

English Composition Program
Department of English
Award Ceremony
March 5, 2013

University of Miami
College of Arts and Sciences
Coral Gables, Florida

Award Winners

Nineteenth Annual
Audley Webster
Memorial Essay Contest



Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest

2012-2013 Contest Coordinator:

Charlotte Rogers

English Composition Program Director:

Zisca Burton

English Composition Senior Administrative Assistant:

Clara Maroney

Contributing Judges:

Alisa Be

Zach Hickman

Zisca Burton

Giovanni Turner

Danielle Houck

Samantha Phillips

Benjamin Alsup

Susan Leary

Katherine Komis

Adina Sanchez-Garcia

Joanna Johnson

April Mann

Charlotte Rogers

Christine Morando

Maria Delis

Ng'ang'a Muchiri

Lauren Petrino

Daisy Hernandez

Josh Schriftman

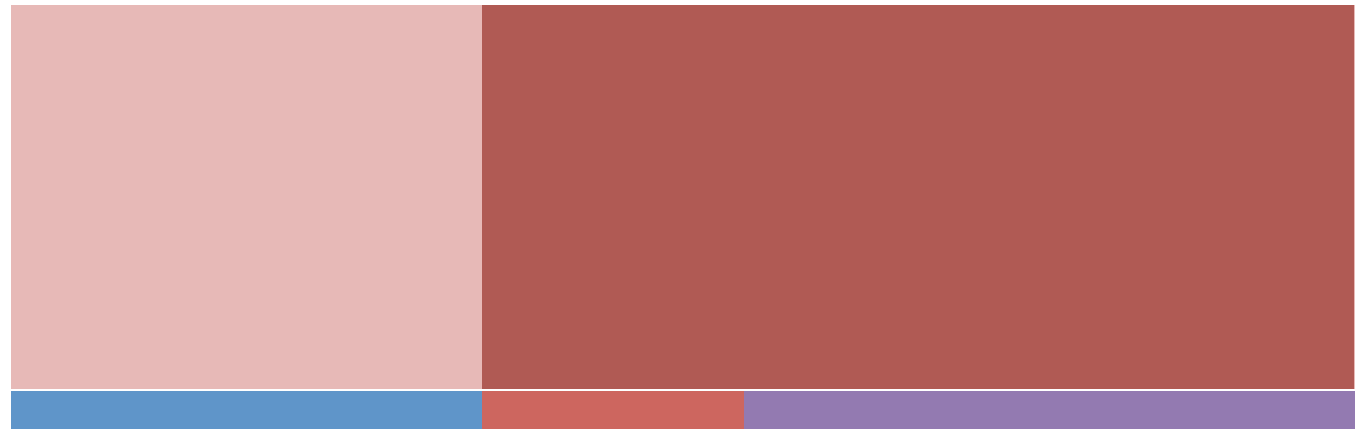
Katharine Westaway

Matthew Meltzer

Judy Hood

Booklet Design/Cover Photograph:

Roxane Pickens



“There are moments you remember,” sings Yentl in the film adaptation of Isaac Bashevis Singer’s story, “Yentl the Yeshiva Boy.” Singer, a Nobel laureate and a Visiting Professor, English Department, University of Miami, knew of these moments in writing. The Audley Webster Contest creates a chance for both recognizing our students’ outstanding writing and creating their moments.

Five students are especially honored this year for emerging winners in the 19th Audley Webster Contest. The two winners are Thomas Frazel and Bilal Quadri. The three honorary winners are Drayden Farci, Vanessa Michaud, and Thomas Sulkoske. This is their moment, and their winning essays follow in this publication.

The process of choosing winners is guided professionally by Clara Maroney, the Composition Program Senior Administrative Assistant. This year, 21 composition instructors read and voted on 81 submitted entries from the first-year composition courses and narrowed these strong entries to 19; the process continued narrowing to 10; instructors then ranked the 10 with 5 essays emerging. The instructors’ eyes—whether of relief, happiness, or both—revealed their moments including those of giving university students both expertise and confidence in communicating their ideas.

Audley M. Webster, recipient of the first University of Miami Freshman Teaching Award in English Composition, receives recognition again. His family honors both him and his work by initiating and sponsoring this contest. His two daughters—Susan E. Webster, Ph.D. and Mary Webster Taylor, Esq.—share this presentation moment on March 5, 2013 in the President’s boardroom.

President Donna E. Shalala, an outstanding writer—and speaker—values this artistic skill. Not only does she provide the standard of verbal excellence for the University, but she also recognizes and supports the University’s composition program. We thank the President for presenting the awards to the five winning students, enriching their college experience.

With Yentl, we sing—even if quietly: “There are moments you remember all your life. ...”

Sincerely,
Charlotte Rogers
Audley Webster Essay Contest Coordinator, 2012-2013

Audley M. Webster

Educator • English Composition Professor • Writing Mentor



CONTEST WINNERS



Bilal Quadri 7
“American Idle: Facing Our Failure to Care for the Mentally Ill”
ENG 208 • Ben Alsup • Spring 2012

Thomas Frazel 15
“Going Back in Time: The History of Timekeeping”
ENG 105 • Martha Otis • Fall 2012

Thomas Sulkoske 23
“Seeds of *The Matrix*”
ENG 106 • James Britton • Spring 2012

Drayden Farci 31
“Assimilation by Performance”
ENG 106 • Dan Chaskes • Spring 2012

Vanessa Michaud 37
“True Environment, True Character”
ENG 106 • Judy Hood • Spring 2012

**Writing entries appear as originally submitted, with no additional editing.*

Instructor Reflections—Ben Alsup on Bilal Quadri

Over the last several years, I have watched many of my students both embrace and extol the word *swagger*. This has troubled me. Defining words is a tricky business, and I am well aware that meanings can shift from context to context and from person to person. Still, as I understand it, the word *swagger* means to carry oneself with a confidence veering towards arrogance, or even aggression. The word is often associated with the powerful, yes, but also, with the hubristic, the pompous, with those qualities which would oppress rather than liberate our fellow beings.

I imagine, for instance, that *swagger* might prove beneficial in placing enormous and risky bets upon collateralized debt obligations. Or, that *swagger* may play a rather large role in the construction of a Ponzi scheme. In Carl Hiassen's use of the term, one is wise to display some *swagger* upon entering a federal prison.

History tells us that many nations have *swaggered* into Afghanistan only to find themselves crawling towards an exit.

Saddam Hussein knew how to *swagger*. Until, of course, he was found weeping in a hole. By the time I watched him hang by the neck with a rope, his *swagger* seemed to have abandoned him entirely. I recall, as well, watching President George Bush *swagger* across an aircraft carrier. Behind him, a large banner read Mission Accomplished. The year was 2003.

But then, we aren't here to denigrate *swagger*. We're here to celebrate the accomplishments of these fine student writers. And yet I can't help but think that these two topics are closely related, because the very best thing about Bilal Quadri's essay is its unwillingness to *swagger*.

Instead, Bilal recognizes the great complexity surrounding issues of mental health and public safety, and proceeds cautiously, humbly. In attempting to reconcile the individual rights of the patient with the collective concerns of the larger community, Bilal does not blithely throw down his proscriptions, substituting the heat of strongly held convictions for the light of considered thought. Rather, he recognizes that in a world of competing interests, many interests may be simultaneously valid and at odds with one another. Bilal's essay struggles admirably to chart a course through such a thicket.

And make no mistake. This is a world of thickets. The way is neither straight nor smooth, and thickets do not reward those who *swagger*. They reward those who approach with patience, humility, and a willingness to engage in hard work. In "American Idle," Bilal demonstrates all of these qualities. They are the habits of thought and action that will serve him well as he walks confidently and humbly into his very promising future.



English 208 • Spring 2012
Advanced Academic Writing

Students should address a current issue in the world/country/state and propose a policy or rule to help fix the problem. The paper must present these things: the problem, why it is a problem, analysis of the problem, a plausible proposition (legislation or idea), and the effects of this proposed law/idea.

American Idle: Facing Our Failure to Care for the Mentally Ill

Bilal Quadri

ENG 208 • Ben Alsup
Spring 2012

One Sunday afternoon in New York City, Kendra Web-dale was standing at a subway station, simply waiting for a train. An average, unassuming man came up to her and asked for the time. Before Kendra knew it, the man pushed her onto the train-rails and she was crushed under the wheels of an oncoming train. This man, Andrew Goldstein, was subsequently arrested. Kendra did not know Andrew at all, and Andrew did not know her. So what drove him to kill her? As it turns out, Andrew had a ten-year history of schizophrenia. While this explanation may make the murder seem less bizarre, it doesn't help that this was the *fourteenth* time Andrew had committed such an assault. According to a 3,500 page psychiatric record, Goldstein's victims included, "a woman and a child in a bookstore, two strangers in a Burger King, a nurse, a doctor, and a woman in a subway car" (Torrey, 11). It wasn't that he had escaped from authorities after each attack, and hence being loose on the streets. To the contrary, Goldstein had been hospitalized each time and was even labeled as "high risk for violence." The last time he had been hospitalized, he responded well to antipsychotic medication when supervised or made

to take it, but he refused to take it on his own. After he was discharged from the hospital, Goldstein promptly stopped taking his medications. Three weeks later, Kendra Web-dale was dead (msnbc.msn.com).

This murder occurred in 1999, but not much has changed since then. There are 4 million individuals in America today with the most severe mental illness: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder with psychosis, and depression with psychosis, but of these 4 million individuals, only 40,000 (1 percent) are in psychiatric hospitals (Torrey, 8). Even today, severely mentally ill patients like Andrew Goldstein are discharged in great numbers. After being discharged, a majority of these severely mentally ill patients end up in jail, homeless, or back in the hospital, only to be discharged again. It is one big, unorganized cycle. To be considered severely mentally ill (SMI), a person must be diagnosed as schizophrenic, bipolar with psychosis, or depressed with psychosis, *and* must be potentially dangerous to his or herself or others. The potential for danger can be measured by patient behavior and threatening language, as well as self-inflicting harm or violent disruptions such as kicking in doors or other

objects. In his book, "The Insanity Offense", American psychiatrist and schizophrenia researcher, Edward Fuller Torrey explains that in America, "The total number of seriously mentally ill individuals who at any given time are homeless (175,000) or incarcerated (218,000) is estimated to be just under 400,000, which is ten percent of the 4 million individuals [in America] with severe psychiatric disorders" (Torrey, 9). About 400,000 of the severely mentally ill in America are violent when not medicated, and an estimated 40,000 of these individuals have committed homicides. It is imperative that we improve the treatment of the severely mentally ill, both improving their lives and protecting our communities.

