

English Composition Program
Department of English
Award Ceremony
March 5, 2015

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

Award Winners

Twenty-First Annual
Audley Webster
Memorial Essay Contest



Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest

2014-2015 Contest Coordinators:

Joshua Schriftman and Giovanni Turner

English Composition Program Director:

Joanna Johnson

English Composition Senior Administrative Assistant:

Clara Maroney (*retired*)

Contributing Judges:

Giovanni Turner

Joshua Schriftman

Susan Leary

Adina Sanchez-Garcia

John Wafer

Paul Deveney

Samantha Phillips

Kimberly McGrath Moreira

Melissa Burley

Judy Hood

Katherine Komis

Darryl Ellison

Alisa Bé

Roxane Pickens

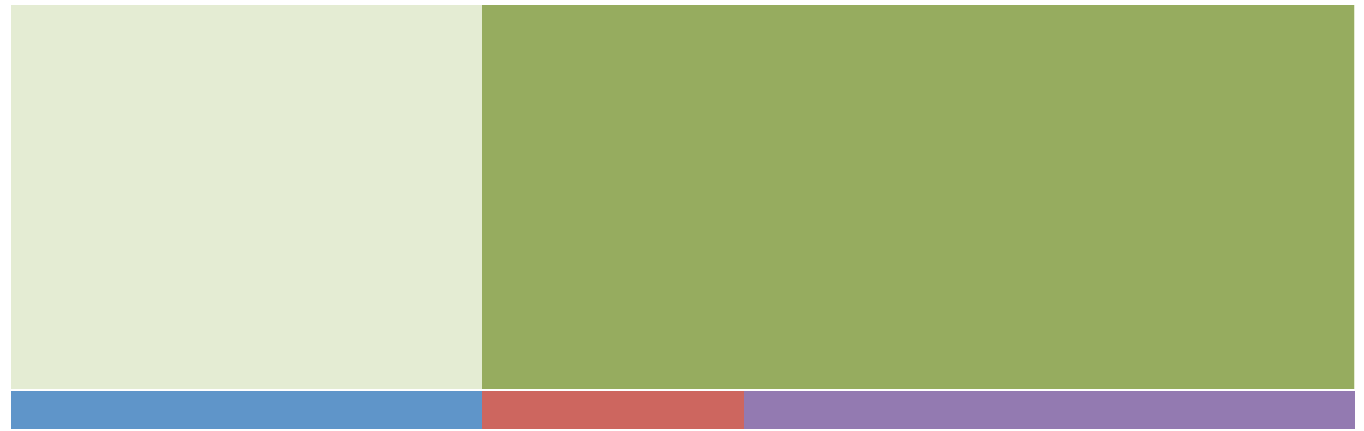
April Mann

Charlotte Rogers

Diana Dabek

Booklet Design/Cover Photograph:

Roxane Pickens

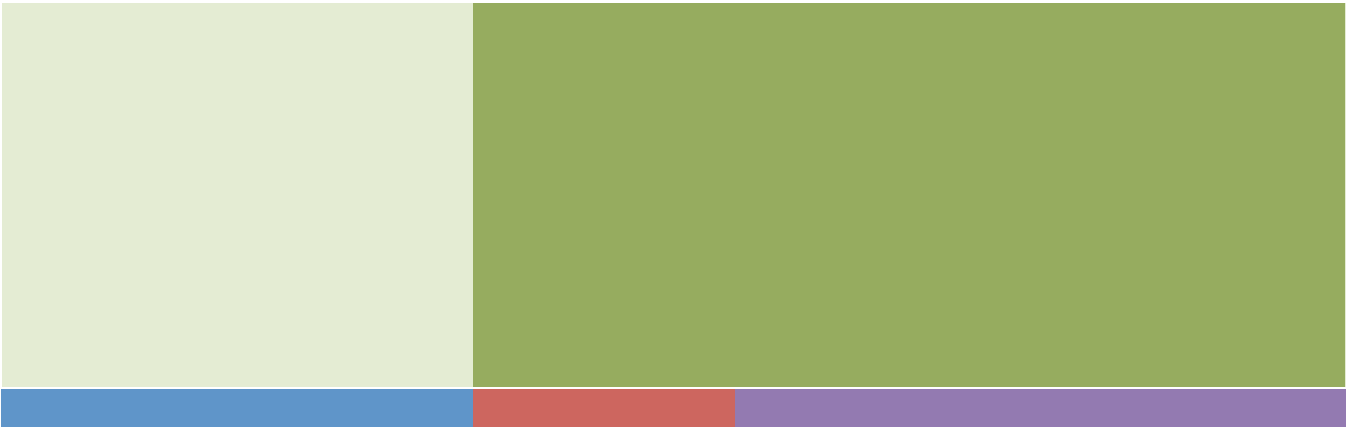


Get to the point! Be brief, be boisterous, be ubiquitous. With one hundred forty character micro-blogs and thirty-second sound bites, we tiptoe ever closer to taking concision past the point of virtue. Viewing writing as purely utilitarian, as if the sole point of writing is to issue directives, we truncate our sentences and emaciate our paragraphs. True, we have gained time. We can work more, produce more, and forsake the now for the next. However, we lose the beautiful of writing and perhaps even a bit of ourselves.

It is through that florid eloquence that we do more than communicate a fact, we tell a story. Every year, the *Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest* honors student writers that have found that nexus between analysis and narrative. In essays that explore the wonder and danger of nature, medical science, and multiculturalism, Antonio Linares, Sarah Ranney, Andrew Winig, and Phaedra Theodoridis have all mastered the art of slowing down. By writing from both the head and heart, their words not only articulate a well-supported thesis, they make us laugh, cry, reexamine our assumptions, and see issues from multiple perspectives. Most important, their words subtly, artfully touch us and make us feel more human, gaining back that bit of ourselves we feared lost to a fast-paced world. For this we cannot thank them enough. Let us read.

Sincerely,

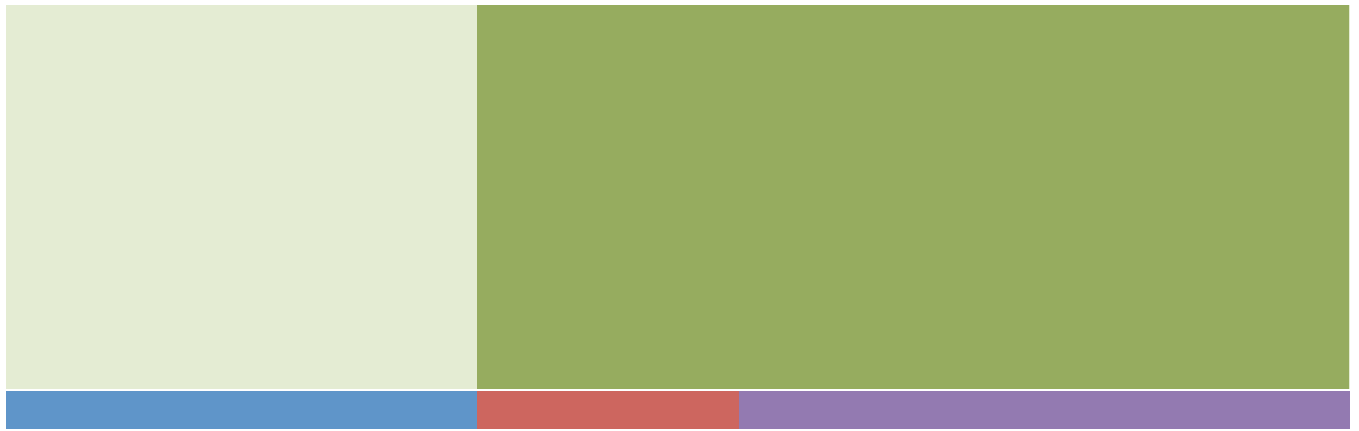
Joshua Schriftman and Giovanni Turner
Audley Webster Essay Contest Coordinators, 2014-2015



Dear Student Writers, Colleagues, Friends, and Family:

It is with enormous pleasure that we present this year's winning group of essays, all written by remarkably talented first-year composition students. Every year the Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest showcases the outstanding writing we see every day in our composition classes. The exemplary writing you will read here is informed, lively, and engaging, and it reflects the formidable efforts of both the students and their instructors. All of us in the Composition Program offer our heartfelt congratulations to each of the winners in this 21st anniversary year. We are in awe of the work you do, and we know that you will continue to pursue your passions and writing in future years with the same vigor, intelligence, and spirit of inquiry that you exhibit in these pages.

