from which the sacred fruit sprang forth” (248). Mary is reduced, quite often, to the role of womb. So, despite Mary’s newfound importance to the religious narrative of the tale, she still derives her importance from Jesus and the feminine duties of being a wife and motherhood which only reinforces—rather than challenges—the traditional roles assigned to women. Brown’s choice to designate her importance to gender-typical maternity negates his elevation of women throughout the novel.

Sophie Neveu illustrates a strong female protagonist as Brown seeks to build a nontraditional role for his lead female character, nonetheless Brown continues to fall short of elevating femininity. Literature has often been influenced by the readers and in a world of growing female literacy, the lack of female characters with depth has become more pronounced. Previous studies have addressed the increasing percentage of female protagonists and decreasing depictions of traditional gender roles; however, many of the novels still reinforce gender roles even with strong female characters because their strengths often isolate them from their peers.¹ Even as feminism leaves its mark and female protagonists begin to dominate the literary field as much as male protagonists, authors struggle to deviate from the institutionalized gender roles. Brown’s protagonist, Sophie Neveu, is created in a nontraditional role that on the surface would earn Brown a feminist title, however deeper analysis of female characters reveals that Brown is not quite able to break from literary gender roles. Sophie is an intelligent and driven woman: “At the age of twelve, Sophie could finish the *Le Monde* crossword without any help, and her grandfather graduated her to crosswords in English, mathematical puzzles, and substitution ciphers. Sophie devoured them all. Eventually she turned her passion into a profession by becoming a code breaker for the Judicial Police” (Brown 77). Sophie is a very intellectual from a young age, completing tasks that many adults struggle with, as Brown intends for her to be a strong character that can help drive the plot forward. She takes her talents to turns them into a job in a field usually reserved for men—police work. Sophie does not wait for anyone to save her, as is typical of women in literary works, instead she is often the one doing the saving when it comes to her partner, Robert Langdon. Not long after meeting Sophie, “Langdon resolved to not say another word all evening. Sophie Neveu was clearly a hell of a lot smarter than her was” (87). Sophie’s calm intelligence is usually reserved for the suave male protagonist who rescues a damsel in distress, however Brown reverses these roles to elevate the role of women and emphasize their importance. Langdon somewhat

¹McCleary, Melissa A., and Michael M. Widdersheim. “The Princess and the Poor Self-Image.” *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice*, vol. 2, no. 1, Spring 2014, pp. 6–26. EBSCOhost, doi:10.5195/palrap.2014.55.

humorously notes that Sophie is a lot more capable than he is in this situation and defers to her expertise to get the two of them to safety. However, there is a distinct lack of other female characters while there is an abundance of male major characters. Despite Brown's creation of a strong, nontraditional female character, he fails to create more than one major female protagonist. Instead all major characters other than Sophie are men. This highlights the deeper habits of literature that preference male characters over female due to the traditionally passive role of women within a text. Although Brown writes Sophie as a strong woman, the lack of other women for her to interact with disrupts the feminism of *The Da Vinci Code*.

While Sophie Neveu presents an impressive female protagonist, Brown's characterization of her lacks the depth that would be expected of a feminist novel; from her physical attributes to her royal blood to her romance with Langdon as her paired protagonist, Sophie Neveu falls short of a feminist writing. Girls grow up with fairy tales idolizing the passive princesses that marry a prince to live happily ever after; this idolization is internalized and makes itself known in adulthood through the traits women have, the friendships they form, and the romantic relationships they build.² The influence of childhood on adulthood is well-known, however the internalization of gender roles illuminates some of the shortcomings of Sophie Neveu as a feminist character. Of course, after a few very intense days Sophie and Robert obligatorily form an intimate relationship: "Sophie leaned forward and kissed him again, now on the lips. Their bodies came together, softly at first, and then completely. When she pulled away, her eyes were full of promise" (Brown 449). The romantic subplot is only heightened by the Holy Grail hunt that highlights the unity between man and woman, and Brown illustrates this romance with an idealized softness. Even as he elevates women and femininity in his novel, Brown falls victim to the ever-popular love subplot. Furthermore, Sophie is created to be attractive, like all female protagonists, however she is also different from typical beauty according to Langdon as the male protagonist: "Her thick burgundy hair fell unstyled to her shoulders, framing the warmth of her face. Unlike the waifish, cookie-cutter blondes that adorned Harvard dorm room walls, this woman was healthy with an unembellished beauty and genuineness that radiated a striking personal confidence" (50). The importance of Sophie cannot be understated, as she is glowing when she first meets Langdon. Brown creates Sophie as an idealistic model of femininity, effortless and warm, yet very importantly different from other girls. This harkens back to the warmth that women are expected to demonstrate while also setting her apart from other women—in looks and skill. Her difference is supposed to add to her beauty, but rather adds to the toxic not-like-other-girls complex that has been growing in modern literature. Sophie is literally a hidden princess, like every little girl's dream, further adding to the gender role expectation. Sophie's late parents were "direct descendants of Mary Magdalene and Jesus Christ... [and] their children represented the most direct surviving royal bloodline" (442). In their quest for the Holy Grail, Brown ensured that the female protagonist was even further elevated as a spotlight case to emphasize the importance of women. The role of princess, however, detracts as much as it adds to Sophie's character. While it elevates her implicit importance even more so, it also boxes her into a more typical female role of beauty and royalty. The underlying gender roles that are reinforced by Sophie add to the romanization of any male and female protagonists questing together, especially as the woman becomes a key aspect of that quest or the end of it.

