The Riverside Community College District Honors Program presents

Celebrating Excellence

2008-2009 Annual of Honors Student Work
Fall Conference, Building Bridges, Essay Contest

Riverside Community College District, Spring 2009
Celebrating Excellence

2008-2009 Annual of Honors Student Work
Fall Conference, Building Bridges, Essay Contest

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Essay Contest Committee
Diane Marsh
Valarie Zapata
Kelly Douglass
Tucker Amidon
Thatcher Carter
Rhonda Taube

Editor
Kathleen Sell, Riverside City College Honors Program Coordinator
From the Coordinators

“The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”
--Marcel Proust

One of the greatest pleasures of teaching in the Honors Program and working with our honors students is the privilege of watching students develop a strong, clear voice and the confidence to express their insights, thinking, reflections, and questions with that voice. These papers were written in honors seminars and then presented at conferences and/ or offered as submissions for the Honors Program’s essay contest. These students took the risk of letting their voices be heard, and we think you’ll be pleased with the thoughtfulness, passion, creativity, and insight with which they present their work.

Within this volume you will find papers on a wide range of topics from a wide variety of perspectives. They all demonstrate the excitement of discovering new ideas and an enthusiasm for learning, for thinking, and for writing that can serve as an inspiration for us all. Thank you to all the contributors and their faculty mentors for the countless hours of effort and thought, in and out of the classroom represented here.

Congratulations to you all—judging from what we see here, we expect great things from you in the future!

Faculty Mentors

- Tucker Amidon
- Thatcher Carter
- Kelly Douglass
- Diane Marsh
- Kathleen Sell
- Nick Sinigaglia
- Rhonda Taube
- Sheryl Tschetter
- Kristi Woods
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Why do Bad Things Happen to Good People? The Problem of Evil and the Book of Job

Adam Apperson
Presenter: Building Bridges 2008, Published in Selected Abstracts, 2009
Faculty Mentor: Nick Sinigaglia, Philosophy

Ever since the introduction of a monotheistic God centuries ago, the question of how bad things happen to good people has been cause of speculation. This question has been asked because God is a supposed good being. However, if God is a perfectly good being and all-powerful, then we must ask the question, how can this God permit bad things to happen to good people? This specific question is referred to as “the problem of evil.”

In the Bible’s Old Testament, the Book of Job specifically deals with this problem. Job is introduced to us as a wealthy, moral, prosperous man. However, God takes all of Job’s possessions, including his money and livestock, while his children are killed in a tornado. Job is then stricken with illness and ridden with sores. After some time, three of Job’s friends, Bildad, Zophar, and Eliphaz—the “three older men”—greet him, and offer their opinions on why such suffering has been inflicted upon Job. The explanation these three men offer Job is that he must have done something wrong, and that he is being punished by God. Eliphaz, for example, says, “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent? Or where were the upright ever cut off? Even as I have seen, those plow iniquity and sow trouble weep the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his anger they are consumed” (Job 4:7-9). Eliphaz conceives of God as being perfectly just—rewarding the virtuous and destroying the immoral. So, according to Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, if Job is suffering, it must be because he has done some kind of wrong.

However, Job cannot see what he has done that would anger God. In the opening line of the Book of Job, in fact, Job is described as a “blameless and upright” man, who “feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). As Job himself says, “Teach me, and I will hold my tongue; cause me to understand wherein I have erred” (Job 6:24). Eliphaz also fails to persuade Job that God punishes only evildoers by pointing out that the wicked often do in fact thrive. Job replies to Eliphaz, “Why do the wicked live and become old, yes, become mighty in power? Their descendants are established with them in their sight, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, nor is the rod of God upon them” (Job 21 7-9). Job’s response to Eliphaz’s theory here is an excellent one. Job himself never becomes convinced of their view. It is indeed difficult to deny that wicked people often prosper and good people often suffer in the world that God created and presides over. Many good people live lives where, as the Scottish philosopher David Hume puts it in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, “fear, anxiety, terror agitate the weak and infirm…weakness, impotence, distress attend each stage of that life, and it is, at last, finished in agony and horror.”

At this point in the dialogue, a younger man named Elihu offers a different perspective on the problem of evil. He agrees with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar that God is just; however, he sees the suffering inflicted on decent people as designed not to punish them, but to correct them and bring them back to God and the path of righteousness. Elihu says to Job, “Behold, God works all these things, trice, in fact, three times with a man, to bring his soul back from the pit, that he may be enlightened by the light of life” (Job 33:29-30). Instead of thinking of God as a judge and executioner like Eliphaz and the others, Elihu seems to conceive of God more as a caring parent, who inflicts suffering on his children not in order to simply punish them, but rather correct them—helping them become better people. Elihu sees Job’s suffering as an opportunity given by God for becoming a better person and growing closer to God—it is an expression of God’s wisdom or care for us.

This can be seen as a solution to the problem of evil because it presents us with the idea that the evil that God allows in the world is actually necessary to create a greater good that otherwise could not exist. Courage, for example, is only possible in a world where there is some level of danger. God allows human suffering, on this view, because it is only through suffering that we can become better people and closer to God.

While some thinkers have found a satisfactory answer to the problem of evil in a view such as Elihu’s, others have found it unacceptable to apply Elihu’s view to children. It is plausible
that some of the suffering we see in the world might be justifiable on these grounds. But Dostoevsky’s character of Ivan is right that it would be a very hard-hearted person indeed who could walk into a children’s cancer ward and say that it is good that these children are suffering, since a loving God sees that it is for our benefit. Ivan says to his brother, “If all must suffer to pay for the harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It’s beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony… and if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of suffering that was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is no worth such a price.”

Albert Camus, too, echoes this view. In Camus’ book, *The Plague*, the character Rieux says it best, “And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.”

God, however, does not adhere to Elihu, or anyone else’s view. God himself appears after Elihu’s speech. Not surprisingly, God condemns the view of Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. God makes it clear that he is not in the business of meting out suffering only to the immoral and rewarding only the good. Instead, God is concerned to demonstrate his greatness to Job, and to show Job that he cannot hope to fathom the mind of God. “Can you send out lightnings, that they may go, and say to you, here we are? Who has put wisdom in the mind, or who has given understanding to the heart? Who can number the clouds by wisdom, or can pour out the bottles of heaven” (Job 38:35-38). We can read God as belittling Job here, and simply saying that Job must worship him for his raw power, but we can also read God as trying to press home to Job the idea that human beings, because of our limitations as created beings, cannot hope to understand why God does the things that he does. This is the response given by another character, Paneloux, in Camus’ *The Plague* when it comes to dealing with the terrible things around us. Paneloux says “This sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.” This is really the most attractive response to the problem of evil offered in the Book of Job, and not just because God himself is the one who expresses it. It is an obvious fact of the world that the bad people sometimes thrive, and good people suffer. It also seems impossible for us to side with Elihu and say with a straight face that the suffering of children is actually a recognizably good thing when one thinks about it. God’s speech implies that we must trust in his goodness, and not expect to understand ourselves how the things that appear terrible to us actually are a part of his divine plan. This serves as a response to the problem of evil by pointing out that is the sort of question that we cannot hope to answer ourselves. Our minds, according to God, are simply incapable of understanding the perfection of God’s.

Job himself is convinced by God’s speech. He says to God, “…I have uttered what I did not understand, things to wonderful for me which I did not know” (43:2). God expresses his anger at Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, for thinking they understand God’s mind when they did not, but Job is rewarded for understanding his own limitations. God gives him twice the possessions he had before, and Job lives out the rest of his days in happiness. The Book of Job offers us a few different solutions to the problem of evil. From Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar’s opinions, to that of Elihu, The Book of Job gives us insight in approaching the problem of evil. Dostoevsky and Camus, too, give intuitive counter arguments to those raised in Job. However, the ideas expressed in God’s speech make the most sense in Job’s attempt to answer the problem of evil. They can also tell us something about the nature of faith—that if one is to be a believer, that person must learn to trust what he/she cannot fully understand.
One Famine Under Islam

Marie-Michele Busque
Presenter: Building Bridges
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Amidon, English 1AH

One out of four newborns will die before reaching age five in Sudan (New Sudan). In the Darfur region alone, roughly 80 infants die each day as a result of malnutrition (“Nationmaster”). For over two decades, lives in the African country of Sudan, have been claimed by unsystematic murder, illness, and starvation. Famine has been caused by drought, disease, floods, and government interference. The Sudanese leaders have entangled their people in what seems to be a never-ending civil war since 1983. This disaster was best personified by the 1994 Pulitzer Prize winning photograph taken by Kevin Carter. It is a picture of an emaciated child crouched down in anguish, with a robust vulture looming in the background. This photograph exemplified the famine taking place in Sudan and brought the civil unrest to our attention in the states and worldwide. Until that photograph, our attention was diverted towards events taking place in Somalia. President George H.W. Bush sent American troops there, stating a humanitarian intervention was needed (MacLeod). He came to this decision after viewing shocking images of violence and starvation and this inspired Kevin Carter, who had grown tired of South Africa’s turmoil. He decided to explore the Sudanese conflict, with hopes of drawing attention to it, for he felt it had gone unnoticed long enough. This ploy worked. When the New York Times first published his photograph in March of 1993, it caused a huge controversy amongst the public. Not only were we now aware of the Sudanese rebel movement, but his photograph had also captured our hearts and connected us to that movement. How were we allowing this to go on in Sudan? Wars and conflicts had been plaguing the Sudanese people since 1983. War was raging between the Sudanese government and numerous rebel groups, primarily Sudan’s People Liberation Army, also known as the SPLA. The civil war commenced in 1983 was the second this country had to witness and most believe it was a direct extension of the first war. It had devastated Sudan’s economy and there were still silent tensions amongst different leaders. Despite these tensions, the Sudanese people had been at peace since 1972, when the Addis Ababa Agreement was signed between the government and rebel forces. This was a series of compromises designed to end hostilities and give the southern occupants sovereignty from the North (History). This peaceful time lasted until 1983. By this time, President Gaafar Nimeiri

Figure 1 Kevin Carter photograph, which won Pulitzer Prize (MacLeod).

Figure 2 Janjaweed militia soldier (El-Kaissouni).
had gained increased support from the Muslim Brotherhood and National Islamic Front. He was greatly influenced by these new supporters and, thus, his political views started to change. This new political outlook lead him to question the prior signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement. Determined to make changes, he soon began implementing Sharia Law, which enraged the Christian and Animist communities in the south. Eventually, President Nimeiri re-divided the southern region into three provinces, thereby nullifying the Addis Ababa agreement. Southern rebels saw red and the civil unrest that had plagued Sudan eleven years prior were reignited. Nimeiri soon found himself facing a successful armed rebellion in the south and growing criticism from the North (History). In response to these dilemmas, he annulled the tripartite division of the south and put cruel aspects of Islamic law on hold, but this still did not win him popular support. He was eventually cast out by his chief of staff in 1985. In 1986, the military government elections turned the Prime Minister title over to Sadiq al-Mahdi. His rule was filled with political turmoil and indecisive leadership, along with failed attempts to make peace with the SPLA (History).

During the three following years, tensions worsened and, in 1989, the National Islamic Front overthrew al-Mahdi’s government. Lieutenant General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir seized power. The new, Islam-oriented, government began using religious propaganda to conscript people into their new army, the Popular Defense Forces, as the regular army was disheartened and under pressure from the SPLA. With backing by the Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and growing support from the western region, the SPLA began a Marxist movement and portrayed the religious propaganda being used by the Arab Islamic government as a crusade to inflict Islam and the Arabic language on the Christian south. This worsened the already unspeakable situation in the tribal south, as fighting became more intense and casualties among the Christian and Animist minorities grew (History).

Not only were these people being killed by deliberate and indiscriminate fire, but a large number of these people were dying as a result of poor alimentation and disease. Along with the political battles being fought, the country was fighting an agricultural battle, which proved to be equally cruel. An unusually long and bitter famine, largely due to droughts and civil war, marked the start of 1991. These irregularities were affecting the amount of land capable of being used for farming and grazing. With no rain and no central irrigation systems, it became increasingly harder to maintain the under developed land. As a result of the famine and widespread droughts, millions of civilians were displaced and/or lost their homes. Eighty percent of an estimated five million Sudanese, living in the southern part of the country, have been displaced at some point during the war and some 350,000 Sudanese are refugees in six neighboring countries (Analysis). These people were constantly battling themselves and now they were at war with Mother Nature. In addition to natural disasters depleting their resources, the government is also to blame for the mass starvation going on in this country. While Nimeiri was in power, his deployment of the Sudanese army only succeeded in disrupting the dispersal of food. This, along with diminished harvests and droughts, created widespread famine in the south (History). Then, while the NIF was in charge, their pro-Iraqi stance during the Gulf War and their questionable civil policies, caused many of their patrons, such as the U.S. and the UN, to sever ties and discontinue aid. The government was also constantly ignoring pleas for food made by southern Sudan civilians and denying any aid Western Humanitarian relief agencies had to offer, in consequence to the SPLA’s glorious victories in the field of battle (History). The Sudanese government has faced much scrutiny regarding their war policies and Clare Short, British International Development Secretary, called this food blockade a “monstrous evil” (“World”). Even with some aid from outside relief agencies, providing these people with ample resources is simply not enough. Short states “The government of Sudan is deliberately inflicting this starvation on these people for its own ends. Aid alone will not bring an end to the crisis. A political solution is needed” (“World”).
These acts of oppression were a direct violation of one's natural rights. After roughly fifteen years of conflict, a report released in 1998 by the U.S. Committee for Refugees, estimated that at least 1.9 million people in Central and Southern Sudan had died since the start of the war, as a direct result of the second civil war and intentional policies of Sudanese government (Analysis). The same report also stated that seventy thousands deaths had occurred in 1998 alone. Millions of people have been displaced, raped, killed, and or have died from disease and malnutrition. The substantial loss of life in Sudan greatly exceeds any death toll in any civil war in the world and can easily be referred to as a mass execution, deliberately implemented by the military government and growing rebel forces (Analysis).

Although Carter was viewed as the vulture by some, his painful portrait of life in Sudan sent a message out to the world to which we had been oblivious. It took only one picture to bring over eleven years of suffering to an entire country’s attention. After Kevin showcased Sudan’s anguish to the world, people wanted to know more. His picture created a desire in others to globalize the issue. Numerous reports and photographs were published in reference to the Sudanese conflict. Visuals, such as the famished little boy pictured above and the cadaverous man in figure three, further epitomized the emerging conflict. It then became evident that the famine was only one piece of a much larger puzzle. Kevin Carter’s photograph winning the Pulitzer Prize was needed to bring Sudan’s torment to light, however, these additional exposures in the media lead to further scrutiny on Carter’s moral character, causing him greater pain. Sontag once said, “The person who intervenes cannot record; the person who is recording cannot intervene,” and Kevin Carter was painfully aware of this (WA, 555). Once, while describing a shoot-out, he was heard saying, “I had to think visually. You are making a visual here. But inside something is screaming ‘My God.’ But it is time to work. Deal with the rest later” (MacLeod). Carter understood that he could not intervene in the loathsome situations he put himself in, because if he had, he would have been unable to capture the monstrosities needed to shed light on worldly evils. His suffering would have been meaningless and his purpose would never have been served. He found no pleasure in his gruesome job and some believe it slowly killed him. He eventually confronted his demons. He dealt with his pain and everyone’s criticism the only way he knew how, by committing suicide. It is heartbreaking that instead of idolizing someone who put themselves in jeopardy to bring us news from around the globe, he was criticized for so many things, including “snapping” the picture. He should have been praised for his acts of courage, for few people would be able to record these horrors in such a callous way and still be able to showcase them and inspire such fervent emotions. I don’t think I would have been able to capture that image and do what he did with it. I would have helped the child and, in doing so, the world might have never known, or it would have taken longer to know, about the everyday torment these people go through. Instead of helping an entire nation, I would have helped only one individual. But which is more important?

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Is Poetry Better Than A Gun?  
A Literary Analysis of Siegfried Sassoon’s “The Poet as Hero”

Marie-Michele Busque  
Essay Contest Submission  
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Thatcher Carter, English 1B Honors

“You’ve heard me, scornful, harsh, and discontented, / Mocking and loathing war” (1, 2). This is just one of the many biting remarks used in “The Poet as Hero”, which helps set the tone to a very menacing poem. Although written about World War 1, the message of this poem continues to hold relevance, especially when considering our current involvement in Iraq. The author, Siegfried Sassoon, uses harsh diction and powerful allusions to lead the reader to believe that war has turned him, amongst many other young soldiers, into a spiteful critic of war. It tells of a soldier so distraught by the perils of war that he regards his old patriotic views as nothing but meaningless jabber, naïve and frivolous to the point where he now has a completely new, more contemptuous perspective on war. In this way, he turns to his poetry as a means of vengeance on the war and vengeance for the wrongful deaths of his kin. In this poem, Sassoon exposes the discouraging effects of combat and uses poetry as his weapon to fight the raging battle against War itself.

Sassoon uses a very intriguing narrating style to commence an anti-war campaign with “The Poet as Hero.” It starts out with a very sarcastic tone and then turns into a bitter, almost eerie, monologue describing himself before the war and himself after the war. Sassoon craftily uses a first-person narrative to intensify his feelings by saying “Of my old silly sweetness I’ve repented / My ecstasies changed to an ugly cry” (3, 4). Because of this, his bitterness can be felt throughout the poem making it more personal. He also uses second person to make the reader feel like the auditor, or the person being directly spoken to. As soon as the poem starts out, he is speaking directly to the reader causing an involuntary feeling of inclusion. Accusatory phrases like “You’ve heard me, scornful, harsh and discontented” and “You are aware that once I sought the Grail” cause the reader to adopt a certain amount of guilt for the agony endured by this disgruntled soldier, further personalizing the poem since it is obvious the narrator was much happier before going off to battle (1, 5). In this way, Sassoon uses his narration as an attack on the listener much like he uses the content of his poem as an attack on soldiers themselves. This poem begins as a bitter act of violence, as the title itself is a direct slap in the face to soldiers fighting everywhere. “The Poet as Hero” alludes to Sassoon’s lack of respect towards the Great War and the soldiers fighting in it by insinuating that he regards poets as more of heroes than the actual battalions dispersed in the fields, as poets have the ability to expose the false pretenses under which soldiers fight. The mere fact that he refers to himself as a hero while being a poet and not while being an actual
soldier is evidence of his discontent with the outcome of war. Furthermore, he continues the violent acts throughout the poem by personifying the perils of war with his harsh, figurative diction. The disastrous effects of war are portrayed with phrases such as “wound for red wound, I burn to smite their wrongs” and “I am no more the knight of dreams and show” drawing a connection between war and poetry (14, 10). Sassoon mimics the ugliness of combat by brandishing his weapon with biting and caustic words such as “lust” and “senseless hatred” (11). This makes the reader fear the consequences of war. The only difference between war and poetry is the soldier’s weapon of choice is the gun and the poet’s weapon of choice is the pen.

Using the poet’s weapon, Sassoon calls on the power of allusions to intensify the meaning of his statements and to further connect the poet to the hero. For example, he uses the Holy Grail and Galahad to reinforce his impurity when he states, “You are aware that once I sought the Grail, / Riding in armour bright, serene and strong / But now I have said good-bye to Galahad, / And am no more the knight of dreams and show” (5, 6, 9, 10). These allusions to Arthurian legend force his scorn to echo repeatedly in the poem. He is telling the reader that he will no longer fight for fabricated freedom and government pomposity. His loss of nobility is exemplified by Galahad who, commonly referred to as the “knighthood embodiment of Jesus”, was a knight of King Arthur’s round table and known for his gallantry and purity (Currin). This statement proves that he, Sassoon or another soldier, has said good-bye to a noble spirit and to righteousness, further making the reader question the benefits of war.

Along with powerful allusions, Sassoon uses incisive diction to portray the brutal aftermath of combat, swaying pro-war minds due to its grim and immoral nature. The diction portrays life after war as a life filled with hate in lines 3, 4, and 11 stating “Of my old, silly sweetness I’ve repented — / My ecstasies changed to a ugly cry / For lust and senseless hatred make me glad.” This tells the story of a mostly optimistic person who, after witnessing the destruction man is capable of, turns into a very cynical and sour one. The mere fact that he uses lust, one of seven deadly sins, to describe the key to his happiness manifests the immorality of soldiers brainwashed by the monstrosities of war. His dissatisfaction is further epitomized when he uses a child’s voice to describe his battle cries saying “And it was told that through my infant wail / There rose immortal semblances of song” (7, 8). Had he been proud of his participation in the war, he would not describe it in such a demeaning and foolish fashion. This in itself is violent as it exposes the courage of soldiers as merely bravado.

Sassoon culminates his violent poetic act in the last stanza by answering the question, “Is poetry better than a gun?” Sassoon clearly demonstrates how much more powerful poetry is with the last three lines bellowing “And my killed friends are with me where I go. / Wound for red wound I burn to smite their wrongs; / And there is absolution in my songs” (12-14). These lines are a metaphor for pen and paper, the resulting poem being the final act of violence. The blood is the ink and the flesh is the paper. The songs of absolution are his poetry, which he writes in forgiveness of the wrongs committed by himself and his so-called friends. The fact that he forgives these freedom fighters instead of praising them, shows how sinful he feels the act of war is.

This “song of absolution,” with all of its personification and literary allusions, clearly demonstrates the terrible effects of war on the mind and soul. It shows that young, fruitful souls turn into dried, pitted ones void of any benevolent emotions. Sassoon uses all his angst and his “senseless hatred” to write vindictive poetry attacking War itself by assaulting the people in it and the people supporting it. He finds a way to divert the psychological distress caused by war to further his anti-war campaign by creating a weapon out of words. The poem proves to be mind-altering because it can be used as a form of political propaganda by attempting to divert feelings of patriotism to feelings of abhorrence towards the war. With the Iraqi War serving as evidence, Sassoon proves poetry IS better than a gun since it promotes social awareness and change without destroying society, in part or in whole.

Works Cited
Americans have sat in front of their television screens and ingested story after story and more often than not, are swayed into believing them to be completely factual. The newspapers we, as a nation, seldom read (only 34% according to a study done by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press) tell marginal truths and in an effort to expose controversial issues, even fail to disclose all pertinent information. Adding to the sources of information about this war are the soldiers in Iraq who reach out to family members and friends through their blogs and give us the individual’s perspective. These different view points though, however varied, only shed light on certain aspects of the truth. Truth becomes evasive. It hides itself amidst a torrent of information and only through keen deduction and observation can it be brought into the light.

The month of May 2004 was one of the bloodiest in the history of the Iraq conflict. Many lives were lost: soldiers, civilians and insurgents. The stories that surfaced during this time both in war blogs such as Fight to Survive and in The New York Times, although different in the relating of specific facts and individual opinions, often crossed paths when it came to pointing out the major issues of the war. Unfortunately, it is these differences in detail and perspective that shape public opinion on this war, how we view our “enemies” and how we decide to move forward in this campaign. With every day we spend, unnecessarily, implanted in this war, another American life is snuffed out, another innocent family loses a child to a misplaced missile and our economy, less importantly, will continue to suffer.

What is the price of a life? It was in May of 2004 that a soldier using the nickname “the heretic” wrote about a young soldier’s encounter with an Iraqi man whose daughter had been critically injured by a misguided 155mm mortar round, and how he found out what the price of a life was, according to one of his commanders. “The Heretic” describes the events of that day, relayed to him by Specialist Spoon, after seeing the man pull up to the gate of the army base:

He reaches into the vehicle and carefully lifts out a child. It was a girl maybe four years old. “The same age as my daughter” thought the Specialist. The girls black swirling hair was matted down with blood and her skin was peppered with sores and cuts. One side of her face was red and bruised with her eye swollen shut. The way she hung limply in her fathers arms made him believe she was already dead. The crew

**Out of Sight, Out of Mind**

*Christian Duran*

**Presenter:** Fall Conference and Building Bridges

**Faculty Mentor:** Kelly Douglass

Marita Sturken writes in her essay on “Camera Images and National Meaning”, that, “Camera images—photographic, cinematic, televisual, documentary, and docudrama—play a vital role in the development of national meaning by creating a sense of shared participation and experience in the nation” (Sturken 24). This is true. It is the power of these images that not only shape our national history but are, in this present day, with their absence, influencing popular opinion in an ongoing war. Considering the fact that images can shape our memory, even our perception of reality, is it possible that their omission from war coverage is utilized by the benefactors of this war to minimize scrutiny? I believe that the sources of information available to us (war blogs, newspaper coverage, television coverage), however different or tainted by biases they may be, all provide pieces of truth about the war in Iraq. No one source of information can be relied upon completely, lest one is swept away by one person or one group’s perspective. Consequently, the truth is scattered. We see glimpses of it everywhere and only through the thorough research of the multiple sources available can we hope to uncover it.

