

Jocelyn Castle

### Connection to Another Life

As I reached down to turn off my car, I could already tell that my two favorite guys were already hard at work. When I slammed the car door behind me, the sound of power tools broke off abruptly. The side door to the garage opened and my greasy boyfriend ran up to embrace me, still wearing his painters' mask. Andrew lowered his mask, revealing his usual crooked smile. Even after two years, his smile was still breathtaking to me. As I reminded myself how to breathe, he took hold of my hand and escorted me into the garage.

When I stepped into the garage, the smells circulating in the air violated my nostrils and made my eyes water. Andrew swiftly handed me a disposable painters mask, and told me to put it on before the carcinogenic chemicals could make me sick. The smells that day were more potent than they had been the week before. I realized that the car would soon be ready for paint, which signifies the near end of a car restoration.

Andrew and his best friend Bobby had been working all day on Bobby's 1967 Ford Mustang Coupe. Bob had been working as a mechanic at Ford and Andrew knew exactly what to do when it came to restoring the body of a classic car. I glanced around the garage and couldn't find Bob. I heard the sound of wheels on the cement and looked down as Bob rolled out from under the car on his padded creeper. He smiled and said a quick hello before sliding back under the car.

I had been in the garage a few times before to talk and hangout as the guys tinkered with various motorcycles and motors. When Bob had obtained the Mustang, the guys spent any time they could working on it. Most girls would spend at least an hour to get ready on a Friday night before going out with their boyfriend. My Friday nights only required a pair of grimy ripped

jeans and an old band T-shirt. I did not pay extra money to have my jeans faded and have holes added like many fashionable people my age. My jeans had earned all of its holes and weariness through hard manual labor.

When the guys found out I was a Chevrolet girl, they made it their goal to convert me to their Ford lifestyle. When we were out in public the guys would make catcalls, never at women, but at fully restored classic Ford cars. They would make fun of imported cars that the local teenagers had tried to improve on a scanty budget. When a Camaro would drive by, one of the guys would dramatically jump towards me and cover my eyes, as if I was a child witnessing something obscene.

Bob's garage was a place where the three of us could go and just be ourselves. The garage always had the potent smell of WD-40 and grease. The walls were a perfect white color with tools hanging magnificently from shelves. The porous garage floor had dark blotches where oil had been carelessly spilled in the past. Parts from other cars and motorcycles sat in the corners, waiting for their turn at a new life.

As I went to go sit down on a garage stool, Andrew gently grabbed my hand and asked me if I wanted to help him with what he was doing at the moment. The texture of his hands never caught me off guard. His hands had been calloused over, just like any other hard working man. As Andrew turned away to get something from the workbench, I rubbed my fingers together. When he had touched my hand, the Bondo powder from his hands had transferred to mine, giving my fingers a dusty texture. He then turned back towards me with something square in his hand. He placed a piece of fine grain sandpaper in my waiting hand and asked me to follow him to the side of the car.

I could hear Bob's grunting from beneath the car as he struggled with something invisible from my sight. Andrew hunkered down, so that he was eye level with the car. I knelt beside him as he caressed the car in a gentle, loving manner. He ran his hand over the car, checking for areas he had missed when he sanded earlier. I had done this before, so I went over a few feet and started to sand down the rough areas where Bondo had been used. The reason for wearing a mask became evident when the powder began to diffuse into the air around me.

The garage was hot as we labored over the hidden beauty before us. They were talking about what it was going to be like to take her out driving. It is in our human nature for us to flaunt what many others do not have. When you get complimented on something that took a substantial effort to achieve, you will remember those compliments above all others. That car was just that, it was a chance to get noticed in the pool of young adults of our generation.

When I heard the garage door open, a familiar scent hit my nose. Bob's dad walked in carrying a few icy beers and smoking his rustic pipe. His dad has a large potbelly, which restricted him from going under the car like his son had been doing all day. As he walked into the garage he started getting excited over how much progress the guys had made that day. The smell of his pipe was always sweet among the potent smells of the garage.

Bob rolled out from under the car and began to tell his dad everything he had done to the engine that day. Andrew went to grab an icy beer while I finished sanding the area I was on. I jumped when I felt something wet and freezing on my hot neck. I turned around and realized that Andrew had stuck an arctic bottle just below my hairline. I fell while trying to stand up fast, which made him laugh. When he helped me up, he glanced over the area I had sanded. His hazel eyes scoured the area I had just completed, looking for any imperfection. Eventually he looked up at me and smiled, which meant I had done a good job.

When we all stepped back to glance at the car, the atmosphere changed. The car was ready to be painted in the next couple of days. Bob started talking to me about the future color of the car and what the interior was going to look like. While he was talking to me I suddenly had an epiphany. This garage was so much more than a chance to hang with my best friends. It was a chance for me to remember a childhood I had pushed from my memory for the longest time.

After my dad had left my family for another woman, it hurt me the most. All the good childhood memories I had, had gotten overshadowed with the hate I felt towards my father. I was the eldest child of four girls. I had spent the most time with my father on various hunting trips and vacations. I realized then, that the place I had spent the most time with my dad was in the garage, talking to him while he restored his 1968 Camaro. When my dad left the family, he took his car, but never asked me if I wanted to come with him as well.

Being in Bobby's garage reminded me that I did not have a bad childhood. I had a few bad memories that had covered the best memories from my past. The time I had spent in Bobby's garage helped me reminisce of the times I had with my father. Hate can do horrible things to a soul, especially one of an unprepared teenager. At that moment, I forgave my father for anything he had done to hurt me in the past.

I built memories of my own, in a new garage with my two favorite guys. The car has been sold, the guys are away in the army, but the memories still linger. The theory that girls choose the guys that are most like their father, rings true in my mind. If it were not for my father being who he is, I would have not been interested in a great guy like Andrew. I know now that the things that hurt you the most, will eventually lead to something better.

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### College Preparation: A Whale of an Endeavor

Keiko the majestic whale was returned to the wild today it was a flawless transferral from her previous Icelandic habitat to the great-blue sea. This is what many animal rights activists would like to have heard right after the movie Free Willie was released. However, in actuality, the captivity-raised mammal has been preparing for this change in scenery for over eleven years (Keiko 2007). This is much longer than we would like to think about training to go into the real world but the truth is... we wait much longer than that. There are five years we spend getting ready for formal school... and then there are eight years of training by licensed teachers before we can get into high school. That is a total of thirteen years. Much longer than a killer whale. We are then trained for four more years in high school for the worst four or best seven years of our lives—college.

Many high school students freshly introduced into the college world may have felt the sting of failure when they received their first “F” on an exam that they had sat down and studied for the night right beforehand. Or maybe students just don’t know how to function now that their parents aren’t around to help with things that they needed or help make decisions. That first sting was probably felt when finding out that college teachers don’t care that they didn’t finish an assignment on time, because the students didn’t actively try to go get help. Many first year college students may feel like they are ready to crumble, as is the case for many. “According to American College Testing (ACT), one in every four students leaves college before completing sophomore year. What's more, nearly half of all freshmen will either drop out before getting their degree or complete their college education elsewhere” (The Dropout par. 5). But what is causing this? For many of us, high school did not give us enough training. Keiko the whale has had years of experience learning how to fish on his own. We get four. So, how do we remedy this? Do we tack on a few extra years? Make it harder to pass high school in preparation for what is to come? Do we make college easier? This is a problem that has plagued the freshman population since the dawn of time, but what is the underlying cause of incoming college students who are not doing

as well as previously planned? What could be changed in order for students to be more successful with the change of scenery that college brings to the table?

First, what are the reasons for this failure? One reason students have a hard time assimilating into college is because many high school teachers do not give enough responsibilities to their pupils. Practice makes perfect and if someone gets to pretend to be dependable and productive they may actually become that way. Also, parents are always in our lives and can be over protective to the point of not letting their children make mistakes for themselves. High school is the time to make those mistakes, it is the time when there are people around to help you through whatever problem you fall into; when you are alone at college is not the time to make every single one of your mistakes. There are plenty of chances to make them while away at the university.

Another reason is because teachers don't challenge college-bound students enough, so when students arrive they don't know how to study properly or get work done correctly. "The overall environment created in the schools is an important part of achieving these outcomes. Students learn best when excellence is expected from them and when they are encouraged to achieve it. They need incentives and stimulation to learn" (Academic 32). I understand that teachers do have a curriculum to follow, schedules to plan, and papers to grade. It is a hard job and they are severely under appreciated. However, it is the job of the teacher to educate students and challenge them so that they can learn how to reach their full potential.

In high school, I was in many honors classes that challenged me, but I guess I wasn't challenged enough. I never had to study; I could usually just look over the material the class period before the test and pass with no less than a B. When I arrived in college, I tried that too. Apparently, chemistry isn't a subject you can just show up to and pass. I think that if in high school I would have been challenged a little more I would have been forced to study. I would have gained a necessary skill that could have gotten me a desirable grade in chemistry. I am not the only student with this story, "I was the salutatorian of my high school, so I wasn't used to getting anything less than an 'A. ...When I got a 'C' on my first chemistry test, I was, like, 'Whoa, what's this? This must be some kind of a mistake.' But it wasn't, and [the student] quickly learned that college academics were a completely different ballgame--and you had to play by different rules" (The Dropout par.22). Students may struggle throughout their entire college career without the proper challenges and preparations made, even if they did well in high school.

Students can also become depressed with all of the new responsibilities and challenges that they are facing after leaving home and being in a completely new environment. "I did all the wrong things," says [Michael] VanAdams. "Instead of seeing my first couple of failures as wake-up calls, I became depressed and immediately started passing the blame onto others. I told my parents that the professors were awful and didn't like me; I told my girlfriend that the kids who went there were snobs and no fun at all. Basically, I blamed everyone but myself" (The Dropout par. 3). When living at home many students rely on their parents to do many things for them. Whether it be taking them to work, bringing their forgotten items to school for them, or even making dinner in the evening and making sure that the student gets adequate nutrition. Even that little of help can be a big help when you have a final to study for or a twenty-five page paper due in the morning. For many freshman this new found freedom in decision making can be overwhelming and stressful, and may lead to a feeling of despair where you feel like you cannot do any more, this is when the depression falls into place. They may fall into the pattern of: not studying, deciding what to do from there with all of the extra stress, depression, trying to study, fail even when you try and then not study because you know you won't succeed and then repeating the cycle. Eventually leading to having an incredibly hard time with school, dropping out, failing out of college or even psychological issues.