Brown's impressive sell on the goddess cult elevates and highlights the importance of femininity and balance, and in doing so Brown also reinforces a male-female dichotomy and the corresponding gender roles. Gender roles are learned and internalized at a very young age to determine how children act as they grow into adulthood, affecting the relationships they build and the way they communicate, and these gender roles tend to lead to sexism.³ Often, the internalization of gender roles shows itself in unexpected

²Maass, Vera Sonja, *The Cinderella Test*. Praeger, 2009.

³Swann, William B., et al. *Sexism and stereotypes in modern society: the gender science of Janet Taylor Spence*. American Psychological Association, 1999.

and uncontrollable ways in literature. Additionally, the relations between men and women in *the Da Vinci Code* are “persistent [in] recourse to the private, specifically its reduction of women to biology alone, ultimately undercuts its feminist potential and reinforces the status quo” (Maddux 241). Brown’s attempts to equalize male and female tend to fall short. He explains goddess worship as inspiring equilibrium in all things: “When male and female were balanced, there was harmony in the world. When they were unbalanced, there was chaos” (Brown 36). The dichotomy of men and women is emphasized from the very start of the novel. Together they create balance, apart they fall in disarray. Brown’s word choice emphasizes the expected peace found in equality of men and women while also accentuating the importance of the diametric balance repeatedly. Addressing the corruption of the goddess cult Brown writes, “Women, once celebrated as an essential half of spiritual enlightenment, had been banished from the temples of the world... the natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole—had been recast as a shameful act” (125). It is important here that sexual union is connected to shame, despite ancient freedom with it. Brown tries to go against the religious morals regarding women and male-female union by retrieving sex from the dirt it was put in when Christianity dominated. Sophie broke her relationship with her grandfather over the contrived shame to be found in sex, which serves to highlight Brown’s critique of the demonization of the union between men and women. Despite Brown’s lofty language surrounding the sacredness of gender balance, he often reduces the so recently elevated Mary Magdalene to the container that gave life to the child of Jesus: “And Mary Magdalene was the womb that carried His royal lineage” (255). More so than a human being, Mary Magdalene is simply the womb, a fact that seems it should be opposed to the goddess worship that is ever-present in this novel. It is not, however, because despite Brown’s efforts to elevate his work beyond the patriarchal sex-shaming and women-hating, he cannot escape the internalized gender roles formed by centuries of female oppression. Brown tries to create a feminist novel that respects and elevates women as historically repressed, but he falls into the trap of objectifying women, even the goddess—Mary Magdalene.

Dan Brown addresses the systematic oppression of women with an intention of elevating the historic and contemporary importance of women. At a surface level, he is successful, however the implications made by his writing reduces women to the gender-typical role of beautiful, passive wife and mother. As the contemporary paradigm shifts, many authors struggle with similar issues of elevating their female characters but still falling victim to the unconsciously internalized gender roles. Female authors are no exception to this. The efforts to enter strong female characters into literature, however, evolves with every author as certain kinds of characters gain more commercial success and popularity than other. Brown’s beautiful but different-from-other-girls female protagonist is one of the most popular kinds of female characters, but a new wave of characters has been growing more recently, learning from the dialogue created over characters like Sophie Neveu.