As the war in Iraq nears its sixth anniversary, public interest in the compounding loss of human life is dwindling as the focus of national concern has shifted to the overwhelming insecurity of our failing economy. Have we as a nation betrayed those words plastered on every bumper after 9/11, “We Will Never Forget”? What role has the media—with its inability or unwillingness to report the raw, bloodstained truth—played in our national ignorance? Today, thanks to the internet, we are able to hear and read the personal stories of soldiers as they cry out from their fighting positions. It is through unconventional methods such as youtube.com and various war blogs that we can experience in some diminutive way the day to day lives of our fellow citizens trying to survive a war, who, like the soldiers writing the Fight to Survive blog, they don’t even understand.

For the past six years, the majority of Americans have sat in front of their television...
on the tank gave each other pale looks as they hopped off the tank to meet the Iraqis. The tank commander radioed the first aid station and an interpreter came out of the guard shack. Spc. Spoon took the girl from her reluctant father while another soldier searched him.

“What happened?” asked Spoon.

What these soldiers found out was that the shells that had been fired an hour before had crashed through his daughter’s bedroom while she slept, and now he was there, at the gate of a military base, asking for help from the people who were responsible for his child’s condition. Unfortunately, the child did not survive. That father’s last memory would be of his daughter’s lifeless body carried away by American soldiers while he was forced to wait at the entrance to the base because of security reasons. What took place after was in a way more tragic than the loss of this young girl’s life. “The Heretic” goes on to describe the scene:

After the medic spoke with the commander, Spoon was ordered to carry the child back to the gate with the Colonel. As the Specialist handed the child back the father almost collapsed with sorrow. Spoon thought he was going to be sick, but what happened next left him paralyzed. Five dollars isn’t much in America, but it is a good chunk of change in Iraq. This is the price the officer offered as compensation for the accidental murder of his daughter. He seemed furious at first and then a heated haggle occurred. After the commander made the point that if it was a boy he would pay more, the man finally settled with twenty dollars. The father left with his dead daughter and his new twenty bucks. As Spoon stood there in frozen awe the officer gave him a long cold stare and walked off straightening his uniform. (Heretic 1)

It is this great detail that is missing in most news coverage of the war. To understand the types of injustices that go on in Iraq is crucial in actually understanding the war. Only through the individual’s perspective and by feeling, in essence, the confusion of the young soldier as he witnesses the death of this young child, the indifference of his commanding officer, the anger of the child’s father as he is offered five dollars for his unimaginable loss, can one marginally see through the eyes of those daily affected by the continuance of the war. Two days after this ordeal, Specialist Spoon’s unit was ambushed while on patrol. After the firefight that ensued, no U.S. casualties were reported, but two insurgents had been killed, among them, the father of the young girl. Spoon figured that the child’s father must have joined the guerrilla after the death of his daughter.

The incident with the young girl occurred in May of 2004. There were no stories reported in the New York Times detailing the events. However, around the same time, there was an article printed in the world section of the paper detailing several attacks on British and American soldiers by Iraqi Militiamen. The article by Edward Wong and Christine Hauser, both reporting from Iraq, describes Iraqi militiamen as “Going on the Offensive in Two Southern Cities” (Wong & Hauser 1). Their story is very detailed, full of great descriptive facts that explain the violence that had taken place. One paragraph in particular stands out because it also begs the question, “What is the price of a human life in Iraq?”, as they wrote:

The uprising in Basra took place a day after an aide to Mr. Sadr, Abdulsattar al-Bahadli, gave a sermon at Friday Prayers there denouncing the Americans for torturing detainees in Abu Ghraib prison. Mr. Bahadli invoked jihad, or holy war, and offered financial rewards to anyone willing to attack the British: the equivalent of $350 for capturing a British soldier or $150 for killing one. He said that captured female British soldiers could be kept as slaves. (Wong/Hauser 2)

The anger and rage that these facts must invoke are understandable. We tend to want to believe that a human life is invaluable, and when we see that for merely five dollars or even for $150 dollars the life of another human being is bought, jars our conscience. It is no wonder the enemy is viewed with such disdain. I believe that inspiring anger, is what these stories are meant to do, as well as to make us question the war and its participants, yet we need to lend our ear to all sides, to see all perspectives. The credibility of these journalists is not in question, yet I wonder what effect it would have had on public opinion to report on the death of that four year old girl and how a U.S. Army Colonel offered only $5 dollars for her life. What would a mother or father feel if they read about a baby girl’s death? Surely, questions would arise as to what is truly
going on in Iraq and as “The Heretic” asks, “Who are we fighting?” (Heretic 2).

There are a diversity of opinions and ideas that permeate both the internet and the newspapers. There are both pro and anti-war sentiments displayed through both mediums. But as William Safire argues in the opinion section of The New York Times on May 31, 2004, there may be a media unwillingness to report the good news, “In Gloomy Gus newsrooms, good news is no news” (Safire 1).

We need to understand that the war is not simply black or white. Instead, there are all kinds of shades intermingled and peppered throughout the landscape of coverage. There is a constant push and pull from different directions that bring us closer to a truth. Safire, goes on to explain that not everything is bad news and we have, as he puts it, “cause for cautious optimism”. This highlights the need for caution, and it is with caution that we need to approach every story. There was also a story published on May 30, 2004, in which Daniel Okrent writes about the shameful tactics employed by the very paper he is writing for (The New York Times) in over hyping stories. He writes:

[...]editors placed the headline “U.S. Experts Find Radioactive Material in Iraq” over a Miller piece even though she wrote, right at the top, that the discovery was very unlikely to be related to weaponry. . .War requires an extra standard of care, not a lesser one. But in The Times’s W.M.D. coverage, readers encountered some rather breathless stories built on unsubstantiated “revelations” that, in many instances, were the anonymity-cloaked assertions of people with vested interests. Times reporters broke many stories before and after the war—but when the stories themselves later broke apart, in many instances Times readers never found out. Some remain scoops to this day. This is not a compliment. (Okrent 2)

With such an important task as explaining, covering and exposing the many facets of the war, there is a responsibility by those who pass information down, to ensure that whatever discrepancies make their way down to the public are quickly remedied. Here, The New York Times needs to understand this responsibility and the consequences of not taking it. Yet it is our responsibility as citizens and because this war is so multidimensional, that we have to dig deep and piece facts together to truly see what is happening. Each story gives a glimpse of the truth, whether its one individual’s perspective or another person’s informed idea based on a myriad of facts.

The truth remains scattered. Thus, in the interest of the men and women who are suffering loss, both foreign and American, rich and poor, pro or anti-war, we must not entrust the navigation of our minds to any one source of information. We must understand the tools that are used to sway our thinking and strive to form educated decisions based on as many facts as we can find. This, of course, requires an interest in knowing the truth and a desire to uncover it. We must, as a nation in turmoil, make use of the gift we have to analyze and question what we see, what we hear and what we read.

Si Se Ah Podido

Christian Durán
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Kelly Douglass, English 1A Honors

We have always been complimented for being a hard working people. The idea that we are proud and family oriented is not new either. We are fruitful. We are a religious bunch that holds on tightly to its colorful traditions—a simple people with humble beginnings. The cholo, the teenage mother, the food stamp recipient, the illegal immigrant, the janitor, the crooked mechanic, the beaner, the wetback, the alcoholic, the womanizer, the macho—all these labels, both good and bad, presume to describe how we fit into this society and in some cases they may be accurate, but the fact is that we, the Mexican American population, are as diverse, as imperfect, with as many vices and shortcomings as any other group of people living in America today. That being said, we are also capable of great achievements, physically, professionally and academically. Yet, if one is honest, academic achievement is not considered a popular characteristic of the Mexican-American. Dropout rates in America, as of 2005, indicate that Hispanics continue to have the highest dropout rate (22.5 %) compared to Blacks and Whites (U.S. Census Bureau 1). Perhaps these statistics give credibility to the perception that as a minority, we do not value education. When a
Mexican American does achieve notoriety for being a great scholar, society sets them apart and identifies them as “extraordinary” for having done so. Why is it so extra-ordinary?

I believe that because of our tragic history, the Mexican American does achieve notoriety for being a great scholar, society sets them apart and identifies them as “extraordinary” for having done so. Why is it so extra-ordinary?

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attending Morehouse College from 1944 to 1948, Pennsylvania’s Crozer Seminary from 1948 to 1951 and Boston University from 1951 to 1953, where he earned his Ph.D. (Howard-Pitney 4). Although Martin Luther King did not have a tragic upbringing, he saw, as an African American, the need to not simply enjoy his success, but to go back into the lower class communities and inspire them. Thus the benefits of his higher education were made available, sacrificially, to the people he strove to help.

Similarly, there must be, within the lower class Mexican American community, a push by our government to extend educational opportunities, such as grants, scholarships and training programs to members of the same community that have a desire to pursue counseling and teaching jobs. There must also be increased incentives to Mexican American teachers and counselors in order to fill more administrative positions within these communities. A study done by Mira Mayer on the dropout rates of Mexican origin students, noted that students, “felt the lack of Mexican origin personnel within the school system contributed to the negative perceptions of Mexican origin students in the community as well as the schools” (Mayer 16). How can Mexican American students truly believe in the possibility of success unless they see examples of that success from within their own communities? Until a student can see, with his or her own eyes, the educated Mexican American, teaching History, English, Science and Mathematics—someone who has the ability to also counsel them, to help them pursue their utmost potential, while being able to understand their family structure, their language, their traditions and their fears—how will they believe success is possible? The student must feel as though they are part of society and not merely an inconvenience to society in order to become an active participant.

The Mexican American student’s academic success is not only important to the individual, but to society as a whole. As Mira Myer writes, in her study on the dropout rates of Mexican Origin students:

Given the fact that the Hispanic population represents one of the fastest growing minority populations in the United States and represents the lower level of educational achievement by any other minority group, it is crucial that policy makers, educators, and researchers alike will pay attention to the dropout rate of the Hispanic population. (Myer 16)

As a society, we must recognize that the problem of that lack of educational success in the Mexican American community is not a minority’s problem, but it is detrimental to the health of our entire society. We must take the steps to ensure that this important part of our population is integrated into the fabric of our culture.

What is it that separates the Harvard student from the gang banger but the circumstances that have paved their way? Could not either one of these people be interchangeable, provided they receive the appropriate nurture and conditioning? The difference is not a racial superiority, as most of us in this age will agree, but the ability to draw out the inherent abilities everyone possesses. This drawing out of human potential begins, of course, at home, but the realities of disparity within the lower class Mexican American community have created an atmosphere where a hope of a better education is bleak and often times ridiculed, even by a student’s own family. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes in her book Borderlands, about the new mestiza consciousness and the cycle of violence and despair that plague the Mexican American community:

> In the Gringo world, the Chicano suffers from excessive humility and self-effacement, shame of self and self-deprecation. . . .The loss of a sense of dignity and respect in the macho breeds a false machismo which leads him to put down women and even to brutalize them. (Anzaldúa 105)

Although Anzaldúa is speaking mainly about the negative effects this “self-effacement” has on the mestiza brutalized by the Chicano, the effects this sociological dynamic has on the entire family creates endless problems with the successive generation’s identity and self worth.

In his book on the lives of the children of migrant farm workers, Robert Coles, describes the way the habits of migrant children are “vastly responsive to the habits of their parents” (Coles 95). If initially, parents of Mexican American children feel they have no claim to the American promise of prosperity, because of whatever reasons; their lack of hope is then transmitted to their children. In the Mexican American community, the ghosts of our past continue to plague the future we are entitled to. It is a future we often and continually reject. This self pity is a result of, as Coles writes, “living half-right”
The hopes and dreams of the lower class in America often reflect this trend of hopelessness. Even when there is an interest in pursuing some form of higher education, the importance of knowledge is lost. As Lucius F. Cervantes references in his book entitled, The Dropout: Causes and Cures: School and possibility of college were viewed by all the (lower class) boys solely as steps to jobs. . . . none craved intellectual understanding for its own sake. . . . Often a distinction was drawn between the diploma and the education it symbolized; the boys wanted the parchment, not the learning. (Cervantes 107)

It is the pursuit knowledge for knowledge sake that is important. The idea that a diploma is only a piece of paper needed to get a job, limits the importance of a higher education. A student will only do sufficiently enough to accomplish his or her goal, which usually, based on the expectations of the lower class Mexican American family, will not push the limits of a students potential.

Ramos and Sanchez have outlined suggestions for helping in the acculturation of families within the Mexican American community. Both see the necessity of hiring bilingual advisors and community liaisons who can communicate with the members of the community and who are familiar with their traditional values. These staff members are needed to establish relationships with the parents, of whom very few went to college. The findings of their study also suggest that counselors familiar with Mexican American students should educate teachers about the criticalness of involving the student’s parents in their child’s education. Ramos and Sanchez recognize that, “The role of the teacher in the Mexican culture is one that is respected and can be used effectively by counselors to promote parental involvement” (Ramos & Sanchez 6). The key is to involve the student and his family, to make them feel as though they are an active participant in their own destiny.

The issues plaguing the Mexican American communities in America are complex and will require, perhaps, successive generations, working together, to advance the progress of our participation through education. Even if the challenges seem daunting, there is hope in acknowledging the problems. This acknowledgement starts us on the path of recovery. When, as a minority, we take responsibility for our own future and take those first trudging steps toward change, when the rest of society wraps its arms around the wounded appendage that is the Mexican American people and helps to heal the wounds of our tragic past, then, and only then, the problem will not be a Mexican American problem, but an American problem.

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United States. Census Bureau. School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 2005: Detailed Tables: Table 1 <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/tables/1_Table_1.htm>
Christian Religion: Construct

Jorge Flores
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Nick Sinigaglia, Philosophy
10H

A great dilemma arose for Christian religion during the twentieth century due to the wide acceptance of the revolutionary theory of evolution as the means by which the human species originated and progressed. Contrary to this, for many centuries, the story of Adam and Eve was the most successful tactic for Christian religion to deal with the question of human origin and suffering. But most theologians now see this as a great myth. Nonetheless, a culture based on this belief was harnessed and utilized in dealing with the troublesome and insurmountable curse of not knowing who we are or what our true purpose is in life. Furthermore, the construct of the fall of man from grace due to Adam and Eve’s defiance of God is no longer acceptable for answering questions about the nonstop and common suffering experienced by all human beings. Growing up, I have always doubted Adam and Eve’s story as a reasonable explanation for the observations I had in life as well as what I learned in school. Understanding this dilemma has been a rigorous process for me, but I can conclude that the doctrines of Adam and Eve and original sin, in terms of what we now know, cannot be taken literally as the one and only solution to human origin and an account of our suffering. The theory of evolution tells us that the views of St. Augustine about the fall of man and introduction of evil to this world are not human caused.

The solution to human origin has never been quite clear for me. Although my understanding has always been hazy, my life has been one of self-understanding and comfort. As far as I can remember, before I entered grade school, I never believed any of the messages relayed by religion. Maybe my inability to believe had to do with personally witnessing brutal beatings, cruel punishment, and even pointless death at a very young age. Nonetheless, growing up I was briefly setup to undergo a religious education; I don’t even know what it was called. (Sunday school). The stories that I was told at Sunday school drove me even further from believing the message of the church. Inequalities in our world such as seeing hunger and being hungry myself alongside the suffering my family encountered and is still experiencing filled my time with trying to reason how or why these stories didn’t make sense. Meanwhile, all of my peers cared about was watching cartoons, playing outside, and being carefree. Once I entered public education I was captivated with the solutions, which were presented by science, and I have grown to accept this as a more literal truth in life.

Contrary to my beliefs, millions of literalist Christians believe that the earth is no more than ten thousand years old. Literalist Christians believe that the earth was created by God in seven days; hence we have seven day weeks. They believe that the world, in its infancy, was a perfect place where even lions lived peacefully and ate lettuce instead of meat. During this time, it is also believed that flowers did not contain thorns and there was no pain, suffering, or even death for the paradise’s inhabitants. God gave Adam and Eve this infinitely perfect world. In the midst of this perfect world, God placed many trees in a garden. Adam and Eve were told by God that they may eat the fruit from any tree except from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God gave him this warning: “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). As most of us may know, they ate the forbidden fruit by their own free will given to them by God. The doctrine of original sin is the concept of the entrance of sin into the world due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve by eating this fruit. I had heard before that Adam did not swallow the fruit (apple) which stayed stuck in his throat (a reason why all men now have a lump in their throat known as Adam’s apple). Although they did not immediately die physically, Adam and Eve were punished by becoming separated from God spiritually. They eventually died only after they had been punished through painful labor and childbirth. In addition, the natural world fell alongside humans. Introduced to the natural world were earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes and the like. Not even animals were spared from pain as a consequence of the fall of man. Animals became either hunters or hunted by other animals and the world became a place filled with starvation. Because of their sin, all who were born thereafter have to suffer by being born with sin. Being born with sin means to be born separate and with no ties to God. This belief has, supposedly, had a trickle effect that has lead to the present-day.

Original Sin is at the heart of religion and has been the essential component that drives the
story or history of mankind. If evolution is right then there is no need for Christianity, or any other religion that accepts this doctrine. Because literalist Christianity is completely committed to the idea that there was once a perfect world that existed, as it is told in Genesis, Christianity is obliged to resist against the theory of evolution. Regardless of the claims that are portrayed by modern day science, the main message of Christianity is assembled around the story of Adam and Eve, thus all other subsequent events need for this story to be true in order for them to also be validated. One example of a biblical event that needs to be validated by original sin, and in my opinion the most important, is the purpose of the life of Jesus Christ. If original sin is suspended or disproved by sciences’ theory of evolution then the whole story of Jesus is not compatible with what any religious person has ever believed. This as we can evaluate can do great harm to the progress that churches and its followers have made over centuries. Without Adam and Eve’s original sin no one would ever need to be redeemed and so therefore there would be absolutely no purpose to Christianity. Genesis is an allegorical way of us realizing that there is something wrong with us humans and thus we need to be saved. The process of being saved according to Christianity is to accept Jesus Christ as our savior. In a conversation I had with Professor Gregory Elder, he said “creationism mixing with evolution puts a bloody knife in God’s hand” If god is responsible to for evolution then he created a messed up world and so we need a allegorical story such as genesis to place the fault on humans because this notion of pain and suffering can surely not be attributed to an all good God.

To this present day Natural phenomena continues to occur. Although it is far from human suffering, animal suffering has been appalling. Animals outnumber humans and we do not seem to feel or understand the pain they are daily inflicted on. C.S. Lewis argues that as far as we know beasts are incapable of either sin or virtue: therefore they can neither deserve pain nor be improved by it. But he speculates that there suffering is one we cannot understand “for, as we have seen, no more pain is felt when a million suffer than when one suffers” (Lewis 132). The reason we cannot understand animal suffering is due to the fact that this is out of range of our knowledge. Lewis is saying that we don’t know why they were made nor what they are, and so therefore everything we say about them is speculative. But he feels that they don’t have a soul and a conscious as sharp as humans and so “the fact that animals react to pain as much as we do is, of course, no proof that they are conscious; for we may also so react under chloroform, and even answer questions while asleep” (136). Lewis concludes to this by saying that a great deal of what seems to us to be animal suffering may not be animal suffering because it may have been us who invented the ‘sufferers’. Secondly, he sais that we have good reason to believe that animals existed far before men and that carnivorousness is older than humanity. So he believes that maybe animals were corrupted by some cruel force long before humans entered the scene. He supports this because “the intrinsic evil of the animal world lies in the fact that animals, or some animals, live by destroying each other” (138). Furthermore he sais “Let us not forget that Our Lord, on one occasion, attributes human disease not to God’s wrath, not to nature, but quite explicitly to Satan” (139, Luke 13:16). Nonetheless, he goes on to say that if God did not cause this he certainly permitted it. But he believe that animals are in their place. “Man was appointed by God to have dominion over the beasts, and everything man does to an animal is either a lawful exercise, or a sacrilegious abuse”.

Science doesn’t know exactly how life got started anymore than do bible scholars or religious people and its purpose is to find out the truth about our existence. Nonetheless, decades of laboratory research has demonstrated that living matter is extremely complex, down to single cell forms, and has progressed over millions of years. Evolution by natural selection and its facts has become a great threat to religion. The findings recently encountered in the past century have led to our entire society to become divided over the theory of evolution and the feud has now spilled into schools, religious teachings, and politics. As a result, faith in God has been under attack in our country by some scientist. The scientists, who attack religion on their fundamental beliefs about the nature of how humans came to exist, come from the fields such as astronomy, biology, and physics. Biology education teaches that evolution is a never ending process that has affected life over a course of thousands of millions of years. It has been widely accepted that life on this planet has and still is developing. But the process was unknown, that is, until the best evidence for this was discovered through Charles Darwin’s’ mechanism known as natural selection. Natural selection states that depending on organisms’
natural surroundings, the best suited of the time are able to reproduce and pass along their traits to newer generations. Over time, this process has led to distinct life and even to the creation of certain species including mankind.

Before there was even such a thing as land, astronomers believe that the universe (that is time matter and space) was created more than 13 billion years ago. This theory, known as the big bang, which is ironic because it started at a molecular level and then began to expand and so therefore it was not big and there was no bang because there were no airwaves to carry any sound, does not tell us what caused it. But from this theory astronomers have been able to recreate the expansion of the universe and have concluded that the earth alongside our solar system was created by the death of another star that preexisted within our vicinity in the universe. The gases and elements from this star, collapsed by gravity, gradually formed our star the sun as well as the planets. Scientist regard the death of this other star as responsible for creating all of the elements, at least, above hydrogen and helium. These elements have been characterized and appropriated into what is the periodic table of elements. Scientists have been able to determine that all known materials to human can only be produced in the intense heat that can only be recreated by stars. Science has figured out, using radioactive isotopes, that the age of asteroids and meteors in our solar system is more than eight billion years.

We know that our ancestors were never just two individuals. Modern genetic analysis or DNA validates that life has evolved over millions of years and will continue to do so. It was in a biology class that I recall being taught that life originated in ancient waters. That it was thanks to algae, a primary bacterium, which formed under water and over time helped create the oxygen levels in our atmosphere that soon allowed for more complex life to form on land. Amphibians were the gateway for more species that eventually walked on four limbs. In a recent documentary known as “Intelligent Design on Trial” scientist portrayed a tree of life that shows the history of evolution. According to the tree of life that is portrayed by scientist, evolution shows that humans are among the most recent inhabitants of earth. In fact that tree also suggests that whales and other large sea creatures can be explained by four limbed animals who at one point in time returned to the water rather than being on land.

The fact of the matter is that we know that there has been life on land far before there ever were any two human beings. Evolution as we know it could not have occurred within the time constraints of ten thousand years. It has also been through the discoveries of ancient fossils such as those of dinosaurs that have helped disprove the meaning of original sin. Finding fossils that are well over millions of years old means that this world had suffering and death long before there could have been two human beings that initiated the process of death. The fossils that have been found are disproving not only the age of the planet we live in but also the theory that evil arose out of the sin of two people whom just recently entered the picture. I certainly believe that if god is all powerful and all knowing he could have made this world a little bit better. Why couldn’t he just snap his fingers and create a perfect world. Evolution suggests that the process taken to make it to human beings is long. Someone might respond that God does not have a problem with wastefulness. Why is this world filled with so much wastefulness? One way thinking about this is that the human male can make billions of sperm cells in a matter of hours, yet he only needs one to reproduce. Is it evil that those other would be human sperm cells are wasted. And what is the point of having billions of stars and galaxies in the universe if only one planet is meant to have life, as far as we know.