One solution to the problem could be to make it more accepted in high school for high schoolers to be smart and challenge themselves. Or the teachers take it upon themselves to challenge the students. The student could push themselves just a little bit further. Instead of just getting the B push yourself to get the A. Put in that extra time so that the finish product is much better than imagined. I know that when I would push myself in, let's say English class, the polished piece of work made me feel really good. I felt like I had done something other than waste my time; I felt like I had actually learned something. I remember one assignment, it was a critical critique of a character from the play "Hamlet." I chose Ophelia, she was a really interesting character, so it was easy to get involved with the project... when I was done I still didn't feel done *enough*. I kept working on it, when I got to class with my paper and presented it, it was the longest by far, but I only missed one point.... That was the best grade I had gotten on any paper in that class. I think about that project when I am working on research papers now. I feel that I put a college-level effort into that assignment. If I had done that with every assignment I was given I would have had no problems getting into to the swing of things. This would happen

a lot more often if other students didn't poke fun at the high-achieving students, ridiculing them as over-achievers... If only high schoolers could see that as a compliment.

One way to challenge students could possibly be by grading harder. By holding students more accountable for their actions, even if those are actions that they don't take. If this were to happen there would be a huge improvement on the success for incoming college freshman. If each teacher in high school graded much tougher than the year before by the time students got into college the grading scale would be about the same as their senior year!

Standardized testing is one thing that could possibly be affecting new college students. Instead of students going into class thinking that they want to learn something, they may just go in so that they can learn how to take tests. Learning how to take a test is a good skill to have in college; however, standardized tests are different. They, are overrated—in my opinion—and have no place in narrowing down the future college options for students. They do not show the ability to learn, how much students actually know, or how creative the student is. All these tests show is the ability for the student to take a test, and give an answer that someone wants, essentially packing a student into a box where they are not allowed to think for themselves effectively. When they get into college most of those standardized tests are over, and notes should be taken differently as should be the way the student thinks about going to class. How can a student possibly transition into this sort of environment with no previous experience or chance to practice?

An option that could be put into action would be public schools changing how large the steps in between different grade or school levels. Having the educational jump from Junior high school being larger than the jump from elementary to Jr. high and slightly smaller than the jump from high school into college. This would make students understand more readily the changes needing to be made with the new college level curriculum. I just wish that there was something to prepare me for the jump into college, or the real world. Change is always a scary thing, but with the proper preparation, a seamless change could occur.

Even though we are in a recession, more money would be helpful in high schools. Less fiscal constraint in public high schools could be used to make them stricter, giving some students that push into being more responsible or concerned with their own futures. It could also give the students more choices of classes in order to find more challenging classes for growing young minds. This new money would also allow school districts to hire more teachers. "Studies relating

schools' resources to students' outcomes have a rich and longstanding history in the social sciences... Researchers in sociology, economics, and education policy have modeled the relationship between a broad range of indices—including pupil–teacher ratio, length of school year, per pupil expenditures, and teachers' education—and an even broader assortment of individual-level outcomes” (Halpern par.1). More teachers would allow for a better teacher to student ratio, giving more individual attention to each student, which could also lead to more personal challenges for the students who are excelling. This training would help the transition to be much smoother. In no time, students will be able to think for themselves make, decisions solo, and overall be more prepared for the new life that is college.

Keiko the whale is still in her watery training bay and had been learning to catch fish for herself as well as survive in the wild—alone. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of freshman in college are struggling in their classes, they may be depressed, homesick or perhaps they are not prepared for the new lifestyle in which they have found themselves. Students worked so hard to get to the place where they have gotten, there is no doubt about that, but that does not mean that they are completely prepared. With a few changes, students could be more adaptable to changes and the classes and people they may come encounter. “All students entering college deserve a fair chance to succeed in higher education. To do so, they must be adequately prepared for college-level study” (Academic 1).

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Jesse Fisker

### Global Warming: Natural Cycles or Human Apocalypse?

Most Americans watched news stories on the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina and felt horror and sickness when the flooded ghettos, decaying bodies, and stranded victims on the roof of their homes were shown. It would be presumptuous to claim that it was the result of global warming, but all current predictions point to more catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina happening as the Earth's temperature rises. Eventually, Idaho might never see snow while Canada becomes enjoyable. The world would change drastically if global warming is left unchecked.

Despite arguments to the contrary, global warming exists, is created by humans burning fossil fuels, and must be dealt with immediately before worldwide catastrophes threaten mankind's continued existence. My beliefs about global warming before I researched the various perspectives and their evidence were that it existed and that something needed to happen, but after seeing how all of the evidence points to the same conclusion, I am convinced of the impending disasters that face mankind as a result of our hunger for energy. Inaction will lead to comprehensive upheaval of the human race, and although some skeptics would have more research and time spent waiting, action must be taken now. It is essential that the steps to reduce and eventually eliminate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions be put into action immediately before the point of no return is passed.

Most of the discussion among scientists, climate specialists, and environmentalists is about what the next step for mankind will be whether to embrace a cap-and-trade method of limiting emissions or to invest in green energy technologies; however, there are some skeptics of global warming who argue that it even exists. Their premise is based on the suspicion that the evidence is inaccurate and insufficient. Ultimately, the evidence has been accepted

overwhelmingly by the scientific community at large and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which is viewed as the authority on global warming and is credited with bringing it to general awareness. The IPCC is a collaboration of 2,500 prominent scientists and specialists on every subject that even remotely relates to climate change and has the mission of providing a comprehensive and objective analysis of possible climate change. These skeptics' concerns are largely unknown to most people even though their arguments should be heard.

The data used to document a global increase in temperature was gathered from tree rings from across North America and core samples taken from the ice in the South Pole. It reconstructed the temperatures of the past 1,000 years and provided the basis for measuring increases thought to be unnatural and man-made.

The issue that has been raised is that because the sample was not worldwide, it could potentially be subject to regional patterns rather than global. It has been questioned if an event occurred that raised the temperature of only North America or the South Pole, such as a volcanic eruption, would it not show in the data collected as a global warming incident? Therefore, are they not inaccurate when it comes to being reliable records of worldwide patterns?

The other issue with global warming's existence strikes at the commonly used imagery of mounting death tolls and huge natural catastrophes. Are those the real consequences of global warming or fear-mongering rhetoric used by environmentalists for political purposes? The source of those predictions is the general circulation models (GCMs) that divide the world's oceans into square units 250 kilometers by 250 kilometers and extending one kilometer into the atmosphere. Each unit has its own system of data input that functions mathematically with its climate. The theory is that the infinitely complex interaction of environment and ecosystem to produce a climate can be broken down into much smaller units that each predict the very local

result of any changed inputs, and that all of the local results can be combined into a regional prediction, and that those results can be combined to formulate global patterns.

The problems that skeptics claim exist in this model are that even units that are 250 kilometers per side are big enough that they become too complex to reduce all of its interactions into mathematical expression. Basically, it is an argument over whether the data collected is truly representative of worldwide conditions and whether technology is advanced enough to be making such predictions of the effects of global warming accurately or not.

The answer to both of those questions is yes. Climate specialists agree that the probability of any event affecting the entirety of North America and not the world as a whole are infinitesimally small and do not need to be taken into account. Claims of possible inaccuracy and ambiguity were refuted in a BBC News article that concluded “warming is unequivocal” (Singer). As is shown by the thousands of scientists that make up the IPCC acceptance of the data as accurate, the scientific community at large regards those concerns as of no consequence. The core samples taken from the South Pole verify what the tree rings showed, that temperatures are higher than they have been both in the past and recently. The IPCC’s 2007 report (AR4) concludes that the twentieth century was the warmest of the millennium, the 1990s the warmest decade, and 1998 the warmest year, firmly establishing that global warming exists and is pushing global temperatures to new heights. As to the effects of global warming, those are agreed upon almost as overwhelmingly. Our technology is more than sufficient to predict weather and climate shifts, and the catastrophic results predicted by GCMs have been evaluated as very likely (having over a 90% chance of being accurate) by the IPCC (AR4 15). Not only are the GCMs being used to create accurate predictions, we are seeing the beginnings of the results right now. Every year brings new record high and low temperatures exactly as predicted, greater

precipitation as a result of higher temperatures which result in more evaporation, and increased magnitude of natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. In the article “Hurricanes and Global Warming: Potential Linkages and Consequences,” published in the May 2007 edition of Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society, Greg Holland of the National Center for Atmospheric Research concludes that if CO<sub>2</sub> levels reach double their normal levels there will be a 10% increase in the intensity of hurricanes. The evidence is clear and comprehensive: global warming is happening and it will have serious and potentially catastrophic effects. In a class lecture, Dr. Robert L. Mahler states that “ninety-eight percent of scientists agree that global warming is a reality,” which means there are crucial decisions to make in the very near future.

Though global warming is nearly universally accepted by experts in their respective fields, the cause is not clearly defined. Most scientists believe that global warming is occurring because of humans’ contribution to carbon dioxide levels as a result of burning fossil fuels, but there is a number that see global warming as part of a natural cycle of Earth. The debate over what is causing global warming is of the greatest importance because the answer should guide humans’ course of action to deal with it. It is clear that humans are emitting large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> and that there is a drastic increase in atmospheric concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> at the same time as higher temperatures are being recorded. Skeptics believe that in various contexts, this is not out of place.

Earth has natural cycles of ice ages and warming ages (interglacial periods); this is a well known and documented fact. In Douglas Long’s book Global Warming, a broad overview of the subject’s evidence and debates, he goes over the history of such events. According to his timeline, there have been eight ice ages in the past million years that have each lasted an average of 100,000 years, interspersed with interglacial periods lasting between eight and ten thousand

years each. We are in the Holocene interglacial period which began 10,000 years ago and is the longest and most stable period in the past 400,000 years.