Joanna Johnson
Director, Composition Program
English Department



Contest Winners

Sarah Ranney – Martha Otis, instructor

Antonio Linares – Judy Hood, instructor

Phaedra R. Theodoridis – Nicole Hospital-Medina, instructor

Andrew Winig – John Wafer, instructor

Honorable Mentions

Shyla Moore -- Judy Hood, instructor

Daniel Householder -- Susan Leary, instructor

Simar Puri -- Briana Casali, instructor

Sarah Michalak -- Charlotte Rogers, instructor

Kemble Mountcastle -- Joshua Schriftman, instructor

Seanna Loeb -- Briana Casali, instructor

Audley Webster—The Professional

by Charlotte Rogers

Twenty-one years ago we selected the first winning essays of the Audley Webster Memorial Essay Contest. These yardsticks of quality prose from the University of Miami's first-year writing courses continue to identify the highest standards. How fitting, then, to boast this name: Audley Webster! Webster's years of teaching composition at our University convey a working definition of the professional.



Webster felt responsibility to a larger educational goal, says his daughter Dr. Susan Webster: “[a] love of teaching, and broader—imparting knowledge.” He loved sharing knowledge and rational thought with all his students, and he “believed that the greatest gift is the gift of learning, and that that gift is not complete until it is passed on.”

Throughout his professional life, Webster made expertise his specialty. He developed skills necessary for both his job and beyond, kept his knowledge up to date, and taught the individual as that individual learned best. Pictures remain of Webster sitting with a student, both concentrating on polishing that clear sentence. Did he succeed? Testimonials offer evidence: “He made instruction so clear,” and “He really cared that I learn to write,” assert two UM alumni. Evidence came, too, in the Monday newspapers wrapped in quotable quotes of the NFL or NBA week's hero, his former students; evidence remains in both national and international market plans that came from UM alumni now in the business world; and evidence appears in the clear, persuasive writing in legal briefs filed by former students, periodically remembering and using Webster's standards for rational thought.

And his was a personality of candor, honesty, courtesy, and respect for human dignity in all relationships. Many teachers of writing remember his advice—about both life and writing. That advice included a professional attitude and optimism. In addition, he could relate a narrative—often personal—to sharpen a point. For example, Dr. Webster, a psychologist, remembers when meeting students their saying, “Oh, you are the feminist daughter.”

Webster in his quiet, dignified, and confident manner, earned the respect of students and faculty with his high values and principles. Even before joining the U.M. faculty, he helped bring about equality through diversity on campuses. He lived the belief of Martin Luther King, Jr. that “An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of the individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.” Audley Webster embodied King's words, and through the above professional qualities—and more—he reminds us all of the highest standards in both teaching and imparting knowledge. —C.R., 2012, *edited*.

CONTENTS



Sarah Ranney	9
“From Beauty to Beast: The Decline of the Chesapeake Bay”	
ENG 107 • Martha Otis • Spring 2014	
Antonio Linares	21
“Remember this Destruction”	
ENG 105 • Judy Hood • Fall 2014	
Phaedra R. Theodoridis	27
“Opa!”	
ENG 106 • Nicole Hospital-Medina • Spring 2014	
Andrew Winig	31
“Pool Culture”	
ENG 105 • John Wafer • Fall 2014	

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

Instructor Reflections—Martha Otis on Sarah Ranney

Sarah Ranney wrote such a strong draft of this essay last spring that it became a model for other students, who were struggling to combine research with real human stories that we could all relate to and care about. The punishment for writing well is that your teacher will ask even more of you. Ms. Ranney came through. A year later, the final version reads to me as a quietly ambitious example of student writing, especially in its description of the snarl of environmental factors affecting the health of Chesapeake Bay. Partly a personal story of growing up on the bay, part profile of environmentalist and family friend Meghan Wren, and part philosophical inquiry into why our culture can't seem to care more about what our class called, for lack of a better word, "nature," Ms. Ranney's paper nevertheless reminds us what citizen engagement and activism can accomplish. I am pleased that she took on the challenge of incorporating concepts from David Abrams' "The Ecology of Magic," adopting the question that underlies much of his work: how did we end up so cut off from nature? How did it ever get this bad? Her paper ends on two images: one, the picture that her sister drew in second grade, the bay carefully (and realistically) colored brown. The second image comes in the last sentence: "My hope is that one summer day I'll be able to wade into the water of the bay behind my parents' home and see my toes as I go deeper and deeper." My heart sinks and bobs to the surface, and floats. I am happy that people in Sarah's generation are thinking so deeply about water.



English 107 • Spring 2014
English Composition II

For your formal paper this semester, you will do an inquiry into something that fascinates you. All semester, reading and discussing the pieces in *Best Science and Nature Writing 2008*, you have been encouraged to develop criteria for what makes good science writing for the general audience. Using these criteria, you can write about anything—even if it does not fit our "science and nature" theme. Remember the two triangles: ethos, pathos, logos; argument, protagonists, cinema. Make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. "A" papers will be very strong in higher order concerns: they will start and end with critical questions, they will offer ideas about your findings, and they will leave the reader unable to so easily make the same old assumptions about this topic.

From Beauty to Beast: The Decline of the Chesapeake Bay

Sarah Ranney

ENG 107 • Martha Otis
Spring 2014

Each and every summer, I wade cautiously into the murky brown water of the creek behind my house in the small town of Rock Hall, Maryland. This quiet, calm body of water, called Herringtown Creek, leads out to the Chester River, a part of the Chesapeake Bay. On a hot day in late July, the water feels barely cooler than the air. Each step I take on the slimy bottom stirs up more mud, darkening the water even more. My feet and ankles disappear behind the dark cloud before the water level even reaches my knees.

Growing up, I never really questioned the dirty brownish-green color of the water that I swam and sailed in (See Fig. 1). Although I knew that

there was clear blue water in other parts of the world, I never imagined that the Chesapeake Bay used to look that way long before I came along. In fact, very few people can remember the clear, blue, beautiful water that

filled the bay before the early 20th century. Most people have come to accept the dirty muck as a norm. Not only is this drastic change in water clarity sad for people swimming or using the bay recreationally, but it has also caused major issues environmentally involving the vegetation and creatures living in the water. I question what has caused these issues and how we might resolve them in order to restore the bay to health. Even further, how could the generations before me have allowed the bay to reach its awful current state

of health?

Most people assume that the Chesapeake Bay consists of just the 200-mile long body of water stretching

across Virginia and Maryland. However, the watershed of the bay actually covers land in parts of six states, as far west as West Virginia and as far north as New York (see Fig. 2). Seventeen-million people live in this



Fig. 1. Photos of Herringtown Creek. Source: Ranney, Constance.

area and each person leaves a footprint on it and the 3,600 species of plants and animals that live in it (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). When we are speaking of saving the bay, “we are also speaking of the 50 major rivers and streams that pour into the bay each day, and the creeks that feed those rivers and streams. We are talking about the roughly 64,000 square mile

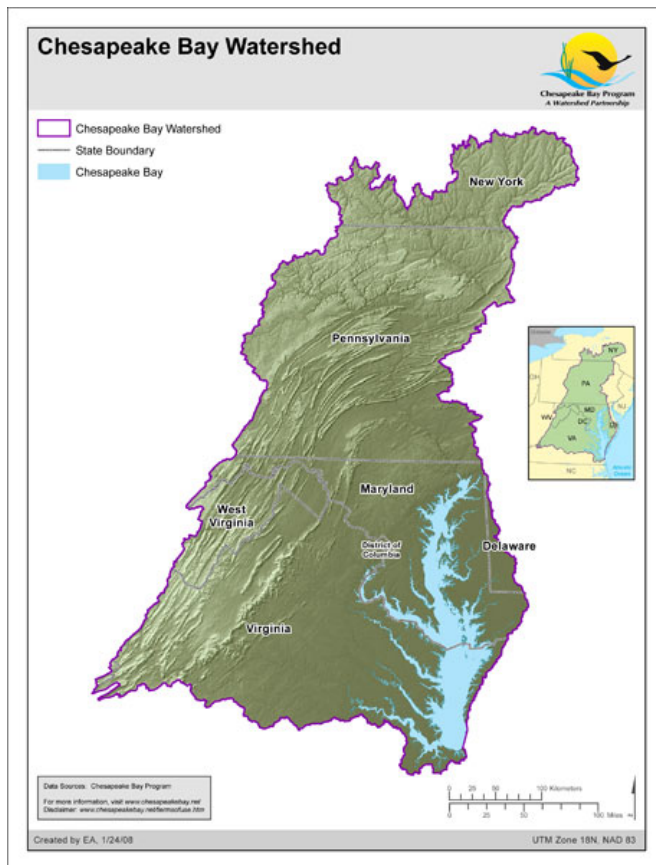


Fig. 2. Map of Chesapeake Bay watershed. Source: Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

watershed covered with forests, farms, and wildlife habitat; cities and suburbs; waste water treatment plants and heavy industry” (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). This means that all of the pollution that goes into the rivers upstream, including the Susquehanna, Potomac, James, Rappahannock, and York rivers, from farming, storm water, and other sources eventually gets dumped into the Chesapeake.