So what is to be of this feud between science and religion? I honestly don’t know but what I do know is that I will be siding with science. I also know that we all are born, we live and then we die. I do understand that my chosen path is one of darkness. What I mean by darkness is that I believe there is not going to be an afterlife for me, just death. Some people cannot handle this. That is why I believe that historically many persons have turned to the ideals presented by religion. Religion offers an alternative to the harsh reality of death and there being nothing else (no eternal afterlife) once we die. But in the process of becoming educated and knowing more and more of an uncertain future I thrive in knowing that I am living my life to the fullest. I do not go about my daily activities with the intentions of hurting anyone or of doing bad. I also do not purposefully disrespect religion and its followers. Although, according to my understanding of religion, I have committed the greatest of all sins, far more extreme than actually killing another human being and that is my non belief. I understand that religion does
serve a good purpose for humans. I am almost certain that religion has historically taken its followers to longer and happier lives than those of non-believers. But I think that religion has outlived its usefulness. As I continue on the path that I am on I hope to serve as a true beacon of hope and demonstrate that I am also able to live a happy fulfilling life in which I can be just as if not a more productive member of society while supporting science.

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**On “The Origin of the Work of Art”**

**The Truth of Art – The Art of Truth**

*Sierra Lapoint*

Presenter: Fall Conference and Building Bridges
Faculty Mentor: Rhonda Taube, Art 6H

When surveying a relatively recent history of philosophy, it is hard to deny the importance and influence of Martin Heidegger, a German philosopher whose work has contributed to many fields of study. He is primarily recognized for his work in ontology, the field of metaphysics that concerns the nature of existence and its relation to being. Specifically, along with his teacher Edmund Husserl, Heidegger is credited with developing the field of phenomenology, a belief system that asserts that existence can only be experienced through being. Although his writing is generally accepted as very influential, it is also notoriously difficult to read, and thus often overlooked or underappreciated by many.

Anyone who has encountered Heidegger’s works has undoubtedly noticed the complicated vocabulary and syntax that are so characteristic of his writing. Often, this complex style serves to intensify the confusion in the minds of students who are already attempting to come to terms with the difficult concepts themselves. I have written my paper with these things in mind, hoping that a thorough synthesis of Heidegger’s essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* will help to clarify the truths within. This essay involves Heidegger’s theory of art, and the way in which the being of artworks parallels human existence. By breaking down the formal grammar and terminology, I believe Heidegger’s theory becomes easier to understand and appreciate.

Before our analysis of this essay begins, it may be helpful to look at the specific artwork Heidegger uses as an example of his theory, namely *Peasant Shoes* by Vincent Van Gogh. Pictured here, as Heidegger describes, seems to be “a pair of lowly peasant shoes and nothing more.” However, it is not enough to be satisfied with a physical understanding of what the shoes are and of what they are made; rather, we must infuse the painting with life by asking questions of purpose: Why were these shoes made from leather? Why do they look so tired and worn? What do these things tell us about their functional use and reliability? These questions, asked by Heidegger, introduce a realm of understanding in which the nature of the shoes is revealed. In other words, we become aware of the world in which these shoes reside. Listen now to the way in which Heidegger perceives the work, and thus the embedded truth:

“From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth. In the stiffly rugged heaviness of the shoes there is the accumulated tenacity of her slow trudge through the far-spread furrows of the field. On the leather lies the dampness and richness of the soil. This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the uncertainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want, and shivering at the surrounding menace of death. This equipment belongs to the earth and exists in the world of the peasant woman. Van Gogh’s painting is the disclosure of what the equipment, the pair of peasant shoes, is in truth.”

In this passage, Heidegger illustrates the way in which the true nature of the peasant shoes has revealed itself in the artwork. Having this description in mind will help us in our attempt to truly understand Heidegger and his existential aesthetic theory.

In his essay, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger attempts to identify “the source of the nature” of a work of art. Through his descriptions and language, he asserts that art exists exclusively within the realm of thought, as it is only through the rational understanding of the message portrayed within the work that one can experience the work as art. Because this message, or truth, contained within the work is the defining characteristic of a true work of art, what Heidegger calls the “thingly element of the work,” or the medium, is merely circumstantial.
This material aspect of the work is therefore only the mechanism through which the art may interact with the human senses, providing the conduit that allows the encapsulated truth to be brought to the eyes and minds of the observers.

Heidegger first establishes that when some thing, entity or being, is depicted fully and truthfully in a work, its nature, that is, its physical attributes (like the worn out leather and dirty laces), its characteristics of usefulness and reliability (as seen in the apparent need for durable, dependable shoes), and all of the automatic mental associations that accompany its usage (such as the image of the hard-working peasant woman who wears them), are immediately revealed to the viewer. Only when the nature of this thing is exposed, and as such, its fundamental truth acknowledged, can we say what Heidegger says: that “in the art work, the truth of what is has set itself to work.” It is therefore this feature of truth that qualifies this work as a work of true art.

Because it is the existence of truth within a work that establishes the work as art, the presence of aesthetic beauty is arbitrary, and sometimes even detrimental to the actual disclosure of the truth. Heidegger claims that “art itself is not beautiful, but [can be] called so [when] it produces the beautiful.” Only if the thing-being and its fundamental truth are pleasing to the senses, should we call the thing, namely the shoes in this case, or the work of art in which they reside, beautiful.

Furthermore, what we deem beautiful is entirely subjective, as it depends upon the mental associations that the human mind automatically attaches to the images of certain things or beings, that is those with which we have had personal experience. If, when confronted with an object as projected in a work of art, we are able to define what and how this object is, and if by doing so, we are able to associate personally with and understand the object insofar as its daily functioning and reliability, then we can say that not only is the truth of the thing present in the work, but that the observer’s personal understanding of the thing gained from the analysis of that truth, makes the work in which the thing and truth reside a work of true art. Thus, what defines art, namely truth, originates from the logical understanding of what is present in the work, since, as Heidegger says, “truth…belongs to logic.”

Essentially, the true experience of a work of art comes from reasoning and understanding, not from beauty. It is only through reasoning and the logical understanding of the truth present in the work that one can come to appreciate the work as art, since truth defines art. In fact, whether the work is beautiful or not is of no consequence to the fundamental experience of artwork itself. While one intakes the work through sensory input, it is the synthesis and rationalization of this input that allow us to comprehend the work of art and the embedded truth.

This process of physically perceiving the artwork so as to understand the underlying truth “opens up in its own way” what Heidegger calls “the Being of Beings.” While our physical body and sensory organs are what initially intake the object in question, for example, we see the painting, we hear the music, etc., it is our mind that is able to experience and understand the truth contained within that work, and therefore able to experience the art itself. Just as in “the Being of beings,” there is the existence, the physical, which precedes, and then there is the essence, that which underlies the physical and gives it meaning. For human beings, there is a consciousness that overtakes the body and uses it as an instrument or mechanism for gathering experiences. First we physically experience a sensation, then we interpret that sensation by mentally associating it with the set of objects and events we know to be involved in its creation, and finally we ascribe meaning. It is the same where art is concerned: we observe the work and may or may not be moved by its physical beauty and aesthetic charm; either way, this is still only a judgment of taste. Once we have beheld the image, our mind attempts to make sense of it by associating anything we have experienced that may be related, and in so doing, we derive the truth, the meaning of the artwork.

Ultimately, a work of art is any work that reveals some fundamental truth. The determination of that truth, as well as what constitutes a work of art, is reliant on two things: first, the rational understanding of the thing-being and its associated truth found within the work, and second, the mind’s ability to interpret the experience of the work and ascribe both work and experience appropriate meaning. As we have seen, neither of these criteria contains a requirement for how and what beauty must be present in a work of art. Instead, the definition of a work of art, and therefore of art itself, is left to the minds, and not the eyes, of the observers.
More Than The Absent Soldier: 
Women’s Roles in Vietnam War in Conjunction with Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried

Andrea Lopez
Essay contest submission
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Thatcher Carter, Eng 1BH

The history of women in war has been substantially forgotten in favor of documenting men’s military accomplishments. In fact, women have always played astounding roles in past wars and if not rightfully addressed, their heroic deeds will no doubt receive less amounts of recognition and praise. Above all others, the Vietnam War challenged the poor treatment of these women because many were never recognized for their war efforts outside of the home. The female characters in Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried not only overcome their false prejudgments, but also challenge the idea that the thoughts and false fantasies about women help men face the atrocities and carry the emotional and physical burdens of war. A reversal of the expectations of men not only infers the gradual empowerment of women, but also gives women a greater hope for the future.

Because many women were marginalized by the Vietnam War, O’Brien uses the burdens of war and a man’s false and desperate search for a distracting outside world to illuminate the overlooked experiences of females in war, challenge the common perceptions of the physical and psychological roles of women in society, and evince the empowerment of women.

Despite the little recognition they received, these heroic female figures were definitely not scarce in number. An estimated 265,000 women, both American and Vietnamese, served during the Vietnam War (Steinman 11). Although most of these women did not serve behind enemy lines, many served where they felt they were needed. The majority of these women were nineteen years old and all served on a volunteer basis. Though the greater part were nurses, others served as journalists, flight attendants, Red Cross Volunteers, recreational therapists, entertainers, missionaries, and civilians attached to American government agencies (12). A significant part of the American Red Cross Association was named “Donut Dollies” (Ebbert 12). These women were seen as women of comfort and support because their primary task was to provide a touch of home in the combat zone. They often entertained the men with board games, served them “Kool-aid”, and enlivened the atmosphere with music. Susan Bradshaw, a former Donut Dolly explains, “We gave them [the men in Vietnam] a reason to get up in the morning” (Steinman 198). Although the characteristics of an ideal “Donut Dolly” seem to support their commonly portrayed roles as “mothers”, many actually fired weapons, laid traps, or served as village patrol (Ebbert 20). Their maternal roles are what often mislead the men into believing that they are to be used as tools of support, rather than the hardworking allies they actually were.

Because of their misleading roles as nurses and “Donut Dollies”, women suffered the many consequences of their double roles as the invisible soldiers during and after the Vietnam War. Despite their large number in the nursing field, women did not experience any coverage by the press or the media (Campbell 2). In addition, many women reported heavy levels of sexual harassment because the men in Vietnam acted uncivilized and often treated women without respect. They also received as little as six months of medical training before they were sent to war and were often asked to perform immediate surgery with little experience or background training (Campbell 3). Furthermore, the women who served in this nation’s longest and most bitter war failed to be recognized after the war as well. One veteran states, “Being a vet is like losing a baby. No one says anything to you, and you don’t say anything to them” (Devanter 123). The women who too, faced death and fear, failed to be nationally recognized in the Vietnam War Memorial in 1987 (Women of the War). Also, many female veterans were often denied membership to many veteran’s organizations and were ineligible to attend counseling at Vietnam Veteran Centers (Ebbert 13). All of these heart-breaking circumstances during and after the war caused these female veterans to feel as though their accomplishments simply were not enough.

Due to their pride and in order to gain credit for the hardships that were withstood, men often perceived women as second class soldiers, aliens to combat, and people who are against all of the war violence and bloodshed. O’Brien explains, “Usually it’s an older woman of kindly temperament and humane politics. She’ll explain that as a rule she hates war stories; she can’t understand why people want to wallow in all the blood and gore” (O’Brien 84). The
common perception of a typical woman is portrayed through O’Brien’s statement that most women are typically against war. Many men in America also argued that women did not belong in combat because of physical weaknesses, fears of women being wounded, and the threat to male war values and customs. Some also believed that the military would make women less feminine, encourage lesbianism, or make war more acceptable (Campbell 4). Another man-made argument against women is a woman’s inability to handle the truth of the war. Because many women fought “behind the scenes”, men believed women would never be able to understand the difficulties of war and the physical and emotional burdens the men were forced to carry. In O’Brien’s fictional novel, Rat O’Brien states, “They [the stockings] kept him safe. They gave access to a spiritual world, where things were soft and intimate” (118). His girlfriend’s pantyhose serve as a symbol of luck and comfort to distract him from the harsh realities of being a machine gunner. In fact, this mindset that the men in war have learned to embrace leads them to believe that women have no thoughts, needs, or fears. This is shown when Mark Fossie brings his girlfriend, Mary Anne Belle, into the Vietnam territory so that she may raise the morale of the soldiers. In order to support this claim, Rat explains, “There was a novelty to it; She was good for morale” (95). Fossie’s decision to bring his girlfriend into the war reflects his own views of women. He goes through the trouble of bringing his girlfriend because he believes she will not be affected by the war and she will not understand it. Rat explains, “There is no problem for bringing a girl [to the war]. After all, it’s just a war” (92). When women arrive in Vietnam, they are expected to retain their feminine qualities and remain unaffected by the atrocities that surround them.

Despite the immense amount of physical and emotional burdens the men in war were forced to carry, those who hung onto the fantasy-like perceptions of women never succeeded in their quest for comfort and love through women. Though Lieutenant Jimmy Cross carried his heart in a girl named Martha, the love he had for her was never returned. In fact, the unacknowledged love he carried for Martha and the fantasy-like world he lived in resulted in carelessness. O’Brien declares, “He had loved Martha more than his men, and as a consequence Lavender was dead” (O’Brien 16). The fantasy world he lived in served no purpose and ultimately proved that women should not be restricted to supporting the men in war. After this realization, O’Brien explains that Cross spoke to himself and said, “No more fantasies” (24). In addition, although Henry Dobbins expected his girlfriend’s pantyhose to keep him safe, his girlfriend unexpectedly broke up with him during the war. The pantyhose proved to be a false and imaginary symbol of his girlfriend’s comfort because O’Brien explains, “They all carried ghosts” (10). Another reversal of expectations occurs when Mary Anne Bell adjusts to the surroundings of Vietnam. Despite the fact that her boyfriend, Mark Fossie, expects her to retain all of her feminine qualities and comfort him in war, she unexpectedly becomes hungry for adventure and does not
comfort any of the men in war at all. O’Brien explains, “[She was] a different person, it seemed, and he wasn’t sure what to make of it” (98). She eventually becomes one with Vietnam, leaving her boyfriend disappointed and ultimately confused. “[She was wearing] her necklace of human tongues. She had crossed to the other side”, Kiley states (116). The tongues around her neck symbolize Vietnam’s consummation of the young girl, hence evincing the woman’s ability to understand the horrors of the war. As soon as the men in Vietnam could see the difference in Mary Anne, Rat Kiley admits, “You got these blinders on about women. How gentle and peaceful they all are. All that crap about how if we had a girl for president there wouldn’t be no more wars. Pure garbage” (107). This statement exemplifies O’Brien’s argument about women and follows the idea that women are not all that men expect them to be. They too, are capable of being sucked into the horrors of Vietnam. Because the women in O’Brien’s novel don’t always fulfill the fantasy role that men carve out for them, they are ultimately viewed very differently.

O’Brien’s feminist views and the reversal of man’s expectations in the previous paragraph reveal the overlooked experiences and the emotional battles endured by those women who served in the war. Similar to the male characters in The Things They Carried, the women who served in the war became so emotionally and spiritually attached, they could not return to previous ways of life. Mary Anne Bell could not return to the real world because she was consumed by the dangerous and exciting world of Vietnam. When Mary Anne first arrives in Vietnam, O’Brien states, “The hostile environment did not seem to register” (O’Brien 96). However, when the time came to return home, she escaped to the ends of the jungle in hopes of remaining in Vietnam. She becomes deeply attached to her new environment and admits to her boyfriend, “I feel close to myself. When I’m out there at night, I feel close to my own body, I can feel my blood moving, my skin and my fingernails, everything” (111). Likewise, Bobbie Knap, a former nurse in the Vietnam War quotes, “The war was a traumatic experience that still manifests itself through nightmares” (Women of the War). As a nurse in the Vietnam War, women were forced to shut down emotionally and quickly lose their innocence and youth. Some served in combat when necessary, and would be forced to quickly amputate body parts when instructed to do so.

Cunningham admits, “We faced death. We faced fear. But we did what we had to do’ (Women of the War). Although there were only eight casualties of women in the War, many had no choice but to return home with the disturbing mental disorders caused by the war. Women who served in Vietnam exhibited the same symptoms of Post –Traumatic Stress Disorder that men had experienced. Some of which, were feelings of isolation, intense anger, depression, and the inability to keep jobs (Women of the War). The tragic experiences of these women prove that war is perfectly capable of consuming all, both male and female.

O’Brien’s Mary Anne and the new and adopted improvements after the Vietnam War proclaim the empowerment of women and deliver a greater hope for women in the future. Because Mark Fossie does not lose himself to the war and his girlfriend does, the woman’s status is strengthened and enlivened by the power of war. O’Brien declares, “There was a new confidence in her voice, a new authority in the way she carried herself” (O’Brien 98). Mary Anne therefore does not view Vietnam as a burden but instead as a passage to her own discovery.

Despite the traumatic stress of war, she is able to seek self identity through the war and lose the common misconception of a “motherly” and “comforting” figure. She explains, “I’m on fire almost- I’m burning away into nothing-but it doesn’t matter because I know exactly who I am. You can’t feel like that anywhere else” (111). Although Vietnam is not expected to have any effect on women who arrive, Mary Anne accepts the fact that Vietnam has completely consumed her. These examples, therefore, challenge the physical and psychological roles that women are expected to play in society. Along with O’Brien, the post-Vietnam Era drastically changed the way many people viewed the veteran women of the Vietnam War. Though they were not initially recognized, women later were brought much closer to full equity with men in the service. In 1994, new laws made women, who composed 15 percent of the military, completely eligible for nine out of ten service positions, including command positions (Campbell 2). Established in 1948, The Women’s Armed Services Integration Act permitted women to serve as full and permanent members of the U.S Armed Forces (Women in the Military). Similarly, many female veterans complained that they were not fully recognized after the Vietnam War. Ten
years after the war, the Women’s War Memorial Statue was built in Washington D.C in order to nationally recognize those who served. The well-earned statue stands sixty-one feet tall and depicts three women. One woman cradles a wounded soldier in her lap, another looks anxiously skyward, and the third kneels with an expression of despair (Women of the War). The statue gives these women an opportunity to bond, come to grips with the war, and obtain recognition for what they deserve. One aspiring veteran states, “We came back fragmented and wise. We went to the wall; we came back with hope” (Devanter 72).

O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* ultimately stimulates this newly born hope by challenging a man’s fantasies about women, highlighting the woman’s experience in the Vietnam War and creating female characters that overcome the simple-minded perceptions of the roles of women. Surely these empowering women of the late nineteenth century have not only uncovered their remarkable accomplishments, but also have rendered to the rude mental awakening of those men who desperately held onto a false fantasy and unwillingly let go of the practicalities of war. As a result, women all over the globe will naturally look upward and see the fully capable women they are destined to be.

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**Hope in the Discourse of War**

**Brian McFadden**

Essay Contest Submission  
**Faculty Mentor:** Dr Carter, Eng 1BH

Starting in 1959 and ending in 1975, the Vietnam Conflict claimed over four million human lives in as little as sixteen years. Though there are various accounts as to why America entered into war with Vietnam, such cause and effect descriptions are ultimately inadequate to explain how rational beings could initiate and permit episodes of mass violence on such a large scale. This unjustified war was continued for over a decade even though a great majority of American citizens opposed it from its onset. Among those criticizing the war were the very soldiers who served in combat, one of them being author Tim O’Brien, who in his novel *The Things They Carried* argues that the Vietnam War was horrific and ultimately impossible to rationally understand. He both criticizes and reports the war by showing different perspectives through different characters and time periods.

O’Brien sets the context and the problems of his book in the realm of Postmodernism: a post World War intellectual movement that assesses the current paradigms of knowledge and society. Postmodernism can be seen as a reaction to the failure of 18th century Enlightenment thought, an age of inquiry that strongly advocated autonomy, reason, science, and self education. The World Wars of the early 20th century are often seen as the final throws of Enlightenment thought in the
Western world; the brutality and senselessness of these wars seem to dispel the relevance of Enlightenment virtues. The Enlightenment description of human experience is unable to account for recent history; postmodernism, however, predicts and explains the phenomenon of war logically and coherently. The Vietnam War can therefore be described as justifying and validating postmodern theories. Thus O’ Brien’s novel can be interpreted as both a report on Vietnam and as supportive evidence for the postmodern tradition.

Postmodernism, though somewhat indefinable, can be described as a reaction, recovery, and awareness in regards to all previous intellectual traditions of human inquiry. The Enlightenment is where the story of postmodernity begins since the Enlightenment postulated ideals that postmodernism would eventually criticize. Enlightenment intellectuals such as Rene Descartes, Adam Smith, and John Locke, all include in their writings a strong insistence on how reason and logic should play a core role in everyday human life. The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant described The Enlightenment as “man's leaving his self-caused immaturity” and having “the courage to use your own intelligence” (Kant 132). These are important postulates to postmodern thought because of their favoring responsibility and autonomy in regards to education. The idea that individuals are responsible for themselves and their intelligence was not unique to the Enlightenment; this theme can be found in traditions predating the 17th and 18th century. The Greek philosopher Plato argued that “the unexamined life is not worth living” and that every individual should be devoted to a life of reason, moderation, and justice (Plato 38a). Following this example, the Christian religion echoed many of the same themes present throughout Plato’s dialogues. Various tenets of Christianity seem to correlate exactly with numerous Enlightenment virtues: concepts like freewill, responsibility, moderation, and temperance. These virtues still permeate Western society today, a fact that is evidenced in the American and European justice systems. If one commits a crime in America today, that person is held entirely responsible without any mention of cultural influence. This insistence on pure autonomy is one of the main reasons The Enlightenment has been regarded as a failed project.

The failure of The Enlightenment is accurately evidenced in contemporary statistics: for example, about half of the entire world lives on less than $2.50 a day (Global). UNICEF estimates that about 30,000 children die each day due to poverty (Global). Examining our current situation carefully will reveal to any inquirer that the Enlightenment virtues have failed to save humanity from global decadence. The fact that nearly a billion individuals entered the 21st century without the ability to read books displays that reason and autonomy are not adequate tools for bringing about global education (Global). World Wars I and II also have much to tell us about Enlightenment influence. World War I caused the death of some 40 million people, all stemming from the assassination of one individual, in the very country that gave birth to The Enlightenment. These facts and others were instrumental in ushering in Modernism: the revaluation of Enlightenment postulates.

Modernist thinkers began their project by casting relentless skepticism on all presupposed virtues and values; identifying problems that were infesting modern consciousness. Ideas that were produced by modernist thinkers included the denial of absolute truth and morality, doubting the validity of freewill, stressing cultural influence rather than self-education, and an overall suspicion of reason. The Modernist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw the failure of The Enlightenment as the death of God and that without new “festivals of atonement” [a new course] we will be “plunging continually… backward, sideward, forward, in all directions” (Nietzsche 181). Modernism should therefore be seen as an attempt to recover from the Enlightenment’s fundamental errors because of their inability to explain contemporary phenomenon, recent discoveries in science, differences between cultures, and the overall lack of rational behavior, among other things. Though Modernism was successful in its criticism, it nevertheless failed under its own standards and was unable to withstand its own criticism; thus a new movement was conceived.

Postmodernism differed from Modernism in that it was aware of itself and its own presuppositions. Modernism was aimless and unaware of itself as a movement; postmodernism, on the other hand, saw itself for what it was and was thus self-critical and self-suspicious. While Modernism attacked the notion of absolute truth, it still operated as though absolute truth was a given; postmodernism became critically aware of this defect. Modernism was still operating under many of the Enlightenment virtues such as the
idea of the individual as a self-created subject. Michel Foucault, a postmodern philosopher and historian, spent much of his career rethinking the concept of human beings as separate, autonomous individuals. Foucault tells us that the individual is not “...amputated, repressed, altered by our social order...” but rather that one is “...carefully fabricated within it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies.” (Discipline 217) One of the forces and bodies Foucault is referring to is his notion of the discourse; Iara Lessa describes the discourse as “…systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak” (Lessa). The discourse can be seen as any book, magazine, television program, commercial, newspaper, school curriculum, or anything else self projecting.