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Spring 2019 Third Prize Essay

ISOLATION IN EXCESS COMMUNICATION: SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE WRITING OF SEQUOIA NAGAMATSU

*By Sadie Kurtzman, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Erin Speese*

Aristotle theorized that “Man is by nature a social animal...Society is something that precedes the individual” (Mudra). Human beings live with the psychological need to be accepted. With the world in a heightened state of technological advancement and mass communication, propelled by the overpowering existence of media, human beings are more connected than ever before. Sequoia Nagamatsu’s story, “Melancholy Nights in a Tokyo Cyber Cafe,” dissects the cyber networking culture of urban Tokyo and the issues involving the influx of social networking as linked to mental health, anxiety, and feelings of isolation through the characters in his story. Akira is a homeless man, out of work and without a sense of purpose. He joins an online chat room for individuals contemplating suicide. There, he finds solace with a mother named Yoshiko. Akira conjures a life for him and Yoshiko in his head, but fails to approach her when he sees her in person. Ultimately, Akira’s tangible contact with another person comes in the form of Seiji, Akira’s new boss after he is hired to run a printing press. The companionship that Akira finds with Seiji pulls him from his isolation, while Yoshiko’s lack of human connection drives her toward her fate. I argue that “Melancholy Nights in a Tokyo Cyber Cafe” is a testament that, though their proximity and accessibility has become expected, communication devices and medias fail to grant the level of interpersonal communication, connection, and emotional support that human beings naturally crave. Through the characters and language, Nagamatsu shows that susceptibility to depression, isolation, and suicidal tendencies can not be eradicated by online social discourse, but can be aided with real, human companionship and finding purpose in one’s own life.

Nagamatsu’s story examines isolation and the issues of mental health in a highly industrialized and connected society. In Tokyo, cyber cafes serve as both a hub for online users and a sanctuary for the homeless. Sakura Murakami evaluates a survey of individuals utilizing the cyber cafes and discusses the influx of cafe “refugees” when she states, “25.8 percent confirmed that they did not have a stable residence and were using the cafes as a housing option” (Murakami). The majority of these individuals are temporary workers without sufficient income or a formal residence who use the cyber cafes as a place to sleep. Sequoia Nagamatsu’s story follows the plight of one of these individuals, Akira, who spends his days searching for work and his nights online in the cyber cafes. The cafes themselves are a hallmark of the rapid computerization in the modern world. The accessibility of the internet and social networking outlets has opened avenues for connecting individuals around the world and allows the sharing of personal information and online personas created by users. Although the internet and social networking sites allow people to communicate from around the globe, these connections lack the emotional support and stability available through in-person relationships. Erin O. Whaitte et al. concluded in their study that there is a correlation between social media usage and social isolation, writing “This study found SMU and SI are strongly and linearly associated, regardless of personality characteristics” (Whaitte et. al). There is a positive relationship between the use of social media as a gateway to the social world and deep feelings of social isolation. In Nagamatsu’s story, Akira attempts to find refuge within online chat-rooms. He is

depressed from his lack of work and the shame it brings to him and his family, as well as his human desire for connection. The chat rooms and his online camrade, Yoshiko, ultimately do not offer him the emotional support he needs, nor does Akira's online presence aid Yoshiko. She commits suicide as a result her depression and lack of human relationship. Nagamatsu uses the relationships of his characters and their fates to insist that, though social media and relationships online are easy and readily accessible to everyone, even those who lack a permanent residence, they do not offer the emotional support and connection of an in-person relationship.

As a temporary working, Japanese man, Akira is immersed in the cultural expectations of honor and duty that are present in traditional Japanese structures. He is homeless and working part-time jobs to survive. Akira reaches out to no one concerning his situation, not even his own mother. Nagamatsu write, "Not wanting to burden or worry his ailing mother, he has never told her the truth about his life" (Nagamatsu 95). Akira feels as though his life would "burden" his mother. This fear of "burdening" his family with his struggles comes from the social constructs that personal failure, in turn, will dishonor one's family. Nagamatsu reiterates Akira's thoughts of dishonor with his failure to connect with Yoshiko in real-life, as "part of him is still ashamed that he is homeless" (Nagamatsu 97). The "shame" that Akira feels keeps him from reaching out to others and deepens his isolation. His isolation, consequently, pushes him toward thoughts of suicide. However, suicide in Japan has radically different connotations than suicide in other countries, like the United States. Yoshimoto Takahashi writes,

"It is a fact that Japan is popularly held to be a country in which suicide is permissible to some extent. It is often reported to the world that the Japanese regard suicide as an honorable way to take responsibility, similar to *hara-kiri*, the traditional form of suicide committed by warriors in the feudal era" (Takahashi).