Meghan Wren Briggs, a woman who has dedicated most of her life to the Delaware Bay, a body of water that has had water quality issues similar to those of the Chesapeake, has been called “the Delaware Bay’s heroine” (Hummel). Meghan was born and raised in Millville, New Jersey, part of the poorest county in the state. As soon as she could, in 1985, she packed up a warm sleeping bag, a tent, some books, and her dog and set off on a journey to find herself. Well, she ended up in Texas in 1986 and soon found herself boarding the Tall Ship for Texas on an expedition sailing to New York City for an event and then back to Texas. It was during this adventure at sea that Meghan found her passion in saving the water. After returning home to New Jersey, she realized that the area she grew up in could actually offer her more than she had realized – she had the whole Delaware Bay in her backyard. This is right about the time when Meghan took on the project that would occupy the rest of her life. She adopted the A.J. MEERWALD, a beautiful 2-masted oyster schooner that used to take a beating as watermen hauled tons of muddy oysters onto her deck (See Fig. 3). Meghan found the boat as a dilapidated hull that looked like it would sink any minute. After about ten years and endless efforts of fundraising and reconstruction, the MEERWALD was returned to the water to sail. This huge task was only the beginning of Meghan’s organization and goal to save the bay.

I previously knew Meghan as one of my mom’s best friends. Each summer, she visits my family’s home with her husband, Jesse, and son, Delbay (yes, he is named after the

Delaware Bay!), for a fun-filled



Fig. 4. A.J. Meerwald sailing after reconstruction. Source: Bayshore Center at Bivalve.

weekend with about fifteen other friends and their children who fill the house with laughter as well as some slight chaos. When I emailed Meghan asking if I could speak to her about her experiences with the Delaware Bay, she quickly replied in agreement and excitement that I was interested in her area of work. This is a woman truly dedicated to the environment that surrounds her home. Over the phone, she told me with a passionate tone, “It feels like home and I never, ever get tired of it – the colors, the wildlife, we’ve got such an incredible location.” Now, without any oysters left to carry, the MEERWALD acts as a “symbolic voice for the bay, representing oysters which are iconic for the bay.” Meghan explained, “The Meerwald needed a place to dock, so the Bivalve oyster shipping wharves is where it all happened. The area in Bivalve, Delaware is geographically a good place to sail, has incredible historical significance in maritime history, and has space to house a museum and host programs.” She says you can watch eagles fly by or look at miles of untouched wetlands across the street. Meghan is now the executive director at the Bayshore Center at Bivalve. Last summer, she bravely swam 13.1 miles

across the Delaware Bay and raised over \$17,000 for her organization to raise awareness and implement new projects (See Fig. 4). Unfortunately, I didn’t get the chance to watch this incredible feat, but I did watch Meghan training for the event in the Chester River while she visited my family last summer. Prior to my talk with her, I understood the basics of her work, but I gained an even stronger appreciation for her devotion by hearing her speak so fluidly and strongly about a topic that we both have concern for.

There is no easy solution to clean up the Chesapeake Bay. The nitrogen pollution comes from many different sources which must be addressed individually. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation reports that forty-one percent of it comes from agricultural runoff consisting of fertilizers and animal waste, which contaminates groundwater that flows into rivers and streams. Air pollution from power plants and motor vehicles makes up another twenty-five percent. Wastewater released from wastewater treatment plants goes directly into rivers and contributes sixteen percent of nitrogen pollution. Stormwater running off of hard surfaces also carries pollution from animal waste and fertilizers into drains, making up fifteen



Fig. 3. Meghan Wren after her swim across the Delaware Bay. Source: Tomlinson, Phillip.

percent. Lastly, three percent comes from septic systems. The stormwater and septic system pollution categories are still increasing due to population growth (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). Reducing any one of these sources' contribution of nitrogen pollution would certainly help, but the bay will never return to full health if they are not all dealt with. Since the largest percentage of the pollution comes from agriculture, many attempts are being made to improve farming practices.

Farms line the Susquehanna River, which provides about half of the Chesapeake's

fresh water, and release an undesirable amount of chemicals from fertilizers and animal waste into it. Although agricultural runoff is the biggest contributor of nitrogen pollution, it is not something that can simply be eliminated. Farms also make a positive impact on the health of the bay. The open land acts as a filter for the water, so preserving this open space is vital (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). However, farms are decreasing due to suburban development and increasing cost of operation. The Chesapeake Bay Foundation explains some "best management practices," or BMPs, that farmers can implement to reduce their input of pollution. First, creating 35-foot buffers on each side of any stream near a farm is very effective. Trees and shrubs in these buffer zones filter the fertilizer out of water before it reaches the stream. Also, building fences



Fig. 5. Before and after implementation of streamside fencing. Source: Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

around streams keeps animals and their waste away from the water flow, reducing erosion and pollution (See Fig. 5). Next, a method called continuous no-till can be used in areas to leave the soil undisturbed, a practice which reduces erosion significantly and allows the soil to hold more moisture which would otherwise flow into streams. Finally, cover crops can be planted after a big harvest during the off-season to absorb the leftover fertilizer and

reduce runoff (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). These voluntary practices are all very effective and smart

methods of reducing pollution issues. However, many farmers are unwilling to implement them because they cost money, take time, or reduce the area of their crop. For this reason, farmers who do implement these best management practices might have opportunities to make extra money through nutrient trading, an exchange of credits received for reducing nutrients. Even more incentives will pop up for farmers through this process (Majsztrik). For example, one Pennsylvania farmer, Harold Wissler, uses just as much manure as he needs to grow his crops and makes money by selling the extra to mushroom growers ("Saving the Chesapeake"). Researchers from the World Bank have reported that the effectiveness of these practices varies from 5% to 95%. "Poorly sited, poorly maintained, and improperly selected BMPs will be nearly

useless, while those that are appropriately selected and properly sited, implemented and maintained may be highly effective” (Cestti). Although farms do cause some problems for the bay, if they collectively change their habits, they could actually help the bay.

We’ve all driven by a power plant and watched as huge clouds billowed out of smoke stacks, polluting the air with nitrogen. However, what you might not have thought of is that the car you’re riding in, along with the others on the highway alongside you, is also releasing nitrogen into the air at the same time through the exhaust pipe, having the same effect on a smaller scale. Nitrogen pollution from vehicles and power plants causes many undesirable issues in the Chesapeake Bay. Nitrogen washes into the water and creates algae blooms, which are the dark clouds in the water (Chesapeake Bay Foundation). An excess of this algae has killed off many seagrasses which previously provided homes for crabs and fish which died consequently. The mercury that contaminates fish in the bay mostly comes from air pollution as well. People are advised to limit their intake of certain fish due to the amount of mercury, a toxic chemical, that they contain. It’s truly disgusting that we willingly eat toxic chemicals because of the cars we drive and the plants that provide us power.

It’s also disgusting that we, as humans, have allowed our actions to wipe out so much wildlife, including almost an entire population of oysters. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) reports, “the oyster population in the Bay is less than 1% of what it once was,” (Oyster Reefs).

The poor water quality that caused this decline is also an effect of the decline. Eastern oysters, *Crassostrea virginica*, actually clean the water by filtering particles (See Fig. 6). They are grouped together in reefs that provide a habitat for tiny organisms that act as decomposers and also clean the water (Rossi-Snook). Many species of fish and crabs also utilize the reefs as a



Fig. 6. Eastern oysters. Source: McCann, Tom.

habitat. Overharvesting, destruction of habitat, and disease are a few main causes of the steep decline in population (Oyster Reefs).