A reoccurring instance of Foucault’s concept of the discourse can be found in Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried with the character Kiowa; a devout Baptist who carries his Bible with him throughout the story. O’Brien describes Kiowa in a manner that resembles Foucault’s notion of the discourse: “Kiowa, a devout Baptist, carried an illustrated New Testament that had been presented to him by his father, who taught Sunday school in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. As a hedge against bad times, however, Kiowa also carried his grandmother’s distrust of the white man, and his grandfather’s old hunting hatchet.” (O’Brien 3) It’s as if O’Brien is asking his readers whether Kiowa was really a Christian by choice, or if he merely inherited the belief as if it was his grandfather’s old hatchet. Kiowa himself supports this view when replying to an accusation that he carries his Bible everywhere and never swears, Kiowa responds “I grew up that way.” (122) This emphasis on Kiowa being raised as a Christian is further developed when O’Brien writes: “Kiowa had been raised to believe in the promise of salvation under Jesus Christ, and this conviction had always been present in the boy’s smile, in his posture toward the world...” (164).

A concept resembling Foucault’s discourse appears in other crucial sections of O’Brien’s book. A connection can be made between the discourse and what the soldiers carried with them since “The things they carried were determined to some extent by superstition” (13). There is no logical explanation as to why soldiers would carry items like a “rabbit’s foot” or a human thumb; such superstitions only make sense when contrasted with Foucault’s discourse (13). Foucault often talks about discourse in connection with power relationships, claiming that the power of the discourse is dominant over the human subject. O’Brien affirms this when he explains that “It was what had brought them to the war in the first place, nothing positive, no dreams of glory or honor, just to avoid the blush of dishonor.” (21). This passage illustrates the fact that soldiers were being corporate and submissive to the power of the discourse’s influence rather than making personal choices on the basis of rationality. Soldiers in O’Brien’s book often struggle to maintain the virtues set forth by the army’s standards, something directly connected with cultural influence: “They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid to show it.” (20). O’Brien addresses this same issue when imaging the life of a Vietnamese man he killed: “He would have been taught that to defend the land was a man’s highest duty and highest privilege. He had accepted this. It was never open to question.” (125)

Another postmodern concept that appears in O’Brien’s story is the idea that language is insufficient to truly represent reality. Michel Foucault describes the human individual as “the subject of a language that for thousands of years has been formed without him, a language whose organization escapes him, whose meaning sleeps an almost invincible sleep in the words he momentarily actives by means of discourse, and within which he is obliged, from the very outset, to lodge his speech and thought...”; a claim assuming that language is something beyond human control and intervention (Order 323). O’Brien makes the same sort of claim when he says of one of his characters, “…the man understood that words were insufficient. The problem had gone beyond discussion.” (O’Brien 51) This reoccurs when O’Brien describes his stories about Vietnam as different than the actuality: “…when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.” (71) When O’Brien returns to Vietnam long after the war’s end, he visits the site where his friend, fellow soldier, Kiowa had died. When there, O’Brien has trouble finding words to express his feelings, “I wanted to tell Kiowa that he’d been a great friend, the very best, but all I could do was slap hands with the water.” (187) This same postmodern theme can be found in another war novel, Slaughter House Five, by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., where the author claims that “there nothing
intelligent to say about a massacre‖, echoing O’Brien’s belief that words can never do justice to the reality of war (Vonnegut 24). Even outside the context of war, in a memory of childish love, O’Brien insists that understanding is something “beyond language” (O’Brien 230). Showing that war can be both bad and good, O’Brien invokes contradiction to display the flimsy nature of language: “War is nasty; war is fun. War is thrilling; war is drudgery.” (80) O’Brien’s skepticism towards language is exactly on par with the postmodern idea that language is not a representation of, nor a mirror to, the external world.

In examining the relationship between postmodernism and Tim O’Brien’s The Things They Carried, it becomes evident that the Vietnam War cannot be explained through the ideals of the Enlightenment. The war, however, can be explained through the scope of postmodernism, including the theories of Michel Foucault. Contrary to the ideas of postmodernism, however, O’Brien tells his readers that he is angry with his fellow American citizens because he “held them responsible” for forcing him into a war he didn’t want any part of (45). This does not cohere with postmodernism because of the importance stressed on responsibility; the civilians weren’t at fault for the war, the aimless nature of the discourse was to blame. The citizens’ responsibility is just as innocent as O’Brien’s wanting no one to “think badly of him” because he was “ashamed to be doing the right thing” (52). Perhaps American citizens’ choice to allow the draft was a byproduct of the discourse, just as O’Brien’s shame was not his own doing but a reflection of his culture. Further correlations between postmodernism and The Things They Carried is witnessed in how O’Brien treats the concept of truth; a particularly postmodern interest. Claiming that “in a true war story nothing is ever absolutely true” and that “a true war story does not depend upon that kind of truth”, O’Brien is indirectly supporting the postmodern, relativistic, conception of truth (82-83). Michel Foucault describes truth as “‘linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it‘, which, if true, would mean that truth is a system of convention, not at all bound to reality (Truth 133). If both Foucault and O’Brien are correct, than “absolute occurrence” is indeed “irrelevant” (O’Brien 83).

As a first hand report, The Things They Carried can be interpreted as a postmodern take on the war in Vietnam. The fact that O’Brien wasn’t attempting to validate or support postmodern theories, but was merely reporting the war as he experienced it, shows that postmodern thought and the Vietnam War are connected and related. The excerpts from The Things They Carried used throughout this paper were natural instances of postmodern ideas, independently experienced by O’Brien without direct academic reference. Thus in being two individual representations of the same ideas, postmodernism and The Things They Carried are utilized harmoniously, potentially bringing about a revitalized course to global progression and unity.

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Hydroxyl Radicals, Atmospheric Cleansing Molecules

Jonathan Martinez
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Diane Marsh, Chemistry 1BH

What happens to the millions of tons of gases that nature and human kind lob into the atmosphere every year? Luckily, their rate of growth is countered by the atmosphere’s ability to cleanse itself of most of these so-called trace gases, especially those in chemically reduced form. When trace gases go through chemical changes initiated by sunlight (photo-oxidation or photolysis), they are transformed into products
that are more easily removed by rain and snow, or that dissipate into the earth’s surface.

Radicals are highly reactive because they have unpaired electrons which tend to transfer to other molecules. The Hydroxyl Radical makes up about a fifth of our atmosphere. Other molecules that are produced naturally in the atmosphere, including ozone (O₃), the nitrate radical (NO₃), and the hydroxyl radical (OH), are much more reactive, even if their atmospheric concentrations are low. "We can measure ions in very low concentrations--easily in the parts per quintillion range--because they possess an electric charge, having gained or lost an electron," explains Eisele.¹ This leaves oxygen (O₂) which is not the main oxidant as some may have thought.

The OH radical is the most important oxidant in the troposphere, the lowest part of the atmosphere (below about 10 km). Nobel Prize winner Paul Crutzen coined the phrase “detergent of the atmosphere” to describe this important cleansing role of OH. Most of the trace gases found in the troposphere are oxidized by OH into water-soluble products that are washed out by rain and snow. Specifically, OH is responsible for oxidizing carbon monoxide (CO) and other carbon-based molecules, such as methane (CH₄).⁶

We can follow the formation of OH and how it acts to cleanse the atmosphere through a sequence of chemical reactions. OH is formed in the atmosphere when ultraviolet light (UV) from the sun strikes ozone in the presence of water vapor (H₂O). The initial reaction involves the photolysis of O₃ by solar radiation.

Let the concentration of O₃ be 1.0M to help show this example.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O}_3 & + \text{UV light} \rightarrow \text{O}_2 + \text{O} \\
\text{I} & 1.0\text{M} \\
\text{C} & -x \\
\text{E} & 1.0-x \\
\end{align*}
\]

Then the oxygen atom (O) reacts with water vapor to produce two OH radicals.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{O} + \text{H}_2\text{O} & \rightarrow 2 \text{OH} \\
\text{K} & = 2.2 \times 10^{-10} \\
\text{I} & 0.0529\text{M} \\
0\text{K} & = 2.2 \times 10^{-10} = x / 0.0529-x \\
\text{C} & -x +x \\
\text{E} & 0.0529-x x x = 1.164 \times 10^{-11}\text{M} \\
\end{align*}
\]

These reactions show why a small amount of ozone is essential in the troposphere: it’s the ultimate source of the OH detergent. OH concentrations show strong seasonal and day/night cycles because OH creation is triggered by UV.⁶ Furthermore, because the creation of OH requires water vapor, the concentration of OH tends to decrease with increasing altitude (due to decreasing humidity). Atmospheric OH concentrations are highest in the tropics, where the solar radiation is intense and the humidity is high.

The high reactivity of OH is associated with a very short lifetime of about a second. This makes OH concentrations highly variable in time and space; the concentrations depend on environmental conditions such as cloudiness and humidity, the intensity of incoming solar radiation, and the presence of urban or natural pollutants.⁶

In theory, limited concentrations of OH can be measured directly, for example through laser-induced fluorescence; however, with OH production rate varying a large amount and its lifetime so short, it’s complicated to measure the self-cleansing capacity of the global – or even regional – atmosphere. Nonetheless, tracking the long-term behavior of OH concentrations at a global scale is critical to understanding the future of this self cleansing capacity, and has become a major research goal.

Such tracking is indirect, usually based on monitoring atmospheric chemicals whose sources are well established and for which OH-initiated oxidation is believed to be the dominant ‘sink’, or removal mechanism. One indirect
method of tracking OH involves long-term monitoring of the trace gas methyl chloroform (a solvent now banned by the Montreal Protocol), which is entirely man-made and mainly removed from the atmosphere by OH. From this monitoring – and from modeling – scientists have inferred global daytime OH concentrations between 100 thousand and 20 million hydroxyl radicals per cm$^3$. At sea level pressure, this is equivalent to between 0.01 and 1 ppt (parts per trillion).\(^1\)

In the atmosphere, OH radicals are also regenerated during the various reactions, so very little is used up overall. We can look at the reactions initiated by OH as a set of chain reactions involving OH production, trace gas oxidation, and OH recycling. If a trace gas contains hydrogen atoms (such as hydrocarbons), OH reacts by taking one hydrogen atom. For example, OH reacts with methane (CH\(_4\)), the simplest hydrocarbon, to produce water and a methyl radical (CH\(_3\)).\(^3\)

At room temp (25°C), a 1.164 x 10\(^{-11}\)M solution of the OH radical

\[
\text{CH}_4 + \text{OH} \rightarrow \text{CH}_3 + \text{H}_2\text{O}
\]

The methyl radical reacts rapidly with oxygen to form the methylperoxy radical (CH\(_3\)O\(_2\)). From here, parallel chains of reactions form the more stable formaldehyde molecule (HCHO), which has a lifetime of about 5–8 hours in sunlight.

The relative importance of different methane oxidation chains is determined by the level of pollutants. The most notable of these is nitric oxide (NO), particularly in urban areas. In an NO-rich environment, the oxidation chain produces excess ozone at levels that can be hazardous to human health. Formaldehyde is directly oxidized through UV light and via OH to carbon monoxide (CO), regenerating OH in the process. Indeed, methane oxidation is the dominant source of CO in the pristine atmosphere, bolstered by incomplete combustion of biomass and fossil fuels, especially in the northern hemisphere.

When Q=K\(_{\text{sp}}\) the solution is saturated. Q=2.2x10\(^{-13}\)=[1.164x10\(^{-11}\)M OH] [x M CO]

\[
x=0.0189 \text{ M CO}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CO} + \text{OH}^* & \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + \text{OH}^* \\
\text{CO}_2 + \text{HO}_2^+ & \rightarrow \text{K=2.2x10}^{-13}\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & .0189M \ 1.164 \times 10^{-11}M \ 0 \\
0 & K=x^2/ (0.0189-x) \ (1.164x10^{-11}M-x)
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C} & -x \ -x \\
+ & x \ +x \ \text{assume}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
x<<1.164x10^{-11}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{E} & -x \ 1.164 \times 10^{-11}M-x \ x \\
& x=2.2x10^{-14}M
\end{align*}
\]

By combining the equilibria and using Le Chatelier’s principle this can be explained.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CO} + \text{OH}^* & \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + \text{OH}^* \ K=2.2x10^{-13} \\
\text{HO}_2^+ + \text{NO}^* & \rightarrow \text{NO}_2 + \text{OH}^* \ K=3.7x10^{-12}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{CO} + \text{NO}^* & \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + \text{NO}_2 \\
\text{NO}_2 & \text{K=8.14x10}^{-25}
\end{align*}
\]

The carbon monoxide pollutant stays in the atmosphere around 3 months before it’s attacked by Hydroxyl Radical, while CH\(_4\) still remains for about a decade. The Hydroxyl Radical formed from photo-oxidation is of pivotal importance in oxidizing both CH\(_4\) (to CO) and CO itself, as well as other natural and man-made pollutants.\(^3\)

It is pretty amazing that the major role of Hydroxyl Radical helps out by getting rid of pollutants and making our atmosphere cleaner. Now with experiments done by Eisele, our average global levels of the Hydroxyl Radical seemed to change over the years; however, it may be due to the immense amount of pollutants we make.\(^1\) Events like these have their consequences, results can vary from not being able to remove pollutant gas from our atmosphere or to the extent that it significantly reduces the Hydroxyl Radical concentration.

Le Chatelier’s principle explains that if the Hydroxyl Radical’s concentration is increased, the reaction will shift to the right which will end up producing Carbon Dioxide. Also this will make it favorable to produce
Nitrogen dioxide because the increase of the 
$\text{HO}_2^*$ concentration. Thus, the Hydroxyl Radical 
helps to make pollutants like Carbon monoxide 
and Nitrogen monoxide to Carbon dioxide and 
Nitrogen dioxide. As stated before, the reaction 
may take months to even decades before the 
Hydroxyl Radical does its job as the cleanser of 
our Atmosphere.

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The Naïve Complex

Ammanda Moore
Presenter: Fall Conference and Building Bridges 
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Thatcher Carter

Today, the experience of war is not confined 
to only young men. Men and women, mothers 
and fathers, old and young, all serve in the armed 
forces today. These people experience the horror 
of war’s reality. However, there continue to be 
people with no war experience who idealize war. 
Today the people that idealize war could be male 
or female. Yet, in the era of World War One, 
there were distinct gender roles regarding war. 
Men were expected to be brave and enlist, while 
women were expected to support the men at 
home. In the World War One era, the 
idealization of war was affected by this gender 
distinction that caused women to idealize war. 

Siegfried Sassoon often wrote literature about 
war, greatly inspired by his heavy involvement 
in World War I. His poem “Glory of Women” 
addresses the idealistic way women view war 
and the soldiers involved. He includes fanciful 
exaggerations about the medals and chivalry that 
accompany war. The poem demonstrates 
women’s reactions to idealized war: glamorizing 
war heroes and honorably wounded men, 
excitedly listening to war stories, and supporting 
the soldiers when alive and mourning the dead. 
These images of an idealized war are then 
contrasted with the reality of war. The poem 
briefly details a snapshot of corpses and blood. 
Although the sarcastic tone of Sassoon’s “Glory 
of Women” suggests the speaker’s disgust with a 
woman’s idealistic view of war, the poem does 
not condemn their naïve beliefs; rather it mourns 
the naïveté of women.

Sassoon uses a sarcastic tone in his poem in 
order to expose foolishness of women’s beliefs 
about war. His use of sarcasm is effective in 
contrastng the idealization of war with its stark 
reality. The poem states: “You worship 
decorations; you believe / That chivalry redeems 
the war’s disgrace.” The “you” refers to women. 
Women are portrayed as enjoying the glamour of 
war. Even the speaker stating that women 
“worship decorations” is sarcastic. Decorations 
were given for bravery or surviving an awful 
battle and are often accumulated by long years of 
service. Therefore, a woman who congratulates a 
soldier on a medal is praising the surface, when 
the medal represents the war they’ve survived 
and their comrades who died beside them. The 
women also believe chivalry redeems war’s 
shame. The speaker is being sarcastic; neither 
braveness nor nobility justifies the death of 
thousands. By opening the poem with these 
ideas, when Sassoon contrasts it with the reality 
of war, the foolishness of these naïve beliefs is 
shown.

Sassoon splits the poem in half to emphasize 
the reality of war. Instead of traditionally 
separating into stanzas where the sonnet splits, 
only the change in rhyme scheme from a two 
rhyme to a three rhyme marks this transition. 
The change in end rhyme changes the sound of 
the poem. In a two rhyme, every other line 
rhymes, creating a dependable and expected 
feeling. When the poem changes from the steady 
two rhyme to a three rhyme, the last sentences 
seem longer, as if waiting for the rhyme. This 
change in rhyme scheme emphasizes the 
desperation of the reality of war: “You can’t 
believe that British troops ‘retire’ / When hell’s 
last horror breaks them and they run, / Trampling 
the terrible corpses—blind with blood.” The 
women don’t understand why the men would 
want to retire, because the women assume war is 
about decorations and chivalry. However, the
speaker points out what war really does to men. War breaks them. The poem proceeds to give a snapshot of the terror of war when the poem says “they run trampling the terrible corpses—blind with blood.” The emotions expressed in this quote are very strong and desperate. The intense imagery and emotion in this sentence makes it the climax of the poem, invoking a sense of chaos in war and horror contrasted to the chivalrous and honorable decoration of the men. From the women’s view, war builds a soldier up, with decoration, chivalry, stories, and honor, while the speaker portrays the opposite as reality. War wears upon the men until it breaks them down and they cannot handle the horror. Many would take this sarcastic tone and the harsh contrast of idealization and reality and interpret the poem as chastising women. Though the poet shows the fallacy of idealizing war, he does not condemn the women for their beliefs.

The speaker presents a reason to commend women instead of condemn them. Although the women do not understand the horror and terror soldiers live through, women are the ones who support the soldiers. The women tend to the needs of the men while they are at war and when they return home. The men enjoy the attention they receive when they return home for being considered “heroes” or when their stories cause the women to be “fondly thrilled.” The women also play an important role by continually supporting the soldiers during the war. This is shown in the first section of the poem when Sassoon states: “You crown our distant ardours while we fight, / And mourn our laurelled memories when we’re killed.” These two sentences are interestingly similar. Whether the soldiers meet victory or defeat, the women support them. The speaker is actually a group of soldiers speaking, since they use the words “our” and “we.” The soldiers recognize that these women are their most faithful supporters. The women do not give up on remembering the soldiers even when they die. This recognition shows the soldiers’ gratefulness toward women for continually supporting them through life and death.

The gratefulness the soldiers express combined with the last few lines of the poem suggests an alternative to criticizing women. The strong emotions that are presented in the second section of the poem are sorrowfully resolved in the last three lines. These lines seem to express a bittersweet view of women’s idealization. The last three lines of the poem say: “O German mother dreaming by the fire, / While you are knitting socks to send your son / His face is trodden deeper in the mud.” The effect of the climax shows the speaker’s anger. After the climax, when the emotions are not angry, the effect is a sorrow for the woman who can never understand her son’s dilemma. The speaker uses soft words to describe the mother. He says “O German mother” which implies compassion for the women. Had he said “You, German mother,” the connotation would have been different and the speaker would have been chastising the woman. The speaker portrays the mother kindly by having her “dreaming by the fire” and “knitting socks” for her son. However, while the woman is innocently trying to help her son with socks, she has no idea that her son might be suffocating with “his face trodden deeper in the mud” at the very moment. The soldier’s main concern is survival, not comfort. The speaker is sorrowful at the end of the poem because the mother will never understand this and will continue to knit socks.

Rather than condemn, the poem mourns the naïve complex of women. The title of the poem, “Glory of Women,” reflects this idea as well. The woman’s glory is to support the man during war. Also part of this “glory” is that they never have to experience the pain and the corruption of war. By not knowing the truth about war, women are able to appreciate the glamour of it, but cannot relate to the men who have suffered through it. Perhaps the poet does not condemn women for their ideals out of compassion for the women. The poet realizes that the women do not have the same experience of war that men do. Therefore the speaker is willing to allow women to continue to idealize war. Overall, the poem suggests that naive innocence shields women from the horrors of war.

Rather than expressing disgust in a woman’s view of war, Sassoon’s “Glory of Women” mourns the idealistic beliefs of women. Sassoon uses sarcasm, poetic structure and word choice to portray this complex throughout his poem. The poem sorrowfully concludes with the idea that women do not understand war, which is both good and bad. They can appreciate the glamour of war but cannot understand the reality of it. How many of us can?
T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” and the Cumean Sibyl: Rebirth and Rejuvenation at the Cost of Complete Societal Destruction

Michael Nguyen
Presenter Building Bridges, Fall Conference Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Professor Thatcher Carter, English 1BH

The young boys approached the Cumean Sibyl whose essence hung within a glass jar at the back of Cuma Grotto, and they asked Sibyl, “What do you want?” only to hear, “I want to die.” Introduced as the epigraph of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” Sibyl, like much of Eliot’s wasteland, exists as a perversion of the laws of nature. The rules that once dictated normalcy within the confines of society have been all— but destroyed; what remains is a stagnant scent that lingers and infects all remnants of life with its moral decay: this is the wasteland. In a near post-apocalyptic depiction of the world, the brief reference regarding the Cumean Sibyl serves to embody the emotions of those trapped within “The Waste Land,” however, it is from this allusion that Eliot offers salvation: only at the price of complete societal destruction can there be hope for rebirth and rejuvenation.

The Sibyls, according to legends, are female prophets whose powers are bestowed upon them by the Greek gods of antiquity. The Cumean Sibyl, perhaps the most well-known of the ten, is recognized for two famous legends. The first tells of how Apollo, god of the sun, offers to fulfill any wish of Sibyl’s if she would consent to be his for all eternity. Blindsided by such an offer, Sibyl clutches a handful of sand and says to Apollo, “Grant me to see as many birthdays as there are sand-grains in my hand.” Unluckily, Sibyl forgot to ask for enduring youth, which she indicates, “This also he would have granted, could I have accepted his love, but offended at my refusal, he allowed me to grow old.” Confined within a glass jar upon her seven hundredth year alive, Sibyl goes on to state, “My body shrinks up as years increase, and in time, I shall be lost to sight, but my voice—will remain.”

The second legend retold by author Amy Friedman tells of how Sibyl approached Tarquinius Superbus, the last of the legendary kings of Rome, and offers him “[…] nine books […] which [contain] the destiny of Rome.” In an uproar of laughter, King Tarquins rejects her offer, explaining to Sibyl that her price is too high to pay. With that, Sibyl burns three of the books and states, “I offer six books for sale, six books that contain the rest of the destiny of Rome.” Appalled at the unchanged price, the king again rejects Sibyl’s offer, and Sibyl burns another three books. In one last attempt, Sibyl offers the last three books to King Tarquinius for her unchanging price of nine bags of gold. Contemplating whether the prophecies are true, King Tarquins reluctantly purchases the last three books for their original price. The prophetic books known as Sibyllin’i Libri were reflected upon during times of crisis. When the Roman Empire collapsed, its citizens speculated whether the books that had been burnt could have spared Rome from its demise.

Eliot’s brief reference to the Cumean Sibyl plays an important role in the telling of “The Waste Land,” as it is a poem about materialism distorting the senses. First noted in the section entitled “The Burial of the Dead,” a seemingly rich countess recalls on moments of her youth only to find that her current state of living is now hollow. With her life now spent, she indicates, “I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter” (18), where she flies the winter that once kept her warm. Again, this is seen when Eliot writes that, “Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant / Unshaven, with a pocket fill currents” (209-210) shamelessly attempts to solicit sexual favors “[…] at the Metropole” (214). This theme, however, is perhaps most prominent in the second section of “The Waste Land” entitled, “A Game of Chess.” The scene is set in one of material extravaganza, so much so that “In vials of ivory and colored glass / unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes, / unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused / and drowned the sense in odors” (86-89). So desensitized has this upper class woman become by her luxuries that have “drowned the sense[s],” that upon her antique mantle, a spot where many often hang their most prized painting, she proudly displays “The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / so rudely forced”; (99-100) a scene in which King Tereus rapes Philomela, cuts out her tongue and then confines her to a cell. Like Sibyl, these illusions of wealth have distorted this woman’s senses and led to her demise; her fixation on luxuries have cost her more than she has bargained for, her senses so skewed, that as she desperately cries for her husband to answer her pleas, the sound of his voice goes unheard in the night. Trapped forever in an empty world of excess luxuries, her only salvation is in “Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door” (138) where perhaps the ghastly figure of Death awaits to end her torment and bring her salvation, the same way dying would offer salvation to Sibyl.