The first hypothesis by skeptics of mainstream global warming theory is that the recent rise in temperature is a function of the Earth going through its natural warming trend, not by human-emitted carbon dioxide. There are a number of suppositions as to what the specific mechanics of the increase are if not carbon dioxide, most notably David Dilley's often-quoted theory of the moon's gravitational effect. Having no credentials besides job experience working for the National Weather Service as one of thousands of employees, Dilley writes on his web site "Global Weather Oscillations" that the moon's gravity pulls the atmosphere's high-pressure systems between three and four degrees of latitude off course within a certain cycle of years, and that the current warming trend is due to end and global cooling begin 2008 to 2009. His claims of accuracy between his predictions and the irregular weather phenomenon El Niño have been disproved, and global cooling has yet to begin.

It is true, there have been large changes in temperature that fall within normal variances without human interference; however, the last century's increase has been the largest of any other in the past millennium, coinciding with the rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels. Nowhere is this shown more dramatically than in Al Gore's documentary An Inconvenient Truth that led him to share the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with the IPCC. Gore draws a graph of the last thousand years' carbon dioxide levels, showing a constant fluctuation of the past 850 years' levels around 280 parts per million (ppm) and ending in a drastic 30% rise in the last 150 years to the current levels of over 360 ppm. Any hypotheses by skeptics exploring the natural causes of global warming must accept CO<sub>2</sub> as the mechanism and propose explanations for its increased atmospheric levels.

Skeptics contend that the latest increase in CO<sub>2</sub> levels is only a continuation of previous patterns. They hold that humans' emissions cannot be the cause of global warming because they account for such a small fraction of the total and that the rising CO<sub>2</sub> levels must be from natural sources as well, such as volcanoes. For some, it is simply their belief that the Earth is so much greater than the sum of its parts, that humans do not have the capabilities to damage it in any meaningful way. For others, it goes back to the natural warming pattern of the Holocene interglacial period, and they assume that the CO<sub>2</sub> is a product of one of the many complex interactions between the Earth and its climate that are not fully understood by science.

Fortunately, we are able to measure worldwide emissions, both from natural and artificial causes. Catherine Brahic, an environmental reporter for NewScientist with many years of experience, writes about them in her May 16, 2007 article "Climate Myths: Human CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions are Too Tiny to Matter." She explains that CO<sub>2</sub> sources have always been balanced by "carbon sinks," or points of absorption of CO<sub>2</sub>, but the recent addition of humans' emissions has unbalanced the equation and now carbon dioxide is building up in the atmosphere. Burning fossil fuels for energy emits about 26.4 gigatons (one billion tons, abbreviated Gt) per year while human-caused disturbance of the land contributes another 5.9 Gt, bringing human contributions to around 32 Gt per year. Those who claim volcanoes contribute more CO<sub>2</sub> than human activities are misinformed, because volcanoes release an average of 0.3 Gt per year, or one hundredth of humans' emissions (Brahic).

When compared with the 770 Gt released from oceans and the decomposition and respiration of living matter, skeptics have a good point. Human emissions make up less than 5% of all CO<sub>2</sub> released each year; however, the carbon sinks balance out natural sources and even offset some human activity. The ocean and photosynthesizing vegetation absorb 790 Gt, all of

the natural emissions and almost two thirds of humans'. This leaves about 12 Gt being added to atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels every year, which is a significant increase (Brahic). Taking carbon that has been removed from the natural carbon cycle and stored as fossil fuels for millions of years and reintroducing it without foresight has begun to threaten our current view of the environment and our effect on it. This is not the first time we have seen relatively little human activity and interference disrupt the delicate natural balance of an environment or ecosystem and eventually destroy it. Humans have caused many plant and animal species to become extinct and made many natural ecosystems unusable and uninhabitable from pollution. However, this is the first time something of this magnitude has happened, and we are not sure how to face it.

By now, there should be little debate left; it is clear that, contrary to skeptics' claims of planetary cycles outside of mankind's control or responsibility, humans have imbalanced the delicate system of carbon sources and carbon sinks and are contributing to the rapid rise of CO<sub>2</sub> levels and corresponding global temperatures. Following the chain of evidence and logical reasoning, the same conclusion is reached as the vast majority of climate specialists and scientists.

Global warming is a well-documented effect from elevated carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, which have in turn been traced back directly to human emissions. The planet's normal cycles of warming and cooling have been disrupted, now what? The answer to that essential question often varies with an individual's values. Whether to take action or not is affected by one's perspective on how the Earth exists and operates-- either with humans as one of many functioning parts of the whole, or as a means for human ends. There are various reasons to believe either way, but action should follow the most sensible and responsible outlook.

Most of the people who support more exploitation of natural resources, less restrictions on what corporations and companies are allowed to do, particularly in terms of pollution, and have a general disregard for how the world environment is affected by human activity hold the point of view that the Earth has no importance in its own existence, but only as a resource for human use and consumption. There is nothing wrong with believing this way, but history has shown that acting this way is ignorant and selfish. Discussing possible courses of action, Dr. William Nordhaus says “In one hundred years we will feel the consequences of our actions now, and to save our great-grandchildren from being ashamed and embarrassed of us, we must take great strides to preserve the natural world” (Nordhaus 33). Exploiting nature results in damage that ends up costing humanity, like hunting animals to extinction, grazing or farming land until it becomes useless, and using resources far beyond their means of being replenished. People who value the Earth for nothing more than human use must restrain their desire to take, use, and exploit and put sustainability and long-term goals first.

The opposite view, that humans are just one more species of animal, smarter than the rest, values the Earth’s existence as part of the natural harmony. People with this perspective believe that in order for the human race to continue to flourish, it needs to work closely with the planet to maintain the natural balance that would exist even if mankind did not. Again, history shows us that actions taken towards this goal are better for the long-term health of humans and will allow us to expand in a positive, controlled direction. Sustainability and maintaining balance are the higher ideals that action should come from, and the evidence shows that action needs to be taken to achieve those goals.

While some critics of mainstream global warming theory argue that to do nothing would be the best course of action (or lack thereof), others point out the flaws in such thinking. There

are definitely some areas of a higher global temperature that would benefit humans, but there are far more negatives. Bruce Johansen lays out the pros and cons of taking action or not in his book Global Warming in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Letting global warming reach its peak would result in increased crop production, a wider range suitable for raising animals for human use and consumption, and much easier and more bearable living situations for the northward or southward latitudes. Unfortunately, rising sea levels would flood most major coastal cities, weather patterns would become more severe and extreme, there would be droughts and floods and more natural disasters occurring more frequently, and mass extinctions and migrations of the current flora (plants) and fauna (animals), perhaps even humans. Taking action would greatly limit the extent of these changes, and either stabilizing CO<sub>2</sub> levels close to their current state or even reducing them would allow us to preserve our way of life and the state of life around us (Johansen 29). Action needs to be taken to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions because the alternative is a sudden and extensive natural selection of all the life on Earth. Paul Stein's Forecasting the Climate of the Future puts the critical level of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> between 450 and 500 ppm, a level that will soon be reached at our current rate. He further pinpoints the catastrophic level as almost double the current level to around 700 ppm, which would result in an increase of between three and eight degrees Fahrenheit, which would cause a complete reordering of life as we know it. Fortunately for us, there are several courses of action that will reduce emissions and prevent these dangerous levels from being reached.

As with most things, there are options that emphasize short-term or long-term results, though the need lies in a combination of both. Short-term solutions work with our current resources and technology to limit emissions by lowering demand, raising efficiency, and through carbon capture technology. The History Channel dedicated an entire episode of its educational

series “Modern Marvels” to exploring the newest phenomenon in fighting global warming.

There are new technologies that allow us to capture carbon dioxide and trap it back in the ground where it was before we extracted it from hydrocarbons and fossil fuels. Ideal places for this are saltwater aquifers, empty or unusable mine shafts, and the very oil reserves that we are emptying at a fantastic rate. There is an estimated storage capacity of 900 gigatons, which would offset seventy-five years of emissions. The only problem is the large expense that companies will not take on willingly (“Environmental Tech” 24 Jan. 2007).

Long-term solutions are mainly investing in renewable and sustainable energy technologies. We already use many renewable energy sources like wind, solar, and hydropower, we just need to improve the technology to make it more economically viable through increased efficiency and lower energy costs. Eventually, all of our energy should come from infinite and sustainable sources like windmills and photovoltaic cells that harness the wind and the sun to provide electricity and heat for homes, businesses, and industries.

These are actions that need to be taken if we are to save our planet and our way of life, but these are actions that cannot be taken by individuals alone. They are measures that will have to be put into place and enforced by governments, and what is needed from individuals is the support of politicians’ constituencies to ensure that these policies get passed. The current measures being taken against global warming by our government include President Obama’s green technology investment proposals and bills that are proposing cap-and-trade programs to impose limits on emissions. If these measures become policies, the fight against global warming will be well on its way. The politicians who vote on these must be made aware that the public sees the higher cause and necessity of putting these plans into action so that they will do everything they can to put these protective measures into place. They have to know that people

are willing to bear the inevitably higher energy costs to make sure that we do the right thing for ourselves and the planet. The government needs to hear the will of its people wanting the best course of action, to begin taking steps to limit our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and eventually eliminate them altogether, preserving the fragile balance of life.

The evidence is clear, and the experts agree that the conclusions are as well: global warming exists, is created by humans burning fossil fuels, and must be dealt with immediately before worldwide catastrophes threaten mankind's continued existence.

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Kevin Kelpo  
English 208, Section 2  
Essay #1

Trailer Child  
An essay about learning

## DAD

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At a child's first glance, the Isabella Dam is only a 100-foot-high pile of large granite boulders. These appear to have been tossed into place haphazardly and leveled on top with fine-grain, corn-colored sand. In the summer, the granite boulders would absorb enough sun by late afternoon to sizzle the feet of any child scaling the stack of rocks to spend the day swimming on the other side. An aerial view of the dam on a blazing July morning might resemble an elongated mound of turbinado sugar being ravaged by desperate ants.