Before trying to draw up a plan of how to help the mentally ill, we must first identify the causes of the problems. How did this all start? There were two causes. First, in the early 1950's, effective antipsychotic drugs were manufactured for the first time and patients were consequently treated until symptoms lessened, and were then discharged (Torrey, 44). Second, and more importantly, was the cry of several lawyers that mental health patients were being deprived of their liberty as they were being involuntarily held in psychiatric hospitals for treatment (Torrey, 45). Many people supported laws prohibiting involuntary treatment and eventually, such laws were passed. These supporters quickly changed their mind, however, as psychiatric hospitals were almost completely emptied and mentally ill patients were released, many living on the streets and wandering the towns (Torrey, 49). Though this process of

deinstitutionalization began almost 60 years ago, the effects are still being felt today and the situation is only getting worse. In 1955, before this deinstitutionalization, about 1 in every 300 Americans was being treated in psychiatric hospitals. Today, about 1 in 100 Americans are severely mentally ill, but only about 1 in 7500 are being treated (Torrey, 8). Whereas there used to be 1 bed for every 352 people in the 1950's, today there is only 1 bed for every 8,304 people (Torrey, 65). With such a limited amount of space for the mentally ill to stay, patients are rushed in and out of hospitals to make room for the next patients. This is hardly an effective system.

The main problem today is that patients, even after having been identified as dangerous to society, are discharged from psychiatric hospitals within weeks without proper supervision to ensure that they take their medications. Often patients with severe mental illness have poor insight or anosognosia, so that they do not recognize that they have a mental illness. Consequently, they refuse to take medications. Because many hospitals do not practice involuntary commitment and treatment, the patients are quickly discharged. This leads to SMI patients wandering the streets, where many abuse recreational drugs and alcohol, leading to an exponential increase in violence, whether it is physical or sexual assault. There are many people who protest this claim that the mentally ill are more violent than the general public. Negating this claim, however, are the findings of sociologist Fred Markowitz. As explained by Torrey: according to a recent study by Markowitz of 81 U.S.

cities, there was “a direct correlation between the decrease in the number of public psychiatric beds and the subsequent increase in homelessness, arrest rates, and crime rates among mentally ill individuals in those cities” (Torrey, 6; Markowitz). In fact, it was found that more than 5 percent of all homicides in The US are committed by the severely mentally ill (Torrey, 153). Even further highlighting the importance of treating patients with anosognosia (lack of awareness of one’s own illness), according to a 2006 five-city study, it was found that patients that believed they didn’t need treatment were 2.5 times more likely to commit serious violent acts (Elbogen).

As a result of this violence, many mentally ill are thrown into prisons, basically being punished for their mental handicap instead of being treated for their disease. Many patients suffer, unable to understand the prison’s rules, lost and unaware of why they are locked in a cell. As a result, a lot of these patients become depressed and attempt to commit suicide. Other severely ill patients constitute at least one third of the homeless population, suffering from hallucinations and unable to find a job. The SMI homeless Americans, when not medicated, commit 40 times more violent acts than those who are being treated (Torrey, 168).

Simply stated, we must pass legislation *mandating* conditional release programs, so that patients with SMI, after being released, must comply with their medication regimen, a lapse being grounds for involuntary psychiatric hospitalization and treatment. This kind of program has been used effectively in New Hampshire, where it was found that

“conditional release program led to markedly increased medication compliance, decreased rehospitalization, and decreased substance abuse, as well as a reduction in violent episodes by half” (O’Keefe). This is exactly the kind of program that could greatly alleviate the mental health crisis in America. One may wonder how it can be assured that patients comply with their medication regimen. The solution to this problem is actually quite simple: assign case-workers to outpatients. These are social workers that check up on patients periodically, making sure that they have been taking their medications and that they are improving. To make sure that patients are not abusing alcohol, they will be given Disulfiram, a medicine that gives patients unpleasant feelings when alcohol is ingested (Torrey, 193). Medication compliance can be monitored most easily by caseworkers counting pills, as most patients lack the cognitive sophistication to think of throwing away pills to deceive doctors and caseworkers. If they do throw away the pills that treat their mental illness, however, an ordinary conversation with a case worker can detect early signs of relapse, as patients start to show evidence of hallucinations, paranoia, and disjointed flow of thought and speech. Additionally, urine can be tested to confirm that the patient is on their medicine (Torrey, 202). If the patient continually refuses to take medication, they can be treated with long-lasting injections, where the medication stays in the bloodstream for weeks, and the case-worker’s job then is to check up on the patient and bring him or her in for further medication every 3 or 4

weeks (Torrey, 202).

Before patients can be released though, it must be made sure that people with dangerous SMI are involuntarily hospitalized when found to be dangerous. For example, if a family member asks for help because the mentally ill person is threatening or exhibiting dangerous attitudes, he or she will be apprehended and evaluated for potential danger through a judicial review process, as is often done in some states. If the patient is seen as dangerous to his or herself or others, then the patient will be involuntarily treated until he or she is deemed no longer dangerous, and therefore fit for release. Then, the patient will go through the aforementioned conditional release program. It is important that we make it absolutely necessary for an imminently dangerous patient to be treated against his or her will. The reason such a measure must be taken is that many patients, especially those with anosognosia, refuse treatment. Many think that they are perfectly fine, while others believe that they are Jesus, God, Malcolm X, a messenger from heaven etc. As a result of the refusal to be treated, these patients are released. In hundreds of cases, the discharging of such patients has led to several homicides and tragedies. It is irresponsible to allow a person with a dangerous mental disorder out into society where they may end up killing strangers or even their own family members, usually the mother or children (Torrey, 168).

Some well meaning people are concerned about violating the freedom and civil rights of mentally ill patients by confining and treating them against their will. This is a valid concern.

However, the rights of SMI individuals have to be balanced against the threat that such freedom may pose to the safety of public at large. Also one may ask the question, "If a person's judgment is so impaired by virtue of their mental illness that they are unable to make sound decisions in their own best interest, and pose a risk of serious harm to self or others, is withholding treatment to respect their freedom of choice, really a freedom at all?" Does it serve an individual's civil rights well, if he is allowed to engage in acts of violence that he would not have committed, were he of sound mind, only to then incarcerate him in the correctional system. No, there is greater injustice in this instance in withholding treatment. After all, we have laws that prohibit anybody with typhoid fever from working in a restaurant, and we prohibit people with active tuberculosis from using public transportation. In fact, those with tuberculosis that refuse medication can sometimes be involuntarily treated themselves for months in hospitals (Gasner). In all of these cases, we use laws to protect the general public from dangerous diseases. While severe mental conditions do not spread like typhoid fever or tuberculosis, they do have lethal effects on the public.

While it may seem improbable to some individuals that the people could ever tolerate involuntary treatment, this is actually a misconception. According to one national survey, 87 percent of people believed that severely mentally ill homeless should be forced to go to mental hospitals even when they don't want to go (Sherrill). In another national survey, 95 percent of people said they would be willing to

involuntarily commit a schizophrenic to a hospital if they were a danger to others (Pescosolido).

Another argument against this proposition is that it will be too expensive. This is an inaccurate assumption. In fact, the amount of money that taxpayers pay for the mentally ill, including that which goes to supplemental security income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicaid, and Medicare, goes wasted on unnecessary hospital admissions for patients that go medicated and then discharged without even being treated. A law mandating programs with involuntary treatment and course-workers, as well as the other details included above, could actually save the taxpayer money, as all of the money that goes towards revolving door hospital admissions and wasted police resources will be spared. Without the program, the amount of money taxpayers give to mental health programs will continue to grow indefinitely, as the mental healthcare programs listed above are “among the most rapidly growing programs in the federal budget” (Mark).

Another reason this action must be taken is that it *helps* the patient and keeps them from suffering further. Critics ask, “who are we to change a mentally ill patient and force him or her to take medicine?” Many declare that it is their right to be mentally ill. But exactly who are we *not* to help these patients? There is no question that patients are worse off *with* their severe mental impairments than if they were treated. After all, would you give up a life of clear-thinking, clean housing, and your career in order to live life as a severely mentally ill “citizen”, living on

the streets and eating out of garbage (Farr)? It is truly baffling that we have the resources to treat these helpless people and to relieve them of poverty, incarceration and confusion, yet we insist that the patients, in their right mind, would rather embrace their “right to suffer.” It is a shame that today, we are not the least bit surprised that many of the homeless that we come across have mental health issues. It has become a part of the expectation. It is clear to see that the mentally ill are *not* being helped at all when we give them the choice to go untreated and live on the streets.

After Kendra Web-dale’s death at the hands of Alex Goldstein, New York passed a program known as Kendra’s law that imposed involuntary treatment for the most dangerous patients. 62 percent of patients who were treated under this law admitted that the treatment had been good for them (Pataki). Many still refused to admit they were sick, but a major portion of patients had successfully begun their recuperation. Yet this program has still not been enough. More is needed to resolve this disaster of mental health.

The most effective solution to our mental health crisis is to impose the program that I have suggested, which combines the most effective treatment methods known today. Many can see it as a utilitarian approach as it increases the well-being for the greatest amount of people, including the patients and the community. One could also see this as a purely pragmatic notion, as treatment of the mentally ill is the most “right” thing that can be done here and now. It is definitely more “right” than leaving the helpless to suffer on the streets, where the SMI women are

often raped, and it is also more “right” than leaving them to cower in prison. As the judge in the Kendra Web-dale case said after the Goldstein trial, “I have no doubt that someday... people will look at our treatment of mental illness and be shocked and appalled”(Winerip). It is a shame that we refuse to look back at this maltreatment with disgust and instead we happily turn a blind eye to the horrid conditions of the severely mentally ill. We must be the ones to look at and acknowledge the appalling treatment of the mentally ill and fix the judicial and mental health system before it is too late for far too many. Then, and only then, we can hopefully come closer to living in a country where the most debilitated citizens aren’t left to waste away on the streets or to be forgotten as numbers in our overcrowded prisons. We have the means to fix the problem, now we just need to act.