Again, Eliot’s brief allusion to the Cumean
Sibyl serves to reinforce another occurring theme present throughout “The Waste Land:” the notion of being neither living nor dead. This idea is first noted by the countess in “The Burial of the Dead,” and directly stated by the hyacinth girl when she says, “I was neither / Living nor dead [...] I knew nothing” (39-40). While the idea is present throughout “The Waste Land,” it is perhaps most prominent in the latter section of the “The Burial of The Dead,” where in the “Unreal city / Under the brown fog of a winter dawn, / A crowd flowed over London Bridge” (61-63) as “[...] each man fixed his eyes before his feet” (65). The pedestrians, possibly alive but also lacking a will to live, trudge forward in monotony where each day “[...] a dead sound on the final stroke of nine” (68) signals the beginning of their mundane jobs. The stale environment of the “Unreal city” seems to infect its citizens to the extent that even a man by the name “Stetson” seems oblivious to his own whereabouts. As the persona shouts out to “Stetson” and begins to question him, his questions are either unheard or simply ignored, the likelihood seems to be the latter when considering the emotionless state of the “Unreal city.” Like the Cumean Sibyl who remains alive only to be confined in a glass jar, the citizens of the “Unreal city” are alive only to be confined to a life that could hardly be called living. The only change in pace seems to come in the form of an oddity: a corpse that has been planted in a garden, like a seedling, which the citizen’s hope will someday bloom. Though strange, this corpse blossom seems to suggest that death must occur before rebirth and rejuvenation can take place.

While those within the wasteland are confined to what seems to be a moral state of decay, the environment of the wasteland is depicted in a similar manner where like Sibyl, it decays but is unable to die. The theme is first noticeable in the introduction of “The Burial of the Dead,” where “April is the cruelest month, / Breeding Lilacs out of the dead land” (2-3) and “[...] the dead trees give no shelter, the cricket no relief” (23-24). Images of the stagnant environment are repeated throughout “The Waste Land,” but it is perhaps most vivid in the third section entitled “The Fire Sermon,” where the persona begins by contrasting the repugnant decay of the Thames River with an old marriage song that once celebrated it. While fishing, the persona describes the scene before his sight: “A rat crept softly through the vegetation / dragging its slimy belly on the bank” (187-188) all while “the river sweats / Oil and tar” (266-267). The rapidly decaying environment is further noted when the persona indicates that there are “White bodies naked on the low damp ground / And bones cast in a little low dry garret” (193-194). As alarming as the environmental situation is, the citizens seem undisturbed by the filth of decay that surrounds them, so much so that the persona even notes that “[...] at my back from time to time I hear / The sound of horns and motors” (196-197) only for the automobiles to continue driving by, ignoring the tar stained, corpse-infested landscape of the Thames River. While disturbing, the ignorant masses of life imply two notions: the first is that while the environment is in a continuous state of decay, like Sibyl, it has not decayed to the extent that it is dead and the second, rebirth and rejuvenation cannot take place until those who are causing its decay are either destroyed or the frame of mind they operate by is abolished.

In the same manner in which Sibyl teeters on the brink of life desperately clinging onto death to bring forth her salvation, so too do the embodied masses of “The Waste Land” cling on to death to bring forth rebirth and rejuvenation. In the fifth and final section of “The Waste Land” entitled “What the Thunder Said,” the setting is depicted at the end of societal annihilation and is described as “Unreal” (376). The land which once sustained life even in its mass decay has finally collapsed into a sterile state; those who remain are noted as “[...] hooded hordes swarming / Over the endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth” (369-370). The harsh condition is commented by the few who remain: “Amongst the rock we cannot stop or think” but “If there were water we should stop and drink” (336 & 335). The fall of society is marked by “Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air” as the “Falling towers” of “Jerusalem Athens Alexandria / Vienna London” (372-375) diminish into the distance. At the cost of societal destruction, the Thunder finally brings forth a brief glimpse of salvation by means of a “[...] a flash of lightning” which calls forth “[...] a damp gust / Bringing rain” (393-394), thus ending the crippling dry spell that encased the wasteland. However, the sustenance of salvation seems to come at the price of three requirements from which the Thunder demands: “Datta, Dayadhvam, Damyata,” (432) which in terms of the human condition means to give, to sympathize, and to control oneself. A final statement by the persona is made which ends the telling of T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land”, “Shantih shantih shantih” (433), which transcribed means, “The Peace which passeth understanding” and is possibly a hint for what mankind gains in exchange for abiding by the three demands of the Thunder.

Like a dimly lit lantern shattering the cascading midnight darkness, Eliot’s allusion to the Cumean Sibyl offers a brief glimpse of hope
John Lennon and his Political Views, Till Death Do They Part: An Essay on Art in Politics

Natalie Reid
Presenter: Building Bridges
Faculty Mentor: Rhonda Taube, Art 6H

John Lennon has been an icon of peace ever since he discovered that the word is love. He was almost destined to be something great. He had the stereotypical troubled childhood of a star, along with ideas, imagination, and opinions that he was not afraid to share with the world. Although he had to tone down his radical opinions and put on his Beatle mask for the public, he was able to reveal the basic ideas behind his beliefs. It was not until the group officially disbanded in 1970 that Lennon was free to share the full extent of his views through his music and acts of protest. After having to sugarcoat some of his more liberal views during the Beatle years, Lennon had free reign to spread his ideas throughout the world.

On 9 October 1940, John Winston Lennon was born to Julia and Alfred Lennon. Unfortunately, his father left Julia to raise John on her own soon after the boy’s birth. This put a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left a huge strain on Julia’s life, and as such, she put John into the care of one of her sisters, Mimi. She and John did spend time together until her tragic death in John’s seventeenth year. Though John had a good life with Mimi and adored her greatly, the early loss of his parents left

When he was younger, his mother would often sing to him, and even taught him how to play the banjo. While attending Quarry Bank, Lennon and some classmates formed a band called The Quarrymen, named after their school. It was through a mutual friend, Ivan Vaughan, that Lennon met Paul McCartney. He was immediately impressed by McCartney’s talents, taken especially by the fact that the boy knew

twenty Flight Rock’ by Eddie Cochran, by heart (Beatles 12). Lennon wanted McCartney in the band, his only worry being that McCartney might steal his spotlight. Coincidentally, McCartney knew another talented youth from school whom he rode the bus with everyday. His name was George Harrison and, though he was younger than the others, they recruited him into their group as well. The last to join the group was Ringo Starr. At the time, he was drumming for a popular group in the area and the other three had more trouble making him an addition to the band. But they did, and thus The Beatles were eventually born.

The Beatles had their humble start into the life of rock legendry, each member of the group enjoying the ride. However, the band did come on the scene right at a turning point in the music business. America’s involvement in the Vietnam War had just peaked right around the time that The Beatles first visited the United States, but it was also a time when artists were still not free to fully express how they felt about such things as the war in public. The Beatles wanted this freedom, though, and by their second American tour they had decided to speak their minds, saying that they “don’t like [the war]…don’t agree with it…[and] think it is wrong” (Beatles 145). Lennon especially felt the constraints of The Beatles. The band kept up with current events and Lennon did want his opinions to be public. Although the band was not known for making political statements, Lennon is quoted as saying, “All [The Beatles’] songs are anti-war” (Beatles 145). During the Beatle years it was difficult for him to fully express himself due to the societal restraints put on the group, but he was able to let some of his beliefs and ideas slip through the cracks. One early example of this was in 1966 when he made a comment saying that The Beatles were bigger than Jesus.

Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn’t argue about that; I’m right and I will be proved right. We’re more popular than Jesus now; I don’t know which will go first--- rock ‘n’ roll or Christianity. Jesus was all right, but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It’s them twisting it that ruining it for me (Beatles 223).

While in Great Britain this comment went over as a witticism, the United States did not take it so lightly. In fact, this generalization, which took up a whole one line of a two page article, caused uproar among many people in the United States. Beatles records were burned and banned from the radio as a way of protesting a band which the country had just taken in with open arms only a couple of year earlier. Time heals most everything, though, and even the
Vatican has come to forgive the “boast” by a young man grappling with sudden fame” (Reuters). Certainly, The Beatles stand the test of time, as their music is still very relevant in a society changed by forty years.

Early in the Beatle catalog there are not many songs that seem to have any kind of political message in them. A bit later, though, Lennon had an epiphany: Love. ‘The Word’ and ‘All You Need Is Love’ are the first great examples of Lennon’s newest inspiration. ‘The Word’ is about him discovering just how universal and important the idea of love is, and it became a sort of “slogan song” (Schaffner 50). Lines such as ‘in the beginning I misunderstood, but now I’ve got if the word is good’ and ‘now that I know what I feel must be right I’m here to show everybody the light,’ detail Lennon’s discovery of love and its universality and power. In the same way, ‘All You Need Is Love’ gives a very direct and obvious message that love is all anyone needs.

Lennon went on to write more politically charged songs, such as ‘Come Together’ and ‘I Want You (She’s So Heavy)’. ‘Come Together’ was written after Timothy Leary requested the Lennon write him a campaign song when he ran against Ronald Reagan for governor of California. The finished product did not go over very well as a campaign song, however. ‘I Want You (She’s So Heavy)’ is much more cryptic, merely repeating the same words over again: ‘I want you, I want you so bad, it’s driving me mad, she’s so heavy’. Although this song was indeed protesting the war in Vietnam, the lyrics do not give a clear message against the war. The listener does not know what is so heavy or why. Lennon is quoted as saying that “in those days I was writing obscurely, à la Dylan, never saying what you mean but giving the impression of something, where more or less can be read into it. It’s a good game” (Davis 24). He “wanted to put out what [he] felt about revolution. [He] thought it was about time [The Beatles] spoke up about it...[and] stopped not answering about the Vietnamese war” (Beatles 298). These four songs mark the beginning of Lennon’s transformation from wholesome mop top to revolutionary rocker.

Before John Lennon could break away from The Beatles, something he had wanted to do since they stopped touring in 1965, there was a time when he and his newly found love of his life, Yoko Ono, started to do some more liberal things in the name of peace and love. Lennon met Ono while visiting an art exhibition. They had an instant connection. Their first big creative project together was their Two Virgins album, which they recorded in 1968. Lennon’s ex-wife was out of town, so Ono visited him and they did some acid together. He says they were both very shy around each other so they decided to make some tapes (Beatles 301). These became the Two Virgins, the record famous for having a picture of Lennon and Ono naked together on the cover. The next year, Lennon decided to send back the MBE award that was given to him by the Queen of England. He sent it to her with a note saying:

Your Majesty,
I am returning this MBE in protest against Britain’s involvement in the Nigeria – Biafra thing, against our support of America in Vietnam and against Cold Turkey slipping down the charts (Beatles 184).

And the letter is signed “with love.” That same year, Lennon and Ono were married on 20 March 1969 in Gibraltar. It was during this period that Lennon and Ono made the decision to call attention to peace through some strange, possibly effective acts. The couple knew that their names would be in the papers no matter what they did, so they decided to at least put the word peace next to their names. To do this, they had a bed-in for peace in Montreal in the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. It was at the end of this bed-in that the song ‘Give Peace A Chance’ was recorded from the hotel bed with a large group of people including “Timothy Leary, Toronto Rabbi Abraham Feinberg, musician Petula Clark, and members of the Canadian Radha Krishna Temple” (“John and Yoko’s”). This song became the unofficial anthem for the Vietnam Conflict, and though it is certainly not one of Lennon’s best songs, he was proud of it nonetheless saying “I like ‘Give Peace A Chance’ for what it was” (Beatles 334). The Lennon/Ono bed-in did spur some opposition, but it also got a large amount of press, and that is just what the couple wanted.

During The Beatle years, Lennon had found love and taken it as his slogan, as something that he wanted to write and sing about. He still very much believed in love after The Beatles split up, but he also discovered peace, and this is where much of his solo inspiration stemmed from. ‘Give Peace A Chance’ is an obvious example, but there are many others. There is ‘imagine’, a world-wide song symbolizing a world where there is “nothing to kill or die for” and all of the people are “living life in peace” (Lennon). ‘Power To The People’ is another good example of a song that was written to liberate the people of the world and to show them that they do not have to be owned by the government. Lennon also penned a Christmas song which was intended to promote peace, entitled ‘Happy Xmas (War Is Over)’. This song voices clearly that we are all just people and
there should not be so much fighting in the world, with lyrics such as:
And so this is Xmas
For weak and for strong
For rich and the poor ones
The world is so wrong
And so happy Xmas
For black and for white
For yellow and red ones
Let's stop all the fight (Lennon)

These lyrics make it obvious that Lennon believed in a world where people are not judged outwardly by their social status or the color of their skin, and that everyone is entitled to peace and happiness.

The songs that John Lennon wrote during his solo career did not always promote peace. Some were written more as protest songs against things going on that Lennon did not agree with. The album Some Time In New York City, released by Lennon and Ono in 1972, is made up almost completely of protest music and is a very political album. Two examples from this album are 'Attica State' and 'The Luck Of The Irish'. 'Attica State' is about "the killing of prisoners [and] guards by troops that had been sent in by [Governor] Nelson Rockefeller during the 'Attica Uprising' at the Attica State prison in New York on 13th September 1971" ("John Lennon"). Lennon's stance on the incident is obvious in the lines "media blames it on the prisoners but the prisoners did not kill, Rockefeller pulled the trigger that is what the people feel." Another song involving Irish protest is 'The Luck Of The Irish', which is a general protest of Great Britain's interference in the country. The lyrics show how strongly Lennon felt on the subject. In the song he questions "why the hell are the British there anyway as they kill with God on their side, blame it all on the kids and the IRA as the bastards commit genocide." It is clear to see that John Lennon was not only wishing to promote peace, but also to protest acts which he felt were wrong. He was easily able to do this through his music.

However, it was not only through music that Lennon protested. He took part in protest rallies, and he was very close to deportation in the early 1970s. In 1972, very soon after Lennon moved to New York, Richard Nixon started a campaign to deport him back to England. Nixon and the government tried to cover up the real reasons behind wanting Lennon out of the country by saying that he had to leave due to a drug bust he had in England a few years earlier. The true reason behind the deportation was, in fact, that Nixon wanted to rid America of this revolutionary, liberal "voice of the peace movement" (Wiener). Lennon went through hell to stay in a country and city that he loved, and he finally won the right to stay in the United States in 1975. This event also led to some great music, as the songs 'Isolation' and 'Scared' both can be seen as songs referring to this time in Lennon's life. While 'Isolation' was released in 1970, a bit early to be considered about Lennon's fight against deportation, lyrics such as "we're afraid to be alone / everybody got to have a home" show that he was feeling the strain of not fitting into society even then (Lennon). 'Scared', which was released on 1974's Walls And Bridges album, also refers to Lennon's search for a place of his own in the lyrics "I'm tired of being so alone / No place to call my own / Like a rolling stone" (Lennon). Although music was John Lennon's main outlet for promotion of love, peace, and protest against all things otherwise, he did take part in rallies and went through bad times with the American government as he was almost deported.

John Lennon was an icon of peace and love in the 1960s and 70s, and continues to be such years later. His start in The Beatles got him the publicity he needed to get his message out, but he was unable to fully express his liberal views as a member of the Fab Four. As soon as the group disbanded officially in 1970, Lennon broke out and began writing songs with much more blatant language. This was his chance to tell the world what he thought, and to try to gain some ground in the fight for love and peace.

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"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Written over two hundred years ago by a band of revolutionary patriots, this is the American promise. It means that a person is entitled to equality and freedom, regardless of who they are. However, history shows us that this is not always true in America. For many years slavery was legal in this country. Many years after slavery was abolished, racism and segregation continued in America. Even with an African-America president, race and equality are issues that are debated even today. Frederick Douglass addressed the issue of slavery in his 1852 speech "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July." In it, he explains that he cannot celebrate the 4th of July because the holiday reminds him of America's brutality. Douglass is very critical of the hypocrisy of allowing slavery while the constitution promises freedom. One of the more recent people to address the issue of America and its promise is President Obama. In his speech "A More Perfect Union", Obama addresses the current state of race relations in America and urges us to recognize our differences and come together as a nation. He shows how we can progress as a society to become closer to a perfect union. Although Douglass and Obama were writing many years apart, they both wrote essential American works that demonstrate that America is not living up to its promise, and yet they both show how and why they believe America can change to become closer to that promise.

Both of these works were written during a time when the author felt it was necessary to show how America was not living up to its promise. Frederick Douglass gave his address on July 5, 1852. The 1850s was a decade of growing tension over slavery that would eventually erupt into the American Civil War. The Compromise of 1850 led to tension between the North and South. This bill made northern states responsible for capturing escaped slaves in the North and created severe punishment for anyone who aided fugitive slaves. It angered many people in North because they didn't believe in slavery, or for being the police for the South. Another Act of congress that angered many people in the North was the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This act allowed territorial governments on the western frontier to decide if they want slavery. Thus, the spread of slavery could continue. In the Dred-Scott Decision, the Supreme Court ruled that a slave is a citizen, which again angered many in the North. All of these events would culminate in 1860 when South Carolina refused to accept Abraham Lincoln as president and seceded from the union; this began the Civil War. Frederick Douglass gave his speech in a turbulent decade in order to support the growing abolitionist movement.

Although 2008 was not as drastic as the 1850s and the Civil War, President Obama was also writing during a time of national crisis. 2008 saw historic presidential campaign that was one of the most closely watched in history because America is fighting two wars, is in a deep financial crisis, and President Bush's approval ratings had plummeted. Obama chose to address the issue of race because of the controversy surrounding his former pastor Jeremiah Wright. Videos were circulating of Wright's sermons in which he makes many offensive and racially divisive comments including his "God Damn America" sermon. Obama's association with Wright was an important issue that had the potential to be racially divisive (Katel). One of Obama's purposes for writing his speech was to quell the controversy of reverend Wright, to ensure voters that he would not give favor to any particular race. But more importantly, "A More Perfect Union" was written during a time of decision to tell people that problems of race relations do exist, but also to tell them that Americans have made progress and will continue to make progress.

Both of these authors draw their beliefs and arguments from America's founding documents and founding fathers. Douglass demonstrates a profound respect for the founding fathers when he writes, "Fellow citizens, I am not wanting in respect for the fathers of this republic. The signers of the Declaration of Independence were brave men." Even though slavery was allowed to exist, Douglass displays a strong admiration for the founding fathers, but it was his love of what they created that was more important to him. He writes, "The Declaration of Independence is the
ring-bolt to the chain of your nation's destiny; so indeed I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, at whatever cost.

Douglass understands that it is these principles that will save America and are worth fighting for. Just like Douglass, more than 150 years later, President Obama echoes Douglass's affinity for the founding principles. He writes, "The answer to the slavery question was already embedded in our constitution—a constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time." Indeed both of these men drew on America's founding documents to create their message; it is the understanding of the true worth of the American promise that fuels these speeches.

These speeches make full use of logical, emotional, and ethical appeals in their arguments about the American promise. One of the logical arguments that Douglass makes is that the Constitution is a Glorious liberty Document. Douglass puts his faith in God and humanity. He writes, "There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. The arm of the lord is not shortened and the—so.

Douglass believes down to his core that the time of slavery had come to an end, that the "affairs of mankind" would truly evolve and progress. In addition, Douglass also puts faith in the foundational principals of America. Douglass writes, "While drawing from the Declaration of Independence...and the genius of American institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious tendencies of the age."

Although at times these authors criticize America about falling short of its promise, they both offer hope and explain how America can become closer to its promise. Douglass writes, "I do not despair of this country." Douglass puts his faith in two very strong foundations. The first is his faith in God and humanity. He writes, "There is force in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. The arm of the lord is not shortened and the doom of slavery is certain...A change has come over the affairs of mankind."

Obama also makes effective use of various appeals in his argument about the American promise. One logical appeal that Obama makes is an appeal for unity. He writes, "And if we walk away now...we will never come together and solve challenges like health care, or education, or the need to find good jobs for every American." Obama makes the simple argument that if we do not unite on the issue of race, we will not be able to come together to solve other problems. He advocates that both the white community and the black community need to come to a mutual understanding. These author's appeals create a well rounded argument that combine emotion, logic, and ethics in addressing the American promise.

"The answer to the slavery question was already embedded in our constitution—a constitution that had at its very core the ideal of equal citizenship under the law; a constitution that promised its people liberty, and justice, and a union that could be and should be perfected over time."

Douglass puts his faith in God and humanity. He writes, "There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. The arm of the lord is not shortened and the doom of slavery is certain...A change has come over the affairs of mankind."

Douglass knew that many others would finally recognize the gap between America's ideals and its reality. Obama is also aware of America's spirit for change. He writes, "The profound mistake of reverend Wright's sermon is not that he spoke about racism in our society. It's that he spoke as if our society was static; as if no progress has been made, as if this country... is still irrevocably bound to a tragic past."

Obama explains that America is not static, that it is always re-evaluating and redefining itself. He understands that we should embrace our dark past, but that we should not dwell on it, and that
we should not let it pull us down. Obama sums up this theme best when he says that "This union may never be perfect, but generation after generation has shown that it can always be perfected."

Douglass and Obama have addressed America and its promise. They point out that America is not a perfect union, but they believe that the path to perfection has been contained within America since its beginning. Often times, we can become cynical about the current state of affairs, and rightly so. America is far from perfect, but it is important to remember that we are and can be the frontier of progress. It is in America that the world sees the strength of diversity. As Obama has said, in no other nation in the world is his story possible. Above all, these authors offer hope in the face of despair. They believe that while America may be far from perfect, it has the ability to strive closer and closer to perfection. This idea is what continues to renew America, and it will continue to inspire future generations.

**Outsiders in an Outsider’s Land**

**Nicolette Rohr**
Honors Essay Contest Submission  
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Kristi Woods, History 6H

America is a nation of immigrants. People from every corner of the globe, speaking different languages, eating different foods, practicing different religions, have made America their home. Yet still there is a notion that being an American has more to do with a prescribed standard of whiteness than it does with the diversity of races, ethnicities, and cultures that compose the true American people. This notion is familiar to any immigrant or outsider struggling to make their way in this nation of immigrants and outsiders. Though white Europeans are not native to the North American continent and never occupied it alone, their successful assertion of superiority has come to dominate the elusive American identity more than any other group. Examining the plight of Native Americans, African Americans, and European immigrants, respectively, Cherokee chief Wilma Mankiller’s autobiography *Mankiller*, W. Ralph Eubanks’ Civil Rights era memoir *Ever Is A Long Time*, and Jacob Riis’s late nineteenth century exploration of poverty in New York City’s tenements, *How The Other Half Lives*, all illustrate the notion of an accepted standard of what it means to be an American and the challenges of achieving equal treatment as American citizens. All three authors agree that it is a defined construct of “whiteness” that constitutes the accepted American identity. The books describe the purposeful denial of rights to any group falling short of this standard and the great struggle to gain access and acceptance as an American.