The dam was built in 1953 to prevent the dangerous and fickle-flowing Kern River from flooding the nearby city of Bakersfield. Ironically, the neighboring citizens of low-lying Kernville were evacuated to higher ground upon the dam's completion as the rising waters washed through their front doors. During any part of the day, local people can be found chatting in liquor stores and diners about life in the *Old Town*, spinning tired yarns about the ghosts of townspeople who never made it out of bed to escape the inundation. Lake Isabella was formed and the growing tourism fortified the population enough to establish a new town of the same name in the late 50s. The Kern Valley and its surrounding mountain towns are best known today as a summer haven for enthusiastic river rafters and a year-round hiding place for pot farmers and meth addicts. For a few sporadic elementary school years I lived there with my father, who, I am certain, had no interest in rafting the Kern River.

The dam was situated at a forty-five degree angle to the back entrance of the Kern Valley Trailer Community. Standing at the end of the last street before heading up the dam, I would stare up, counting the closest rocks and continuing to count back until I could no longer tell one from

the other. My journey would then begin, step by careful step for nearly an hour. By the end of the summer, my feet would be blistered and calloused, my skin bronzed to a deep butterscotch, and my hair as blond and dry as the sand at the summit of the dam.

I spent every day on the lake and every evening retracing my steps home. From the summit, the trailer homes in my neighborhood resembled fallen trees floating in two rows on a billowing sea of dust. Low moonlight poured down the main street of the trailer park and illuminated the stirring dirt as it swirled its way out between each home, enchanted by arid wind. The trailers cast their own low, flickering light and vibrated with the canned chorus of sub-suburban banter. Headlights from a neighbor's wobbly pick-up would pierce the suspended dust at the entrance of the park, the gears grinding and the engine clunking to rest in a gravel driveway. In the farther distance, most traffic would zoom past the turnout to our trailer park and continue up Lake Isabella Boulevard to towns in the mountains or to homes on the lake. The trailer park had no perceivable boundary other than the surrounding desert, which met the winding boulevard on two sides, the mountains on another, and the dam on the side closest to my home. From above, the neighborhood could be mistaken for a traveling band of circus performers or a shanty, isolated religious commune abuzz with the Holy Spirit.

The lowest rocks on the dam were also the largest, and my last step onto the street was more of a short fall terminated by firm slaps of my calloused feet in flip-flops, my hands bracing my landing on the dirt beside me. Heading home between the two rows of trailers, I would peer into the lives of my neighbors. Randy Claire, a skinny autistic blond in my class, spent his evenings on the porch building forts for his family's four cats—tiny architectural wonders crafted of cardboard and coffee cans. On the other side of the street several homes down, parked under a long-dead black maple at the edge of a cracked concrete slab, was the home of Wayne and Jonelle Rippins,

twins in the grade below me, ages 10 and ten-minutes-older-than-10, who wore the same *California Raisins* t-shirts every day and professed their devotion to the NRA over cartons of whole milk at the lunch table. Crunching my flip-flops into the sanded street, I would make my way toward the second trailer on the left from the entrance, an olive-green singlewide where my grandfather lived before us. The time would be just before 7, just before *Murder, She Wrote*.

On one evening, I hurried up the three aluminum stairs affixed to our home and flung open the flimsy trailer door. I was greeted by an eye-burning cloud of cigarette smoke and a burpy *hey boy* from my dad before he bounded over the railing and out into the grassy center of the trailer park. I turned to see that a fun-spirited neighbor had lit a garbage can on fire. Opportunistically, the neighborhood men ran to urinate into the flames while the women smoked Capri Slims and drank Bartles & James, pretending the sight were unusual. Feeling trapped in somebody else's life, I headed inside and hurried for TV-land.

My nightly forays into the glamorous and otherworldly lives of characters like those in *Dynasty* and *Quantum Leap* were my version of socializing. While my peers played sports in the evenings and had sleepovers, I grew more antisocial (and socially awkward) in front of my tiny TV. I wanted so desperately to be Jessica Fletcher, whose life seemed impossibly touched by murder and drama while she maintained countless invitations to fabulous parties in remote locations full of danger. Or, like Jean-luc Picard from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, I longed to be a futuristic gentleman commanding the well being of innumerable, otherworldly civilizations with the grace of a French-named, Scottish tea party host. At school, I was awkward and unpopular, but in the fulfilling and melodramatic solitude of TV-land, I felt involved.

Apart from the lake, the television was my life in those days. Modern conveniences like the remote control didn't exist in my real life, and so my father, exercising the prowess that I often

described as making him *so much like McGyver*; fastened two dented brass curtain rods together with electrical tape and gifted it to me one evening.

“Here you go, boy. You got yer damn remote control. It’s not even yer birthday!” My eleventh birthday was, in reality, in exactly nine days. Giving my father the benefit of the doubt, I assumed this was the joke. I was, after all, elated, reaching the shaky rod out from my seated position on the couch, changing the channel and adjusting the volume on the TV across the coffee table. Dad roared with laughter, broken-toothed and jolly, before calling over the bong from a visiting friend who had watched the whole scene in stoned awe.

The cramped living room in our trailer home was made even more crowded by wooden shelves my father had erected to house his wife’s various brass knick-knacks and plants and some 50-100 different kinds of incense burners. The walls behind all of these shelves were wood-paneled, and the smell of cedar and cigarette smoke hung in the dank air. The floor was covered with cold, brown, warped linoleum that raised and sank into mounds as it wrapped its way back through the length of our trailer. Following its path, I would pass through the kitchen that was installed along the wall of the hallway, and my bare feet would tap the cold linoleum, the raised parts caving under my weight and sticking to the sub-floor for a moment before growing back into their low, wavy form. Toward the back of the trailer, another open area with a small couch-bed and cardboard chest of drawers served as my room. It shared the wall to the right with a tiny bathroom made of plastic, and the far wall with my parent’s room, a windowless cave dusted with ageless layers of ash. In memory, sitting in the living room on a puce velvet couch and bundled up in old blankets, I stare down the hallway at my father’s bedroom door and imagine what might be happening behind it. The voices of Lindsey Buckingham and Stevie Nicks whine a muffled melody out from under the door ushered by faint, yellow light and pungent, boggy smog which fills the

floor outside the door and creeps its way up the walls. My dad was like a rock star in his dressing room, and I'd watched enough MTV to imagine what might be happening behind that door.

Sometimes, maybe feeling guilty for locking himself away with rock music and forbidden fog, my father would come along for a day on the lake. He would pack a tackle box, insisting I liked to fish, and cram our faded blue Coleman cooler with Olympia stubbies. He would whistle the tune from *The Andy Griffith Show*, each of us carrying a fishing pole, and we would dance up the dam—father and son, both named Kevin, a real-life Normal Rockwell painting. Settling into a suitable beach was easy for both of us. My dad needed only beer since fishing was the secondary pastime, and I needed only the lake. He would bait up the hook for me—I still refuse to stab and thread a living worm—and I would fling the line and watch as the bloody lure plunked into the lake right in front of me. My father would then reel in and re-cast my line to the perfect spot in the great distance.

“You’ll get it soon, son.” We would both discover later that I would not get it, ever.

Although this scene was sure evidence of my future as a sissy, my father would persist with the hook thing throughout my adolescence. I think he still hopes that one day I will love to fish with him, and I hope he’s right.

In my boredom, I would often leave my pole and my father to wade out into the lake and practice the water ballet techniques I’d learned from watching late-night sports coverage on television. I would twirl and do handstands, pointing my feet and working on my form, certain I had an Olympic future. My father would be slouching in a lawn chair on the beach, his beer belly cradled comfortably on his Tabasco-themed swimming shorts, chuckling to himself or whistling

tunes to classic rock songs. It wasn't until much later that I would describe him as *oblivious*, but in these moments my dad's simple personality soothed me, and my life seemed full of possibility.

There had been few days that summer that I didn't climb over the dam and spend the day in the water. One such day, I woke alone before taking post on the sofa to wait for my dad to stammer through the door smelling of what I later learned was the mixed aroma of well-brand tequila and Camel Menthols. I would not know the number of things my dad taught me inadvertently until much later, but this smell in particular is one I associate with those lessons, and for which I have a particularly keen sense.

"You goin' swimmin' today or not?" His lips were heavy, barely producing actual spaces between the words. "It's a hun'ed fuckin' degrees out, ya know."

"Yeah, I know, it's hot. Are you gonna be home later then?"

"Maybe I will an' maybe I won't. Maybe Ed McMahon gonna' roll up here and give me a check and I'll just go to Jamaica."

"Okay. See ya later." A half-smile found its way from my mouth before I turned.

"Later alligator."

It is rumored that my dad was a violent drunk in his youth. My mother told me about times when he would beat her bloody and wrap his Ford around trees after too many shots of mescal. Every story about my dad's picking a man up by his shirt and throwing him onto the bar floor, or burping out babbly threats to kill strangers in bowling alleys are, to me, stories of suspicious merit. My father's most consistent trait is his jolly and rather corny sense of humor. He's always been a drunk, but always of the playful sort—inappropriate, always, but never angry.

I understood this more than ever the time I accompanied my aunt to pick up my father from the Lake Isabella jail. When we arrived, my dad was sitting on a metal bed, chuckling as if

he'd been caught for some venial offence—stealing candy or skateboarding in a grocery store. In the real story, however, he was leaving the Green Room bar around 8 P.M. the night before, and an unsuspecting young girl in a canary yellow sundress zipped her pink bike out into a crosswalk in front of him. His drunk driving was like his drunk talking—aimless and slow—so she was mostly unharmed. But when I came to school the following day to find my girlfriend in an arm sling, holding a card signed by all of my classmates and reporting that it was a smiling, bearded man's truck with Joe Camel mud flaps swinging in its wake that mowed her down, I was mortified. My dad still laughs about running over my 6<sup>th</sup> grade girlfriend. *You know, tha's why he's gay now. His ol' dad runned the bitch over and he's been payin' me back e'er since!*

## KELLI

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While I can't say that having a father who is permanently trapped in adolescence was any good for my own adolescent development, I can say that my father educated me about more than the smell tequila and menthol cigarettes. He taught me about women, the kind you want, and the kind you want to avoid. And he taught me how to find soft-core on cable television if you couldn't get one of the former.