Works Cited

Allness, D. J., and W. H. Knoedler, *The PACT Model of Community-Based Treatment for Persons with Severe and Persistent Mental Illness* (Arlington, Va.: NAMI, 1998).

Edie. "A Deadly Encounter." *Msnbc.com*. MSNBC Digital Network, 20 Jan. 2007. Web. 1 Apr. 2012.
<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16713078/ns/datetime_nbc/t/deadly-encounter/>.

Elbogen, E. B., R. A. Van Dorn, J. W. Swanson, et al. "Treatment engagement and violence risk in mental disorders," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 60th ser. 189. 354 (2006).

Farr, R. K., *The Homeless Mentally Ill and the Los Angeles Skid Row Mental Health Project* (Los Angeles County: Department of Mental Health, 1985). Magnus,

Gasner, M. R., K. L. Maw, G. E. Feldman, et al., "The use of legal action in New York City to ensure treatment of tuberculosis," *New England Journal of Medicine* 66th ser. 340. 359 (1999).

Mark, T. L., R. M. Coffey, E. King, et al., "Spending on mental health and substance abuse treatment, 1987-1997," *Health Affairs* 20th ser. 19. 108 (2000).

Markowitz, F.E., "Psychiatric hospital capacity, homelessness, and crime and arrest rates," *Criminology* 72nd ser. 44, 45 (2006).

O'Keefe, C., D. P. Potenza, and K. T. Mueser. "Treatment Outcomes for Severely Mentally Ill Patients on

Conditional Discharge to Community-based Treatment." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 11th ser. 185. 409 (1997).

Pataki, George E., and Sharon E. Carpinello. *Kendra's Law: Final Report on the Status of Assisted Outpatient Treatment*. Rep. New York State Office of Mental Health, 2005.

Pescosolido, B. A., J. Monahan, B.G. Link, et al., "The public's view of the competence, dangerousness, and need for legal coercion of persons with mental health problems," *American Journal of Public Health* 45th ser. 89, 1339 (1999)

Sherrill, M., "Out There: They are homeless, hopeless, wretched, heartbreaking, cunning, grungy, needy, greedy, idle, hungry, angry, aggravating. And ours," *Washington Post*, 19 Jan. 1992

Torrey, E. Fuller. *The Insanity Offense: How America's Failure to Treat the Seriously Mentally Ill Endangers Its Citizens*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Print.

Winerip, M. "Bedlam on the Streets." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 23 May 1999. Web. 03 Apr. 2012.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/23/magazine/bedlam-on-the-streets.html?pagewanted=all>>.

Instructor Reflections—Martha Otis on Thomas Frazel

Every Fall, I assign a history paper. There is inevitably a point during the process when a bright student suddenly asks, “Why are we doing this? I mean what makes this any different from...”
 “... an information dump?” I ask. “Well, yeah.”

And that’s when I know that they are engaged and thinking, and I can really start working with them. The task of assembling coherent narratives from a vast set of facts extends to scholarly and professional life in many, many fields. Our fascination with detective stories, for example, relies on the tension surrounding the search for a definitive version of “What happened, and how?” That is to say, it’s not over ‘til the narrative sings true. Politicians who fail to create convincing narratives about themselves and their constituencies are losing candidates. But narratives are important not only in establishing a common understanding of the past, but because they are so often where we start creating meaning out of both individual and collective experience. There is never just one version of the story, never only one reason to tell it. The “History of X” assignment challenges students to reach for both coherence and meaning. In this essay, Thomas Frazel, an audio engineering student, writes,

“It seems all too poetic that our modern measurement of time is precise to billionths of a second, yet our understanding of time remains in question; that is not to say, however, that our understanding of time has not progressed... The ancients held time eternal, as the sunlight streamed down from the heavens to their shadow clocks, whereas the Enlightenment astronomers conceived time set in motion by a clockmaker God like their own mechanical clocks.”

There are many levels of mastery apparent even in this short passage. Rarely does a freshman write with such an elegant cadence, such a mature voice. The essay as a whole handles a subject full of frustrating unknowables with exactitude and style. To the scientists’ linear and the ancients’ cyclical understanding of Time, Frazel adds the lyrical. Here is a young man who *knows how—and why—to tell a story.*

English 105 • Fall 2012
 English Composition I

In "1491" (an excerpt from the book 1491) Charles C. Mann looks historically at something we don't usually think of as having a history: the American wilderness. He explores the possibility... that what we once considered wilderness was actually made or cultivated by Native Americans prior to European discovery- and thus, paradoxically, something "natural," but also historical and cultural. Mann shows us how these scholars are turning on its head the "pristine myth" that has for so long shaped our notions of what our country and what our American continents might have looked like prior to 1492. Such an analysis challenges us to question the given, unquestioned category "nature" at its very core.

Write a paper in which you give a history of something that we don't usually think of as having a history - something we don't usually think of in a historical sense. Choose the kind of timeline you wish: long or short, millions of years or a decade or a year. Choose three to five points along that timeline to focus on. This will be your version of this history and your choices of what to include will be significant. There should be a detectable "principle of selection" for the points you choose. This will be determined by what you're curious about, what you want to know: your critical question.

We'll ask, how can you challenge your reader? Our class readings, so far, give us some good models. Can you question categories and definitions as you explore your topic? Can you redefine, or define something that hasn't been defined, or even re-categorize?

Can you trace a thread or find a historical pattern, or historical echoes? Another challenge is of course to surprise your reader(s) with the freshness of your topic. Here's a start: the history of biological warfare. Did you know that hundreds of years ago, armies would catapult plague-ridden corpses into the cities of their enemies? This is a cool topic, but not, as it turns out, terribly original. It comes immediately up on Google, for example. Where to take this topic?

History is a narrative, a story. But it doesn't end, and it's hard to know if we ever got it right. So here is the creative part: use this exploration of your subject to explore some "what if?" possibilities or implications, the way Mann does in his last paragraph. These might involve envisioning what might have happened had the history played out differently, or exploring what is at stake in being able to see your "X" in the way that you are presenting it in your paper.

Going Back in Time: The History of Timekeeping

Thomas Frazel

ENG 105 • Martha Otis
Fall 2012

Imagine a spinning bicycle wheel. If you observe the wheel alone and choose any particular point, for example the bottommost point, you will notice that it will return to the bottom as it spins as though nothing has changed. When you now, however, observe the wheel as part of the moving bicycle, you will realize that your bottommost point has not in fact returned to the same place as it spins, but rather it has moved forward along the ground. This exercise may seem very elementary, but when considering the way humans measure the passage of time, it becomes quite puzzling. Take any calendar date or lunar phase and it will inevitably repeat, so far as human timekeeping is concerned, but the originally chosen moment will never return as we say it has. Our fundamental timekeeping system is based on cycles—cycles of seconds in minutes, minutes and hours, hours in days and days in years—but we know time to be linear. The answer to why we have chosen to measure time cyclically lies in the origins of timekeeping itself.

Consider the founding of a settlement thousands of years ago: a tribe of wandering people has found a consistent source of food, be it fertile

land by a river or a healthy population of coastal fish or migratory animal. Without knowledge of the yearly flooding of the river, the farmers will fail to plant and harvest their crops at the right time to reap the most produce; without knowledge of the daily tides, the fisherman will not catch the ideal amount of fish; and without knowledge of the annual migratory patterns of mammals, the settlement could awake one morning to find its dinner has moved on. In these ways, cyclic timekeeping became a necessity for early civilizations, a necessity congruous with basic human experiences of time cycles, such as night and day, the seasons, and even daily routines. Timekeeping today can perhaps be taken for granted, as finding the time and date is as simple as a push of a button on a cell phone or a glance at a watch; but for thousands of years, humans could only offer an estimate of the time. An argument can even be made that our unprecedented ability to keep time today has actually changed the meaning of the word ‘time’ itself—no longer a vague reference but an actual fraction of the earth’s rotation. We have been relentless and resourceful in our endeavor to keep time throughout

history, but how has the evolution of timekeeping methodology influenced our ontological understanding and perception of time itself?

Ancient Timekeeping

The first evidence of timekeeping predates recorded history, with places like Stone Hedge and ancient artifacts and bones marked with curious regularity suggestive of early methods of tracking moon cycles (“A Walk through Time”). The Egyptians are credited with the first calendar around 4500 BCE; after noticing the rise of Sirius, the region’s brightest star, coincided closely with the annual flooding of the Nile river, the Egyptians devised a calendar as an agricultural tool for timely planting of crops. The exact length of the year, as measured between Sirius’s risings, was later computed to be 365 days; the Egyptians used their calculation in order to create a civil calendar of this length by the year 2776 BCE. Proving exceptionally resourceful and accurate, Mesoamerican civilizations, notably the Mayans and Aztecs, concurrently devised 260-day and 365-day calendars based not only on solar and lunar data but also on the planet Venus (“A Walk through Time”). By 2000 BCE, the Babylonians, borrowing from the Sumerian idea of periodic daytime divisions, developed a system of 24 hour periods, with each hour lasting 60 minutes, and each minute 60 seconds, similar to the modern divisions of time. (O’Connor and Robertson “Classical time”).

To measure the daily increments, these ancient civilizations all used some form of the shadow clock, the earliest of which being the Egyptian obelisks of 3500 BCE. Later,

using sundials, whose centralized shadow-casting styles were rotated at midday, and a clever device called a merkheth (comprised of a weigh hanging motionless on a taught, vertical string across which the creeping nightly passage of stars could be observed), the Egyptians were able to measure approximate hours and minutes both during the day and night (“History of Timekeeping”). The most accurate, complex ancient clocks were clepsydras; meaning “water thieves” in Greek, the ancient Romans and Greeks revolutionized these water displacement clocks (which utilized floats on a steadily changing water level to measure time) between 100 BCE and 500 CE, borrowing from an Egyptian technology already more than a thousand years old (“The History of Timekeeping”). The Chinese also expanded the technology of water clocks: using the periodic motion of a water-release escapement, they constructed the famous Su Sung Clock Tower in 1088 CE (see illustration), fully equipped with an automatically rotating globe and five doors with appearing mannequins ringing bells and gongs and holding tablets indicating the time of day (“A Walk through Time”).