Native Americans are the only truly non-immigrant group in the United States and yet they have been systematically fractured and reduced to the status of an outside minority. In her autobiography *Mankiller*, Wilma Mankiller produces both a personal memoir and a collective history of her people that describes the imposition of European power that led to an American policy of mistreatment and injustice towards Native Americans. Mankiller’s story is not the story of new immigrants, forging their way in America, but the tale of a people who called America home long before anyone else did and yet struggled to maintain their land, culture, and language. European relations with the indigenous peoples were, from the beginning, defined by conquest and imposition. By the time of the founding of the United States, a policy of white superiority had already been established in the Americas. Then in 1830 President Andrew Jackson enacted the Indian Removal Act, authorizing the transplanting of American Indians from their native lands to the lands west of the Mississippi River.\(^1\) The act allowed for lands in the east to be more available and secure for white, American settlement. The Cherokee, Mankiller’s tribe, took their case against Jackson’s policy to the Supreme Court and won the favorable judgment of Chief Justice John Marshall. The Cherokee made their petitions in an American court, through the American system. But the American ideal of justice and legal rights did not apply to Native Americans. President Jackson ignored Marshall’s decision and the Cherokee too were forced to move west, to Oklahoma, the place Wilma Mankiller now calls home.

Mankiller’s own family experienced the United States’ government’s efforts to sever Native American’s ties to land and heritage. In 1956 Wilma Mankiller and her family moved from their home in Oklahoma to San Francisco as part of an Indian relocation program designed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to fracture

Native American’s connections to their lands and cultures. Mankiller also describes the government’s systematic efforts to harm Native American culture by removing children from their families and heritage and teaching them the ways of the white world. “The philosophy,” Mankiller writes, “reflecting an errant missionary zeal, was to get native children away from their families, their elders, their tribes, their language, their heritage. They isolated native children so they would forget their culture.”

Mankiller writes that the boarding school system was a method developed by the United States government “to deal with what its officials always called ‘the Indian problem’.” As early as 1819, Mankiller reveals that the federal government created a fund for the “civilization of the Indians.” When the boarding schools were first established in 1878, Mankiller writes that students were “punished for speaking their native languages and practicing their own religious beliefs.” Five years later it became a federal offense to practice Native American religions and remained illegal for ninety-five years, until the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978. Native Americans were consistently denied the freedom to practice their own traditions and were seen as culturally inferior to the European American’s way of life. Though they were the first to hold the geographic distinction of an American, it was not until 1924 that Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act, bestowing voting rights and citizenship on all Indians “born within the territorial limits of the United States.” True citizens of the American continent but not the American government, Native Americans were treated as unwelcome immigrants in the land of their heritage.

Shortly after the arrival of the Europeans in North America and the immediate conflict between Native Americans and Europeans, another group was introduced to the continent. Africans, arriving in America as slaves, were systematically indoctrinated to accept a status of inferiority. The institution of chattel slavery ended with the American Civil War, but its legacy continues to this day. In his memoir Ever Is A Long Time, W. Ralph Eubanks explores this legacy as he journeys through his own memories of Mississippi in the Civil Rights era. Eubanks portrays a world of black and white, with clear distinctions between who is more entitled and more American. The Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896, which declared that separate was equal and constitutional and made way for the Jim Crow era of legal segregation and racial violence, established a recognized separateness in American life. When separate was deemed unequal and unconstitutional in the 1954 case of Brown v. Board of Education, Eubanks describes the continued efforts of Southern white society to maintain the status quo of separate racial spheres and the Southern “way of life.” In his memoir, Eubanks specifically explores the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a state-operated, tax-funded program established in 1956 to “create a permanent authority for maintenance of racial segregation” and to monitor politically active African Americans, including Eubanks’ parents. Eubanks’ parents were educated, informed members of society who cared for their children and lived with higher standards of honor and decency than many of the white families Eubanks describes. The Eubanks did well in spite of a society that did not want them to succeed. “The white power structure dared them to vote and to raise their family decently,” Eubanks writes, “they chose to defy it by doing both. In Mississippi at the time, that alone was a subversive act.” Eubanks discovers that segregation was far more than a matter of prejudice and discrimination on the part of white people, but often an elaborate, calculated effort by the state and local government. “The Sovereignty Commission had its own agents, a network of spies, subpoena power, and the legal authority to keep its records secret all in the interest of maintaining a segregated society in Mississippi, especially in the public schools.”

The battle of integrated schools is paramount in Eubanks’ narrative, appearing as the ultimate nightmare of a white society.

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3 Mankiller, 7
4 Mankiller, 7
5 Mankiller, 282
6 Mankiller, 285
7 Mankiller, 290
8 Mankiller, 6
9 United States Supreme Court. Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896.
12 Eubanks, 79
13 Eubanks, 113
determined to preserve their way of life without any black interference. Eubanks suggests a fear among the white people in his community that appears as a common theme in the struggle over segregation—fear of outsiders, fear of change, fear of the unknown. Eubanks describes the virulent hatred that even school children felt towards President John F. Kennedy through their glee upon hearing of his murder. “‘They got him,’” they cheer as they run home from school, “‘Yay! They finally got him.’” Kennedy represented the federal government’s attempts to integrate Southern education, especially through his involvement in forcing the University of Mississippi to admit James Meredith, its first African American student. Kennedy’s agenda interfered with the Southern “way of life” so fiercely protected by many white Southerners, including the nineteen United States Senators who signed the Southern Manifesto calling the government’s efforts to integrate schools an “unwarranted exercise of power by the Court, contrary to the Constitution.”

Eubanks writes about his community’s anti-integration group, the Citizens for Local Control of Education, in which local control can be interpreted to mean white control. But as many forces of opposition to integration and racial progress as Southern whites had, the African American struggle included countless groups and movements of both blacks and whites working for civil rights, equality, and access to American society, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Jackson Movement, the March on Washington, the Freedom Riders, and the crucial American figure, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The efforts for equality and civil rights combat a particular mindset of whiteness that believed in reserving Americanism for a certain type of American—a white American who believed in their own superiority and separateness.

The Native Americans were indigenous to the North American continent, African Americans were brought here by force, but for millions of European immigrants, coming to America was a choice, often a brave and hopeful decision. Essentially anyone could come to America, but for the immigrant, the question still remained of what was required to be an American. In How The Other Half Lives, nineteenth century journalist Jacob Riis reveals the plight of European immigrants, suggesting that to be accepted as an American one must not only be white, but be a certain type of white. In the late nineteenth century a new wave of immigrants arrived in the northern cities of the United States from places like Poland, Russia, Italy, Greece, and Hungary. Coming from Southern and Eastern Europe they were dark, Catholic, and different. Previous immigrants had come from England, Ireland, Germany, and France, the places where the first Americans, who shaped the new national identity and culture, had come from in the early days of the nation. These “old stock” immigrants were easily assimilated into the new American culture their fellow countrymen had formed. With the exception of the Irish Catholic, whose American experience has been fraught with prejudice, immigrants from Northern and Western Europe were easily welcomed in America because they were not different and therefore not threatening. But the new immigrants came to work the industrial jobs in a newly urbanized America and quickly crowded the slums of New York City. They lived and worked in deplorable conditions, which Riis aimed to expose through his groundbreaking photographs of tenement living.

Riis wrote in the context of the “nativist” prejudices and anti-immigration sentiments of the late nineteenth century, which eventually led to the National Origins Act of 1924, creating immigration quotas and increased restrictions on America’s previously open doors. Riis himself expresses his share of bigotry and prejudices against immigrants, referring to them always on the basis of their ethnic identity—the Italian, the Irishman, the Chinaman, living in Jewtown, Chinatown, or the black-and-tan district—and yet he is firm in his conviction that society has some responsibility to these people, regardless of where they come from. Riis writes that “the sufferings and the sins of the ‘other half,’ and the evil they breed, are but as a just punishment upon the community that gave it no other choice.”

14 Eubanks, 61
16 United States Congress. Immigration Act, 1924. 68th Congress.
sheds on the plight of the immigrant serves as a challenge to a white, largely Anglo-Saxon society living comfortably outside of the tenements with no apparent concern for the way that this “other half” lives. The two worlds of New York City illustrate the separateness of American society. If a middle class, white child of Anglo-Saxon descent died of suffocation by foul smell, as Riis describes in the tenements, there would be outrage. But it went ignored when it happened to an immigrant child who lived in America and yet was not accepted as a full American. Riis makes a powerful point that holds true in all instances of an Americanism that is reserved for only a few Americans. “The tenements to-day are New York,” he writes, “harboring three-fourths of its population.”

New York is not the small fraction of people in the nicer part of town, who go to the same church and speak the same language; New York, and America for that matter, is all the people, all the languages, all the cultures, and all the ways of life.

As a nation of immigrants, founded on the principles of freedom and equality, America has a past to reconcile with when it comes to Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrants. Robert Kennedy, descended from an Irish Catholic family that fought the power structure of Anglo-Americanism, said that “in part to be an American means to have been an outcast and a stranger, to have come to the exiles’ country, and to know that he who denies the outcast and the stranger still amongst us, he also denies America.” Today, in the twenty-first century, America is more diverse, with another wave of immigrants coming from Asia and Latin America. And still today Americans of all backgrounds struggle with the notion that America is the suburbs and the slums, Cape Cod and Palm Beach, as well as the barrios of Los Angeles and the projects of Detroit. A terrorist attack in New York City, a hurricane in New Orleans, and a flood in North Dakota affect all Americans, regardless of their heritage. The election of President Barack Obama marks a triumph of American pluralism and a recognition of the complexities in the greater American character. A man whose life and whose family reflect the diversity of America, President Obama represents a movement of the marginalized to the mainstream in American life. In this young century his administration brings on a changing standard of Americanism and a positive shift towards an America that exists for all Americans.

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**Repairing the Waste Land with the Upanishads**

*Nicolette Rohr*

Presenter: Building Bridges, Fall Conference

Faculty Mentor: Professor Thatcher Carter, English 1BH

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is a poem infamously riddled with references and allusions. Phrases and ideas from mythology, religious texts, Shakespeare, and Dante fill the poem from beginning to end. Each allusion has undoubtedly been the subject of extensive scholarly debate since the poem’s publication in 1922. Eliot’s allusion to the Upanishads in the final section of the poem is critical in examining Eliot’s ideas on repairing the “waste land” in the...
aftermath of World War I, perhaps advice we could still heed today.

Upanishads are philosophical scriptures in ancient Hinduism that address issues of God, knowledge, and meditation. Eliot introduces the Upanishads toward the end of “The Waste Land,” along with other Indian images and allusions to the Ganges river, which flows through the Indian subcontinent, and the Himalaya mountain range along the Indian border. The poem’s ending also includes Latin, Italian and French phrases. These inclusions indicate an awareness of the global relevance of human struggles in the aftermath of World War I and achieve a sense of universality by mixing languages, and especially by extending the references and allusions to the Eastern world. Eliot’s employment of Hindu religious texts and tenets provides advice for the world that is not limited to Western culture.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which Eliot specifically alludes to, Prajapati says “da” and asks gods, men, and demons if they understand. They each come back with a different meaning: the gods understand damyata, meaning that they are to practice self-control; the men understand datta, that they are to give; the demons understand dayadhvam, that they are to be compassionate. The Brihadaranyaka concludes “Therefore one should learn these three: self-control, giving and mercy.” Eliot’s placement of these three words at the conclusion of the poem reads like a parting message—a piece of advice to repair the disastrous world described in “The Waste Land.” None of Eliot’s characters are giving or compassionate, and none exhibit self-control. Upanishads often end with the word “shantih,” which translates as a peace which passes all understanding. Peace of any kind is absent in “The Waste Land.” Eliot portrays this wasteland of a world through a series of characters feeling or acting oddly in a strange world. Though any study of Eliot’s characters must recognize the extreme ambiguity of dialogue and speakers throughout “The Waste Land,” the Upanishad’s principles of peace, compassion, giving, and practicing self-control are markedly missing from all scenes and situations in the poem. And yet Eliot emphasizes them—give, sympathize, control, words incongruous with the poem as a whole, but perhaps necessary if the inhabitants of the waste land are to repair it.

Eliot creates characters that are remote and isolated. No one is giving of his or her time, love, wealth, or kindness. As the Countess Marie reflects on her youth in the pre-World War I world as a much lovelier time, Eliot writes that she “read[s] much of the night, and go[es] south in the winter” (Eliot, line 18). As an aristocrat, Marie’s world of nobility and gaiety is completely shattered by the war. In longing for her once carefree world, Marie does not give or interact with her present world.

Eliot demonstrates a similar lack of interaction in his character “the hyacinth girl,” who is involuntarily paralyzed of speech, movement, and thought. She says, “I could not speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither living nor dead, and I knew nothing” (lines 38-40). She exhibits a perverted response to the appearance of her implied lover. Though in a garden scene of youth and life, all human emotions are disconnected and confused.

Eliot writes repeatedly of this perversion, especially evident in cities, the “unreal” cities. The bustling metropolis of London is seen as polluted and bizarre, with its citizens walking emotionless in crowds. He writes, “Each man fixed his eyes before his feet” (line 65). Eliot portrays these people as wholly singular. Even though they are marching in a crowd, there is no sense of brotherhood or community. They are numb to their world. In the same way the Countess reads alone and the hyacinth girl is unable to speak or interact, the citizens of London look to their feet. They do not look next to them to help their fellow man; they do not look above them with thoughts or prayers. They are focused on what is directly in front of them, with no concern or compassion for the world.

Eliot also portrays a lack of control and compassion in his unromantic romances between the neurotic rich woman and her silent husband, Lil and her soldier husband, and the typist and real estate agent. Each couple demonstrates a series of worldly concerns and actions being perpetuated in meaningless relationships. The rich couple resides in a small and self-centered world. The woman’s attempts to talk with her own husband are frantic and offensive. Though he never speaks, she also fails at any attempt to conduct an effective or meaningful conversation. “Speak to me,” she says, “Why do you never speak? Speak. What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? I never know what you are thinking. Think” (lines 112-114). Their life and relationship appear antithetical to peace, to “shantih.” They are not giving or compassionate in their relationship or in control of their words and feelings.

The typist and the real estate agent also have a strange and meaningless relationship. Eliot writes of their “patronising kiss” (line 247) before the real estate agent “gropes his way” (line 248) with the typist. When their assumedly dispassionate intercourse is finished, the typist thinks to herself “Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over” (line 253). Again, Eliot’s romantic scenes are horribly unromantic.
He writes of a world where nothing is meaningful or good. Eliot’s telling of a barroom conversation also tells of bizarrely and perversely discontented and confused people. Lil is the married mother of five who was unfaithful to her husband while he was in war. She became pregnant and had an abortion. Lil has no teeth and she uses the money her husband gave her to see a dentist (because he couldn’t bare to look at her) for her abortion. Eliot describes her as “antique” (line 156) and makes it clear that she is uninterested in “pleasing” her husband, as her friend tells her she must. Her friend, however, is happy to do so, and Lil appears happy to let her. Eliot’s lurid barroom dialogue illustrates a scheme of perversely relationships—an unfaithful woman who has an abortion, a husband who tells his wife she’s so ugly he can’t look at her, a woman offering to have sex with her friend’s husband. This is not a faithful or compassionate marriage or a traditionally accepted friendship, but one in which giving and sympathizing includes sexual exchanges. Eliot writes of people and relationships that are perverse and dysfunctional, dry as the wasteland, and with little thought of true compassion.

Eliot’s wasteland transends the desolate landscape and Unreal city. The prevailing tones of death, dryness, and unnaturalness are just as applicable to the humans in “The Waste Land.” People exist in emotional isolation, meaningless relationships, and restless routine. What can be done to repair this world? Eliot’s inclusion of the human flaws indicates a humanist belief in the intertwined nature of the state of the world and the state of human beings. Eliot was a member of the Anglican Church, and the time and place of “The Waste Land” would have looked to Christianity for answers. But Eliot does not. He does not rebuke or ignore the Christian church, but Eliot does not conclude that it is the way and the truth and the all right answer to everything. Christian theology advises to abide faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13). The three practices advised in the Upanishads are less philosophical and more active. If humans are broken, humans are demanded to do something to fix their lives and world. Faith, hope, and love are entwined with damyata, datta, and dayadhvam, with give, sympathize and control, but the Upanishads command the practice of these verbs. Hope and love can be verbs, but even at that, they are theoretical. T.S. Eliot was a faithful man, but he felt that religious terminology was cliché. He does not reject religion but strives to improve it. Had Lil gone to a Catholic priest he would have granted her forgiveness with ten Hail Marys. Had Marie talked with a minister, he might have told her to pray for life to be lovely again. But if the characters were told to give, sympathize, and control, the neurotic rich woman might have attempted a more meaningful conversation with her husband, Lil and her friend might have approached their lives with more care and control, and the real estate agent might have strived to be more compassionate and less self-indulgent.

Forgiveness of sins does not provide real world solutions, and while the Bible indisputably instructs and encourages a good and giving life, Eliot chooses the didactic ancient words of the Upanishads. The Upanishads offer words to live by concerning human existence and interaction, and in the aftermath of World War I, people needed words to live by.

The Upanishads hold that “human beings can achieve moksha, or liberation from the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, by realizing that Atman (the essence of the human soul) is the same as Brahman (Ultimate Reality)” (Prothero 230). The Upanishads clearly advocate the human pursuit of greater knowledge and understanding. As the worldly cycle of “The Waste Land” appears so bleak and disrupted, Eliot’s inclusion of these ideas further supports a sense of human action in the universe. The Hindu text Bhagavad Gita furthers the values of the Upanishads and describes three paths to God: devotion, action, and knowledge (Prothero 162). Again, these three attributes are lacking in all of Eliot’s characters and situations. The idea of liberation from the cycles of life is also reiterated in the Bhagavad Gita’s principle of being in the world but not of the world. Hinduism provides advice for living in the world, but it also speaks of things that are not yet of this world, like shantih, the peace, which transcends all human understanding.

Eliot furthers his reference to the teachings of the Upanishads by ending the poem with “Shantih shantih shantih.” Shantih is the traditional ending to Upanishads, and Eliot chose to end “The Waste Land,” his own Upanishad—dealing with God, knowledge, purpose, life, death and the soul—in the same way. The peace which passes all understanding is also a part of the Judeo-Christian traditions, found in Philippians 4:7 (“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”), but Eliot chooses the Hindu phrase instead, broadening the scope of his message and reiterating the values of Hinduism. The peace to repair the wasteland is not a political peace, it is an inner peace which transcends all human understanding. Eliot is not asking for peace between the King and the Kaiser, but peace in hearts and minds that
enters relationships and infuses all human kind with a peace that comes from individuals.

Eliot’s end to the poem is slightly and surprisingly optimistic following the images of crumbling cities and dysfunctional relationships. He reiterates datta, damyata and dayadhvam as advice for the crumbling world. He repeats Shantih as almost a mantra following the whirlwind poem and “heap of broken images” (line 22). Today we find ourselves with another “heap of broken images,” coming from the dry desert wasteland of Iraq. Our understanding of the truth is pieced together, a “heap of broken images” from news clips and photographs, filtered and fragmented, elusive as the coffins of dead Americans coming back from Iraq. We are confused between outrage and complacency, numb to reality. We are still in need of advice to repair our world. In “The Waste Land,” Eliot’s prayer for human goodwill and for an otherworldly peace reconciles the horrible images of death and destruction with calm and hope. The reader is overwhelmed by the fragments of ideas and images and is still spinning with the poem when it ends quietly and peacefully with Shantih. Shantih shantih shantih.

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Apple Pie as an American Icon

James Ryan
Presenter: Fall Conference
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Professor Kelly Douglass, English 1AH

"As American as apple pie" is a very old, common saying in America. When Americans hear the saying, they are reminded of what an American icon apple pie is. The phrase suggests that apple pie is so American that in comparing something else to it, it is to say that the thing is just as American. For many Americans, the apple pie is simply an unquestioned, ingrained characteristic of America. Few people know however that the apple pie did not originate in America at all and has actually been around for centuries. Upon knowing the history behind the apple pie, an indifferent opinion of it as an American icon can be moved to an opinion of respectful admiration. One is likely to be impressed to see that it has a positive history and represents American genius. Because its history depicts Americans in a very positive light, as being inventive and industrious, the apple pie remains an accepted, well-founded icon of America.

In some version or another, apple pies or apple tarts have been around since the Middle Ages. Before fruit pies came about, the English people of the fourteenth century commonly consumed meat pies. Fruits such as apples were soon substituted for meat and the pie was then known as a dessert as well as an entrée. It was then that the apple pie was created. European settlers who came to the New World, and who would subsequently become the early Americans, were the ones who brought the apple pie to America. The English who came to America in 1620 brought not only apple pie with them, but also apple seeds since there were no apples in the Americas yet. What distinguishes the apple pie as the famous American pie from the original English pie is the American qualities and innovation that went into it. (appleofyourpie.com). The English may have brought the pie but Americans made apple pie the great success that it has become. When someone mentions apple pie, many people form mental images of an American family out at a 4th of July barbecue with apple pie on their red and white checkered table cloth. They might picture a bright Sunday afternoon with Mom in her pretty apron bringing a steaming apple pie to the kids or men competing in an all-American pie eating contest.

Before there could be the apple pie, there were the apples. Apples were grown all over the world but they thrived in America. The great climates in America led to the success of apples unlike any seen in the world up to that time. Besides American creativity, even American climate and soil were superior to their European counterparts. As J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur says, in Letters from an American Farmer: “No wonder we should thus cherish its possession, no wonder that so many Europeans who have never been able to say that such portion of land was theirs, cross the Atlantic to realize that happiness” (Crevecoeur 13). The soil, the very dirt of America, is a unique contributor to the success of the apple pie and the American people. Crevecoeur also says about the soil: “…on it is founded our rank, our freedom, our power as citizens, our importance as inhabitants of such a district” (Crevecoeur 13). The spreading of apples
around the country was helped in part by the now legendary John Chapman, or Johnny Appleseed. Our national fondness for the apple is supported with childlike imagery of a man hopping about the land planting apple seeds. When asked, most American children will affirm that Johnny Appleseed is the man who traveled around America planting apples. Apples themselves, along with the apple pie, have become very culturally important as well. Because of the early successes of the apple, Americans came to use it endearingly in what came to be common sayings. Popular sayings in America include “the apple of my eye”, “an apple a day keeps the doctor away”, “how do you like them apples?”, and the bad person of a group being referred to as a “bad apple”.

Along with the winning production of apples, Americans made the apple pie thicker by making two crusts, as opposed to the thin English pie that had just one crust. Also, Americans expanded the apple pie to versions such as apple cobbler, apple crisp, and apple slump. It is characteristics such as these, multiple versions of the pie, two crusts instead of one, which make the apple pie so representative of America. The added crust shows how Americans generally seek more and similarly, the different creations of the pie show the American propensity for variety, choice, and diversity. Further, the apple pie became very popular after the happy ending to the Revolutionary War. The recipe for the new American-made apple pie spread along the colonies and it became even more remarkable. Colonists often ate pie for every meal because they liked it so much. Ben Franklin and Martha Washington were known apple pie enthusiasts. For his pies, Ben Franklin grew prize apples in his backyard and Martha Washington served apple pie at official dinners. It was through the enthusiasm that these iconic American figures had for the apple pie that, in turn, made the pie itself so iconic and legendary. Apple pie is a significant part of today’s 4th of July parties and it became at its highest popularity during the very first 4th of July parties in the 18th century.

In short, apple pie has become such an American icon because of the American improvements on something that was first European. Americans transformed, with their delicious American grown apples, the simple European apple pie, into a new, thick, two-crusted, culinary masterpiece that captured America’s taste buds and hearts. It is more than just a sweet American treat; it is a symbol of American struggle and invention, of moving on from the old. The American apple pie came about during a unique period in history for Americans. They were adjusting to their newly acquired freedoms and their desire for their fledgling land to become a success. The apple pie captures the spirit of Americans striving to be independently successful and of always reaching for that American dream.