Many oyster restoration projects exist around the bay that attempt to restore the population. Earlier projects called for citizens to volunteer to aid in the process of oyster restoration. Years ago, my family adopted a cage of oysters to hang off our dock and care for while they grew and multiplied. To care for them, we had to occasionally clean the sediment off of them by forcefully raising and lowering the cage underneath the water until a lot of the brown muck was removed. If we hadn’t cleaned them, they would have died just like all of the naturally growing oysters in the bay did because they can’t manage to filter the sediment that settles on top of them quickly enough. I later read that the only way to tell if an oyster is alive or not is to tap on one whose shell is open – if it snaps shut, it’s alive. We never

tested for life in our oysters, but we did as we were told to care for them. However, when the time came to return them, we were told that they had all died and our efforts had failed. The fact that even some oysters receiving care cannot survive in the conditions of the water of a Chesapeake Bay tributary says a lot. This attempt of citizen involvement in restoration did not have much success.

Current programs have increased intensity and technology. Oyster production is now on a much larger scale where the process is very mechanical (See Fig. 7). Sites are prepared, protected, and monitored so that the oysters can easily thrive. Some of these sites have had highly successful survival rates, while others have failed due to disease, sedimentation, and harvesting (Oyster Restoration). Although oyster restoration could assist the bay in returning to health, the oysters cannot singlehandedly support the body of water's cleanliness.



Fig. 7. Oyster farm. Source: Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Tom Horton, just like Meghan Wren, has dedicated his career to saving an environment that he deeply cares about, the Chesapeake Bay. He is one of the most respected nature writers in the United States. He teaches at Salisbury University in Maryland, works as a freelance writer for several magazines including

National Geographic, *Rolling Stone*, and *New York Times Magazine*, and spends his free time on his bicycle and in his kayak exploring the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed (See Fig. 8) (Tom Horton). In one of his articles for *National Geographic*, he reflects on his younger years living on the Chesapeake:

It was much easier then to lose oneself in the countless creeks and rivers that vein the tidal bay's more than 11,600 miles of coastline, to jump black ducks from the marshes, pluck soft crabs and oysters from the clear, grassy shallows, and float on waters not constantly churned by the wake of high-speed sport boats. So much has changed—oysters nearly gone, crabs near historic lows, waterman towns dying out, buildings and roads fracturing the countryside. Population in the estuary's watershed, which includes parts of six states and the District of Columbia, has doubled in our lifetime, from 8 million to 16 million, compromising solitude as well as water quality.

After the Clean Water Act passed in 1972, people started paying a lot of attention to point sources of pollution, which are sources that can be specifically identified. In the Delaware Bay, Meghan Wren said, this attention had a strong positive effect. The quality of the Delaware Bay did improve significantly once many point sources were found and fixed. "The shape of the Delaware Bay, like a funnel, allows for quick flushing," she explained. Since the Delaware is much smaller than the Chesapeake, "It takes much longer for particles in the Chesapeake to travel from the top out

to the ocean. It takes weeks in the Chesapeake versus days in the Delaware.” The Delaware Bay consists of a much smaller watershed that has many easily controlled point sources and less nonpoint sources, whereas the Chesapeake watershed’s issues come mainly from difficult-to-control nonpoint sources.

According to an article written in 2009 by a writer at the New York Water Environment Association, 438 significant point sources, municipal and industrial water treatment facilities, were identified to be still continually releasing pollutants into tributaries of the Chesapeake watershed. Since then, most of these sources have been reissued permits with limits on the amount of nutrients they can release (MacKnight). Point sources like these can easily be controlled through laws and restrictions placed on the specific facilities. The elimination of the pollution released by them does help the bay, but the pollution coming from unknown or unspecific locations, also known as nonpoint sources, is a much larger problem on a much larger scale.

Nonpoint source pollution is mostly from runoff coming from parking lots, groups of homes and developments, and farms. I’d like to refer to these nonpoint sources of pollution as “people pollution” as I first heard Meghan quite accurately call it. “Adding more people to the mix puts more pressure on the ecosystem to support them,” she explained. “More and more houses, roads, driveways, and roofs means water picks up speed and temperature and moves as surface water instead of naturally soaking into the aquifer.” The hard surfaces that we continue to cover the ground with cause rainwater to move easily and pick

up chemicals as it travels into tributaries of the bay.



Fig. 8. Tom Horton in his kayak. Source: “Tom Horton”.

Ultimately, we are losing open space that the bay needs to filter runoff before leaking into the bay and infecting it. A study done by Edwin Stennett’s Growth Education Movement of the suburbs of Washington, D.C. showed that two-thirds of the loss of open space was due to population growth and not individual demand for larger lots (“Growing!” 12). The amount of carbon dioxide in the air in Maryland increased by a whopping 21 percent between 1990 and 2004 due to the “consumptive lifestyle” that we live. Increased carbon dioxide is the leading cause of global warming, which is causing damage to the Chesapeake. The water temperature has risen so much that eelgrass, a vital habitat for blue crabs and other creatures, cannot survive (“Growing!” 12-13). Even if everyone in the watershed reduced their footprint, it wouldn’t matter because we’re multiplying faster than we can figure out an environmentally friendly way to live. Although the efforts to save the bay help on a smaller scale, the larger issue in the Chesapeake Bay’s problems truly lies in population growth. “Continuing to

ignore growth renders environmental progress in all other areas temporary,” Tom Horton explains (“Growing!” 6).

Unfortunately, this larger issue is one much more difficult to deal with. We cannot simply stop multiplying – it’s human nature. Tom Horton very correctly states, “Whether it is global warming melting Antarctica or nitrogen runoff killing little crabs in Bay creeks, sustainable solutions will mean attending both to how we live and to how many of us live here” (“Growing!” 13). I think attending to how we live is the most important part of preserving and improving not only the Chesapeake Bay, but struggling bodies of water everywhere in the country. Why doesn’t everyone care about their surroundings as much as people like Meghan Wren and Tom Horton? They have both made tremendous sacrifices in order to accomplish a goal that we should all be working toward. Meghan has given up most of her leisure time, which she would have used for pleasure reading and socializing, in order to be able to continue running the Bayshore Center. She has less quality time with her family than she would like. She laments, “I always imagined that when I had a child I’d homeschool; maybe sailing from port to port visiting historic sites and museums. My current reality is very different. I take my son from meeting to meeting and most of our field trips are built around work responsibilities.” Through all of these sacrifices, Meghan makes do with what she has and is still a happy woman, satisfied with her immense accomplishments in life. She has successfully created a voice for the Delaware Bay which has led to a great start to recovery. Putting forth an effort to make changes in our lifestyles

can improve the beauty of the nature surrounding our homes.

David Abram, an American philosopher and cultural ecologist, wrote an essay, “The Ecology of Magic,” in which he portrayed nature as a living entity that humans must connect with in order to live happily. In the essay he explains that the trouble is that people today think of nature as just a “pleasant backdrop of our more pressing human concerns” (Abram 6). Unfortunately, this claim is pretty true. We worry more about money and personal issues than we worry about the environment we live in. Why is this? Perhaps the reason is that we know ourselves, our feelings, and our capacities better than we know anything else. As Abram puts it, “We cannot readily experience the precise sensations of a hummingbird sipping nectar from a flower And yet we do know how it feels to sip from a fresh pool of water” (Abram 10). Although we will never know how exactly it feels to be a hummingbird drinking from a flower, or a tree soaking up water into its roots, we know the general feeling of quenching thirst. What we don’t realize is that we are part of nature. We experience many of the same sensations as other animals in the wild, but we don’t think of them as part of our same sphere of living. Only when we accept the fact that the concerns of humans, animals, and plants are all of the same level of importance in our world will the environment be able to return to health. Once we learn to respect these plants and animals and the land and bodies of water that they count on to survive, we will be able to return nature to its glory.

It’s impossible to change everyone’s way of thinking to this

mindset. In order to begin to gain respect for our surroundings, I believe it's important for people to spend more time outside with nature. By doing outdoor activities such as hiking, gardening, boating, swimming, or exploring, you notice things that you don't notice or appreciate from behind the window of your home. You start to notice each precise line in each leaf on the tree you're sitting by or the pattern of ripples in the water that surrounds you in your kayak on the Chesapeake. These are the moments when you feel like a part of nature. Then, people must learn how to live sustainably so that the environment can continue offering its beauty and supporting the living organisms, including us humans, that call it home. Perhaps if people were more educated on their personal impacts on their local environments, then they would be more inclined to reduce their footprints. People must learn that the environment is an extremely pressing human concern, and that it is not just a nice backdrop for the other issues in our lives.