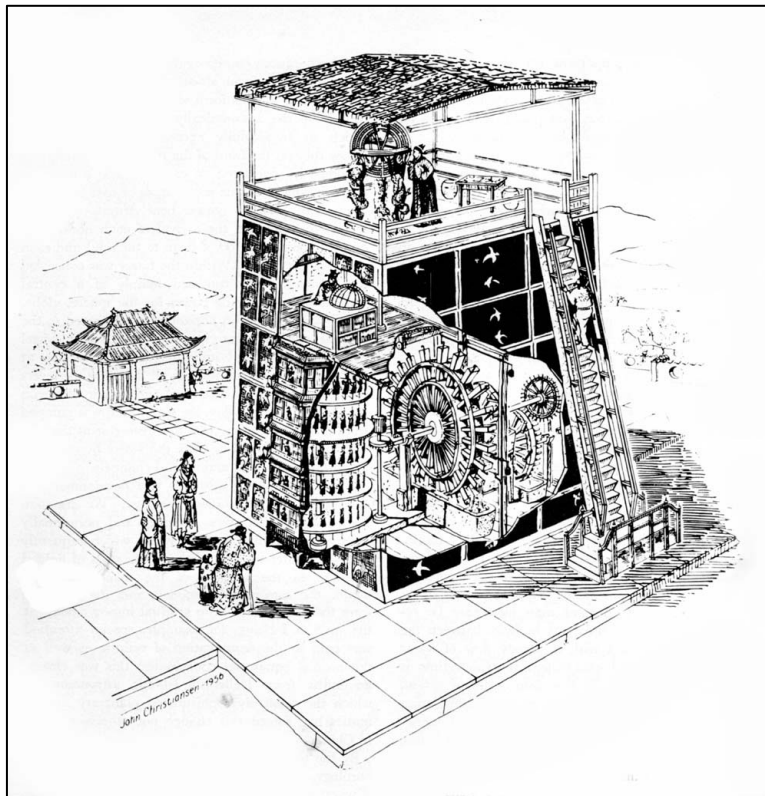
Timekeeping, despite being a relatively new outlet of human inquisition, made impressive initial strides in precision and technological methodology, progressing from the simple shadow casting of sundials to decorated displays of wealth and knowledge like Su Sung’s tower. As humanity began to scratch the surface of timekeeping, we simultaneously began integrating our conceptions of ‘time’ into religion and philosophy, shaping a primordial worldview that

included the time we spent so much effort measuring.

The universally mythological and sacred role time has played in human culture may not be one of time's immediately obvious characteristics. From the seven days of Biblical

creation to the Buddhist cycles of existence, from the Egyptian notions of afterlife to the Salah of Islam, time has earned a role as sacred across all cultures and religions (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). It is no surprise too that many of the greatest ancient philosophers pondered the essence of time. One of the first of these renowned philosophers to study time was Plato.

Plato's belief that wisdom came from the Eternal led him to propose in his work *Timaeus* that a creator, attempting to mirror his own likeness, fabricated an eternally moving image that we call 'time.' Not surprisingly, Plato's secular pupil Aristotle disagreed with his notion of eternal time, suggesting that time past and future could not exist as they could not be observed; instead, only the passage of time present existed, and thus proposed Aristotle that time itself was



Sketch of Su Sung's Clock Tower, 1088 CE

motion (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). These starkly contrasting perceptions of time—eternal versus transitory—dominated ancient cultures and religions predating these men; many ancient cultures and their religions, the Egyptians being a well-

known example, believed in life after death—an extension of time beyond Earth. Despite being common conceptions of time, Plato and Aristotle were some of the first to articulate them in writing.

Because time plays a vital role in every religion, early religious teachings give great insight into human conception of time. St. Augustine, one of the greatest religious philosophers of his day, wrote about time; in his autobiography *Confessions*, Augustine pondered this conundrum: how can an event's duration be measured, as things passed are fundamentally no longer existent and thus without measurable properties, but things present are yet to have duration (Poidevin)? In contemplating this, Augustine concluded that time exists only to those with the intellect to consider past, present and future, though he never found peace in his

own answer (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). In many ways, the beginnings of measuring and pondering time brought about more questions than answers; the advances in timekeeping, however, paved the way for classical timekeeping and sciences that, in turn, altered the way we perceived time itself.

Classical Timekeeping

Clock mechanisms gradually improved between 500 CE and 1300 CE, a time period in Europe often referred to as the Dark Ages, but breakthrough progress would not be made until the late 16th century. During this time, large mechanical clocks operating by turning large cogs with weights in many town centers as a means of keeping local time (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). As Europe emerged from the Dark Ages, Renaissance industry created the need for a means of determining longitudinal calculations due to confusion caused by local time discrepancies. Galileo Galilei attempted to solve this problem with astrological calculations, but they were largely impractical (this problem was later solved for a prize in 1761 with a breakthrough marine chronometer invented by a carpenter named John Harrison); his biggest contribution to timekeeping, however, was his discovery of periodic motion in a pendulum in 1583 ("A Walk through Time"). Galileo himself was unable to create a working pendulum clock, but Christiaan Huygens succeeded in 1656 where Galileo failed, developing the first mechanical pendulum clock accurate to an unprecedented error of only one minute per day ("History of Timekeeping"). Mechanical advances in pendulum clocks continued into the

nineteenth century; by 1889 Sigmund Riefler's designed a pendulum clock accurate to one hundredth of a second per day ("A Walk through Time").

The mechanical clocks and pendulum clocks inspired Classical conceptions of time. Robert Boyle, a famous seventeenth century chemist, considered the universe running mechanically like a clock set in motion by God. Enlightenment values of empiricism and secularism suggested that mathematical explanations could be offered as solutions to natural phenomena, and such thinking was applied to the understanding of time. In 1687, Sir Isaac Newton proposed such an explanation for time in *Principia*, stating the belief in absolute time—that is, time that flows without any external forces and is beyond space itself (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time").

Newton's laws of motion based on absolute time proved so accurate that they became universally accepted as truths that are still taught to physics students to this day. The infallibility of Newton's concept of absolute time, however, troubled some of his scientific peers, however, who questioned how his laws could work equally well backwards and forwards in time and whether the future could be predicted with such certainty as his laws suggested (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). As humanity approached the threshold of twentieth century timekeeping, Newton's idea of absolute time withstood increasing pressure before finally being put to the test.

Modern Timekeeping

Most of what we know about time comes from the technological and

theoretical advances of the twentieth century. Quartz clocks took the place of pendulum clocks by the 1920's, using frequency-consistent periodic vibrations of quartz in electrical fields to operate a clock. The advent of trains in the mid-nineteenth century increased the need for centralized time, but not even quartz clocks could provide the necessary accuracy; this rejuvenated search for the most accurate method of timekeeping led to the creation of atomic clocks ("A Walk through Time").

At the turn of the century, scientists knew that atoms emitted electromagnetic radiation at frequencies specific to the compound or element. To induce this radiation, however, scientists had to wait until the 1930's and 40's for the invention of high frequency radio wave emitters. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a Colorado based research facility, created the first atomic clock in 1949 using ammonia ("A Walk through Time"). The latest NIST F-1 Atomic clock, constructed in 2002 and located in Boulder, Colorado, surpasses all clocks built to date; using 9,192,631,770 oscillations of a cesium atom at its resonant frequency as the definition of a second, the NIST F-1 is accurate to within 20 billionths of a second per year—that is, the clock will not lose a second's accuracy for 20 billion years ("History of Timekeeping"). The advent of atomic clocks led to the replacement of Greenwich Mean Time with Coordinated Universal Time (UTC) in 1972, the calculation of the year to 365.2422 days, and the current calendar accounting for leap years every fourth and four-hundredth years ("A Walk through Time").

Paralleling this incredible

technological progression, theoretical science of the twentieth century changed the way we perceive time. The fundamental issue with Newton's absolute time arose in the way objects related to one another within observable time. Rudolf Clausius was the first to propose solid evidence against Newton; in 1850, Clausius described entropy in what was to become the second law of thermodynamics, stating that relationships between particles naturally flow towards disorder in a time asymmetric fashion (O'Connor and Robertson "Classical time"). Cambridge Professor of Philosophy Huw Price expanded on of this idea of time asymmetry in 1996, proposing that the cause and effect of time events—one 'now' causally preceding the next 'now'—makes time indisputably asymmetric, as 'now' does not and never has caused the past to occur (Poidevin).

Einstein and Heisenberg are responsible for completely shattering Newton's view of absolute time. Einstein considered time the mysterious key to the secrets of the universe, and, with his theory of Special Relativity, conjectured that object moving at different speeds experienced simultaneous time events differently as a result of the finite speed of light. In 1927, Heisenberg established the Uncertainty Principle, which, for all intents and purposes, states that both the exact position and momentum of a particle cannot be determined without a shadow of a doubt (O'Connor and Robertson "20th century time"). By proving time is relative to the observer and the future of a particle cannot be predicted because its present condition is always

uncertain, Newton's absolute time and motion laws were unequivocally disproven.

It seems all too poetic that our modern measurement of time is precise to billionths of a second, yet our understanding of time remains in question; that is not to say, however, that our understanding of time has not progressed. By studying timekeeping historically, we can more clearly trace humanity's understanding of time and uncover the parallels between concurrent timekeeping methods and time perceptions. The ancients held time eternal, as the sunlight streamed down from the heavens to their shadow clocks, whereas the Enlightenment astronomers conceived time set in motion by a clockmaker God like their own mechanical clocks. Where do we stand today, and why does an understanding of time even matter?

Volumes of books and thousands of web pages could try and answer those questions, but I instead pose them to you. What do you know about time? Do you ever look around at the fleeting stillness of the moment and wonder? To contemplate time is to join an entire history of humanity in the search for answers to the fundamental questions of our existence. The driving principle in the evolution of timekeeping has been precision for the purpose of utility, but what if we have reached the edge of human timekeeping ability? Perhaps the evolution of timekeeping across the history of humanity intimately parallels our own search for answers throughout our "personal histories" we call life; try as you might to find answers to why we exist, what if you too inevitably hit a wall of understanding in your own lifetime? An

old saying goes that even a broken clock is right twice a day; we may never fully understand time, but perhaps, over this relatively short history, we too have gotten a thing or two right about time.