I used to think that apple pie was such an American icon merely because it has been popularly consumed since the early days of America. I did not put much thought into why it was such a beloved part of the country. I simply assumed that apple pie is generally considered a pleasant tasting food. I see it much differently now that I know that it was not originally American to begin with. It is impressive to me now to know that the reason it has become such an icon is because of American innovation. Apple pies were around before America was but they were a one-crusted, average food item. It was Americans who grew the better apples for the pies, who made it with two crusts instead of one, who expanded it into different versions, and who embraced it proudly. America, not Europe, is the reason that the apple pie is so popular and iconic. The enthusiasm Americans produced for the apple pie demonstrates their originality and resourcefulness. The people of the new America were brought together by this new culinary success. It created a sort of bond and a sense of pride between the citizens of this new country. When journalists would ask American soldiers in World War II why they were going to war, a very popular answer was “for mom and apple pie”. The words “for apple pie”, the way the soldiers intended them, meant much more than just “for dessert food”. By this time, the apple pie was of such importance that, in a soldier’s reasons for fighting a war, it meant that the soldier was fighting for the freedom of the American spirit. The apple pie now came to symbolize the potential of the American and that was what the soldiers put their lives on the line for. It warms me to see something so seemingly minor as dessert food bring a people together the way apple pie has.

My faith for the closeness and collaboration between Americans is swelled. Learning the history or origin of a cherished cultural icon often results in disappointment. Commonly respected things often have a dark history. In Bernard-Henri Levy’s “Rushmore as a Myth”, it is revealed that the American icon that is Mount Rushmore has a dirty back-story and is not the simple, innocent, inspirational piece of work that most people see it as. Mount Rushmore’s history, aside from the monument being created by a member of the Ku Klux Klan, consists of violating sacred Indian land. Another American icon with a murky history is Grant Wood’s iconic work of art American Gothic. In America Goes to College, John Seery speculates that
American Gothic contains dark symbols of abuse, incest, and evil. The true origins of these long standing American icons left me with an unpleasant feeling of discomfort and disappointment; I do not see them the way I did before. Learning of the discreditable histories, especially in the case of Mount Rushmore, I was lead to question the integrity of the Founding Fathers and to examine the value of the monument itself. Other people have likely felt the same. The full story of apple pie not only lacks a dark history for a change, but has a very positive, inspiring one. The origin of apple pie tells of great American qualities and the triumph of the American spirit. It reinforces the positive things that Americans believe about themselves and aspire to: creativity, hard work, and originality. There is nothing disappointing in this history. The effectiveness of the apple pie as an American icon is retained. Americans will not look on the fame and iconic state of apple pie as tainted or something to question. Nothing was stolen and no Indian lands were violated to make apple pie the icon it is.

The apple pie as an American icon has always been a simple fact with no real meaning behind it. Other than a fondness for its taste, I, like most other Americans, never saw its importance. The reason that something American can be deemed “as American as apple pie” is because Americans made a permanent place in American culture for the apple pie. It was their innovation, ingenuity, and creative genius that transformed a dull European pie into the delicious, two crusted sensation that became a national favorite. Although finding out the origins of a country’s icon often leads to disappointment, learning the history of the apple pie brings encouragement and pride. It reassures the positive beliefs that Americans have about their country: that Americans are inventive, creative, hard workers who have the ability to turn something that is relatively unknown into something that an entire nation includes in their annual Independence Day celebrations. Unlike the American icons presented by Bernard-Henri Levy and John Seery, the apple pie is an icon that continues to inspire only pride in Americans. The apple pie, even if its history becomes widely known, will remain as important an icon to Americans as it always has been; perhaps more so. I, for one, am happy to know how apple pie came to be an icon and am proud of the inventive spirit that this country was built on.

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All Men are Created Equal...Except the Gays.

James Ryan
Presenter: Building Bridges Conference
Faculty Mentor: Kelly Douglass, English 1A Honors

Imagine there is a couple who is very much in love and who, like so many human beings in love before them, would like nothing more than to celebrate their love by getting married. Now imagine that the country the couple lives in, though it generally promises equal rights to all its citizens, will absolutely not allow them to marry. It will not let them come together as a couple under the law, and it will not give them the same benefits it does to so many other millions of couples. The reason for this injustice is that the couple is two women, and it happens that their country does not consider their union worthy of marriage. The United States of America, the country of freedom and equal rights, still will not allow its gay and lesbian citizens to legally marry. Marriage is a simple, basic right that should not be denied to one certain group of people. Denying homosexuals the fundamental right of marriage is hypocritical of the American government and a failure of the
promises of America. The right thing to do is to acknowledge civil rights and legalize gay marriage.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness..." These are among the opening words of the Declaration of Independence of the United States (United States Cong.). These are the words that open one of the most sacred documents of a country which prides itself on the freedoms it provides for its citizens and the example of equality it presents to the rest of the world. Reading these precise words as they appear on the Declaration of Independence can leave one speechless. There it clearly says "all men are created equal", and yet a large group of people are treated unequally.

The denial of gay marriage directly goes against the very founding beliefs of America. As Mary Bonauto, director of the civil rights group Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders, or GLAD, rightly asserts about marriage: "...if a right is fundamental for some, it's fundamental for all. There's not a gay exception in the Constitution" (qtd. in Jost). The government cannot choose to exclude a part of its citizens from fundamental rights; it’s denial of marriage to gay citizens is entirely hypocritical.

For a country that has seen so many years of different kinds of discrimination, it seems logical that by now America would promptly repeal the ban on homosexual marriage. It has been forty-one years since, in 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned laws that prohibited marriage between different races. The Court had concluded that "states that bar marriages solely on the basis of race violate the equal protection and due process clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment" (Zorea). The discrimination on the basis of race of that time is just like the discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation of today. Further, as the Court’s conclusion shows, it happens that prohibiting non-traditional marriages, that is, marriage between a couple other than a man and a woman of the same race, violates two founding proclamations of America: the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. "Unequal treatment is inconsistent with the Constitution. All these couples seek is equality," says Jennifer Levi, a civil rights attorney (qtd. in Jost). As Levi notes, these couples only expect what the doctrines of their country promise them.

One of the main reasons that gay marriage should be legalized is that, without it, gay couples do not receive the same legal benefits that heterosexual married couples do. Married heterosexual couples enjoy over a thousand benefits from the United States government that they can only have by being married. A few of these many benefits include: assumption of spouse’s pension, the ability to make medical decisions on behalf of their spouse, social security survivor benefits, and being allowed sick leave to care for their spouse (Johnson). Though unmarried gays and lesbians are not completely devoid of benefits, (they can be joined in a sort of marriage substitute called a civil union and are allowed limited rights in forms such as being able to create wills and health-care proxies, and being able to have co-parent adoptions), marriage is invaluable in the benefits it brings. These non-marriage rights are limited and unfair. Mary Bonauto states that, being unmarried, homosexual couples "cannot contract their way into changing pension laws, survivorship rights, workers-compensation dependency protection or the tax system, to name just a few" (qtd. in Jost). Allowing same sex couples only these limited rights is not a just a small matter of injustice; denying them the many rights that are theirs as Americans citizens, and that other couples receive, can have major, painful ramifications. If a gay woman is injured, for instance, how is her devoted partner to see her in her hospital room without the legal right of hospital visitation that comes with marriage?

Besides the legal benefits and rights that come with marriage, the benefit of expressing love and being able to exercise one's status as an American citizen is being denied as well. For many couples, marriage is a dream, something they passionately hope to attain so that they can be completely joined with their chosen partner. Not being able to marry makes homosexual couples seem like neglected, second class citizens. As Mary Bonauto rightly states, "...gay men and lesbians will continue to fall short of the status of full citizenship, marking them and their children with a stamp of inferiority" (qtd. in Jost). In a country where all citizens are meant to live in equality, on level ground with one another, the fact a certain group of those citizens is denied the right to marry, and subsequently the same basic life benefits as all the others, is a major problem. What kind of message is America sending to children who are growing up in this environment that is unfair and relegates a number of its citizens to a lower class, unworthy of rights? The United States government is
telling these children, as well as the rest of American people, that it does not consider the relationships of gays and lesbians to be valid; it does not consider them worthy of equal treatment.

Another reason why gay couples should be allowed to marry is that they function just like most any heterosexual couples. It is important for opponents of gay marriage to realize that gay couples are humans like everyone else and that there are no shocking or horrible differences in the way gay couples conduct themselves. Contrary to popular stereotypes, not all homosexuals are promiscuous, moving from person to person, and never settling with one partner. They are denied the right to solidify their unions by marrying and are simultaneously believed to be incapable of holding a stable relationship. How can opponents of gay marriage use this argument in their fight to keep marriage banned for gays, when marriage would actually promote monogamy and long term stability? Many gay couples stay together for years and years, longer, in fact, than many heterosexual couples in a country where currently fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce (“Divorce Rate - U.S.A.”). Julie Goodridge and her partner Hillary, of Massachusetts, are an example of such a longstanding couple. They have been together for sixteen years and have a daughter. "We have a child. We own real estate together. We have wills. We have health-care proxies. But we have no legal relationship to each other," Julie says (qtd. in Jost). Ken Heard and Martin Padgett, having been partners for twenty five years, are another example of the reality that gay couples do maintain long term monogamous relationships. They were the first gay couple to marry legally in Canada (Jost).

Opponents of gay marriage believe that marriage should be a strictly protected institution and that allowing gays to marry would destroy the harmonious traditional marriage, between one man and one woman, which has existed for so many years. The Defense of Marriage Act, signed into law in 1996, defines marriage as "only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" (United States Cong.). Supporters were pleased to see it become law because to them it meant protecting the traditional marriage. As Senator Phil Gramm of Texas put it, "The traditional family has stood for 5,000 years. Are we so wise today that we are ready to reject 5,000 years of recorded history? I don't think so" (United States Cong.). Frankly, it is hard to see what traditional, working institution of marriage they are trying to protect. Restricting marriage to one man and one woman, in the "traditional" sense, has not produced generations of happy, functioning families. Traditional marriages are not at all stable; as stated before, fifty percent of them currently end in divorce. Through a combination of out-of-wedlock childbirths, single parent households, and a heavily increased number of premarital relationships, the "traditional" family has broken down.

The 2000 census showed that the number of out-of-wedlock births increased from 4 percent in 1950 to 35 percent in 2000. As a result of these changing patterns of sexual relations, marriage no longer served as the primary institution by which children are brought into the world and socialized in the United States. The 2000 census showed that six out of 10 children were born into homes in which the parents were either unmarried or divorced (Zorea).

It seems that traditional marriage has destroyed itself. Furthermore, what progress can be made by sticking to thousand year old traditions? As lawyer Thomas B. Stoddard argues: "If tradition were the only measure, most states would still limit matrimony to partners of the same race" (Stoddard 289). Progress in a society is about moving forward, not clinging to old discriminatory traditions. Opponents of same sex marriage say marriage in America should follow tradition; racist opponents of interracial marriage in the 1960s probably said the same thing.

Another major reason why gay marriage should be legalized and why homosexuals should not be harshly discriminated against or seen as bad people, comes from the common misconception that homosexuality is a choice that people make. Ron Crews, President of the Massachusetts Family Institute, believes that being homosexual is a choice and that it can be changed. He states that "the push for legalizing homosexual marriage is based on at least three myths" and that one of these so-called myths is "that same-sex sexual behavior is genetic and unchangeable" (qtd. in Jost). It is not a myth. Gays and lesbians did not get up one day and think to themselves, "I think I'm going to be gay! Yes, I am choosing to be attracted to members of my own sex and have the general public, and possibly my family and friends, feel alienated by me!" Speaking personally as a gay man, I can attest that homosexuality is not a choice. I did not choose to be homosexual; I did not ask to be homosexual, but I am. I am also a college
student, a best friend, and most importantly, an American citizen. I, like most other homosexuals, am just like any American trying to be happy. I have grown up in America, I obey its laws, and accordingly, I expect it to allow me the fundamental civil liberty of marriage, like it does everyone else. That is all that the lobbying gay and lesbian Americans want: not to destroy any beloved institution, or to turn anyone homosexual, but to be equal under the law.

Recently, during the 2008 general election, Proposition 8 was voted on and passed in California. The purpose of the proposition was to eliminate the right of same sex couples to marry. Prop 8 has engendered enormous controversy and passionate debate both before the election and after. So many Californians who voted against Prop 8, as well as similar minded people around the country, are in outraged disbelief that it actually came to pass. It is a direct violation of fundamental rights. One of the base arguments of opponents to gay marriage is that outlawing it "protects marriages as an essential institution of society because the best situation for a child is to be raised by a mother and father" (qtd. in Gray). People cannot know what the best situation for children is. As California chief justice Ronald M. George explains: "An individual's capacity to establish a loving and long-term committed relationship with another person and responsibly to care for and raise children does not depend on the individual's sexual orientation" (qtd. in Gray). Are Prop 8 supporters worried that the children raised by gay couples will turn out wrong in some way, or even gay themselves? This cannot be, because the majority of the gay people who exist now came from the one type of parents that is actually allowed marriage: heterosexual parents. A couple's sexuality does not affect their ability to lovingly and responsibly bring up a child. Evidence of this can be seen in everyday life where there are clearly plenty of delinquent or unhappy children that come from the traditional heterosexual family that is so ardently supported.

Perhaps the most maddening detail about the passage of Proposition 8 and its supporters is that, whether or not it passed, the usual rights of heterosexual couples would not be affected in any way. With or without Prop 8 in effect, heterosexual couples could still marry and receive their many marriage rights as they always have. As Ronald M. George puts it, "The exclusion of same-sex couples from the designation of marriage clearly is not necessary in order to afford full protection to all of the rights and benefits that currently are enjoyed by married opposite-sex couples" (qtd. in Gray). Opponents of gay marriage who supported Prop 8, or Prop "H8te", as gay marriage advocates have coined it, have no logical reason to be barring people from their rights. In sum, it can be concluded that gays being able to marry would not affect usual heterosexual rights, the well-being of children, or the institution of marriage in general. The burning engines inside many Prop 8 supporters, that drive them to hurt so many people, are fueled by fear, hate, and ignorance. "...the reasons for denying gay and lesbian couples the right to marry that served as the 'factual' basis for Proposition 8 are but pretexts for discrimination" [...] "Proposition 8 was explicitly designed to relegate hundreds of thousands of Californians to an inferior legal and social status" (Gray). For passionate advocates of gay marriage, the painful illogic of Prop 8 is all too clear; but apparently the rest of California, as well as the American government, cannot see the right. One simple reason why marriage should be legalized: To stop senseless discrimination.

Faced with the mass discrimination in America and the government’s failure to enforce equal treatment, a gay American might be a bit confused about his or her place as a citizen of America. Why should I be treated differently, that person, and the millions like them, might wonder. "Depriving millions of gay American adults the marriages of their choice, and the rights that flow from marriage, denies equal protection of the law" (Stoddard 289). America was founded on simple, brilliant principles: principles of freedom and equality. It is des despairing to know that, even after everything America has overcome, it still denies gay and lesbian citizens their right to marry. Without marriage, gay and lesbian couples do not receive the same legal rights and benefits that other couples do. Without marriage, gay and lesbian couples are seen as inferior, second class citizens. It is a sad time when heterosexual couples are divorcing and remarrying time and time again while homosexual couples who have been together for twenty years have never once been allowed the privilege of marrying. Yale law Professor Eskridge said that same sex marriage would "civilize America, by replacing homophobic group hatred with the kind of group acceptance and cooperation that is a source of American strength and pride" (qtd. in Jost). Legalizing gay marriage would mean equality as well as recognizing and promoting love in an
increasingly gloomy, conflict-filled world. Imagine that.

A Self Incrimination

Kacia Salgado
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Sheryl Tschetter, English 1BH

Where is the line between the supernatural and reality? Can it really be distinguished at all? This line is the place which Edgar Allen Poe’s “Ligeia” dances over, back and forth, through the sometimes confusing but always eerie account of a narrator addicted to drugs. This narrator describes Ligeia, a seemingly paranormal woman he passionately admires, as well as his experiences with her death and regeneration. After Ligeia dies, the narrator talks about a woman he marries named Rowena, though considers her far less fantastic than Ligeia. He also watches Rowena die, though not before the couple experience seemingly mystical events. Meanwhile, he makes readers well aware of the fact that he repeatedly abuses hallucinatory opium, which throws doubt upon the truth of his entire tale. This story can be interpreted as the result of supernatural phenomenon or opium hallucinations. Textual clues ultimately reveal the more obvious answer of the two. However, in both cases we can be sure that the narrator is experiencing something disturbing and unusual.

The narrator’s description of Ligeia suggests that he is seeing something supernatural. He paints Ligeia as an incredibly gorgeous lady with beautiful eyes, hair and even an admirable nose. He hints at her superiority to all humankind when he describes her “infinite supremacy”. Even her mind seems to be more advanced than human nature allows when he says her knowledge is more extensive than any man or woman that ever has lived. At times, he describes her in a way which seems to merely compare her to anything, but bluntly says three times that she was dead, saying “she perished”, “I gazed upon [Ligeia’s] corpse”, and “she died”, which leaves little doubt that he was convinced she had made that usual passage from life. Indeed, the fact alone that Ligeia gets sick is enough to separate her from traditional definitions of mystical creatures. When looking solely at these clues, there is strong evidence against the idea that Ligeia is paranormal.

However, even some of Ligeia’s actions indicate that she has supernatural powers. To begin with, she dies, but returns to life. If taken on its own, this event could not be explained in any way but as supernatural. Another instance of an unearthly power is when Ligeia has a physical transformation into herself from Rowena’s corpse. There is no point at which the narrator describes an opportunity for a mortal Ligeia to have entered the room, or, especially, Rowena’s wrappings. One supernatural event in the story that could possibly have been another product of Ligeia’s superhuman powers was when Rowena is seemingly poisoned. The moment before the narrator depicts some invisible force dropping a liquid that makes Rowena sick into her cup, he describes hearing a light footstep come near the woman, as well as seeing a dim shadow. This is eerily similar to the description that the narrator makes of Ligeia, which he felt had “incomparable lightness and elasticity of [...] footfall. She came and departed like a shadow”. Although it is not explicitly stated that Ligeia was to blame, these two descriptions are so similar that it could be an additional mystical work of Ligeia. Undoubtedly, none of these things could have been done by a normal human being.

While there are many hints at Ligeia’s supernatural tendencies, the fact that this evidence comes purely from only one source is significant. When she is described as having supernatural power, this is the narrator’s work. The narrator is the only one who praises her or sees her do anything mystical. In another story, with an undoubtedly mentally sound narrator, a conclusion that supernatural forces are at work in this tale might be undeniable. However, this
occurrences. This whole story could actually, things she does, and the other strange seemingly supernatural Ligeia, the fantastical narrator. This would realistically explain the experience and claims are related by the narrator through paranormal events, when someone else fix of the drug. Even in the only other moment well have been imagined through a delusional memory (or real time experience) of a paranormal events could possibly be happening, abnormal force could be at work. Additionally, after he senses something invisible drop liquid into what Rowena drinks, he blames it on what he calls his “vivid imagination”. Yet, he soon says that “I cannot conceal it from myself- after this period, a rapid change for the worse took place in […] my wife.” Again, he seems to be suspecting that he did not imagine this, but that it was a real paranormal incident with genuine repercussions. Although even he tries to explain these strange events logically, the narrator is not able to convince himself that they are normal occurrences. This leaves a sense that paranormal events could possibly be happening, even when Ligeia is not mentioned.

However, while he tells this story, the narrator admits that he is under the influence of opium, which throws doubt upon the reliability of his entire account. The first reference to the drug is when he originally describes Ligeia, setting the stage for the recurring subject of his drug addiction. Opium, as a substance that he admits clouds the mind and causes visions, could really be the cause of all of this. It is possible that he is relating this entire tale from a memory (or real-time experience) of a hallucination at any given place, at any given time, instead of really experiencing anything. The complete story from beginning to end could well have been imagined through a delusional fix of the drug. Even in the only other moment when someone else- Rowena- seems to go through paranormal events, her entire experience and claims are related by the narrator. This would realistically explain the seemingly supernatural Ligeia, the fantastical things she does, and the other strange occurrences. This whole story could actually, truly occur - even if it contains extraordinary elements - because of a drug that can make anything seem to happen.

The narrator relates his tale with such description and supposed emotion that it seems he really believes everything he is saying. The way that he is able to describe Ligeia’s physical appearance down to minute details of her forehead shows he has a very clear picture of her in his mind; one which, if imagined, would have taken unusually intense forethought. The abbey he lives in, too, is described scrupulously. He also gives his story, however bizarre, a cohesive timeline that spans what he calls the “long years” that had passed since meeting Ligeia. Emotions, too, are related with such clarity and passion that he implies being convinced that he actually felt them. From when he describes feeling “fully impressed with the strength of [Ligeia’s] affection”, to when he says “I [was] crushed into the very dust with sorrow [so that] I could no longer endure the lonely desolation of my dwelling”, it is insinuated that narrator opens up his very heart on the page. The fact that he describes such depth in his passionate emotions makes it seem that he could be convinced they are acute memories. The depth and detail in these descriptions imply that the narrator is relating a tale he deems completely true.

Yet, at times, it is almost as though he admits that none of his story even really happened. One of the biggest clues is his first mention of the drug, when he says “It was the very person of Ligeia […] it was the radiance of an opium dream”. Taken literally, that makes perfect sense. Ligeia was the radiance of an opium dream. At some points, he will describe a situation in great detail, then suddenly interject with a mention of the opium accompanied by a contradictory word such as “but”. This gives his stories a sense of saying that fantastical things happened, but that great attention should also be paid to the fact that he was experiencing visions at this time. This gives the narrator very little credibility, because when he so clearly describes the effects of opium, he repeatedly reminds readers that all he’s describing could be drug-induced.

The fact that this story is told by the narrator, and the clues he gives about himself, are what unravel the truth behind his tale. It is easy to get distracted by the many ways he builds Ligeia up as a supernatural being, allows otherworldly events to occur and describes his tale with great detail. When talking about her, it seems that he fully believes that he actually shared experiences with a real paranormal creature. However, he discounts his own story through blurbs about being a drug addict. When he even bothers to explain that opium
inspires crazy hallucinations, he provides a logical, consistent explanation to his entire fantastical tale. This makes an opium state of delirium the most obvious answer to the true force behind the supernatural elements of the story because anything can happen in a vision. Although the narrator seems to put so much trust and belief in Ligeia’s mystical qualities, his confessions about opium visions throw doubt over every wild thing he sees. This tale, especially its fantastical elements, simply cannot be trusted, because it is a story on drugs.

Women in Islam

Maureen Sheikh
Presenter: Building Bridges
Faculty Mentor: Kathleen Sell

Islam is a religion that has been for many years, and continues to be misrepresented, misunderstood, misinterpreted, and, above all, misused by Muslims themselves. The teachings of Islam primarily lie within the Holy Scripture, the Holy Qur’an, and secondarily within the Sunnah/Hadith, which are the sayings/actions of the Prophet Muhammad that provide an explanation to those passages from the Qur’an that may be difficult to understand or aren’t mentioned in detail. While this option of turning to an existing interpretation (the Sunnah/Hadith) exists, Muslim men still tend to structure societies according to their interpretations of verses from the Qur’an. Jane I. Smith’s article, “Islam,” about women in Islam, covers many controversial issues about a woman’s role in society in regards to taking the veil, ownership of property, inheritance, education, marriage, and divorce. In the article, she grasps the idea that most Muslims adhere to the conventions of society regarding women in Islam rather than that of the Qur’an, but blurs the distinction between actual Islamic teachings and interpretations thereof that portray the faith in a negative light.

The role of women in Islam is particularly difficult for Western culture to understand because it is a culture that has no strict boundaries in terms of how people should dress or interact with one another, especially between men and women. It is also because Western culture has evolved throughout the years and is now very modern compared to the culture represented by Islam. Islam was founded 1400 years ago, when the time and cultural context was completely different than that of today. At that time, women had no independence as compared to their relative liberty now. Most of them could not even be further educated due to cultural and financial constraints because they had brothers whose education was more important. This is because, keeping in mind the historical context, men were the breadwinners and women were housewives, so their education was not as important as that of their brothers; indeed, they didn’t bear the burden of providing for a family. However, this does not mean that women should not be educated, for in Islam it is stressed that men and women must learn to read and write from cradle to grave. This is where the distinction between culture and religion comes in. In the early stages of Islam, parents and relatives did not educate their daughters because they either could not afford to educate both sons and daughters, or they encouraged their daughters to stay home to spare them from the sight of non-related men, for the safety of their respect.