Hara-kiri is a form of suicide that the samurai once used as an escape from dishonor and has bled into the social constructs of suicide in Japan over the years (Varley, 323). The Japanese construct of suicide as an honorable way for Akira to take responsibility and control his life changes the way in which the reader views Akira's struggles. His suicidal behaviors do not necessarily trace to mental health issues as American readers would interpret from our own predilections of suicide and the individuals who commit it. Akira is not mentally ill. Rather, he is simply looking for a way in which to give his life purpose. Suicide, to some degree, would give his life more purpose than he now has, for it would allow him to die more honorably. However, Akira ultimately finds a purpose, not from the online chat rooms and conversations with Yoshiko, but from Seiji and the promise of a stable life.

Modern Japan, surrounded by a intense cyber structure, has procured a generation of individuals who struggle to facilitate a social life without their phones. In the words of Nannette Gottlieb and Mark J. McLelland,

"The students in his survey express incredulity at how people could ever have organized their social lives before the advent of the mobile phone. Many express their dependency on the technology: from waking them up in the morning, giving them something to do while killing time commuting (or sitting in the lecture hall) and helping them to rendezvous with friends" (Gottlieb and McLelland).

Like many individuals in Japan and the rest of the world, Nagamatsu's character, Akira, has developed issues pursuing human contact and resorts to interactions in online chat rooms. Nagamatsu writes, "He entered chat rooms and began talking to people, telling strangers how it felt to be forgotten" (Nagamatsu 96). Nagamatsu chooses to show immediately from the moment Akira enters the chat rooms, that the people he is interacting with are "strangers" and are therefore not his friends. Though he shares his most personal struggles and thoughts of ending his life, these online entities are unknown to him. There is no

personal connection to the individuals he chats with online, besides their communal sorrow. Through the chat rooms, Akira begins messaging a woman who feels the same isolation and temptation of suicide. Nagamatsu writes, “Akira established a routine with Yoshiko, chatting every night after she returned home and tucked in her daughter” (Nagamatsu 97). The language in this particular passage is extremely revealing about the relationship between Akira and Yoshiko. Nagamatsu writes that the two “established a routine” – not that they became friends or even that they became familiar with one another. The phrase “establish a routine” highlights how distant Akira and Yoshiko’s relationship truly is, as it fails to voice any intimacy within their contact. Nagamatsu also chooses to write “daughter” instead of giving Yoshiko’s child a name to show how unfamiliar Akira is with Yoshiko’s life. Akira does not know the most important details of Yoshiko’s life, specifically her “daughter’s” name. Akira found someone to “chat” with, but not a true connection. Akira has seen Yoshiko in person, working as a street vendor, but he fails to approach her out of embarrassment of his homelessness – something Yoshiko would know about Akira if their online conversations shared the more intimate realities of their lives. On one of the occasions that Akira goes to see Yoshiko, Nagamatsu writes “Akira goes to the Ameyokocho market as he always does to be with Yoshiko” (Nagamatsu 102). Nagamatsu chooses to say that Akira goes to “be with Yoshiko” to imply that “being with” someone is something that can only be done in person, even if they do not speak. Through his language, Nagamatsu is showing that one cannot truly “be” with another via a chat room. The real connection is developed in person and, though Akira shares his woes online with Yoshiko, he desires a deeper, more valid connection with her. He discovers where she works and goes to see her because, even if they do not speak, the value of physically being near Yoshiko is a greater pleasure for Akira than speaking intimate words through a chat room. The chat room, however, is not the only mode of communication that Nagamatsu chooses to highlight in this story.