Works Cited

- "A Walk through Time." *Physics Measurement Laboratory*. National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), 5 October 2010. Web. 20 November 2012.
- Christiansen, John. "Su Sung water clock tower." 1956. Sketch. Gutenberg.org. Web. 27 November 2012.
- O'Connor, J.J. & Robertson, E F. "A history of time: 20th century time." *The MacTutor History of Mathematics Archive*. University of St Andrews, 2002. Web. 8 November 2012.
- O'Connor, J.J. & Robertson, E F. "A history of time: Classical time." *The MacTutor History of Mathematics Archive*. University of St Andrews, 2002. Web. 8 November 2012.
- Poidevin, Robin Le. "The Experience and Perception of Time." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition)*. Ed. Zalta, Edward N. Stanford University, 2011. Web. 8 Nov. 2012.
- "The History of Timekeeping." *Timekeeping History*. Beagle Software, 2011. Web. 8 November 2012.

Instructor Reflections—James Britton on Thomas Sulkoske

In choosing to write about *The Matrix*, Thomas Sulkoske took a chance. The choice made sense, as the movie effectively set up his examination of technology's accumulating effects on human identity. Yet, the movie's popularity and its role in our cultural imagination presented a challenge: simply put, we already think we know what the movie means. Thomas dealt with this challenge by providing a new context for our understanding, placing *The Matrix* within a larger philosophical and scientific discussion of our relationship to our technology, and constructing a new meaning for the film. While *The Matrix* is the kind of movie that gets people to think, it doesn't necessarily get them to think deeply. In this essay, Thomas thinks deeply. It is an ambitious work, the result of a writer and thinker who asks hard questions and won't settle for easy answers.

English 106 • Spring 2012
Writing about Science Fiction

At this point, you should start thinking hard about your topic for Paper 4. You can write about any of the stories or films listed below. While our focus in this class on post-human identity or transhumanism, you can interpret this broadly and follow your interests. You can use a variety of approaches, including scientific, psychological, sociological, historical, technological, gender studies, or whatever else interests you. While you can choose to write about only one story or film, you aren't limited to one primary source. If you find some combination of stories or films interesting, follow your interest. As long as you develop a coherent idea and the analysis you provide holds together, you're in good shape. As you work on your topic, you may decide to either work with fewer primary sources or expand what you'll discuss. Both are fine. If you have a topic in mind, there is a good chance that it will evolve as your work progresses, especially as you continue your research. That you do not know exactly what you will say at this point is okay; this allows room for your ideas to grow and it does not predetermine the analysis you will offer.

In your proposal, you should begin to explain what you plan to do in Paper 4. What will you examine? Why are you interested in this topic? How will you approach the topic? What questions will you try to answer? In the research you have done so far, what about the topic has stood out for you? Do you have a preliminary thesis? What is it that you want to understand and explain?

With these questions in mind, write one typed page (at least 250 words) laying out your tentative plans for Paper 4. This is a proposal in the broadest sense, so you should establish why this topic is worth examining and what

direction you plan to take. Do you foresee your topic becoming narrower in some specific way? Are you beginning to focus on some particular aspect or do you have a number of things that interest you?

As you develop your ideas, please remember that you will not be writing a position paper in which you take one side on an issue. Instead, your goal should be to offer an analysis in which you attempt to understand and explain the complexities of the topic you have developed.

Fiction

Bear's "Blood Music" (SF 1175-94) Kress's "Beggars in Spain" (BB 204-260)
Silverberg's "Sailing to Byzantium" (BB 1-45) McHugh's "Nekropolis" (SF 386-415)
Keyes's "Flowers for Algernon" (SF 1110-32) Egan's "Wang's Carpets" (SF 135-61)
Asimov's "Liar" (SF 282-95) Dick's "Second Variety" (SF 296-331) Egan's "Oceanic"
(BB 455-90) Gibson's "Burning Chrome" (SF371-86) Lin's "The Algorithms for Love"
(SF 415-27) McDonald's "Recording Angel" (SF 958-69) McDonald's "Tendeleo's
Story" (BB 491-541) Rosenberg's "Start the Clock" (SF 651-63) Swanwick's "Slow
Life" (SF 161-79)

Films

Cameron's *Avatar*
Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*
Cuaron's *Children of Men*
Gilliam's *Brazil*
Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*
Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*
Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*
Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*
Scott's *Bladerunner*
Wachowski's *The Matrix*

Seeds of *The Matrix*

Thomas Sulkoske

ENG 106 • James Britton
Spring 2012

A future where robots rule the earth and humans serve only as an unlimited power source: this is the future projected by the Wachowski Brothers in *The Matrix*. With the convergence of artificial intelligence and autonomy, also known as the Singularity, not far off the horizon, it is time for scientists and the general population to begin considering the implications of sentient machines. But even before we reach the Singularity, technology will become more integrated with our lives and our bodies, perhaps to the point that our own human functions will become obsolete. Today we are seeing the very start of this kind of reliance on technology. Our increased access and connection to the internet; our devices that tell us what to do, where to go, and how to perform basic tasks; and our increasing amount of time spent in front of computer screens as opposed to engaging in real life interaction are all contributing to a sharp increase in our dependence on personal technology. As a result, we are physically interacting less and, essentially, *thinking* less. Each device invented by mankind has resulted in an amputation of reliance on a human function, such as the shovel's

replacement of the hands in order to dig. In the 21st century, we are, for the first time in history, seeing an amputation of the mind's capabilities through technology. Computers, calculators and GPS's are replacing the need to develop mental skills, such as number crunching and map reading, that were necessary less than twenty years ago. Agent Smith, a character from *The Matrix*, stated, "as soon as we started thinking for [humanity] it really became our civilization." We may not need to reach the singularity to find out whether machines will supersede us; if we allow technology to continually sever the capabilities of our minds and bodies, we will already be under the control of the sentient robots we have yet to create.

The idea of technology controlling the efforts of humanity is not at all recent. In the early and mid 1900's, philosophers began exploring the ideas of technological determinism and autonomous technology. Technological determinism is the philosophical stance that human culture and values are shaped by technology. For instance, the first humans to cultivate land set a precedent for their descendants which has only grown stronger in our culture

over the course of history. Agriculture made humans a stationary species, and this shaped the invention of new technologies which more firmly implanted the tradition of agriculture in our civilization. Daniel Quinn, author of the philosophical novel *Ishmael*, wrote: “With agriculture, [man’s limitations] vanished, and his rise was meteoric. Settlement gave rise to division of labor. Division of labor gave rise to technology. With the rise of technology came trade and commerce. With trade and commerce came mathematics and literacy and science, and all the rest” (Quinn 46). Technology has constructed our society from the ground up, and much evidence suggests that our society has always been fundamentally dependent on it.

Following the philosophy of technological determinism is that of autonomous technology. Despite the name’s association with science fiction, it has nothing to do with self-conscious machines and robots. It has to do with the complexity of systems created by technology and the lack of people’s ability to control or comprehend those systems. Author Val Dusek offers a sturdy explanation of the term:

The claim seems paradoxical, as human beings invent, market and use technology. However, ... various groups of people that would seem to have control over technology do not do so. The technologists and engineers who develop technology lack understanding of the social impact of technology and are often naive about the means of controlling it ... politicians and business people who support research lack understanding of

the technical aspect of technology. (Dusek 105)

To put this in perspective, consider the Manhattan Project. Robert Oppenheimer and many other scientists working on the project did not understand the political and social implications of the atom bomb. As a result, the bomb was used as a slave of various political machines, and this spawned the arms race between Soviet Russia and the US. Another observation of the theory claims that every technology results in unanticipated problems, which in turn leads to more inventions to fix those problems. The autonomous technology theory shows that we are not 100% in control of our creations, and as such it could be considered one of the key ingredients leading to a Matrix-like scenario. Technology is always aiming to better itself, and the complex amalgam of politics, social integration, economic impact and technical application make it difficult for anyone to have control over it.

While humans do lack the ability to control the systems surrounding technology, we are always in control of which technologies are created, which ones are rendered obsolete, and which ones are given the most social and political attention. As such, the proposal that technology is completely autonomous is at present fairly absurd. There have been many instances in which the cultural context has shaped which innovations prosper and which are ignored. For example, the technology behind flying cars and electric cars is more plausible than most people believe, though the economic implications of these technologies has left them untouched

by popular science. Another instance is exemplified by Dusek: “[T]he decline of space exploration after the Cold War shows that the technology alone does not automatically expand once the cultural context has changed” (Dusek 110). It would seem that there is a reciprocal relationship between the revolutionary aspects of technology and the goals of society as a whole. Because of this give and take relationship, neither humanity nor technology can effectively be sovereign at this point in time. There are more ingredients besides autonomous technology that need to be considered if a real-life Matrix scenario is to be plausible.

Earlier, it was explained that each technological innovation amputates a human ability that was hitherto absolutely necessary. Agriculture amputated the need to migrate for food, motorized transportation amputated the need to walk and run between most destinations, and today there are numerous innovations which are amputating our need to think. But behind this idea is a more specific, fundamental one: Amputation via technology facilitates “an abandonment of previous lines of inquiry” (Moore 401). When the solution to a complex formula can be attained by typing a few numbers into a calculator, the user is left little reason to wonder what other avenues are available to discover the same answer. The computing device, however, has all of these pathways programmed and will never forget them. The same is true when using a computer: The user has little reason to figure out how to use code or a command prompt when almost everything on a computer is

accessible through a mouse and keyboard. There are of course technicians who specialize in writing code for computers, but to what extent are these experts necessary? It is a reasonable prediction that within the next twenty years, computers will be able to write their own code without the expertise of a technician.

A similar situation was presented in “The Second Renaissance,” a prequel written by the Wachowski Brothers providing background on the story of *The Matrix*. In it, the robots built a city named ‘Zero One,’ and they were able to create and innovate more efficiently than any human being. The narrator remarks: “Zero One prospered, and for a time, it was good. The machines' artificial intelligence could be seen in every facet of society, including the creation of new and better AI.” This made human productivity and innovation obsolete, forcing utter reliance on the efforts of sentient machines. The efficiency of the robots in *The Matrix* may seem like a far cry from what our technology can do today, but let us consider the following: Machines create our cars, they refine our oil and they package our food. They do these things with such efficacy that we could not sustain our current lifestyle if we did not have them. While our machines are not sentient, they still make the efforts of humans obsolete in each of their respective fields. Because technology is always aiming to better itself, it will continue to eliminate the need for human ability and function, even to the point that it will begin to reshape the functionality of our own bodies and minds.