Kelli was my father's second wife and a member of the latter group of women. And although they were never legally married, she insisted on being called his wife *because of the common law*. Despite being a very dimly lit, plain person, Kelli believed herself a brilliant bombshell. Making use of her savant vocabulary, she described herself as *tall and statue-like*, asserting her potential for success as a model while she sunbathed with girlfriends in the weedy front yard of our trailer plot. In reality, though, Kelli wasn't so much tall as long, with heavy ropes for arms and an oversized jellybean for a head. Her hair was stringy and naturally the color of a long-dead mouse. The left side of her face was paralyzed from below her eye to her chin as a condition of what my aunt described as *a drug-related stroke even though she says it's some kinna palsy*. Her gait was swinging, awkward, and punctuated by forceful stomps of her frisbee feet—her chin leading her path as if she were always on to the scent of a nearby gas leak. As for intelligence, she wasn't so much smart as loud, often boasting her natural aptitude for skills like fencing, hairdressing, and Faberge restoration. These were mouthy proclamations of an air-raid decibel level which announced the invasion of Kelli's excellence to anyone within earshot of the rapid fire.

“It’s Kelli with an *i*,” she would often chide. “I hate the spelling with a *y*. I’m Kelli with an *i* and if I see you spell it with a *y* you’ll be grounded.” She was also an expert parent.

The year was 1992 and crystal meth was the cheapest drug in the valley. Even still, Kelli and my father’s party habits eventually caught up with their budget, and they (and, as an afterthought, I,) were in danger of trailer park eviction, a position my father described as “rock fucking bottom.” *Lower*; I remember thinking, *much lower*. My father begged Kelli to find work and she did so reluctantly, taking and losing various minimum-wage jobs before her first paycheck could clear the bank. After she failed a surprise drug test and lost her job as a janitor at the Plaza Royale nursing home, she and my father began to fight.

One time, the sound of their arguing jolted me from sleep and I left my bed to peer out into the living room. My dad stood silent as Kelli swarmed around him, screeching and thrashing. As she crooked her neck and shook her head, her pale face seemed to change shape as though her skin were tight, gray latex stretched over a tiny, struggling animal. It was like seeing the devil scold a zombie in a flickering old projector movie. Rushing down the hallway toward me like a frozen wind, her screams ripped past my head and down my spine causing the muscles surrounding my tailbone to clench. The only thing missing was a set of boney, barbed bat wings growing from her shoulder blades. What happened next, I would later describe, was like a scene from *Silence of the Lambs*. Kelli lunged at my father, her weight taking his balance and smashing him against the wall. She then bit into his cheek, removing a piece of his beard and the flesh beneath it, and smacked and clawed at his chest and face. I stood transfixed as the blood of one of my parents ran from the mouth of another of my parents, and I realized that something was terribly wrong with my life.

Scenes like this one comprise the better part of my childhood memories of my father; in all my recollections of him, he is that sort of a doormat. From the perspective of youth, he was the kind of dad that kids in our trailer park coveted—no rules, no bed time, no pressure to go to school—just a young man exposed to the stinging darts of premature parenthood. When I remember him today, though, I wish he had been firmer. Not because I ever felt that I needed more discipline, but because of the kind of women that his ease-of-use attracted. Today, when my dad jokes that running over my 6<sup>th</sup> grade girlfriend made me gay, I tell him that no, it was actually his choice in women that flipped that switch.

## FRIENDS

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Simple things become important to children when they learn about the lives of their classmates. And when a child realizes that he is profoundly different, profoundly deficient in terms of these simple yet important things, he becomes self-conscious, angry, and pitiful. At 12 years old, I measured the quality of my life against that of my peers' at every opportunity. Theirs were similar and normal and charmed, while mine seemed stale and infected and freakish. They lived in homes that were firmly affixed to the earth on large concrete slabs. My home, affixed to a strong enough truck, could be removed from the earth and parked in a different town within an hour, leaving only a pale rectangle of un-sunned desert dirt. Also of concern was Kelli's growing collection of brass figurines shaped like animals copulating. These faunae seemed to sprout up magically from every surface in our home—embalmed, holy turtles and bears in love, reclaiming their place on earth. I feared rejection from the charmed children in my class if they ever found out about this and other aspects my life. I feared them, and wanted to *be* them. This simultaneous fear and adoration drew me into solitude as I avoided the kids in my neighborhood, seeing too much of my own desperate condition in them, and longing only to escape to a life more closely resembling suburbia.

I've heard it said that *children can be so cruel*. From my perspective, however, it is the parents of privileged children who are the truly cruel ones. I was 12 years old the first time I was invited to stay the night at a friend's house. And although I realize now that Danny England's parents were not wealthy, their home had a foundation, and in my mind there must also have been a giant tree rooted into their living room floor that grew cash and cookies instead of leaves. This invitation marked my first opportunity to climb the social ranks of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and my nerves

began to unravel the moment I climbed into the Englands' shiny white Suburban after school. Danny got to listen to whatever he wanted in the CD player on the ride home, and he chose MC Hammer's latest single *Can't Touch This*. The song was to be played, on a loop, at a tooth-vibrating volume for the duration of the 25-minute drive North to their home in the conifer spotted hills above the lake. The drive took us down Isabella Boulevard, through the town's only stoplight at Main Street, past Von's supermarket, and finally, just before ascending the dam, past the entrance to the Kern Valley Trailer Community. Danny's bouncy conversation with his mom and the thumping rap lyrics provided a muffled soundtrack to my thoughts as I gazed out the back window of the SUV. I watched the tumbleweeds blow through the dusty gravel streets of my neighborhood, imagining a time 20 minutes later when the school bus I usually rode home would come to a lurching stop before its hydraulic doors hissed opened to let out my raggedy classmates. I imagined them all returning to their dust-covered, aluminum-enclosed lives while I lived just one night of privilege. The optimism rushed to my head like an intoxicating injection as I folded the song lyrics into my thoughts—*You can't touch this, you can't touch this, you can't touch this...*

When I entered their sturdy home, though, that rush of optimism gave yield to a self-conscious comedown. I stood in the entry of their clean, white house and immediately noticed the dirt clumps on my sneakers and permanent gunk under my fingernails. From what seemed like twenty feet above me, Danny's father extended his hand. I glanced again at my fingernails then stared up at him, sinking into my sneakers for a moment before reaching out my sooty hand in return.

"Nice to meet you, son," said the giant clean man. "What's your favorite subject in school?"

"Art class," I offered. "But I also like English."

“Art’s not a subject, son,” he chuckled, confirming my fear that I’d given the wrong answer.

Danny had many possessions that kids like me could never think of owning—video games, a waterbed, a dirt bike, an electric toothbrush. I recall taking my things from my backpack and placing them next to his on the bathroom counter. All of my items lined up beside Danny’s, I reflected upon my position in the world. I was an old gray toothbrush with frayed, weedy bristles like miniature dandelions—thick stalks at the base and fluffy cotton at the extremes. The world stood towering over me on its electric base station, a Sonicare skyscraper thrusting toward space. I was a bar of soap and film canister of hair gel stolen from Kelli. The world was minty neon-green floss, fragrant liquid soap, aerosol hairspray, and Egyptian cotton. Countless evidences of privilege and preparation were stacked one upon the other, a stairway to a future fortune that I was sure I would never know.

“No more ice cream, Kevin,” said Danny’s mom after dinner. “You eat as though you’ve never eaten ice cream before and never may again.” For all I knew I hadn’t and wouldn’t.

I felt the eyes of the entire family as I wiped my mouth on my sleeve and placed the spoon on the table. Staring down into the bowl, my eyes projected a series of cinematic dissolves onto the surface of the sugary soup. My inadequate toiletries, primate table manners, and hunger for more dessert replayed in front of me like a bad dream I used to have in which I forgot to wear my pants to school. I felt the embarrassment and nausea expanding between my ribs. I felt as though I were being charged with the grave offence of ice cream eating. Of bar soap using. Of foundationless home dwelling. I sat, on trial, and felt the sting of a deep-cutting, numbing shame. I knew that I was different.

After dinner, Danny and I stayed up late playing Nintendo and listening to Vanilla Ice and MC Hammer. We talked about Billy Reynolds, a boy in our class who was rumored to be 16 but

too dumb to pass the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Danny assured me that Jessica Mills, a pretty girl in my art class who painted still-life baskets of neon fruit and dreamy pastel landscapes, had a crush on me. We watched MTV and practiced the break-dance moves we learned from C&C Music Factory while chewing our way through a bag of gumballs and drinking a case of Pepsi. I remember thinking that the sleepover was the best night of my life, and that things might be turning up.

The next morning, after I packed my backpack, Danny and I headed down the hallway toward the inside entrance of the garage. As we passed through the hallway, I counted four doors. I imagined that each of them had some kind of circus or racecar collection on the other side, and that if my friendship with Danny had another sleepover in its future, I might get the chance to find out for sure. Just before we passed the last door on the right, Danny's mom rushed out into the hallway carrying a white leather purse and wearing what seemed like brand new clothing. She cradled the car keys in a loose fist at her side, jangling them up and down against her palm and back to rest again on the undersides of her long painted fingers.

"Good morning, boys," she said.

"Good morning, Donna." Awkward silence grew from my casual use of her first name.

"Mrs. England, Kevin." Wrong answer again. "Did you boys have fun last night—"

"Yes! We stayed up so late!" I was thrilled to answer first.

"Yes, I noticed," she said, looking only at Danny, never at me.

As the Suburban cruised down the highway descending the dam, I imagined myself in a gaudy, white boat like the ones I saw on *Miami Vice* that were big enough to house maids' quarters and small pools. The ride was undiscernibly smooth, unlike the clanky, bouncy trips on this same road in my dad's gray 1960 Ford. I peered down onto my neighborhood from above, imagining a

time when I would only be passing by and not returning. I had begun my ascent through the ranks of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade; this felt like a perfect morning.