Throughout the story, Sequoia Nagamatsu uses communication devices to highlight both the proximity of these tools to the characters and the overall failure of these devices to convey the characters’ desires for human connection, regardless of how accessible the instruments are to the characters. When the reader is first introduced to Yoshiko, she is selling calligraphy prints. Nagamatsu chooses to associate her with calligraphy to show how near modes of communication – the calligraphy prints – are to her; Yoshiko is literally selling writing utensils. Akira has a habit of buying pens from other vendors when he is too afraid to introduce himself to Yoshiko when he sees her at the market. Nagamatsu illustrates Akira’s defeat when he writes “An assortment of pens build up on the computer desk of Akira’s cubicle at the cyber cafe...each one a reminder of another day that Akira could not walk a few feet further and cease being invisible” (Nagamatsu 97-98). The “build up” of pens and the calligraphy prints at Yoshiko’s vending stall are used to show how near and unused these communication devices are and how little help they are in solving Akira and Yoshiko’s issues. Though they share intimate life struggles over their cyber chats, Akira is “invisible” to Yoshiko. He has no face and no conscious presence in Yoshiko’s mind. Akira’s employer, Seiji, is also primarily associated with a form of communication – a printing press. Nagamatsu writes, “He says that he wants to save people. He takes a stack of papers from the printing press and hands them to Akira” (Nagamatsu, 100). Akira is desperate for communication and acceptance, so much so that he is considering death as an alternative to his present state of isolation. Seiji, who has deep feelings of loneliness himself, wants to save him. He physically gives Akira a mode of communication - the paper and printing press - and a purpose. Akira is saved by the possibility of a life he could have and the connection he has found with Seiji. As Akira and Seiji get to know one another, Akira’s sorrow and isolation seem to dissipate.

When Akira goes to work for Seiji, the two find comradeship in their shared struggles. Seiji, who lost his wife in the 1995 Sarin gas attacks in Tokyo, has fallen out of contact with his daughter as a result. He discusses his own isolation and Nagamatsu writes, “Seiji confesses to Akira his abandoned plans to take

his own life” (Nagamatsu, 103). The reader is unaware of when Seiji “abandoned” his plans, but it can be assumed that it was soon after he and Akira aided one another with their companionship when Seiji says “the isolation pulls at me... it saddens me that only tragedy can bring these people together. The bonds... are erased so easily like chalk on a blackboard” (Nagamatsu, 104). Seiji is alluding to individuals who bonded after the terror attacks, but his message translates to Akira’s situation and his relationship with Yoshiko. The two “bonded” over the “tragedy” of their lives, but their bond had no real connection. The pieces they shared were not in person connections and they could easily forget one another, “erasing” their connection. Akira’s isolation and suicidal thoughts had not been diminished by his relationship with Yoshiko; Akira still logs in to chat rooms for individuals who want to commit suicide. Rather, Akira’s in person connection with Seiji and his job allowed him to restore the man he once was. However, as Akira’s life shifts in a positive direction, Yoshiko’s struggles and lack of human connection ultimately seal her fate.

The reader is only aware of Yoshiko’s life from the information Akira gathers from their online chats and what he imagines as he watches her in the market. The extent of Yoshiko’s struggles, however, can be inferred from the deep isolation revealed in the brief revelations about her background. Through their chats, Yoshiko reveals that her husband works far away and that she has to maintain her house and tend to her autistic daughter on her own. Nagamatsu writes “She knows no one in the city...and doesn’t have the luxury of making friends” (Nagamatsu, 97). This quote reveals that not only is Yoshiko extremely lonely and isolated, but that she does not consider talking to Akira online as “making friends.” Akira lives in the city and has even seen Yoshiko in person, yet she says she does not know anyone. Nagamatsu is implying that even though Yoshiko discusses her hardships with Akira online, she does not consider him her friend, as she does not have this “luxury.” In Yoshiko’s world, Akira is nothing but an online entity. He never approaches her in reality and thus cannot supply the comfort and support of an in-person connection. While Akira finds an in-person relationship with Seiji, Yoshiko ultimately succumbs to her struggle with isolation, killing herself and her daughter. Akira and Yoshiko begin the story in similar positions, but it is the presence or lack of human companionship that determines the outcome of each. Yoshiko is overcome by her loneliness, while Akira and Seiji are both saved by the connection they find in one another. Nagamatsu ends his story with a final commentary of the force of in person relation, stating that after Yoshiko’s death, Akira “looks upon the faces of the people around him, vastly different in their own ways, but each having a story not unlike the other, connecting them together in our most human and fragile moments” (Nagamatsu 104). Nagamatsu chooses to end the story by enhancing the idea that human connection is something that is found in person, by seeing the individuals around them and understanding their relation to the world, not to a computer screen. Akira looks at the “people around him” and feels “connected” to them without knowing their stories. It is the proximity to others that allows Akira to understand the similarities and differences and the ways in which humanity binds them. They all have stories and tragedies, but the relationship to other human beings is what ultimately destroys the isolation each of them can suffer.