When my sister, Kate, was in second grade, she drew a picture of our family on a sailboat in the water. When the teacher came around and observed the artwork, she knit her eyebrows in confusion as she noticed that Kate had colored the water in with brown and green instead of blue. Almost disgusted, the teacher asked Kate why she chose those colors. She innocently responded, "Because that's what color the water really looks like." She made a good point. All of the children who color the water with a nice shade of blue have actually chosen the wrong crayon. The water of the Chesapeake Bay is most definitely not a pretty shade of blue. It's the unpleasant

shade of brown and green that my sister colored the water in third grade, and it's going to stay that color due to extremely low water quality until the population of the watershed makes positive changes in its lifestyle. My hope is that one summer day I'll be able to wade into the water of the bay behind my parents' home and see my toes as I go deeper and deeper.

Works Cited

- Abram, David. "The Ecology of Magic." *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: First Vintage Books, 1997. 3-29. 28 Apr. 2014.
- Bayshore Center at Bivalve. N.p. 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.
- Cestti, Rita, Jitendra Srivastava, and Samira Jung. *Agriculture Non-Point Source Pollution Control: Good Management Practices – The Chesapeake Bay Experience*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2003. Print. 28 Apr. 2014. Chesapeake Bay Foundation. N.p. 2014. Web. 18 Feb. 2014.
- Horton, Tom. "Growing! Growing! Gone! The Chesapeake Bay and the Myth of Endless Growth." The Abell Foundation. August 2008. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.
- Horton, Tom. "Saving the Chesapeake." *National Geographic*. N.p. June 2005. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.
- Hummel, Jack. "Meghan Wren is the Delaware Bay's heroine." *South Jersey Times*. New Jersey On-Line, 8 Jul.

2013. Web. 30 Mar. 2014.

MacKnight, Evelyn. "NPDES Permitting: A Key to Restoring Chesapeake Bay." NYWEA. N.p. 2009. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

Majsztrik, John C. "Water Quality Regulations in the Chesapeake Bay: Working to More Precisely Estimate Nutrient Loading Rates and Incentivize Best Management Practices in the Nursery and Greenhouse Industry." *HortScience*. 48.9 (2013): 1097-1102. Web of Science. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.

McCann, Tom. "Passport to Nature: Barging into the Bay – with Oysters." *The Nature Conservancy*. N.p. 2011. Web. 28 Apr. 2014.

"Oyster Reefs." *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Chesapeake Bay Office*. NOAA. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

"Oyster Restoration." *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration: Chesapeake Bay Office*. NOAA. Web. 23 Mar. 2014.

Ranney, Constance. *Untitled*. Apr. 2014. Photograph. 25 Apr. 2014.

Rossi-Snook, Kate. "Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) gardening program for restoration in Delaware's Inland Bays (USA)." *Aquaculture International*. 18.1 (2010): 61-67. Web of Science. Web. 27 Feb. 2014.

"Tom Horton ENVR 460 Chesapeake Bay Topics." *Salisbury University*. N.p. n.d. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

Tomlinson, Phillip. "She did it! Meghan

Wren completes 13.1-mile swim across Delaware Bay." *New Jersey*. 3 Aug. 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Instructor Reflections—Judy Hood on Antonio Linares

Antonio Linares asks us to imagine waking up one morning and stepping out into a world we have never seen before. But every calamity, desecration, and unimaginable horror he asks us to imagine is all true. In his analysis of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina captured in photos by Richard Misrach, Antonio compels us not to *Destroy this Memory* but “Remember this Destruction.”

Writing from an innovative perspective, with a critical eye and attention to detail, Antonio goes far beyond assignment expectations and effectively challenges picture theorists whose criteria he has applied in this remarkable analysis. He brings an interpretation that is devastatingly, unforgettably true, sending the reader outside the frame of the image/word dialogue and into the psyche of the American and human spirit.

His analysis makes readers aware that the verbal text is quite literally inseparable from the images and that without this relationship, “seen scrawled on signs, ruins, cars, and just about anything that can act as a canvas” there would be so many voices and so many stories left untold.” Antonio’s writing brings readers those voices and those stories “to bear witness to the destruction so they may not forget it.”



English 105 • Fall 2014
English Composition I

Examine a photographic essay which shows a significant interaction of image and language... Choose one from the library or a public domain source. Write an essay which analyzes the photographic essay. Your reader will probably not be familiar with the book or essay you have chosen; therefore, you must provide summary, example, and illustration as part of your discussion. Who wrote it? Who took the photographs? What is the project? What is the author trying to show?

Analyze the work by applying criteria based on your research and reflection about visual rhetoric and your reading and interpretation of Mitchell’s “The Photographic Essay” and Blakesley, Brooke, and Miltner’s discussion of “Visual Rhetoric.” Analyze the images by applying strategies for reading images. Write a focused description of the verbal text. Examine the relationship between the photographs and the writing. What governs conversations between visual and verbal language, the photographer and the writer?

Some questions to consider: How is this photo essay representative of visual rhetoric? How is the subject represented? Is the photographer selective in order to present a message, suggest a course, elicit sympathy, persuade to take a certain action? How effectively does the visual rhetoric accomplish this perceived objective?

Remember this Destruction

Antonio Linares

ENG 105 • Judy Hood
Fall 2014

Imagine waking up one morning and stepping out into a world you have never seen before. Imagine witnessing the destruction of your entire neighborhood, the loss of your house, the desecration of countless memories. Imagine having to walk miles in flooded streets in search for any sign of relief as you pass numerous floating bodies, some being of people you knew. Even though these images may seem like something out of a disaster movie, they were all too real for the people of Louisiana when they awoke on August 30, 2005. "Destroy This Memory" is a photographic essay, with pictures by Richard Misrach, that captures the reactions of these people to the most destructive natural disaster in Louisiana in the twenty-first century, Hurricane Katrina.

Unlike many photographic essays, the verbal text of "Destroy This Memory" is quite literally inseparable from the subjects. It is seen scrawled on signs, ruins, cars and just about anything that can act as a canvas. That's because instead of having any human subjects, this essay depends solely on these words to convey human emotion. These words are in

constant dialogue with their surroundings, they sometimes complement the destruction and in other times openly challenge them. This sort of dialogue within the image itself is something completely unique to this essay. Indeed a leading picture theorist, W.J.T. Mitchell, would have an immediate problem with the interaction between image and text seen here. The problem being that there is no separate text. Mitchell claims that visual rhetoric has three requirements "equality, independence, and collaboration" of visual and verbal text. And even though this essay gives both image and text equal power of exposition and allows them to collaborate fluently and naturally together, they are not independent from one another. In "Destroy This Memory" the text is not only inspired by and in reply to the subject, it becomes part of the image itself. In this way the image has a direct response to the text. Rather than being a negative, as Mitchell's criteria would indicate, this interdependence is one of this essay's strongest points. Without this meld, "Destroy This Memory" cannot convey nearly the same

meaning that it does, there would be so many voices lost and so many stories left untold. This unique relationship is one that is essential to the visual rhetoric of the photo and one that cannot be ignored.

The first image that prominently features the written text as part of the visual rhetoric is the photograph of the deteriorating truck with the death tolls of several pets. The establishing shot in this picture serves to further extend the feeling of decay and death. In this picture



the truck is featured with an open door, inside there can be seen an engine as well as a variety of loosely located wires. The immediate impression is that the truck is a dead or dying animal, its entrails on display as it was gored by the violence that ravaged the rest of the picture. In this way, the list of dead pets has a new symbolic significance when it is carved into the husk of the truck. The photographer's choice of an eye level shot gives a direct and uncompromising view of the carnage; there is no sense of pity that would be elicited from a high-

angled shot, instead the image is almost confrontational in its exposition of the destruction.