If machines are to make our bodies obsolete, then by strict

definition we will be replaced by robots. While this does not necessarily entail a malicious takeover, it does imply that our replacement is inevitable. Such an idea was explored by scientific philosopher Marvin Minsky in his work "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?" Minsky writes, "[W]e must imagine ways in which future replacements for worn out body parts might solve most problems of failing health. We must then augment our brains and gain greater wisdom. Eventually we will replace our brains - using nanotechnology" (Minsky 1212). Minsky does not see the replacement of the human body as a negative occurrence, but rather a necessary one that will greatly benefit the human race. According to Minsky, utter reliance upon technology is the only way we will survive and continue to evolve as a species. In order to prosper, humanity must allow technology to be its master. The term "master" as it is used here does not describe an oppressive relationship, though one could argue that because the human experience would be lost in evolution through technology, humans as a species would be living under the oppression of machines.

Minsky's argument focuses on augmentation as opposed to amputation. Augmentation is a personal term, used to reference changes to the actual body, while amputation refers to the removal of the need for the body to function. For instance, a laptop computer allows any person to Google the answer to any question they desire, amputating the need to think critically about the question in order to produce an autonomous answer. In contrast, a nano bot designed to enhance brain

capabilities would allow the subject to acquire above average critical thinking skills, hence allowing them to give autonomous answers that a Google user would not. This difference is important when considering the implications of our reliance on technology because innovations can fall into either category. It is often difficult to distinguish between which technologies serve as amputations, which serve as augmentations, and which serve as both. *The Matrix* itself could be considered both an amputation and an augmentation. Inside *The Matrix*, a human's physical body is completely useless, but the mind is allowed to do things it could never do without *The Matrix*. If humans create enough augmentative technology, it would be relatively easy to counteract the amputations of other technologies. Hence, the possibility of a successful hostile takeover by sentient robots would be much less likely.

There is another way to avoid the possibility of a hostile takeover by sentient technology, and that is to blatantly abandon our technological lifestyle which has been in place for over ten thousand years. This is Daniel Quinn's pivotal point in his novel *Ishmael*. The novel claims that humans blindly believe that technological advancement and civilization is the only way to live. The reality is that there are numerous other, more universally correct, ways to live. The titular character, a philosophical ape, preaches that man's blind faith in his own civilization will eventually lead to an unforeseen catastrophe, a robot mutiny in the case of *The Matrix*. He also explains that civilized society is not necessarily the right way to structure

life, citing various differences between modern societies and unrecognized, 'uncivilized' people groups. Ishmael states:

[I]f they got tired of being agriculturalists, if they found they didn't like where it was leading them in their particular adaptation, they were able to give it up. They didn't say to themselves, 'Well, we've got to keep going at this even if it kills us, because this is the *right* way to live.' For example, there was once a people who constructed a vast network of irrigation canals in order to farm the deserts of what is now southeastern Arizona. They maintained these canals for three thousand years and built a fairly advanced civilization, but in the end they were free to say, 'This is a toilsome and unsatisfying way to live, so to hell with it.' They simply walked away from the whole thing and put it so totally out of mind that we don't even know what they called themselves. (Quinn 99)

Our civilization is of course much more complex than that of a mere irrigation-based society, and giving up our current lifestyle would in itself cause worldwide pandemonium. However, it is worth noting that in our society, it is most often our own efforts to advance which cause us the most suffering. This idea complements the philosophical nature of the war between robots and humans in *The Matrix*. If humans were to take up a lifestyle separate from technology, nuclear war and energy crises would be averted, and the destruction of various ecosystems

around the world would be stopped. However, giving up technology would mean giving up transportation, mass production and all communication devices. While giving up our technological culture would be impractical, it is worth considering the implications behind doing so, as one may be hard-pressed to find particular fault in such a lifestyle.

Given the possibility of a hostile takeover by artificial intelligence, there are numerous philosophical stances to consider. First are those of technological determinism and autonomous technology. The former represents technology's ability to heavily affect the trends of all aspects of society; the latter posits that the systems of politics, social integration, economic impact and technical application of technology make it impossible to predict or completely control the development of technology. While these theories are thought-provoking, they are not substantial enough to conclude whether or not technology is capable of mastering humanity. As shown in previous examples, technology has a give and take relationship with humanity, which automatically counteracts the idea that machines are completely autonomous. This idea is expanded on in the sequel to *The Matrix*, and is encompassed in a conversation between Neo and the Councillor of Zion:

Councillor: Down here, sometimes I think about all those people still plugged into *The Matrix* and when I look at these machines I... I can't help thinking that in a way... we are plugged into them.

Neo: But we control these

machines; they don't control us.

Councillor: Of course not. How could they? The idea is pure nonsense. But it does make one wonder... just what is control?

Neo: If we wanted, we could shut these machines down.

Councillor: [Of] course. That's it. You hit it. That's control, isn't it? If we wanted we could smash them to bits. Although, if we did, we'd have to consider what would happen to our lights, our heat, our air...

Neo: So we need machines and they need us, is that your point, Councillor?

Because the two theories are not adequate in explaining the probability of a robot takeover, one must consider the difference between technological amputations and augmentations. Amputations imply the rendering obsolete of a human function and closing other pathways of inquiry, intellectual or otherwise. Augmentations imply the sharpening of a human function, which can, in contrast, open up many different avenues of inquiry. Herein lies both the problem of and the cure to a mechanical mutiny. If the number of amputations outweighs the number of augmentations, and machines gain sentience and malicious intent before this imbalance is checked, then robots will be successful. However, if the opposite is true, and our augmentations outweigh our amputations, a robot mutiny should not pose a problem to humanity. The alternative to these two situations would be to give up the technological lifestyle completely and live in a manner that not only benefits oneself,

but also benefits the entire ecosystem.

Works Cited

The Matrix. Dir. Larry and Andrew Wachowski. Perfs. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Film. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1999.

Dusek, Val. *Philosophy of Technology: An Introduction*. Boston, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Print.

Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael*. New York: Bantam/Turner Books, 1992. Print.

Minsky, Marvin. *Science Fiction: Stories and Contexts*. "Will Robots Inherit the Earth?" Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print. 1211-1221.


The Matrix Reloaded. Dir. Larry and Andrew Wachowski. Perfs. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Film. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2003.

"The Second Renaissance," *The Animatrix*. Dir. Mahiro Maeda, Wachowski Brothers. Perfs. Julia Fletcher. Film. Warner Home Video, 2003.

Moore, D.R. (2006). "The Technology/Inquiry Typology: Defining Instructional Technology." *Journal of Interactive Learning Research*, 17(4), 401-406. Chesapeake, VA: AACE.

Editor Reflections—Roxane Pickens on Drayden Farci

In a world that owes its existence to the benefits and problematics of human migration and cross-cultural interaction, many of our greatest writers have considered the challenges of assimilation and the hard-learned lessons of that experience. Their offerings task us with deeply assessing how self and society develop through the complex engagements between “them” and “us.” It is this instruction that Drayden Farci has taken seriously, and the results of his close analysis and critical thought is an essay that pays homage to the creative work of authors Toni Morrison, Chang-rae Lee, and Nathan Englander. In his essay, “Assimilation by Performance,” Farci looks at how ethnic, racial, and religious others pay the price of acceptance by protestant white society. With deft observations and careful consideration, Farci demonstrates that an inauthentic performance of a presumed ideal is doomed to be unsatisfactory. For many of us, this is a lesson that takes a lifetime to fully comprehend. It is heartening to see such a promising student display that comprehension at this early stage. May Farci’s work aid us all in our journey toward cultural cohesion and individual wholeness.



English 106 • Spring 2012 Writing about Ethnic Fiction Instructor Dan Chaskes

Eng 106: Writing Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Fiction Final Paper

Your final assignment is to write a research essay using a peer-reviewed journal article. This assignment should represent a culmination of your thinking and writing about ethnicity, identity, and the ways these are represented and complicated in works of fiction.

In this paper I’m looking for you to make a clear, argumentative statement about the contemporary ethnic experience. Consider all of the things we have discussed this semester: form, characterization, theme, etc. You will use two kinds of evidence: course texts and journal articles.

You must use at least one peer-reviewed scholarly journal article and at least three course texts. This can be an article on one of our authors, or on whatever social component you are writing on.

You will bring an abstract to class that provides a road map for your paper. This should be about a paragraph in length. It should include your thesis and brief discussion of what sources you will be using and what you believe they say.

Your final revision is due on the last day of class as part of your portfolio. You are expected to follow MLA documentation style for in-text citations and the list of works cited.

Assimilation by Performance

Drayden Farci

ENG 106 • Dan Chaskes
Spring 2012

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*, and Nathan Englander's "The Gilgul of Park Avenue" all illustrate that an ethnic outcast will perform to white society's standards in an attempt to assimilate. Morrison shows this through Claudia, who disagrees with society's standards of beauty and must hide her resentment in order to seem normal. Lee creates a character named Doc Hata who performs kind gestures to people and hides his troubled past in an effort to fit in with his neighbors, who also perform in order to appear to be without any troubles. In Englander's short story, Charles goes through a rebirth and discovers he's Jewish, but he is soon ostracized by his wife, showing that it would have been better for Charles to continue his life in a performance that hides his Judaism. The desire to assimilate is prevalent in each text and these three authors experiment with depictions of various ways of being different. Each presents a unique experience of what it means to try to fit in, but all three rely on the idea that one will perform falsely in an attempt to overcome racial or religious differences and conform to the standards of white society in order to avoid being exiled or criticized.

In Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Claudia, a young black girl, struggles to find acceptance because society idolizes blond hair and blue eyes over her dark skin and hair. Claudia is subjected to her struggle every day as she sees "magazines, newspapers, window signs," all agreeing that "a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned" girl was ideal (Morrison 14). Claudia receives a doll for Christmas – a white, "big, blue-eyed Baby Doll" – and is expected to adore it just as everybody other kid does (13). Claudia doesn't like the phenotype, however, and she hates the fact that she must adore the doll or be considered different. Naively thinking that beauty is a physical object hidden inside someone or something, Claudia dismembers the doll. She wants to "discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped" her (14). She removes the limbs and separates the head from the torso, searching for the source of the beauty that society idolizes. Setefanus Suprajitno explains in his article, "Abject Selfhood in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*", that "Claudia... is... questioning the myth of White beauty as supreme in her dismembering of the White doll to search for its authenticity and power" (Suprajitno 13). Claudia

doesn't believe that such a doll should be considered better than another, and she searches for the reasons why people adore it. After failing to find the "secret of the magic they weaved on others", Claudia's hatred towards the white dolls turns into hatred towards real white girls (Morrison 15).