Islam by no means tries to oppress the rights of women, but sometimes is confused with that concept because of fundamentalists within the religion and Western bias. If a Westerner sees a Muslim woman who takes the veil, the idea of suppressed sexuality and submission may cross his/her mind primarily because of the reputation of Islam: a religion in which men have control over women and are superior to them. Smith (Jane I. Smith) discusses these stereotypes and refers to specific verses from the Qur’an and interpretations of its teachings. She first explains what the Qur’an has to say about women and how, since men provide for them, they are a step above them. Therefore, this concept comes up in major issues such as “marriage and related topics, divorce, inheritance and ownership of property, and veiling and seclusion” (237).

In the beginning of the article, she points out two verses from the Qur’an that seem contradictory. She goes on to say these “two verses have caused a great deal of consternation to Westerners. One is 2:228, which says literally that men are a step above women, and the other is 4:34, clarifying that men are the protectors of women (or are in charge of women) because God has given preference to one over the other and because men provide support for women” (236). Although she adds verse 4:34 after 2:228 to explain it, she maintains that “[m]uslim women traditionally have been married at an extremely young age, sometimes even before puberty” (238). This may be true in
some Muslim countries, but it has nothing to do with the religion itself. It is a culture based practice. The Qur’an asserts, “[m]ake trial of orphans until they reach the age of marriage” (4:6). This means that men may only marry women if they have reached the age of consent (puberty). It also puts forth the condition that both the man and woman must be in agreement to wed each other. Putting forth the example of young girls who have been forced to get married before they can even be called adolescents takes away from the teachings of Islam and focuses on the culture many Muslims have embraced.

Within that culture is also the misunderstood concept of divorce in Islam. Unlike Christianity, divorce is allowed but just not favored. According to Islamic law, when a man divorces a woman it is called talaq, and when a woman divorces with her own will it is known as khula. However, Smith reveals the side of the so-called shariah (Islamic law) by saying “men can divorce for less cause than women, and often divorces hung up in courts with male judges can prove enormously difficult for women to gain” (239). This is true in many Islamic countries because Muslim men tend to think of themselves as owners of women rather than providers, but it does not mean that this is what Islam teaches. Every teaching of Islam is in the Quran, and the Quran states: “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means” (4:34). The actual word used in the surah is “qawwam,” which means to take care of or look after. A slight change in translation of a word gives a verse in the Quran a whole new meaning and it’s (the verse) negative interpretations are widely accepted in the West because of the unfamiliarity of Western culture and Islam. Being the provider for a woman and family gives a man more responsibility and the meaning of men excelling women is just that they are ahead of them because they are ahead in responsibility.

Verse 4:35 has been interpreted in many ways that contradict the other verses in the Quran that clearly say, “And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise” (2:228). This means that men and women are equally responsible for their actions in God’s eyes, but the advantage that men have over women is just that they are more exposed to matters outside household affairs and moreover they have more freedom to be out of their homes because their safety is not an issue. However, now times have changed and so have the interpretation of verses. This does not mean that the core values of the verses should or have to be changed. Even though Smith acknowledges that “[f]or the Muslims the words of the Quran are divine, and the prescriptions for the roles and rights of females, like the other messages of the holy book, are seen as a part of God’s divinely ordered plan for all humanity” (249-250), she concludes the article saying, “Change will come slowly, and whatever kinds of liberation ultimately prevail will be cloaked in a garb that is- in one or another of its various aspects- essentially Islamic” (250). The “various aspects” of Islam she is talking about are precisely what prevent the essence of Islam to be understood. The various interpretations of verses such as 4:34 and 2:228 have translated in ways that depict Islam as being a submissive religion in which women should be oppressed by men to keep society in order. So the only way to understand this faith is to read the direct message of the Quran instead of prying to translations that can prove to be delusive.

The word Islam means "submission", or the total surrender of oneself to God (Arabic: ﷺ, Allâh)

Works Cited

Burning burning burning: An Analysis of the “Fire Sermon” in “The Waste Land”

Kameron Straine
Presenter: Fall Conference
Faculty Mentor: Thatcher Carter, English 1BH

The allusions in T.S. Eliot’s poem “The Waste Land” are intricately woven together to create a dense package for the reader to disassemble. There are many allusions made in the large poem pertaining to cultures and religions, but the densest of all these allusions has to be Gautama Buddha’s “The Fire Sermon”. Buddha’s sermon’s central message is to avert all senses from earthly desires in order to attain spiritual enlightenment. Buddha is the founder of the Buddhist religion which teaches its
principles of eradicating human suffering. The Four Noble Truths explain the nature and origin of suffering as well as offering a cessation of suffering. Buddhism teaches against the extremes of human character such as greed, dishonesty, and corruption. Eliot’s allusion of “The Fire Sermon” in “The Waste Land” uses the theme of averting the senses, but he transforms it to fit into his message to the reader; he uses the allusion to show the industrialized world’s disastrous effects on humanity and to illuminate the misogynistic treatment of women.

The choices made by the industrialized world greatly affect humanity’s attitude towards its environment particularly during and after World War I; for example, the automobile industry was introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century which in turn has caused some of the destruction to earth. The perverse language which pervades Eliot’s poem creates an unnatural world in which the reader can understand the origins of human attitude of the time. The depictions of the characters and settings are ironic and grotesque in their manner: a woman using her hair to play music (377-78), rodents crawling along the river bank (188-87), a river that sweats oil and tar (266-67), corpses blooming out of the ground like plants (71-2), a blind prophet with women’s breasts (218-19), towers upside down in mid-air (382), and “bats with baby faces in the violet light” (Eliot 379). These creatures and settings that dwell in “The Waste Land” were created by the people who controlled the world’s practices with the fire of greed as their motivation. The river is polluted with oil and tar from factories’ drainage systems as well as shipping boats excreting oil from its fuel pipes. The factories and boats are small pieces of a capitalist structure which has a prime goal over anything or anyone and that is the profit. The woman who is fiddling her hair like a violin has turned desperately madden creature. The Waste Land has infiltrated her to the extent in which her only expression is to play a soft, delicate tune. Although Eliot suggests in the course of the poem that part of the blame for the Waste Land goes to the apathetic public, the other side of the blame is directed towards the malicious practices of the industrialized world that have created a breeding ground for these horrific images.

Eliot’s criticism of the industrialized world’s practices is not exclusive to the effects on mankind but also the effects on nature. Eliot uses the literary technique of personification towards things like the grass, the jungle, and the thunder in order to illustrate the far-reaching power of mechanized-industry in the world. He attributes a voice to the grass in “What the Thunder Said”; “In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing” (386), and he personifies the grass in order to show the reader the desperation of non-human living things at that point in time. This song is not a jubilant expression for the fertility of the earth but it is a desperate cry against the treatment of the earth. It is extremely bizarre to have the grass sing but Eliot is showing that things with no wind pipe are lamenting the current state of the world.

The second stanza of the poem describes the Waste Land in an abysmal condition with no shade from the trees, the noise of crickets and the lack of water. Eliot continues to show that the Waste Land is worse than being in hell when he repeats the condition of the place as having no water whatsoever (331-58). The absence of fresh, drinkable water is detrimental to the life of any living thing, and the Waste Land is a nuisance of a place that does not allow comfort. Also, Eliot describes the air quality in the Waste Land, “Unreal City,/ Under the brown fog of a winter noon” (60-1), and “Unreal City/Under the brown fog of a winter noon” (207-8). Fog is not typically brown in its natural state; however, when smoke, gases and other pollutants mix in with the fog then it becomes a hazy brown. Eliot mentions the air quality perhaps from first-hand experience due to his living in London, England. England was undergoing a massive industrialization at the same time the Americans were transforming their economy.

The perversion of humanity and the lamentation of nature stem from the by-products of the industrialized world which are adamantly denounced by Buddha’s “The Fire Sermon”. Products such as bombs, cars, guns, airplanes, etc. have polluted nature as well as humanity. These things that have affected both nature and humanity are the result, as considered by Buddha in reference to his sermon, of fiery senses: Buddha writes, “With the fire of passion, say I, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of infatuation; with birth, old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair are they on fire.” Buddha is writing to people everywhere that the problems come directly from human beings; all of these feelings have caused the Waste Land. By adding “The Fire Sermon” to his poem Eliot is showing his people where the problems lie which in turn is a solution to these problems if his society wishes to recognize them.

Also, the effects created by the practices of the industrialized world dig deep into the personal relationships between man and woman; the corruptive practices of industry create self-indulgent human relationships. In “The Waste Land”, relationships in the conventional sense are broken, “The river bears
The relationship between men and women in "The Waste Land" is unequal. The women in the poem are subordinate to the men's burning senses of lust, infatuation and vanity. The treatment of the women is due to the covetous nature that has been created in the Waste Land: the woman's submission to the gropes of her lover, the money given the military wife to fix her image, and the deranged violinist driven to madness by man's creation of the Waste Land. The reason why the deranged violinist is a part of the misogyny of women is because Eliot could have easily written it as a man fiddling with his hair, but the use of the deranged woman fiddling her hair adds to the poem the pains that the women bear. The pains of the military wife represent the condition of women especially when she complains of the pills that the doctor has given her for the abortion she had, "I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face, 'It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said, 'She's had five already, and nearly died of young George'" (158-60). Yet after the complaints of the pills, her friend in the pub is urging her to look her best for her husband who wants a "good time". Although, in the case of the military wife and her abortion, the women are not blameless for the pain, they are in fact the instigators of the pain that fills the Waste Land. The lawyer's aborted baby was not conceived with the help of her husband because he was off fighting the war. On the other hand, the groped woman does not bear so much pain as she does the wicked disease of apathy in the Waste Land when her "lover" assaults her with his vain desires. Eliot allows the woman to plainly fade away from the story; however, by doing so Eliot shows the passivity that has infiltrated the woman, "Paces about her room again, alone./She smooths her hair with automatic hand./And puts a record on the gramophone" (254-256). The woman is left alone with no lover to be beside her and she has music which allows her to escape into another dimension. These women of the Waste Land are wading in the river of solitude filled with despair.

Once again Buddha's "The Fire Sermon" is intertwined with this problem of misogyny in the Waste Land. The people in the Waste Land have forgotten about the respect for humanity and compassion between one another. The women are treated poorly and the men go on objectifying women for their own self-pleasure. Buddha writes in his sermon to ward off those senses which destroy and cripple human beings in order to achieve something better, "...by the absence of passion he becomes free...and that he is no more for this world." The Buddhist principles are the way out of the Waste Land which allows relationships to fuse
together with a sense of mutual love and respect. These principles must be followed by from the highest level of the hierarchy to the lowest in order to eradicate the treatment of the women of the Waste Land.

Clearly, through examining all the atrocities committed by the industrialized world and in turn the relationships between men and women Eliot has provided a solution to a small portion of the vast number of problems in the Waste Land. The solution is to adhere to the principles of Buddha’s sermon by turning away from worldly pleasures because it has shown to do more harm than good to society. By combining “The Fire Sermon” into “The Waste Land” Eliot has created a warning for his society as well as any future society.

Shantih shantih shantih

Work Cited

The Insightful Use of Ezekiel as an Allusion for “The Waste Land”

Michael Sutherlin
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Dr. Carter, English IBH

T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” is a very complex and meaningful poem that uses many allusions in order to create an embedded meaning, which is to show the human condition of despair and provides a source of salvation from it. One of Eliot’s allusions that confirm this analysis is the book of Ezekiel from the King James Bible. Within this portion of the Bible, the prophet Ezekiel prophesizes the destruction of the Israelites and warns them to change their ways or they will be destroyed. It is also very important to note that the Israelites did not listen to God’s commands and were obliterated. T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land” alludes to the book of Ezekiel in order imply that the causes of the Israelite’s destruction are the same as the Waste Landers sources of despair and that they can be freed through certain steps found in Ezekiel’s messages from God.

Whenever Eliot refers to the people living in the wasteland, the numerous sins of the people are thoroughly displayed with intense, horrible detail and imagery. One area where Eliot presents the Waste Lander’s disgusting sexual acts is in “The Fire Sermon.” Eliot describes a woman being sexually assaulting by a “carbuncular” young man, which according to the Oxford Dictionary of Current English, is a man with multiple boils on his skin. Furthermore, the woman cares so little she does not give “defence” to the man. Although this may be a revolting image in itself, Eliot continues by describing the narrator watching this incident as an “Old man with wrinkled female breasts” (219). The disgusting, sexual scenes like this one, along with adulterous acts and lewdness of the people displayed throughout “The Waste Land” occupy so much of the poem; Eliot emphasizes these sins so that the reader must focus on the Waste Landers’ sins. Eliot’s sinful subject matter of his poem coincides with Ezekiel in the vivid detail of the sins of the Israelites and the description of their sins clearly in Ezekiel 36:17. Here, when God describes the Israelite’s sins, He says explicitly that the ways of the Israelites are, “…as the uncleanness of a removed woman.” Eliot’s bridging between the allusion of the Israelite’s disgusting sins and those of the Waste Landers, helps reveal a solution to the hopelessness of a sinful life. All of the immoral acts of the wasteland people have trapped them in despair, making freedom from the wasteland seem impossible. Through Eliot’s thematic allusion to the Israelite’s sins, he shows us that becoming free is possible through the prophesies in Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 18:31, God orders Ezekiel to warn the Israelites, “Cast away from you all your transgressions…” so that you might “live.” Alluding to the book of Ezekiel presents a path of salvation for the Waste Landers through eliminating their sinful ways and seeking a new life but Eliot informs the reader to only use the poem’s path.

Eliot’s first direct allusion to the book of Ezekiel is used to describe Ezekiel himself. Eliot cites in his notes the verse Ezekiel 2:1, which says, “And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee.” Here, Ezekiel is regarded with honor because God is speaking to him, whereas the poem contradicts this image. In the poem, Ezekiel is referred to in a demeaning manner when he is asked, “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow/Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, /You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/A heap of broken images” (20-2). By describing Ezekiel as only capable of seeing partial images, Eliot implies that even the most holy and important people can’t save the Waste Landers. While Eliot degrades Ezekiel, the question that is given is not debased, since all
that Eliot accomplishes is to prove that even great men cannot provide an answer. Although it may seem ludicrous to lower the responder in order to highlight the question, Eliot does this in order to show that Ezekiel’s message given to him by God is what can solve the question and nothing else. While Eliot declares that the message to Ezekiel was only “A heap of broken images,” Eliot does not say that the image’s advice is broken but only that Ezekiel can’t articulate it. Eliot implies that the message from God as a whole can help the Waste Landers, as long as they don’t stray from the direction presented in the poem. This is further seen in the poem after Ezekiel is disgraced and someone exclaims, “There is shadow under this red rock. / Come in under the shadow of this red rock.” And I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;” (27-9). By adding these lines after Ezekiel is accused of not knowing the answer, Eliot shows that there is a course of relief from the wasteland through the poem. When Ezekiel warned the Israelites to leave their sinful ways, he did not give instruction relating to how they should do that. Because Ezekiel does not provide this direction, Eliot is also ridiculing Ezekiel to show that his means were faulty and the poem’s method of providing steps to free the despair of the Waste Landers is what is necessary.

In the question asked of Ezekiel, Eliot explains that one major step to leave the wasteland is to have God soften their hearts so that they can turn from their sins. Eliot alludes to a prophesy in Ezekiel describing the Waste Landers need to have God when he says in his poem, “What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish?” (19-21). When reading this passage in the poem, it is as if someone is asking Ezekiel if growth can occur in the stony fields of the wasteland. This passage is further connected to an allusion employed by Eliot from Ezekiel 11:19 where God declares to the Israelites, “I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of fleshy heart; That they may walk in my statutes...” Because this verse tells the reader that God will replace the “stony heart” of the Israelites, the question presented to Ezekiel regarding fertility in the “stony rubbish” definitely connects to the wasteland people not being able to grow until God has replaced their hardened hearts. In Ezekiel, God knows that the Israelites are hardened and will not turn from their sinful ways even saying in Ezekiel 3:7 that the nation of Israel “…will not Harken unto me.” Just as God understands the mindset of the Israelites, Eliot also creates the same mindset for the Waste Landers and portrays their hardened hearts to need more than just a command to clean up their act. In the waste land, turning the stony ground fertile, or turning the people’s hardened hearts into flesh carries deeper meaning when Eliot describes a man questioning a fellow soldier by saying, “‘What is the wind doing? / The wind under the door. / What is that noise now? / What is the wind doing?’” (117-19). In this part of the poem the wind is again waiting and calling for the Waste Landers to open the door although they don’t understand. Because of the extra significance Eliot gives to
the instruction to come to God, it is very important that the Waste Landers not only listen to the message but also be determined to do it.

The dry bones passage Eliot uses is also an allusion of the Waste Landers’ necessity to have an eagerness to fight their despair. One area that Eliot warns against is the Waste Landers’ lack of determination to fight their misery. Eliot does this when he declares, “Dry bones can harm no one” (390). This line is an allusion to Ezekiel 37:11, where the Israelites are described as being in a hopeless state by saying, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.” Because the Israelites were a nation, the limbless analogy of the Israelites represents their inability to fight or sustain themselves. Throughout the poem, the people go about their daily lives not accomplishing anything but furthering their depressions. Eliot even explains in one scene that “each man fixed his eyes before his feet /Flowed up the hill and down King Williams Street” (65-6). An additional form of being undetermined in fighting their despair that Eliot reveals is people trying to release themselves through meaningless acts. One person seeks comfort from the waste land by trying to forget her troubles when she “...went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten./And drank coffee, and talked for an hour” (10-11). Their refusal to face their troubles could be represented by the author as being harmless. Eliot uses this allusion of the helplessness of the Israelites to show that the Waste Landers can’t be restored until they are willing to fight their miserable situations and follow the poem’s steps to leave their despair.

Eliot’s allusion to the book of Ezekiel is extremely important to understanding the complicated meaning of his poem since it reveals several hidden meanings of key sentences and many of the overall themes of the poem. Through Eliot’s comparison of the waste land inhabitants to the sinful ways of the Israelites, a relation to a solution out of the constant misery of being in the waste land can be seen. While the poem does go off track from the interpretation of Ezekiel, it is only to highlight the importance of following the poem’s instruction to become free of the despair of living in the waste land. Eliot also uses selective wording to reveal how the Waste Landers can and cannot leave the wasteland. Alluding to the book of Ezekiel gives clarity to Eliot’s poem and contributes to helping the reader understand that it is about the human condition of despair and how to find freedom from it so that the poem may be applied to everyday life.

Work Cited

Rebelling Against Society: An Analysis of Siegfried Sassoon’s “The Poet as Hero”

Launa Tedder
Essay Contest Submission
Faculty Mentor: Professor Thatcher Carter, English 1BH

Siegfried Sassoon’s “The Poet as Hero” dramatizes the conflict between society’s expectation and a soldier’s reality as it pertains to war. In this poem, the author introduces a speaker who is a soldier during World War I. The soldier explains that he used to be at peace with the rightness and nobility of being a soldier, thus living up to society’s expectation of him. However, as a result of his experiences, the soldier now scorns the naïve patriotism of his past and those who expect him to adhere to such principles. Sassoon employs poetic techniques in addition to biblical allusions to emphasize the speaker’s defiant resolution to break with society.

The speaker establishes his anger immediately with the opening line, “You’ve heard me, scornful, harsh, and discontented,/Mocking and loathing War” (Sassoon lines 1-2). Although the author’s decision to use the second person point of view shows the speaker’s desire to be confrontational, his continual reference to himself suggests a more personal plea to be understood. He continues with the lines, “You’ve asked me why/Of my old, silly sweetness I’ve repented,” referring to ardent patriotism, which is a creation of society (2-3). Therefore, if the speaker is mocking patriotism, he is by default scornful of society. This is further evidenced by the second stanza, in which the speaker states, “You are aware that I sought the Grail/Riding in armour bright, serene and strong” (5-6). Additionally, “Of my old silly sweetness” implies that striving for honor in war is an antiquated notion (3).

Moreover, the structure of the poem mirrors its angry, mocking tone. For example,
the poem is a sonnet with a traditional rhyme scheme, which suggests conventional thinking about the nobility of war. However, the syllables in the first stanza alternate between eleven and ten per line, whereas the remaining two stanzas have a uniform ten syllables per line, thus underscoring society's misunderstanding of the speaker's conviction. In addition, the first two stanzas consist of one sentence, but the last stanza contains two sentences. This suggests that the poem's author wishes to emphasize the importance of the speaker's change in conviction regarding unquestioned faith in the rightness of war and innocent faith in society's propaganda. The speaker comes to this epiphany and is forever changed by it, as he refers to his previous feelings about war as “my old, silly sweetness” (5). Additionally, the entire second stanza is devoted to his old romantic notions of what it means to be a soldier. In it, he states, “You are aware that once I sought the Grail./Riding in armour bright, serene and strong” (5-6). He goes on to say, “But now I've said goodbye to Galahad./And am no more the knight of dreams and show” (9-10). In this way, the speaker seems to mock himself as well as war.

In addition to poetic technique, the author utilizes biblical allusion to emphasize the speaker's defiant resolution to break with society. The “Grail” is the legendary chalice supposedly used by Christ at the Last Supper, but it can also represent something that is long sought and difficult to obtain such as honor in war (5). It is interesting to note that the speaker does not use the common reference, Holy Grail. Instead he refers to it just as the Grail conceivably to imply his disrespect for religion. Patriotism, whether practiced by society or individuals, can rise to the level of religion. In addition, patriotism and religion are constructs of society. Just as the Holy Grail is a legend to be sought after, patriotism is an ideal that society encourages individuals to strive for as a matter of honor. Perhaps religion and patriotism are inseparable to the speaker, indicative of his need to blame society for his involvement in the war and his subsequent disillusionment.

Additionally, the author’s use of biblical allusion to critique a Christian society further emphasizes the speaker's disillusionment with that society's moral right to send him into battle. The Holy Grail is also associated with the Crusades, or the Holy Wars, which were a series of battles for the Holy Land sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church. By referring to the Holy Grail as merely “the Grail,” the speaker is affirming that there is nothing holy or venerable about war (5). Indeed, holy war is an oxymoron, in that war contradicts Christ's teachings of love and forgiveness. Therefore, a Christian (or Christ-like) society should not be advocating war. When the speaker ends the poem with the lines, “Wound for red wound I burn to smite their wrongs;/And there is absolution in my songs,” he is indicting society and himself of hypocrisy (13-14). This is further evidenced by the lines “For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,/And my killed friends are with me where I go” (12-13). In essence, the speaker is stating that the war Christian society sent him to fight turned him into someone who is incapable of love and forgiveness.

Moreover, as a result of the horrors the speaker witnessed at war, he “burn[s] to smite [the] wrongs of his killed friends” (12-13). Such use of the word “smite” suggests the Old Testament of the Bible. In this book, God was a figure of strict rules and retribution, and “smite” was used frequently as part of God’s episodes of wrath. It should be noted that God’s wrath was also used to cleanse away sin. Possibly, the speaker feels complicit in the deaths of his friends when he says, “For lust and senseless hatred make me glad,/And my killed friends are with me where I go” (11-12). As a participant in war, the speaker has allowed himself to commit murder in the name of patriotism. If death for such a cause is frivolous, then his friends died in vain.

Interestingly, the speaker mentions forgiveness at the end of the poem when he says, “And there is absolution in my songs” (14). However, his use of the religious term for the pardon of sins is another example of his anger toward society and its institutions. The angry, mocking tone of the poem illustrates the speaker’s belief that there can be no forgiveness for the sins of war. Instead, “absolution in my songs” refers to the speaker’s freedom from the guilt or wrongdoing that society places on soldiers for speaking out against war.

Ultimately, the speaker absolves himself of his duty, obligation, and responsibility to society. It is ironic that the speaker chooses to use religion against society in order to accomplish his spiritual freedom from it. On the other hand, it is perfectly rational to counter society's religious propaganda with truth gained by experience. In this way, the speaker is declaring independence not from the war that he chooses to continue, but from societal norms.

Work Cited