The words in the first image are unorganized in their distribution, there is no deliberate order to their placement, at least not at first glance. This structure, or lack thereof, lends itself to a sense of chaos, there is a cacophony of words as the reader tries to analyze and organize the ideas of each in his mind. A reader would have a natural reaction to organize the words into a list, "1 dead dog, 2 dead birds". The effect of this disorder is that it obstructs this process. It makes it harder for the reader to give this image order that it doesn't possess. The result is that each statement conflicts with each other for attention within the viewer's mind. Instead of allowing itself to be organized, the text asserts its intrinsic chaos therefore allowing each individual line to come and go into the reader's mind as soon as he perceives it with no

predetermined order.

The result of this combination between the text and the image on the photo creates a kind of narrative. The "third voice" of this fusion as Miltner would call it, is how the writers of the text manipulated the environment and the objects inside the image to convey their message. The writers used the truck to concentrate their voice. This symbolic desecration gives off a sense of desperation. The writers need to be acknowledged, to have their story expressed to others. As this urge becomes stronger, they

grow increasingly desperate to be recognized, to communicate their story. The words slowly encroach upon the scene as they begin exhausting all available space on the walls of their home. As their story increases, their available space decreases, until they eventually reach the truck. And although the truck has by now become a lifeless part of the environment just like the walls, its use still seems unnatural. The truck had life at some point and now it sits in decay, its only use being another empty surface waiting to be filled with the stories of others. This dialectical relationship tells a story, the progression of despair through the words until they desecrate one of the very symbols of the tragedy. By showing the end product the reader is given the opportunity to infer how bad things must have gotten to reach that level.

The relationship of the written and the visual in this image is one of both exchange and resistance. The location and placement of the words on the image create a story, as despair and desperation increases, so does the chaos as is reflected in the position of the words. But eventually the thoughts of these words begin contradicting themselves when they meet a certain point in the image. In an attempt to continually convey the constant loss of life because of this disaster, they overwhelm the truck, a symbolic victim. This form of storytelling is one completely unique

to this image, the words and the image are completely equal in developing this emotional response, but they could not exist separately. The desperation could not be conveyed without the setting and the truck and the degree of emotion could not be conveyed without the words.

The second picture features a car that has ended up on a grounded boat. In response to the absurdity of this image the owner of the boat posts a sign telling the car owner to "Please remove your car from the boat without crushing it!" If the car is interpreted as being the subject of the image, which is quite plausible due to its imposing position, then the image is low-angled. The car is an imposing figure, its dominance over



the rest of the image and the boat becomes the act of the moment. It sits upon the mangled corpse of the boat in a meaningless show of victory. The boat lies in shambles, scratched, dented, its belly laid exposed and vulnerable to the elements. Meanwhile the car sits on top like a victorious hunter over his dying prey, gloating on his makeshift

throne. The owner of the boat's response serves to point out the absurdity and strangeness of the situation, almost like by association with the boat he admits defeat. He begrudgingly requests that the owner of the car end this act of irrational humiliation.

If the image were shown to the viewer without any sort of text to compliment it, a part of its story would be lost. The viewer could easily see the destruction of the moment as well as the peculiar position of the car without any sort of description or commentary. They could be stunned at the destruction, or just as easily be amused by the awkward placement of the objects. This freedom of interpretation is something that this text limits. Even if text were provided outside of the image, it would still fail in capturing the authenticity of the sign. The sign reminds viewers that this is not a display, that the image is not there to evoke pity or amusement. This is a reality, someone had to live through this event and attempt to make sense out of the ruins of the world they once knew. The sign

acknowledges the absurdity of the situation in a humorous tone, the writer is trying to cope with the situation in a comical way. Even then the sign is still overshadowed by the objects as they ignore all attempts at lessening the weight of reality.

The center of the third image is populated by two white boards. In the background there is a partially damaged house. Right above the boards there is a broken window. In this picture the pureness of the boards is contrasted not only with the destroyed background but with the impure white of the window. The window has been tainted by the corruption around it while the boards remain untouched. This image is supported by the reference to the Biblical passage on the larger board. The Bible quote reads "You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you." This verse invokes a sense of security, that even in such strained moments there is sanctuary. This message is amplified by the purity of the signs, as if they are lending credence to the validity of the verse. The signs stand in perfect defiance of the chaos around, an oasis in a desert.

However, this claim is not to be accepted at face value. The verse and board are symbols of safety and purity, but they are surrounded by destruction and desecration. There is no real sense or sign that anything said in the verse will come to pass. The board attempts to become the light at the end of a tunnel but in fact no end is in sight. Not only is this conflict evident in the object of



destruction, it is evident in the text as well. The Bible verse is not transcribed onto the board directly, it is merely referenced. The viewer is tasked with searching for the quote themselves. This indirect link to the promised salvation further emphasizes the gap between reality and hope in the image because of the gap between the reference and the actual verse itself. In this way both the image and the way the text is cited creates a direct conflict with the supposed intention of the writer.

In "Destroy this Memory" Richard Misrach captures a new type of collaboration between words and objects. Misrach captures the thoughts of the individuals in the image without their knowing. This lack of awareness from the part of the writers gives a raw, natural view of what the image actually depicts. In this way the message of the essay transcends the literal interpretation of "destroy this memory", instead the reader is asked to witness the destruction so that they may not forget it. The text manages to be captured in the image but does not become subservient to it as Mitchell feared. Instead this dependent relationship creates a level of collaboration that brings meaning that has never been seen before.

Instructor Reflections: Nicole Hospital-Medina on Phaedra R. Theodoridis

This class was a lively one, rich with large group discussions that made the wall clock disappear. We examined the public and personal constructions of the self, mostly by way of academic essays and narratives. For this one particular paper, students wrote about identity development in the context of their respectively-chosen memoirs. Each had the option of using her/his own self as an additional resource. Not unexpectedly, only a few braved the depths of self-analysis, and not unexpectedly, Phaedra R. Theodoridis was hungry for the challenge. An astute and stand out student, Theodoridis, always seated in the very center of the room, presented herself authentically. Authenticity, the class would determine, is a vital ingredient of true identity. Theodoridis' authenticity is present in her essay. It gracefully and honestly manages the tone of the work as much as it provides an expertise. For who could write about Theodoridis with more accuracy than herself? She crisply and personally makes parallels between her own identity development and that of Susanna Kaysen (author of the memoir, *Girl, Interrupted*). These comparison points unveil keen, exact links between one's name and one's mind. Theodoridis, through her writing, successfully delivers groundbreaking insight on identity development.



English 106 • Spring 2014
English Composition II

This prompt requires self-introspection as well as argument and analysis. You will need to create a comparison (based on correspondences) argument between your identity development and the identity development of your memoir's protagonist/author. You can focus on a particular event or a process. You may use the notions, resources, and knowledge on "the self" from our class, as long as the argument is cohesive, vivid, and strong. This will require use of quotes and concrete specific evidence from the memoir, our class materials, and your memory.

Opa!

Phaedra R. Theodoridis

ENG 106 • Nicole Hospital-Medina
Spring 2014

“Phaedra?” Then they stare at me for a few seconds, head tilted to one side and eyes semi-squinting. “That’s Greek, right?” Every. Single. Time. My name is always the most outlandish in class rosters, and never mind trying to get one of my newfound tremendously American friends here to pronounce my surname. Five syllables apparently crosses the line and transcends into the realm of impossible.

Yes, my name is very Greek and so am I for that matter. It follows me wherever I go like I’m wearing a collar around my neck and like most pets, though initially slightly uncomfortable and angry, I’ve come to terms with it. I’ve almost come to love it, actually. My name is part of my identity. Much like how I have come to feel about being the ‘Greek girl’, Susanna Kaysen welcomed her supposed ‘insanity’. In *Girl Interrupted*, Kaysen showcases her transformation from depressed adolescent to enlightened woman by documenting her two-year response to being diagnosed with ‘Borderline Personality Disorder’ and attests that facets of one’s self that may not be equally appreciated by all are not to be debased, but embraced.

According to Kaysen, it is precisely a concoction of these facets that

compose an identity. Of course, by no means am I saying that being Greek makes me particularly special, in knowledge of the fact that there are at least another twelve million out there with the same nationality, nor was Kaysen the sole human being ever diagnosed with a psychological disorder. But a combination of these factors makes each of us unique, and this is why both Kaysen and I cling to our little facets like kids cling to their toy balloons. We don’t want to let go because we don’t want to lose ourselves in the process.