Embarrassed about her thoughts, and perhaps not understanding how to handle them, Claudia learns to hide her hatred in a performance of false adoration towards the girls and dolls. She describes the process to the reader, explaining that "the best hiding place" for the hatred "was love" (16). Claudia realizes that she will continue to be different if she hates what everyone else loves, and she realizes that she can't change her appearance to match that of the white girls. Suprajitno explains that "the only way an 'uprooted' Black person can survive is to be as White as possible", indicating that Claudia must make an effort to be like everyone else (Suprajitno 11). Because the "White beliefs and views... become the yardstick of the society," and "anything different from the White perception is viewed as deficient", Claudia must act like everyone else and accept these standards as superior. While not believing that such standards are better, she is willing to sacrifice her beliefs in a performance of "fraudulent love" in order to appear as though she agrees (Morrison 16). This false love, merely a performance by Claudia, is continued throughout her life. By performing an adoration of the standards established by white society, she is able to assimilate and feel normal.

False performances are also

seen in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*. The story follows Franklin Hata, called Doc Hata by the townspeople, and his struggle to be accepted by his new town, comprised predominantly of white, middle class Americans. In his article "Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*: The Recuperation of Identity", Matthew Miller describes Hata as a "transplanted Korean identifying himself as Japanese transplanted in America" (Miller 1). He moved to a town in New York called Bedley Run, which has established itself as an "affluent" suburb with a "peaceful pace of life" (Lee 2, 3). Upon moving to Bedley Run, Hata performed kind gestures for people, hoping that they would welcome him into their society. Though he is kind and receives kindness in return, Hata feels partially secluded from the rest of the townspeople. Miller explains that Hata's "race is the limiting factor that impedes social acceptance" (Miller 1). People continually hold pre-conceived ideas about him, and in an attempt to make up for the racial differences, Hata continues to perform to the society in the form of kind gestures. Hata hopes that if people see a good side of him, they will dismiss his appearance. However, some people, including himself, note that occasionally he has "too keenly sought approval"; he tries too hard to please others (Lee 5). These "empty social gestures" are what Hata uses in an attempt to "acculturate fully into... the adopted [culture]... of America" (Miller 1). Through a performance of empty favors, Hata attempts to gain acceptance in Bedley Run.

In addition to kind gestures, Hata also performs by adopting a nickname that emits a false sense of

knowledge and education. Upon moving to Bedley Run, Hata opens a medical supply store, which he sells after several years. Hata earns the nickname “Doc” because of the store, but in reality “it’s obvious [Hata is] not a doctor” (Lee 11). Adopting the nickname and keeping it even after the store was sold is another performance by Hata in an effort to fit in with his new neighbors. He wants to fit the style of Bedley Run: affluent, peaceful, and respected. Hata adopts the nickname “Doc” to sound more educated and cultured, hoping to gain acceptance into a community which clearly has high standards. However, when the new shopkeeper questions Hata on why he has kept the nickname after selling the store, Hata dismisses the question. He either doesn’t know the answer or he would like to keep the answer private, illustrating a third performance in Hata’s life: the hiding of his difficulties.

Hata covers up difficulties by not responding to tough questions. Additionally, he patches up his daughter’s room to forget about a trauma that she has caused him. By “patching and repainting the ceiling and walls” (14), Hata “systematically blots/erases [his daughter] out of his life” (Miller 4). Miller points out that “refashioning [his daughter’s] room represents Hata’s denial” – the denial to accept past traumas and move on, as well as the denial to tell others about his life. Hata struggles with these memories of his daughter, and he attempts to hide them from Bedley Run in a false performance as though nothing were wrong with him. Hata hides his difficulties in a performance of mental peace in order to try to assimilate into Bedley Run, where

people are seemingly without troubles. However, he learns that the new owners of his store, the Hickeys, have their own problems that they hide from society.

One day, Hata enters the store and Mr. Hickey immediately starts yelling at him. Hata learns that Mr. Hickey is having trouble keeping the store running, and Mr. Hickey says that the bank will “have the whole place soon” (Hata 10). After a short outburst, Mr. Hickey leaves Hata alone with Mrs. Hickey, and despite “all this negativeness, Mrs. Hickey was still cheerful, joking and kidding” (12). Through his brief interaction with Mr. Hickey and the response from Mrs. Hickey, Hata learns that the couple has more problems than just running the store, and Mrs. Hickey attempts to hide their difficulties by remaining cheerful. Lee shows us that individuals will attempt to hide their troubles, even if others have issues as well.

While Morrison and Lee have their respective characters hide behind false performances, Nathan Englander chooses to allow his character, Charles, to display his true identity. Instead of acceptance, however, Charles is met with rejection from his wife, indicating that it may have been wiser to hide his true identity in a performance to keep the peace. In “The Gilgul of Park Avenue”, Charles goes through a rebirth and discovers he is Jewish. He immediately seeks guidance on how to act like a proper Jew, as well as how he should tell his wife about his new religion. Upon learning about the different habits and rules regarding Judaism, Charles tells his wife, Sue, that he is Jewish. She immediately asks him if he feels “like [he is] clinically insane” (Englander 118). Not knowing exactly

how to react, Charles continues on, hoping that she would not react more drastically.

As time passes, the relationship between Charles and Sue dwindles. Charles explains that he was “driven from his own bedroom” because he “changed his diet and said a few prayers” (122). Sue repeatedly points out her frustration about the news, wondering why Charles couldn’t “have turned into a vegan... or a liberal Democrat” instead (122). Sue actually would have preferred if Charles had “slept with [his] secretary” instead of converted to Judaism. Through Sue’s reactions about Charles’ new religion, we see that it would have been better for Charles to hide his true self from her and continue his life as though nothing had occurred. As a result of his rebirth, Charles’ “marriage is falling apart” and “Sue hates [him]” (124). The couple lives in a nice house in a nice neighborhood, comprised mainly of wealthy Christians. Because Sue wishes to remain like the rest of the neighborhood, she is resistant to such a drastic change. Instead of race being the defining factor of acceptance, as in the cases of Claudia and Hata, Charles’ religion limits his acceptance into white, Christian society. Had Charles performed a false identity, one where he hid his Judaism from his wife, he could have continued to live happily. However, once Charles allowed his secret to surface, his wife could not cope with the change and he was ostracized by the one person he loved the most.

In each story, we see that individuals must falsely perform in order to attempt to fit the standards established by white society. Morrison shows us that people must be willing to

sacrifice their beliefs in order to gain acceptance. Lee illustrates that even if one tries to assimilate through false performances, they may not succeed. Englander demonstrates that without a performance, one will not be able to fit into their society, and an effort must be made to perform a false persona to remain welcome and normal. Each author examines the method of performing in order to assimilate, and each shows that one must be willing to sacrifice certain aspects of their life in order to fit the standards established by a white society.

Works Cited

- Englander, Nathan. “The Gilgul of Park Avenue.” *For the Relief of Unbearable Urges*. New York: Knopf, 1999. 107-137. Print.
- Lee, Chang-rae. *A Gesture Life*. New York: Riverhead, 1999. Print.
- Miller, Matthew. "Chang-rae Lee's A Gesture Life: The Recuperation of Identity." *Ethnic Studies Review* 32.2 (2009): 1-11. Gale. Web. 6 Apr. 2012.
- Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye*. New York: Holt, 1970. Print.
- Suprajitno, Setefanus. "Abject Selfhood in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye." *K@ta* 2.1 (2000): 9-15. Summon . Web. 5 Apr. 2012.

Instructor Reflections—Judy Hood on Vanessa Michaud

I was trembling when I left Miami's Carnival Studio Theatre in late October. It was not the chilling wind bending palms and sending eye-stinging sand swirling that made me shiver. I was still unsettled following the performance by professional actors and students from the University of Miami in *House of Bernarda Alba*. Later in the Spring, all my emotional response to Federico Garcia Lorca's play resonated once again when Vanessa brought *La casa de Bernarda Alba* to stand side by side with *Reading Lolita in Tehran* under the lens of Malcolm Gladwell's theory of the *Power of Context*.

Adela's struggle for autonomy in the play echoed that of Azar Nafisi's secret band of young female students determined to "give shape to [their] vision and identity" in a world where they existed as "figments of someone else's imagination." Adela's parallel to "Azi's girls" and Bernardo Alba's repressive, authoritarian house as metaphor for Iran's "restrictive, theocratic, and patriarchal society" were Vanessa's discovery. This essay challenging the "powers of context to force conformity" is her gift.

English 106 • Spring 2012 Writing Into the Wild

This final project asks you to apply the critical thinking expertise, textual analysis strategies, organizational, and stylistic writing skills practiced throughout the course.

Apply "The Power of Context" as a lens for reading one of the Selections from *Into the Wild* and *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, "How to Tell a True War Story," or "The Moral Instinct."

Write a researched paper which not only reads a subject through a lens (applies a theory to a text) but also puts primary and secondary sources into conversation with each other and locates your own role in the conversation. Design a project which explores a particularly significant, curious, strange or disturbing aspect resulting from your application of a reading as a lens and synthesis of primary and secondary sources. Evaluate the significance of your analysis.

This paper needs to:

- Clearly establish your guiding principle, question, assertion, thesis) which you believe application of the lens uncovers and evidence from both primary and secondary sources explores and/or supports.
- Clearly present and discuss your read of the lens and the primary text you are considering (focused description.)
- Clearly articulate what application of the lens reveals: how the subject fits and how it does not fit the lens
- Clearly present the perspectives of secondary sources as they relate to your primary texts and your focus.
 - Incorporate, cite, and explain quoted and paraphrased evidence in MLA style.
 - Show analysis. Ask and answer: So what?
 - Establish and follow a recognizable organization.
 - Create connection and fluidity through a variety of transitional devices.
- Culminate by bringing significant threads together; evaluate by revisiting the original claim and making a judgment; challenge the reader and awaken further thinking.