Danny and his mother rode in silence. The cheery mom and kid I remembered from the previous day were not in the car with me, but I persisted with my positive thinking. I whispered to Danny with just a trace of doubt, “Everything’s okay, right?”

Danny said nothing, and stared into the distance. I glanced into the front of the car to see Danny’s mom looking at him in the mirror. Her mouth was firm and the wrinkles around her scarlet lipstick quivered with tension. Her eyes darted from the road to the mirror and back three times before I turned to look closer at Danny’s expression. His distant gaze had fallen to a flat stare fixed on the back of the driver’s seat, his eyes were glazed and his mouth tight. When recounting this story several years later, I would describe myself as *completely oblivious*, but in this moment I remained drunk on optimism despite my growing gut-instinct that I’d done something wrong.

Danny’s mom finally broke the silence. “Are all trailer children so poorly mannered?”

The words broke from glass and scattered about the floorboard at my feet, gumballs sent flying from a fallen candy jar.

On the Wednesday of that week, Danny and I would meet in our school cafeteria at lunch. He would tell me how his mother, the morning after our sleepover, apprehended him on the way to the bathroom wrecked from a sleepless night. She heard me using swear words, he would report. What’s worse, he would say, was that she felt I didn’t bathe *a single time that week*. “Well, had you?” he would ask. He would then tell me, I think feigning disappointment, how she no longer approved of our friendship.

Danny’s mom stopped the Suburban at the entrance of the trailer park to let me out. I did not attempt to say goodbye, or to thank Danny or his mother as I got out of the car. I wanted to

cry, but I did not. I wanted to tell her how hard I had tried, but I did not. I wanted to kneel at the driver's side door of the Suburban and beg for another chance to be normal and similar and charmed, but I did not. Instead, I propped myself up at the side of the road as the great white boat sailed its way down the boulevard without me. And I hated Danny's mother. I hated her, in fact, with a focus and clarity that might lead some children to open fire in a high school cafeteria.

I spent the rest of that year despising the privileged around me. Watching their parents pick them up in cars made from silver and upholstered in exotic fur, I imagined them all going home to feast on countless bowls of ice cream before brushing their teeth with toothbrushes from space. I began to hate them all with that same clear focus I employed in hating Danny's mother, and luckily for them, I dropped out of high school at age fifteen.

## KEVIN

...

When I was eighteen, I had the chance to return to Lake Isabella. My oldest cousin was getting married, and after visiting her new family for several days, I took a trip down Isabella Boulevard to the Kern Valley Trailer Community. I walked to the end of the last street, taking in the familiar smells of desert dust and stagnant water, to stare up at the dam and count. I remembered, standing in that dry air, what my father had taught me about women who collect brass. I remembered Danny's mom and her lessons about manners—and her accidental lesson about kindness. I thought back to a later time when my Dad and I moved away from this place, and how Randy Clair and the Rippins kids threw a party for us in the grassy center of the park. It was then that I learned about friendship from these kids whom I'd snubbed to pursue relationships with classmates who wouldn't have me. I remembered the time when I was fifteen and a liquor store clerk in Los Angeles had me arrested for stealing a bottle of Jameson. The following year, when the opportunity to *borrow* a family friend's convertible proved too tempting, I ended up in jail for the second time. "It runs in the family," my father would later remind my aunt.

Each rock and each passing moment became another lesson to remember that day, as I stood at the dam and considered myself as the son of my father. I considered how fortunate I was to have never been exposed to those stinging darts of premature parenthood as I counted rocks and climbed over the dam like I had done so many times before. For one more day, I was that bronzed young boy blistering his feet and soothing them in the mossy lake water. And today, when I wake alone and confused, I return to that return. At the end of that same dust-covered street, I am an optimistic young boy with corn-colored hair, counting boulders, looking for answers.

Trust those who don white

Bonded under a great oath

Sworn to do no harm

"We need to get a sample."

The physician smiled at me. I smiled back from my mother's lap.

I was told this man just wanted to make sure I was okay.

He swiveled on his brown wheeled stool, pulled himself along the floor digging the heels of his Nike shoes against the dirty gray carpet. I watched him waddle-roll to the drawers then looked to my mother. She wanted me to go to school. I wanted to go to school. Before that could happen, I had to have "the checkup." I endured the cold stethoscope, the tongue depressor, the knee mallet. I did everything I was asked.

The blond haired physician returned, Nike shoes straining for purchase on the carpet to move the stool closer. He held a small plastic box in his hands.

"Give me your paw, partner."

I looked back at my mother. She nodded consent.

I held out my hand which he took in his massive grasp. He sorted through my fingers, squeezing each gently before he selected the one next to the pinky. The box was turned and I watched as he guided my finger into an opening. The finger grazed something within the box.

A sharp pain pierced my world. My heart fell to the floor in dozens of pieces as I looked to my mother who tried not to meet my tearful face. I tried to jerk my finger free but the physician held it firm between two of his, planting the crimson bloom of blood onto a card he conjured. At four years old I received my first lesson in betrayal.

Twenty Years Later

I am his patient again

He has forgotten

I told the doctor I didn't care for needles.

I told the nurse.

I told the nurse again.

"Surprise!"

That was all she said, and jabbed the medical punji stick into my flesh.

Radioisotopes flooded into my system from the syringe. I felt my cells react, a ripple of energy flowed from my scalp all the way down to my ankles. I felt myself becoming tense, my muscles flexed, and I felt stronger, more aware. No, it was the conditioned air tumbling down onto me from within the laboratory's overhead ducts.

"Now run, please," the doctor said.

"Gladly."

I eyed the open door that lead into the medical center's hallway. A quick turn to the left and 500 feet later I would be outside.

"On the treadmill, Mr. Fleener," he said.

The doctor offered a faint smile, my jackassery earned no points.

So I ran.

Beta and gamma rays released from the gallium-67 danced through the vast corridors of my vessels, arteries and organs. The isotope raced toward my heart. It raced through it. It raced through it again and again, excited to be free in new territory outside the lead lined storage jar.

The Caduceus

Serpent entwined staff and wings

The healing sigil

The Caduceus messenger staff was first borne by Iris, the herald of Hera in Greek mythology. It became the property of Hermes once Iris was obsolete. Paired serpents twist together to form a double helix. Angelic wings crest the peak of the Caduceus, the icon for modern Western medicine. It is the sign of healing.

History aside, did you notice that the rod comes to a point? It occurs right at the very bottom where the rod, snakes, and wings all blossom. Right from that hypodermic point. My eyes center on it each time the doctor's lapel pins flash under the unsympathetic fluorescent light of the examination room.

A super science

The future is here now

Medicine evolved

"Nuclear medicine," the doctor said. "The space age at our fingertips."

Sidelong from the treadmill, the doctor doodled on his clipboard.

I ran on the treadmill, oxygen tube strapped to my face like a feedbag, wires crisscrossing over my shoulder and into four beeping, standardized, clay-tan medical devices that looked like they were fished out of the 1980s.

I waited to fall over dead. Wasn't that what happened to people with heart disease when exertion taxed their bodies? Or was that congestive heart failure? There was a radioactive isotope coursing through my veins! Won't that melt something important before my heart fails from disease? What am I worrying about heart disease for? The pains in my chest will be nothing compared to losing my hair or growing an eleventh finger.

"Stop running. Let's go see what the radiation tells us," the doctor said.

The nurse disconnecting sEMG sensors from my chest smelled of cold cuts twisted with 409 cleaning solution. My lungs desperately grabbed for the air 30 minutes of vigorous exercise

had torn from me, but they rebelled against the potency of her aromatic bouquet. I wanted to retch.

The doctor stood, tucked his clipboard under an armpit and strolled out into the corridor toward the imaging lab. I shakily followed the sound of his squeaking Chuck Taylors down the hallway, shirtless and sweaty.

The imaging lab was dimly lit from the hallway behind me, the innumerable diodes and glowing switches before me, and fear from deep within dampening my vision.

"Go on ahead and lay down. Don't move," the doctor said.

I hesitated; the gurney in the center of the room provoked some feral sense of ambush in my brain. The probe-like device rotating about on its circular track over, under and around the bed blossomed panic in my irradiated chest.

"It's a camera. It will show us the pathways that the isotopes took through your body and highlight any obstructions or points of interest," the doctor said.

I laid down.

The extremely aromatic nurse appeared from nowhere and clipped me into modern doppelgangers of the ancient machines from the treadmill room. They beeped, whirred and throttled to life.

"We'd better add another dose so the camera image is strong," the doctor said.

The nurse obliged.

I told the nurse I didn't care for needles.

She skipped saying "Surprise."

"Let's setup a drip solution too," the doctor said.

Four attempts later, she plugged an IV into my arm and the two of them abandoned me while the camera tracked all around my chest. It moved a hairsbreadth from my flesh, retracted out for a panorama shot and bobbed like it approved of what it saw beneath my skin. It repeated this for an hour. The blood flow registered on the screens overhead in little speckles at first, coalescing into solid lines of veins and blobs of organs, a Google Map of my circulatory system. Those white blood cells could save ten minutes if they had taken that last right.

I heard a pop. My arm went cold.

*Air conditioner*, I thought. I kept my eye on the boxy camera and the glassy iris of the lens focused upon me.

At the end of it all, the camera hissed back from my body and began beeping.

I laid there. I waited for someone to come in and tell me what the multi-color images on the screens beside me meant. My arm was still cold.

The doctor walked in, looking at some papers. He strolled over to the screens and looked up at the 3-D images that the radiation revealed.

"Well, was this worth it, doctor? Am I in bad shape?" I asked.

I didn't really want him to answer that.

The doctor looked at the screens and then to me.

"You're all right as far as I can tell. Your heart doesn't look diseased. We've spared no expense."

He looked down and took a step back.

"Jurassic Park," I said.

"Hmm?"

"We've spared no expense...it is a line from Jurassic Park."

"Oh."