Sequoia Nagamatsu’s story “Melancholy Nights in a Tokyo Cyber Cafe” highlights the struggle for true human relationships in a world of technoculture. Akira and Yoshiko become allies in their misery, as they discuss their lives and thoughts of suicide through online chat rooms. Akira, however, never approaches Yoshiko in real life. Their relationship cannot be translated into reality and does not bare the emotional support that either of them require to overcome their struggles. Akira finds human connection and a purpose from Seiji and together, the two men set aside the suicidal thoughts that overwhelm Yoshiko. Nagamatsu uses the nearness of communication tools – chat rooms, calligraphy sets, and printing press – to show that, although globalization has allowed people to connect in platforms from all around the globe, the cyber world does not give individuals the sense of companionship and emotional availabili-

ty that people can experience face to face. Nagamatsu emphasizes, through his story, that while the world may be connected online, the feelings of isolation and lack of human connection remain detrimental to individuals who struggle with these issues and that the “bonds” humans find with others online cannot compare with the connections formed together, human to human.

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Fall 2018 Third Prize Essay

CONGEALING MODERNITY

*By Colleen Hammond, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts
Instructor: Dr. Matthew Ussia*

From the darkest depths of history, the greatest minds arise. While much of humanity finds unity in the joy of family life, the comfort of national stability, and the carefree sentiments of youth, two of the most prominent, philosophical minds of the twentieth century find their common ground in the fear and uncertainty of today's world. Regardless of the ten-year gap in publications, Zygmunt Bauman's *Liquid Times* and Pope John Paul II's address at World Youth Day XII expertly complement one another. Despite their seemingly contradictory writings, Bauman and Pope John Paul II share a profound cognizance of the constant, terrifying precariousness of the modern world, allowing their works to effectively converse decades after publication.

To comprehend the similar nature of these texts, one must acknowledge the parallel origins of the authors. Polish nationals John Paul II and Bauman were born in 1925 and 1920, respectively. As a result of their unfortunate historical timing, these men frequently faced an inordinate amount of uncertainty at an early age. By the age of twenty-one, John Paul II had lost his mother, brother, sister, father, and, similar to Bauman, his homeland. After the Nazi overthrow of Poland in 1939, both men found themselves expatriates in their own country. Bauman's Jewish heritage exposed him to a new level of human atrocity and fear during an age of genocide, and John Paul II's devotion to preserving Polish culture as well as the lives of his Jewish companions placed him at high risk of imprisonment and death. With the danger of Nazism and the utter despair of the Holocaust breathing down their necks, John Paul II and Bauman dared to defy their oppressors. Although their paths never directly crossed, both John Paul II and Bauman fought in the Polish resistance during World War II. After the war, both men found themselves unwelcome in Poland for their political views. Bauman was exiled from Poland in 1968, and throughout much of his papacy, John Paul II received intense backlash from the Soviet government while attempting to enter the country and speak on the benefit of true democracy. These uniquely traumatic lives fostered a philosophic perspective based primarily on the influence of fear of the unknown in the modern world.

For instance, one can observe the commonalities in the world views of Bauman and John Paul II through the idea of liquid modernity. Bauman describes, "a 'liquid' phase of modernity: that is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long" (Bauman 1). He comments on the everchanging and rapid rate of societal movement in the modern era. Because modernized societies continue to change the status quo so quickly, most traditional social structures have disappeared due to their refusal to change with the times. This leaves humanity in limbo: constantly questioning what the daunting future might hold for the next generation as he defines, "Uncertainty means fear" (Bauman 94). Although the term "liquid modernity" was not coined by Bauman until the publication of *Liquid Times* in 2007, John Paul II echoes this idea in his speech from a decade earlier as he notes, "We are living in an era of great changes: the rapid decline of ideologies that seemed to promise a long resistance to the wear and tear of time; the tracing out on the planet of new confines and frontiers. Humanity often finds itself uncertain, bewildered and anxious" Both men recognize the radical shift away from tradition and towards a new variation of perpetually changing moral relativism.

Bauman leaves this situation at the level of superficial warning.