Clinging may not come naturally though. When readers are first introduced to eighteen-year-old Susanna in her memoir, they meet an incomprehensible, depressive, irate yet simultaneously indifferent girl who is infuriated at herself and the world that surrounds her, completely engulfed by her own dark thoughts. Although her admittance to the hospital is voluntary, she becomes enraged at how easily other people can label her as ‘crazy’ or ‘insane’ and ‘unstable’ or any other delightful word used to describe individuals that may occasionally trigger feelings somewhat outside one’s comfort zone of social etiquette. “I was trying to explain my situation to

myself,” she says of that time in her life (Kaysen 153). Kaysen was lost, that she accepted. What she did not approve of is others taking the liberty of labeling her rather than allowing her to define herself.

In a similar way, for a time, I would hate this labeling tendency my new acquaintances here had. Having moved to Florida from Greece, it never occurred to me that I was really that different from anyone. In Greece, I was surrounded by Greeks, just like me. Suddenly, I found myself surrounded by people that oftentimes had not even left the State, with no passport or travelling experience whatsoever. So when they labeled me as the ‘Greek girl’ I retaliated by deeming them uncultured, naïve and uneducated, much like Kaysen reacted with her outbursts of anger and her fierce criticism. For example, though records always stated that her doctor’s visit before admittance into Mclean lasted a good three hours, Kaysen never accepted the notion. In her mind, it was no more than twenty minutes before the crazy doctor called her crazy and locked her up in a crazy place for crazy people.

Of course, on paper it did not say “crazy”. On paper, Kaysen’s apparent disorder was defined as a “pervasive pattern of instability of self-image, interpersonal relationships, and mood, beginning in early adulthood and present in a variety of concepts” (Kaysen 147). Upon reading her diagnosis for the first time when Kaysen and her fellow patients of the ward break into the director’s office, the words uttered from her mouth are “Oh, that’s me” (Kaysen 113). Therefore, it can be seen that her disorder isn’t only something seen by

the outsiders. Kaysen sees it too. She identifies herself with it and though the description in the nurse’s book is rather harsh and she makes a few annotations of her own, it speaks the truth.

Likewise, though I don’t always like it, I can never claim that people’s definition of ‘Greek girl’ is completely mistaken. “Do you really dance on tables and smash plates and yell ‘Opa?’” “Oh so you can make tzatziki, right?” “How is moussaka *really* pronounced?” “Do all Greek people like Windex that much?” Granted, constantly being compared to the characters in the blockbuster *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is obnoxious but it is simultaneously usually devastatingly accurate. Would it be authentic of me to reject my culture? Just like Kaysen eventually stops fighting the claims against her sanity but rather, embraces them, I cannot discard aspects of my own identity as if they are not there. In fact, I don’t even wait to be identified as the ‘Greek girl’ by others anymore. I introduce myself as Greek and even throw in an ‘Opa!’ here and there. “We say that Columbus discovered America and Newton discovered gravity, as though America and gravity weren’t there until Columbus and Newton got wind of them,” (Kaysen 119) so why wait to be told I am something by others when I can do exactly the same all by myself?

This method is a form of self-creation. Although at first Kaysen views her diagnosis as a restriction that imprisons her and allows an outside source to govern her and tell her who she is, she soon realizes her disorder is a liberating kind of identity that she clings to. Naturally, rather than childishly immediately accepting a stranger’s definition of her personality,

she discerns certain points about it on her own as well. By the end of her stay at McLean Hospital, however, and therefore by the end of the memoir, we are confronted with a bright young lady who has accepted her experiences and is now determined to put her past behind her and make a life for herself outside the psychiatric ward.

I, too, try to employ this method. It's always great finding people who know some more about Greece than its cuisine, but I am not going to complain about or disparage those who don't. I am certainly not going to detach myself from my label just because I sometimes don't love it. I no longer blush with humiliation over the funny yet devastating fact that my culture is nowadays more easily connected to *Mamma Mia*, Ouzo and College Greek Life than it is to its contributions like democracy and science. Nor do I cringe whenever someone brings up Nia Vardalos. I smile, laugh even, because however juvenile these connections are, they're a facet of my identity as a young Greek woman today, and that, I love.

Kaysen therefore validates the important idea of using a label to one's advantage. Despite common misconception, she proves that a title, whether that is 'Borderline Personality Disorder' or 'Greek girl', does not take away from your identity but rather, enhances and molds it, subliminally encouraging the reader to embrace that title, not hide from it. As contradictory as it may sound, mine is now one I stand tall under, because at the end of the day, "whatever we call it - mind, character, soul - we like to think we possess something that is greater than the sum of our neurons and that animates us" (Kaysen 137).

Works Cited

Kaysen, Susanna. *Girl, Interrupted*. New York: Turtle Bay Books, 1993. Print.

Instructor Reflections: John Wafer on Andrew Winig

When I first read Andrew's observational essay about UM's outdoor swimming pool culture, I was reminded of the pleasure that comes with a beautifully written sentence. And Drew composed a lot of them, like: *"The pool is their temple, and the sun is the God"*. I enjoyed how he wonderfully used a version of a refrain – *"They mean business"* – after thick, delicious descriptions of the swimmers, divers, lifeguards, and then the largest group of all – the tanners:

"Tanning oil is never out of reach and is often left on end tables as a little gift for the next tanner. Out of all the people here, these are the people who are here to get work done."

Andrew turned the table on what work means, that tanning was the most "competitive" sport with very specific goals, and hard work.

In our meeting to vote for the winners of this year's contest, one Judge talked about one of the strengths of Andrew's essay here - how each paragraph was its own gem, full of concrete details, as well as thoughtful and fresh analysis.

But beyond the wonderful writing, what Drew does really well - that is essential for academic discourse - is acknowledging the limits to what he could learn strictly by observation. Drew wrote about the tanners at the end of his essay: *"Perhaps all communication is done through body language since almost everyone has their headphones in and sunglasses on. It can be difficult to read people and see direct interactions. Glances and especially stares carry a lot of meaning here"*.

Here, Andrew takes the advice found in a textbook many of us helped create a few years ago, *Composing Inquiry*, edited by Dr. Margret Marshall, and the former Director of our UM Composition Program. Drew's writing demonstrates that he has become a "member of a discourse community that values deliberation and rigorous thinking over pure persuasion."
Welcome aboard Andrew.



English 105 • Fall 2014 English Composition I

... Write an essay in which you prepare a Geertzian "reading" of some part of our culture you know well. Ideally, you should go out and observe the behavior you are studying, examining it and taking notes with your project in mind.

I would like you to undertake an analysis of some kind of social activity that takes place somewhere on the UM campus or around Miami. Borrow Geertz's anthropological techniques in order to closely observe and analyze some event or "happening" that seems to have multiple levels of significance. In order to succeed in this project you will have to observe and closely analyze with both critical clarity and intellectual audacity. To borrow Geertz's terms, you can "start anywhere in [our] cultural repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else" (332). I'm interested in both the real and the really real. You might also borrow Geertz's organizational approach in this paper, making use of multiple sections, multiple voices, and multiple perspectives in order to get a fuller understanding of your subject. The best papers look closely in order to expand our view...

Pool Culture

Andrew Winig

ENG 105 • John Wafer
Fall 2014

Millions of Hindus worship the sun God, but I think the Miami sunbathers give them a run for their money. In Miami, the swimming pool is a religion all its own. The pool is the temple, and the sun is the God. All lined up, ready to pray, hundreds of sunbathers cycle through the pool each day in order to fulfill the highest form of enlightenment, that oh so perfect tan. As if it's their religious duty, even a quick stop at the pool is worth it because every minute there counts. As with all religions, there are special ceremonies and rules so the University of Miami swimming pool has its own set of rules that everyone must follow in order to reach the darkest and most even of tans.

The Layout

I walked through the pool doors and was met with overstimulation. I'm not shy to admit I have anxiety, but it was definitely a lot to take in. It was a busy Friday afternoon and after a long week of classes people were more than eager to head to the pool. As the silver doors swung open I was immediately overwhelmed by the blinding sunlight and 90 degrees of sticky Florida air. A club remix of Britney Spears "Work Bitch" had the school's speakers bumping and booming and was taking

over the thick air. The view, however, was beautiful. I'm not talking about the people. The pool is positioned right next to the school's lake which has a giant fountain that spews water 40 feet high in all sorts of beautiful patterns. The sun catches the mist from the fountain and creates an eternal rainbow visible from every direction. Behind that you can see the four towers of the freshman dorms alongside the school's prized possession, the brand new, extremely modern, Student Activities Center. Palm trees are never out of sight at Miami and the pool is no exception.