The doctor set down his paperwork onto the top of a monitor and walked out into the hallway. I heard the rustling of paper packaging and the squeaky snap of latex gloves. The doctor came back into the room, and gave a lopsided smile.

"How long has your arm been like that?"

I looked down.

Sanguineous lines had percolated from the IV spigot, dribbled down the length of my arm and coated my skin in a deep burgundy shell. My ears became alerted to a soft patter in the room that had been drowned out by the whirr of the camera's aperture and servo motors of the robotic arm. A puddle the size of a salad plate had collected on the green tiled floor.

I told them I didn't like needles.

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English 375:01

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### The Eternally Fruitless Labor

For centuries, philosophers and scholars have been struggling to understand and quantify knowledge. In fact, there is an entire branch of philosophy, epistemology, which seeks to study the nature of knowledge. The theories and discussions are endless, but Jesus, one of the world's most influential philosophers, taught in a way that sought to oppose traditional human understanding; this is exemplified through his use of ambiguous parables. He spoke in parables; they often depicted the juxtaposition between God and the world. The typical earthly topics (labor, weddings, baking, etcetera) help reveal an inner, sacred knowledge – one that is far more complex than conventional understanding. This gives each individual reader the chance to discover, explore and interpret the parable on different levels. For example, the parable of the vineyard and the laborers (Matthew 20:1-15) has been interpreted as a call for private generosity and equality through socialism – two very different perspectives. Out of each interpretation, new knowledge and understanding is found; therefore, Jesus encourages a loving and understanding interpretative community that should be focused not on explaining knowledge or finding “right” answers, but on individual meaning and discovery.

The parable of the vineyard and the laborers begins, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard” (Matthew 20:1). The landowner agrees to pay them a typical day's wage; a couple hours later, he finds more workers and agrees to pay them what is “right.” The landowner repeats this process again a

couple hours later; he asks why they are still standing in the marketplace idle, and they respond that no one has hired them yet. Thus he hires them, and they go to work in the vineyard until the end of the day. At the end of the day, he pays them all the same wages – a denarius. Of course, the laborers who had been working since early in the morning were upset at this injustice. The landowner responds, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (Matthew 20:13-15). In Crossan’s book, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus*, he asserts that it is largely agreed that the next verse, “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16), was not originally part of Jesus’ parable (Crossan 109); thus, this reversal parable ends with open-ended and rhetorical questions that leave the hearers and readers yearning for an answer.

Perhaps most obviously, this parable can be interpreted as a call for generosity and grace. The reason the landowner gives a full day’s wage to the workers hired at the eleventh-hour of the twelve-hour workday is the landowner’s generosity. He provides at least a decent wage to them, even though they did not earn it. In *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, Hultgren concludes his interpretation of the parable of the vineyard and the laborers with the following: “The point of the parable – both at the level of Jesus and the level of Matthew’s Gospel – is that God saves by grace, not by our worthiness. The church at worship does not first of all celebrate what its people do for God, but celebrates God and what God has done for them” (Hultgren 43). This conclusion is logical, interesting and inspiring, but perhaps a bit simplistic.

It is important to further Hultgren’s interpretation, because this is not only a picture of God’s kindness and charity towards humankind, but it is also an image of how we should act

towards others – graciously and generously, making certain that everyone around us has what he or she needs. If we fully commit to this interpretation, we see a much more individualistic relationship with God and faith develop, which is a major shift from the Old Testament and Israel's way of interpreting through the collective thought and being. We keep the collective relationship to each other, but begin to interact with God as individuals, not as a people. In this way, a new and deeper knowledge and understanding is developed. This interpretation can be proved and interpreted well, but it can also be argued against well.

In Scott's book *Hear then the Parables: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus*, he begins by questioning the traditional reading of the householder as a generous role model (Scott 283). If the point was generosity, perhaps the wages should have been more than barely peasant wages for the time period (Scott 283). Further, perhaps the landowner should have generously given extra to those who worked all day; after all, Jesus had always been a teacher of going the extra mile (Matthew 5:41). If the landowner is not supposed to be interpreted as generous, what is the meaning of the parable?

If the generosity is not the message, then perhaps equality is. This parable has been used as a call for political revolution in the form of socialism. In a socialistic state, every citizen is given equal pay – no matter the job. One can see how this plays out in the parable; no matter the levels of work, each worker is given enough to survive – a much more collective lifestyle. On the contrary, capitalism has class systems naturally bred into the system – a hierarchy. So the parable teaches an anti-capitalistic point of view, because the landowner at the end of the parable destroys the hierarchy by pointedly giving each worker equal pay (Scott 296). This can be applied to not only politics, but also the church. Today, the church has a definite hierarchy. Pharisees and Priests are naturally at the top, and the tax collectors and peasants are often found

at the bottom. This parable expresses an intense distaste for such hierarchies. The kingdom of God is open to all people, at all times – regardless of merit.

Although the implementation is different, when we zoom out on this parable and see the metanarrative, both focus on loving others with actions – whether through private generosity or equality through socialism, which has always been Jesus’ chief concern (Luke 10:27). Jesus leaves the actual execution up for interpretation.

Maurice Nicoll’s book, *The New Man: An Interpretation of Some Parables and Miracles of Christ*, explores the possible implications to this idea of subjective execution. His idea focuses on goodness versus truth (Nicoll 44-46). He argues that goodness is greater than truth, and truth is what has caused all the problems and wars in the world, because it is based on opinion and knowledge, which is difficult to prove (Nicoll 46-49). His exploration of human knowledge as a problem – not a solution, is in direct contradiction with conventional wisdom. Traditionally truth says that the people who worked all day deserve more, but the parable takes that idea and spins it around into a “new” knowledge. The householder had good intentions (whether generosity or equality), and that is the main point. Not only is absolute rightness’ existence questionable, but it is also essentially meaningless without goodness and love. From this, we also realize that perspectives should not be placed in hierarchies either.

The ideas and meanings in the parable of the vineyard and the laborers can be translated into many different ways of life and subjects. We know this, because the use of hyperbole clearly leads the reader to believe there is something “more” going on in the story. Overall it (and many other parables) encourages an open interpretative community, which is especially important in the field of literature. In fact, the idea itself of looking inwards for meaning was a recent surge in literary theory – Reader Response Theory.

Reader Response Theory essentially encourages readers to look inward for answers, and through personal experiences, many interpretations can be proved and accepted. The parable uses this exact move when the landowner turns to the grumbling early workers and says, "Friend, have I done you wrong?" (Matthew 20:13). The use here of the word "friend" is very important, because he is asking a singular individual, a friend (a positive term), to answer the question for him or herself. Many scholars have criticized this theory because of its tendency to destabilize truth, and many philosophers have criticized Jesus for the same crime, but perhaps this interesting and albeit frustrating idea of individual meaning would create a more aware community. Our current society and education circles do not usually condone "feeling," which is a paradox in itself, because making the reader "feel" is clearly the purpose of every storyteller; we also see this in the parable of the vineyard and the laborer.

When reading this parable, we truly **feel** the outrage of the laborers who have been working all day, because in our mortal understanding, it is unfair. Reader Response Theory also focuses in on the emotional response a reader has to a text. And that point of emotion is exactly where the householder turns the story into a reversal. That feeling is the most memorable part of the parable, and it is what the reader is asked to focus on and answer to.

The parable of the vineyard and the laborers has many different interpretations that can be argued, but we miss the true meaning if we spend time arguing those points. When interpreting the parables of Jesus or any text, it is important to step back and look at the metanarrative. In this case, we see that the kingdom of heaven longs and demands for an open and accepting interpretative community – a lesson that many branches of society can learn from, particularly politics, religion and academia. There is a higher calling than arguing with one another, and it is to love and respect one another.

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emmanuel anderson  
Cellini's Perseus

A girl sits on a guitar case  
singing Dylan's "Subterranean Homesick  
Blues" in the boxy shadow of Uffizi.  
While tourists pick through Florence  
cleaning up the culture marrow like vultures.

At 2:00 in the afternoon the sun turns  
Medusa's brazen serpents to gold once again  
in the furrowed fist of Perseus.  
Dylan's druggy lyrics seem to be a serenade  
*Look out, kid is there something you did  
To lose your precious head?*

I linger in the Piazza Della Signora,  
beside the prostate Chthonic body.  
Sword-bearing Perseus pauses  
To look back at the dish of Medusa's belly  
and the ripe orange halves of her breasts.

Like a wild boar he entered her cave  
and cleaved her while she slept.  
None of the hundred eyes on her head  
turned upward to face the curve of his sword.  
I remember the last time I heard Medusa's myth,  
a tragic story, and wonder if I am not complicit

in her fate. And I am more than vaguely aware  
of, that is to say, I cannot stop thinking about  
what I do not fully understand: the American Colonel  
who said on the television, *we lit up Baghdad  
like a Christmas tree , it was shock and awe.*

Our eyes meet when the girl playing a Bob Dylan  
song stops and she says, *The death can be beautiful,  
no?* And my mind is possessed  
by Lance Corporal Steven Henry's ear,  
which lay on a street in Falluja,

clipped off by a gleaming piece of shrapnel.



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Gender: The Weapon of Choice in Erec & Enide?

Without question, a substantial amount of Chrétien De Troyes medieval narrative *Erec & Enide* revolves around the development of plot structures that function as a sort of gender experiment. In episode after episode, representatives of each sex are placed in peculiar situations and are asked to “use” gender appropriately. Chrétien’s knights, for example, senselessly wander from one battle to another in an effort to uphold their masculine honor and integrity. Women mechanically follow directions and strive for outward beauty in order to uphold a presumed feminine ideal. It is easy to read such a text as an engine for patriarchal ideology. Yet, work in gender theory may allow us to complicate this striving. Judith Butler argues in her work *Gender Trouble* that gender is a complete fabrication; gender is only “performed” and does not otherwise exist. She states, “If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity” (136). Instead of gender being an inherent biological disposition, she claims that gender “is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all,” and that these acts are done voluntarily because “we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right.” Butler’s theory seems to ring true for Chrétien’s *Erec & Enide*, but what is perhaps more interesting, and perhaps problematic, is how the contemporary “gender ideal” of Butler’s theory seems entrenched in the characters of the story even without the use of modern media which would seem so important in the

enunciation of the idea in our own contemporary culture. It seems that Chrétien's text is in a sense filling this void by providing guidance on what the gender ideal is for its medieval culture, while all the while corroborating Butler's claim that gender is created through social transmission instead of biological disposition. As it is for Butler, it seems that gender for the medieval culture is a compulsory act and a source of societal control.