On the contrary, John Paul II refuses to desert his audience in the anxiety of this liquid state. Instead he prophetically answers Bauman's work with a message of guidance and hope. He bolsters humanity by proclaiming, "But the word of God knows no decline; throughout history and among changing events, it remains firm and gives light." Amidst the chaos of the modern world, many ponder the purpose to human existence, frequently to no avail. John Paul II offers humanity an island to rest on in the sea of uncertainty through the immutability of God. While this solution may not appeal to all, one must acknowledge the entice of hope over despair in times of radical societal upheaval.

This perpetual desire to uplift humanity and cultivate a culture of hope sets John Paul II apart from Bauman. Although their upbringings and philosophies on fear unite these men, Bauman, without directly naming John Paul II, clearly describes the one fundamental difference between the two men. Bauman, by his own definition, is a hunter, and John Paul II is a gardener. Bauman defines, "The sole task hunters pursue is another 'kill', big enough to fill their game-bags to capacity" (Bauman 100). Throughout his book, Bauman consistently alarms his audience with the worst possible outcomes instead of pragmatic practicalities. He only seeks to make his audience more aware of their fears and abandons any thought of how to conquer them. With his unnerving tone, Bauman fires frequent intellectual warning shots and moves on to his next intellectual target. As a true hunter he desires only to warn and never to guide humanity towards a brighter tomorrow. Contrastingly, John Paul II is a gardener. He "assumes that there would be no order in the world at all (or at least in the small part of that world entrusted to his wardenship) were it not for his constant attention and effort" (Bauman 99). John Paul II accepts the modern world's need for individuals who tend to the garden of humanity with justice and dignity. The former pope urges the youth to work for a better tomorrow as he states, "In this world you are called to live fraternally, not as utopia but as a real possibility." He includes this call to action in the hopes that his audiences understand "even the desert can then become a garden." With a communal, gardener mentality, the waves of liquid modernity subside, and the individualistic hunters begin to drown in their own chaos.

Consequently, John Paul II urges his audience to question whether they are a hunter or a gardener. In the age of rampant capitalism and individualism, each person must decide if they are interested in serving humanity or the interests of a single man. While the lure of personal wealth and success at the misfortune of others deeply resonates with the modern generation, John Paul II questions the young people of the world if liquid modernity is truly what they desire. "But – I ask you – is it better to be resigned to a life without ideals, to a world made in our image and likeness, or rather, generously to seek truth, goodness, justice, working for a world that reflects the beauty of God, even at the cost of facing the trials it may involve?" He argues that it is better to march into hell for the heavenly cause of human unity than to sit by the wayside collecting one's own riches at the expense of the less fortunate. Bauman rejects the notion of generosity from the upper class; he cannot fathom the idea of freely giving of one's self for the benefit of someone less fortunate. He comments, "they (the urban elite) need not be concerned, and apparently nothing can compel them to be concerned if they decide not to be" (Bauman 75). The fear and uncertainty of his childhood has so damaged Bauman that he cannot see beyond the looming dread of uncertainty. Where Bauman's fear of the unknown paralyzes him, John Paul II sprints forward into the unknown to set an example for the youth of the world, showing them that society needs more gardeners who will serve their fellow man, and less hunters who will only serve themselves.

Moreover, John Paul II conquers the despair of his past while Bauman remains defeated by his past on the subject of human dignity. Bauman shocks his readers as he declares, "Refugees are the very embodiment of 'human waste'" (Bauman 41). This statement is a vivid representation of how Bauman views himself, as he was a refugee for much of his early life. After years of mistreatment due to his refugee

status, Bauman has come to believe all refugees -all those without a home nation- cannot function productively in society. In the context of modernized nations, refugees serve no purpose and therefore are waste in the age of efficiency. Despite his similar circumstances, John Paul II denies his past the right to embitter him. Without belittling the intense degree of suffering in the world, he reminds his audience “Jesus’ dwelling is wherever a human person is suffering because rights are denied, hopes betrayed, anxieties ignored.” Suffering does not devalue human dignity but enriches the human experience in order to allow man to accept that his purpose is greater than momentary happiness. John Paul II embraces uncertainty for the sake of the redemptive quality of suffering. He overcomes the pain and fear of his past as well as the precariousness of the future by grounding himself in the service of others. It is in his connection to his fellow man that John Paul II pieces together the broken scraps of the modern world.