The pool is equally as beautiful as its surroundings. The bright blue water of the pool mimics the sky and seems appealing after only being outside for a brief second. The lounge chairs lined up all around matched the water, extending the rich blue up onto the concrete. On the left side of the pool, the diving tower doubles as a piece of art. It has four diving platforms with the highest reaching 10 meters into the sky. The platforms wrap around one big white obelisk like a vine to a pole. Next to the diving platform is a small white machine that sprays water over the back half of the pool like a fire hose. Although I'm not sure of its purpose, it

drapes the pool with a blanket of mist. Other than that there isn't much else. One lifeguard positioned at each end of the pool and the rest were tanning zones. All this makes for a majestic temple, worthy of dedicated travelers, who fill this place of worship not only on Sunday, but everyday of the week. But now lets get to the good part, the people.

The Cliques

Just like the tables in a high school cafeteria, the pool has its own clearly defined cliques that occupy their own territories. There is the dive team who jump around on the platforms doing all sorts of backflips, the swim team swimmers huddle in the back corner in their skin tight colorful speedos, and of course, the sunbathers. In Miami its sunny everywhere. It's sunny on the fields, by the dumpsters, in the parking lots, but for some reason the swimming pool is the headquarters for tanning. Interesting. Lets take a look at some of the different groups:

Four small girls, in their one piece speedos, stand across from me on the pool deck. They tune everything and everyone out as they line up next to the edge. One by one, they walk up to the edge of the pool, hop up on a little wood platform that appears to be the same dimensions of a diving board, wiggle around a bit with their arms extended high, and then jump into the water as they do a tight backflip or two. Their heads nearly graze the edge of the pool and more times than not, it looks like they're actually going to collide. I cringe at every jump. Their arms and legs are tucked in as they flip to form a perfect ball. The whole jump happens so quickly its almost too fast to process. The entire act is executed in silence and you can see the laser sharp

focus in their eyes. They mean business.

Six people huddle around a small table in the back left corner wrapped up in towels with goggles on their foreheads and goggle imprints still around their eyes. Everyone catches their breath after climbing out of the swimming lanes. These are the people who come here to actually swim. Yes, there are people who actually come to swim. A roar of giggles arise over the inside jokes that are exchanged. Their back muscles are chiseled like the statue of David. It is as if the water sculpts their bodies as they tear through the resistance. They too mean business.

The two lifeguards sit in their high chairs with their bright red bathing suits and don't do much. Barely monitoring the few swimmers, they're here to hang out and look cool. In my two hours of observance I didn't hear one whistle blow or anything come out of them. Getting paid to sit around, they seemed proud to represent the stereotypical "cool lifeguard". Their business is saving lives.

Aside from the few toddlers and elders, the rest ignore the actual pool and lay around for the sake of getting tan and looking good. They clearly make up the majority portion of people at the pool at about 85%. Both guys and girls alike lay out and both wear such minimal clothing at times it is hard to tell the difference. A bottle of Hawaiian Tropic SPF 4 Dark Tanning oil is never out of reach and is often left on end tables as a little gift for the next tanner. Out of all the people here, these are the people who are here to get work done.

The Perfect Spot

Picking the perfect spot to tan is the most important decision that a sunbather will make all day. This can be

quite an intimidating process. In order to find your seat you must walk down the row of sunbathers until you find an empty chair. Similar to a fashion show runway, this is where people size each other up. Through the sea of Chanel and Gucci sunglasses, people lock eyes while they walk past the chairs. It is the same routine every time someone arrives. With their backs arched tall and shoulders pushed back, everyone puts on their best strut. They hold their heads high, pull out their inner confidence, and walk. Their eyes dart around scanning every person they pass. For the guys this is where they not only get to see the girls in their skimpy bikinis but it is their chance to show the other guys what they got and assert their dominance. Girls try to impress the guys but I think they're really there to impress the other girls.

There are roughly 40 identical lounge chairs lined up along three sides of the pool but some real estate is much more valuable than others. "Do you wanna sit here?" one girl said to her friend. Her friend responded by with "ew, no. There is better sun over here." So they dragged their oversized Louis Vuitton tote bags about twenty feet down and settled in at two chairs with full sun exposure. After analyzing the trajectory of the sun they decided to adjust their chairs by angling them diagonally. Chairs with obstructed sun exposure are always the last to fill up.

Sometimes people prefer to lay out on the sizzling concrete ground before taking a seat with inadequate sun. If there is room, it is a big no no to sit directly next to someone you don't know.

Getting Settled

Once you have your chair, it's time to get settled. When people come to

the pool they come prepared. Bags overflow with all sorts of pool necessities. The first step is to get out the towel. One girl meticulously spreads her towel, scrutinizing it and removing every possible wrinkle. She is determined to have the smoothest towel possible. She flaps it back and forth in the wind a few times and flinches to avoid hitting herself in the face. It gracefully falls over her chair and she gives a slight head nod showing her approval. She reaches nearly shoulder deep into her LV tote and pulls out two small clips which she fastens to her towel to make sure it doesn't go anywhere. Back into the bag she goes and out comes a bottle of tanning oil. Lathering up, making sure not to miss a single skin pore, she adjusts her bikini and is ready to get down to business. She scans the scene and stops for a second at each person to see what they're up to and more importantly, if they're looking at her. Perhaps all communicating is done through body language since almost everyone has their headphones in and sunglasses on. It can be difficult to read people and see direct interactions. Glances and especially stares carry a lot of meaning here. For sunbathers, there is the desire to be the hottest and tannest so a simple glance can make a big difference. It can act as a confidence enhancer since it seems like people only look at people who they find attractive.

Tanning Olympics

Sunbathing is the unofficial sport of Miami. More competitive than diving and swimming, sunbathing is a cutthroat sport. The game starts when you enter the pool and ends when you leave. If executed properly, your trophy is a beautifully bronzed body along with

approval from all. A guy walks tall down the row of chairs in a skimpy muscle shirt and shorts that reveal half his thighs. He looks everyone up and down on his way to his chair. After he reaches his chair he crosses his arms and slowly begins to remove his shirt over his head. His biceps and abs are fully flexed like he wants someone to photograph him. He slowly applies Chapstick and looks around to see if anyone is looking back at him. Next he applies sunscreen to his clearly flexed muscles as a way to emphasize how big and strong he is. You can see he takes pride in the way he looks by the confidence he displays. Much like gorillas in the jungle, he displays his dominance and masculinity through his actions and wants to be viewed as a top competitor.

The next person to enter the pool area is a girl, already darker skinned than I will ever be. She purses her lips and walks wearing her sheer coverup and accompanying Gucci beach bag with pride. She too looks everyone over on her way to finding a seat. Only this time, there were a few guys who did lift their heads as she walked by. Her blonde Barbie hair is caught in the wind, and she knows she's putting on a good display. She makes herself at home and is ready to play ball. Enforcing the typical blonde stereotype, she removes her coverup to reveal a stringy white bikini that only makes her look more tan. She cracks her gum which produces a sound so piercing it turns heads. Perhaps this is a ploy to get people to look over and check her out. It works, she reeled one in. She's officially on the scoreboard. Knowing she's gotten some attention, she gracefully puts her earbuds in, puts one knee up, and closes her eyes. The sun becomes exhausting and its clear

that only the toughest of the tough can withstand the intense Florida heat. About twenty minutes later she wipes the sweat beads as they form on her forehead. She splashes water on her face revealing bright pink skin along with a big exhale. She rolls her eyes and lowers her head back onto the lounge chair. She cannot give in. Instead, she rolls over onto her stomach and roasts like a rotisserie chicken. I check back two hours later only to find her in the same spot.

Packing Up And Heading Out

As the sun begins to lower and the clock approaches 5:00, it is time to call it a day. Some people have been at the pool for hours, others just a few minutes. Lifeguards make their rounds letting people know that the pool is closing but at this point, only the most dedicated sunbathers are left.

Whether you're at the pool to swim, dive, tan, or socialize you are competing. I believe that humans have an innate sense of competition and will continue to find ways to be "better" at anything. However, if the pool is your regular hangout spot you understand the poolside rituals and most likely are good at following them. Everyone praying to the sun God craves dominance, masculinity, femininity, and of course, attention that only a perfect tan can mask.

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