True Environment, True Character

Vanessa Michaud

ENG 106 • Judy Hood
Spring 2012

At a very young age, it becomes evident that no two individuals are alike. Each person represents a set of physical attributes, preferences, and tendencies that make themselves unique. These features, however, may be influenced by other outside factors, including parental figures. In his essay “The Power of Context”, Malcolm Gladwell tries to explain the magnitude of the influence current external environments can have on a person’s character. While not refuting the fact that “our inner psychological states and personal histories are... important in explaining our behavior” as well as heredity, Gladwell provides strong evidence for immediate outside influences affecting the behaviors of individuals. He offers the Zimbardo prison experiment as his evidence, in which healthy, normal, law-abiding men actually became their assigned role of prison guard or prisoner when placed in a prison-like environment (164). But does a human being’s intrinsic character truly change based on external circumstances? Can certain controlled external environments allow an individual to display their “true self”? If an intrinsic character does exist, is there a certain inherent morality in each individual? Set in

restrictive external environments, Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and Federico Garcia Lorca’s *La casa de Bernarda Alba* address these questions while countering certain aspects of Gladwell’s theory.

In *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Nafisi recounts her experiences as a teacher in an Iranian university and then as an organizer of a secret discussion of banned literature with a group of select students, all women, in her apartment in Iran. Because they live in Iran, a restrictive theocratic and patriarchal society, law requires the women to wear scarves and cover almost every inch of their bodies at all times in public. However, when the young women enter the apartment for their discussions about literature, they take off their robes and scarves. Nafisi’s metaphorical writing style is most evident here, describing the girls with many different colors as they take off their burdensome garments, and engage in the risky activity of reading forbidden books. The act of the women wearing the garments in public conforms to Gladwell’s theory because their behavior changes in accordance with their environment; they are unable to show their inquisitive, knowledge-hungry, and colorful selves to the world

because they are trapped in black robes and scarves.

Iran acts as an external environment to the young women in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. This environment encompasses the Iranian government and its laws, and Iranian law dictates that women must wear scarves and robes to cover their bodies among other requirements, such as not reading banned literature. In accordance with Gladwell's theory, the behavior of the women in public is influenced by what is dictated through their external environment, to be "dressed in black robes and head scarves, covered except for the oval of their faces and their hands" (Nafisi 248). They do this regardless of what their preferences and personalities are because they cannot afford to do otherwise and suffer the consequences; and yet, "[they] took every opportunity to flaunt [their] insubordination: by showing a little hair from under [their] scarves [and] insinuating a little color into the drab uniformity of [their] appearances" (Nafisi 264).

Consequently, the situation of these young women does not match every attribute of Gladwell's theory. When explaining his theory, Gladwell states that "character is..like a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstances and context"(163). The behavior of the young women in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* challenges this theory and indicates through these meetings that character is indeed a set of closely related traits. The living room where the girls meet acts as a neutral environment, instead of one that determines how they should act. They

realize that "in [the] living room... [they] were also living, breathing human beings; and no matter how repressive the state became, no matter how intimidated and frightened [they] were, like Lolita they tried to escape and create [their] own little pockets of freedom"(Nafisi 264). Freedom to the young women is equivalent to being able to show their true selves in this "sanctuary". This is evident when Manna, one of the young women, describes how she "want[s] to wear outrageous colors" or how Nafisi describes each of the girls with different colors after they all take off their black or dark robes when coming into the room (Nafisi 256). Contrary to Gladwell's theory, Nafisi's living room does not change the "convictions of their hearts and content of [their] thoughts" but rather demonstrates that the girls' true characters are visible when placed in a neutral and safe environment (Nafisi 263).

In this sense, the "true selves" are equivalent to the character of the girls. At almost every meeting, Nafisi "could not get over the shock of seeing them shed their mandatory veils and burst into color" implying that each of her students' personalities is different and unique (250). In the outside world of Iran, they are forced to cover up these identities through robes and scarves and are "a figment of someone else's dreams" (Nafisi 265). Nafisi's living room, however, in its unorganized state, is considered a neutral and safe ground for the girls because they are able to discuss banned literature without being severely punished and show that their true characters are made up of strongly definite traits. They struggle between their two worlds, which is evident when

the “censored view” of the Elburz Mountains is visible to Nafisi as it “intensified [her] impression that the noise came not from the street below but from some far-off place... whose persistent hum was our only link to the world we refused” (252).

A similar situation occurs in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, or the House of Bernarda Alba and can be interpreted through Gladwell’s theory. Just like the young women in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Bernarda Alba’s five daughters are surrounded by an extremely repressive environment set in place by Bernarda, the matriarchal figure of the household, who holds strongly to traditional values of her Spanish culture. Unlike the girls in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Bernarda’s oldest daughters conform to the environment set in place by their mother, which fits Gladwell’s lens since the girls are acting in accordance with their environment. According to John Gabriele’s article “Of mothers and freedom: Adela’s struggle for selfhood in *La casa de Bernarda Alba*”, Bernarda’s behavior is equivalent to that of a mother who “needs to control the actions of her children because her identity is inseparable from her role as mother” and as guardian of the controlled environment that, according to Gladwell, dictates her daughters’ behaviors. She requires the daughters to not leave the house, to dress in black clothing out of mourning and respect (after the death of her second husband) and “prevents bonds between the girls and men” (Lorca 201). The youngest daughter however, Adela, refuses to conform to her mother’s repressive society. Her nonconformity is evident when she exclaims: “No me acostumbre. Yo no

puedo estar encerrada... yo quiero salir!” (Lorca 215), meaning that she will not reform because she cannot be trapped in an environment where she cannot show her true self. At this point, she draws attention to her rebellious, nonconforming character and her need to be independent. Adela’s attitude goes directly against Gladwell’s lens because throughout the play, she acts contrary to her external environment.

Adela’s rebellious behavior can be compared to Nafisi’s behavior in *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. They both act out of a need to free themselves from an external environment where their society is dictated by cultural norms set in place by an authoritarian figure. In *La casa de Bernarda Alba*, Adela’s lover, Pepe el Romano, is to be married to her oldest sister Angustias because, according to cultural norms, the eldest daughter was to receive all money from a deceased parental figure. Both Angustias’ father and step father had passed away, leaving her with a small fortune. Adela is devastated and frustrated that she is unable to be with the man she loves. As a result, instead of following cultural norms, “Adela ... consummates her relationship with Pepe in an act of revolt against... unjust cultural codes”, which Thomas Blake explains in his article “Bernarda Alba and Frogs with No Tongues.” According to Gabriele, Pepe “can provide Adela with the opportunity to fill an instinctual desire within her,... to bring about her autonomy.” Nafisi’s discussion on banned literature in the living room where the girls are able to take off their robes and scarves allows the girls to escape from their repressive environment outside of the living room and provides them with an outlet of expressing their true selves. Both Adela

and Nafisi's behavior seems to stem from a strong desire to protect their identity in any manner possible. A certain set of principals may guide their actions to stay true to themselves, but not all are held in equality; one may take priority over another.

Contrary to Gladwell's theory, Steven Pinker, author of "The Moral Instinct", suggests that regardless of our current environment, five "themes" guide an individual's morality: do no harm, fairness, community (group loyalty), authority and purity. These themes strengthen the claim that character is a set of definite and identifiable traits. However, Pinker also states that we "juggle the spheres" so that they are "universal and variable at the same time." Their importance to each individual is based on culture, implying that each individual's hierarchy of morals can shift, as Pinker explains. The shift in morality can be attributed to the environment that an individual is placed in but is also based on their character. The girls in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* have an internal desire to escape the restrictive society of Iran and keep their identity true, but they do this by engaging in activity that is not condoned in their culture, such as lying to their parents, reading banned books and taking off their scarves and robes so as not to be covered. Similarly, Adela strongly desires to be with Pepe el Romano and not conform to her mother's repressive regime, so she keeps true to her passionate and independent character by having an affair with Pepe, who is to be married to her sister, and goes against her mother's will. Both these elements enrage her mother Bernarda, who is the domineering keeper of Spanish traditions and culture, some of which

include staying a virgin until married and respecting the will of parental figures at all times. Both Nafisi and Adela's moralities seem to be guided by Pinker's fairness theme above all other themes, indicating the shift in morality they experience to protect their character and to demonstrate that they are above conforming to cultural norms.

Consequently, the example of the girls in Nafisi's living room in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* and that of Adela in *La casa de Bernarda Alba* indicate that Gladwell's theory is flawed. Individuals can act based on their external environments or circumstances, such as the individuals in the Zimbardo experiment, but there are certain neutral and controlled environments in which they can demonstrate their true self, or character, as seen with Nafisi's girls in the living room. Although they "no longer [know] the answers" of which of their two worlds was more real or to which they belong, the girls in Nafisi's memoir do not need to put on their symbolic mask of conformity in the living room as they do when they walk on the streets of Iran; they can show their true colors, as Nafisi describes them to have when they take off their robes (264). Adela is completely against conforming to her mother's will of keeping traditions alive in a never-ending cycle of repression, and her actions of having an affair with her true love are a result of her staunch independent character, so as to avoid "the horrors under the roof [of her house]" (Lorca 246). Both Adela and Nafisi with her girls seem to be guided by Pinker's themes of morality to safeguard their "true selves" but experience a shift in the importance of these themes which leads them to

actions that are deemed unacceptable by their respective cultures. Yet, this shift in morality allows them to break away from the society that tries with all the powers of context to force them to reinvent themselves in a character that conforms to cultural norms.

Works Cited

Blake, Thomas. "Bernarda Alba and Frogs with No Tongues." MP: An Online Feminist Journal. 3.1 (2010).

Gabriele, John P. "Of Mothers And Freedom: Adela's Struggle For Selfhood in La Casa de Bernarda Alba." *Symposium* 47.3 (1993): 188-199. *Academic Search Premier*. Web 27 Apr. 2012.

Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Power of Context." *The New Humanities Reader*. 4th ed. Ed. Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 152-165. Print.

Lorca, Federico. Abriendo Puertas: Antología de literatura en español. Ed. Wayne Bowen. Fresno, California: Nexttext, 2003.

Nafisi, Azar. "Selections from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*." *The New Humanities Reader*. 4th ed. Ed. Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009. 248-265. Print.

Pinker, Steven. "The Moral Instinct." New York Times 13 July 2008.

English Composition Program
Department of English
University of Miami

1252 Memorial Drive
Ashe Bldg., Rm. 327
Coral Gables, FL 33146
Ph.: (305) 284-3090 Fax: (305) 284-5396