However, John Paul II’s bonds to humanity are not reserved only for the elite. He proclaims, “In reality, every human being is a fellow citizen of Christ.” He upholds human dignity. In the everchanging and chaotic world of fear and uncertainty, one piece must remain, or all civilization will collapse: human dignity. As long as man can respect himself and his fellow members of the human race, Bauman’s writings are only post-apocalyptic, fear-mongering ramblings. With the maintenance of human dignity comes hope.

Particularly, the threat to human dignity is highly visible in the present living conditions in most modern metropolitan areas. Bauman comments on cities, “one feature has remained constant: cities are spaces where strangers stay and move in close proximity to one another” (Bauman 85). Similarly, John Paul II observes the degradation of human dignity as he notes, “the huge metropolises, where millions of human beings live often as strangers.” Bauman identifies the origins of the fear that encapsulates modern society as the apprehension associated with uncertainty. This uncertainty is amplified when the modern man sees his neighbor as a terrifying, unknown entity, and not a fellow traveler on the road of life. To label another human being as dangerous, just because he is unfamiliar is a frequent act of ignorance in the modern world. The term stranger degrades human dignity because it fashions a divide between the known and unknown, ostracizing those who, by a sheer trick of fate, have not yet entered one’s isolated circle of daily life. These men remark on the lack of humanity in cities perpetuates the cycle of anonymity, creating nameless faces out of valuable human beings.

This disturbing paradox of loneliness in a crowd of thousands is defined by Bauman and John Paul II as the makings of nightmares. Although cities used to be a haven for artists, immigrants, and those seeking for greater job opportunities, they quickly deteriorated into a hellhole of crime, cyclical poverty, isolation, and uncertainty. Bauman quotes Michael Schwarzer as he describes cities as “places where ‘dreams have been replaced by nightmares and danger and violence are more commonplace than elsewhere’” (Bauman 73). He speaks of the decline of urban prosperity, and its effect on the morale of city-dwellers. Conversely, John Paul II again notices a problem and offers a solution. When discussing how to repair the damage of liquid modernity on modern cities, he encourages young people to get in touch with their humanity and welcome the stranger and outcast. When young people take action to mend the broken bonds of humanity, “You will discover the truth about yourselves and your inner unity, and you will find a Thou who gives the cure for anxieties, for nightmares and for the unbridled subjectivism that leaves you no peace.” In service to others, the loneliness of the modern age will melt away. These places of nightmarish prisons can be reborn as the sanctuaries of dreamers.

Lastly, the anachronist conversation between Bauman and John Paul II concludes with their mutual disgust for the effect of the age of efficiency on humankind. Modernity decimates the human spirit through its placement of productivity over humanity. John Paul II refers to inhabitants of the modernized world as “victims of an unjust model of development, in which profit is given first place and the human being is made a means rather than an end.” John Paul II notices the detrimental effects of uneven

modernization. He realized that when human beings become a commodity and not stewards of their own destiny, the gears of society come to a grinding halt and promptly fall apart. Bauman upholds this sentiment as he blatantly states, “possibly the most fatal result of modernity’s global triumph, is the acute crisis of the ‘human waste’ disposal industry” (Bauman 28). Modernity kills the modern man in favor of machines and a life of ease for the wealthy. Bauman and John Paul II witnessed the dangers of modernity as the Nazi Party attempted to eradicate all “human waste” from their new empire. Through violent and unspeakable acts of genocide against Jews, Christians, political adversaries, homosexuals, gypsies, and the disabled, the darkest and most gruesome aspects of modernity were displayed to Bauman and John Paul II in their early childhoods. Both men came to realize the unbeatable dangers and utterly distorted brainwashing one must endure to place efficiency above the fundamental rights of man. Man cannot be treated as a means to an end, but as the caretakers of the future.

Although terror and despair unite Zygmunt Bauman and Pope John Paul II, their similar backgrounds illuminate the origins of their philosophies. From the ashes of war-torn Poland arose two men who recognize the terrifying precariousness of the modern world. While Bauman merely fires warning shots into the oblivion of the modern era with complex intellectualized arguments, his contemporary, John Paul II, swallows the fear and uncertainty all men face daily and guides humanity towards hope. Their core acknowledgement of perpetual fear permits their writings to converse decades after publication. Where Bauman alerts the public, John Paul II ushers them and attempts to assuage their fears. John Paul II instructs the young people of the world, “Break down the barriers of superficiality and fear.” To attempt to congeal the watery mess of the modern world, one must listen to the warnings of the Jewish hunter and the counsel of the Catholic gardener.

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