Perhaps one of the best examples of gender performativity in Chrétien's text is the story of Erec & Enide. Chrétien tells us that before Erec's marriage with Enide he is seen as a perfect model for male gender which is defined through his actions: "his name was Erec. He was of the Round table and had received great honor at court: as long as he had been there no knight had been so highly praised...never was any man of his youth so accomplished in knighthood" (38). Thus Erec's identity is formed by his victories in battle and the associated valor, which both work to produce his masculinity as a consequence of his performance. Enide is seen as Erec's perfect feminine counterpart. Her identity is based in contrast to Erec's by her outward appearance and dress, as well as her subservient attitude towards the tasks asked of her by men. Chrétien writes that "the maiden was very beautiful, for Nature in making her had turned all her attention to the task...never was such a beautiful creature seen in the whole world...she was in no way ill-bred" (43).

It is interesting to note that although Nature is the reported source of Enide's beauty, Nature's production of Enide's beauty is oddly described as a "task" which seems to imply that Enide's beauty is the result of a continuing process rather than an inherent biological disposition. That is to say that Enide must continue in Nature's toiling process of outward beautification in order to remain in the realm of the feminine ideal. Thus, Nature's "task" in forming beauty is not to be seen as inherent biological disposition, but rather as

performative act. It seems that not even Nature is immune from the process of performativity.

However, the gender act quickly falls apart as Erec fails to continue performing his gender after he is wed with Enide, “But Erec was so in love with her that he cared no more for arms, nor did he go to tournaments. He cared no longer for tourneying” (67). Joan M. Farrante even goes so far in her work *Woman As Image In Medieval Literature* to state that “the sexual roles have reversed” here. She writes, “Chrétien’s Erec...shows a tendency to ignore the realm of male activity...after marrying Enide, he stays alone with her and pays others to do his fighting for him” (80). Thus it is Erec that steps into the realm of the feminine by replacing his warrior masculinity for more feminine qualities. Instead of engaging in battle, Erec “wanted to enjoy his wife’s company...He turned all his attention to embracing and kissing her; he pursued no other delight.”

Of course, if Butler’s theory is indeed applicable to this particular story, then the text should reflect some sort of social sanction against Erec for failing to perform his gender “right.” The text does not fail to deliver this sanction. Chrétien writes, “All the nobles said that it was a great shame and sorrow that a lord such as he once was no longer wished to bear arms. He was so blamed by everyone, by knights and men-at-arms alike, that Enide heard them say among themselves that her lord was becoming recreant with respect to arms and knighthood, because he had profoundly changed his way of life” (67). This basic social sanction holds the key to the creation and maintaining of artificial gender roles. Because gender is “not expressive but performative” (141), the key to securing Erec’s masculinity lays not in his past, but his ability repeat his socially approved actions. Butler writes, “This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperience of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (140). Thus, it is up to society to ensure that the performance is repeated through the use

of “punitive consequences” and tools like public scorn in order to prod Erec back into performing his gender role.

Here, however, the text turns in an interesting direction. Erec seems to take no notice of the public sanction and instead continues spending his time in the delight of his wife. It takes the act of his own wife breaking her own gender role in order to restore Erec to his masculine performance of gender by confronting her husband about his behavior. This creates a very curious situation as the gender roles between the couple, as Ferrante argues, have become completely reversed, albeit only temporarily. Erec, reproached by his spouse, realizes that in a sense he is performing a feminine role of subservience in listening to his wife, and Enide likewise is performing the masculine role in voicing her concern. It takes this act of Erec’s wife literally calling him a girl to spur him back into the social gender system. Erec responds by forbidding Enide to speak to him and by immediately setting out in travel.

This response at first seems strange but in reality this approach is twofold. The first problem is that Erec must reassert his masculinity with himself, his wife, and society. In addition, as Butler argues, Enide’s transgression of stepping out of her feminine role in order to reproach her husband cannot go unpunished. Thus Erec must come up with a solution that fulfills both of these requirements. Enide’s forced silence works to provide Butler’s required social sanction. However, as Ferrante writes, the silence also buys Erec time to “admit his own failure” (80) and reconcile his own gender as he seeks, in a sense, to put back on the pants in the relationship. The travel is intentionally meant to expose Erec to danger with which he must re-engage in the masculine gender performance and repetition of battle in order to regain the security of his gender in the eyes of himself, his wife, and society. Ferrante notes that only when Erec is able to reconcile his own gender identity with

his new relationship to his wife is the conflict ended, "His reunion with Enide signals his own perfection and enables him to accept his proper role in society" (81).

In this sense, the love between the couple and their gender roles are only reconciled when their love is made to exist without compromising the existing structure and expectations of the sexes in society. As long as Erec continues mindlessly wandering from battle to battle no one will question his masculinity, but as soon as Erec forsakes societal ambition for more selfish pleasures, his gender identity becomes unstable once again.

It is a curious paradox then, that Erec gains no advantage on an individual level by performing his gender. In fact, as demonstrated when Erec put aside his gender performance in order to spend more time with his newlywed bride Enide, his pleasure actually increased (and thus his subsequent obsession in his love). Thus, if there is nothing to be gained on an individual level through the gender performance, why is the surrounding culture so concerned about Erec's failure to continue his performance? Perhaps, if an answer cannot be found in what Erec has to gain through the continuation of his gender performance, then the focus should be switched to targeting who (or what), would have something to lose if Erec could not be persuaded to continue his gender performance.

Louis Althusser perhaps hints at the answer to this search in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." He writes "As Marx said, every child knows that a social formation which did not reproduce the conditions of production at the same time as it produced would not last a year" (127). Taking this idea into context, it would be safe to say that the social formation of the time for Erec and Enide would be a class-based system starting at the top with the king & his nobles, and ending at the bottom with the peasants and serfs. Thus, as Althusser contends, the king must have some sort of device to ensure the continuation of this class structure if he wishes to keep reaping the benefits that such a system produces.

Althusser posits that this solution is twofold. The first device operates through the “repressive state apparatus” which “contains the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police...” (142). Taken again in the context of Erec’s era, the repressive state apparatus can be found in the king and his army, which is of course made up of knights just like Erec. Thus, if the king is to keep benefiting from the existing class stratification, he must rely on his army in order to “repress” those who would seek to overthrow it, including his own military. So how then is the king able to keep control of his military and those with which he shares his power? Althusser writes that this is the second part of the solution which he calls the “Ideological State Apparatus.” Whereas “the Repressive State Apparatus functions ‘by violence’...the Ideological State Apparatus functions by Ideology” (145).

The king needs a tool to ensure that knights in his kingdom will come to his aid and do battle when called upon who are loyal, experienced, battle-hardened, and always prepared to engage the enemy. He seeks to neutralize the threat of his able-bodied knights being disloyal, inexperienced, out of shape, and lazy. It seems that the king’s tool of choice to achieve these ends is the ideology of gender. It is Erec’s gender that encourages him to be loyal, strong, and prepared for battle.

Butler, in responding to Althusser in her own book *The Psychic Life of Power*, helps us understand the linking between gender and ideology in becoming a tool that maintains this class structure. She writes that ideology, by its very nature, must be performative and ritualistic, “For Althusser, to perform tasks ‘conscientiously’ is to perform them, as it were, again and again” (118). This repetition is meant to blur artificial performance and genuine identity of an individual together to the point where an individual accepts the performance not only as a part of identity, but as a necessary part of identity. Butler writes, “ritual is meant to render belief and practice inseparable” (Psychic Life 120). Thus, because gender is created by ideology, society’s insistence in the need for repetition and ritual of Erec’s

gender performance becomes clear. However, this also creates a problem. Butler writes “The notion of ritual suggests that it is performed...Inherent to any performance is a compulsion to ‘acquit oneself,’ and so prior to any performance is an anxiety and a knowingness which becomes articulate” (Psychic Life 120). This creates a quandary because even if Erec doesn’t identify his gender as an ideological tool, he will have a disposition to return to a previous “non-performative state.” Because of this, Butler writes that the ideology (like gender) “animates only on the occasion of the reprimand” (Psychic Life 120). Thus society’s insistence on the repetition is actually twofold. On one hand “ritual is meant to render belief and practice inseparable” while at the same time functioning as a “reprimand” and providing social sanctions (such as scorn) that encourage Erec to resume his performance should he have “a compulsion to acquit” himself of his performance.

The ideological intensity surrounding this idea must be enormous, as those who are reaping the benefits of this class stratification are relying on gender to keep this structure intact. Thus, it comes as no surprise that society has been instructed not to take their gender roles lightly. It literally takes only a single act of Enide calling Erec a girl, and herself stepping into the role of the man, for Erec to voluntarily step back into the system.

In this sense, because of the ideological intensity surrounding gender, it can be used as a type of ransom which can be taken away from an individual and held hostage as leverage into goading an individual to act in accordance to society’s goals. Ferrante notes this idea as well in her work *In Pursuit of Perfection : Courtly Love in Medieval Literature*. She writes that, “[Erec’s] His failure was not simply in devoting himself to Enide, but in not taking his social responsibility seriously enough. He discharged it in a superficial way by equipping his men to fight, but refusing to fight himself” (146). Society demands that Erec take the social obligations of knighthood seriously. Staying at home all day long making

love to his wife doesn't qualify as fulfilling that obligation. Thus, as Ferrante contends, society must seek a tool that will restore Erec into the proper prescribed roles of knighthood. The tool chosen to achieve this end is obvious; Erec's gender identity is attacked as a means of prodding him back into a system that relies on him as part of a larger apparatus that maintains class stratification and the status quo.

This idea is compounded as the story of Erec & Enide is found in a text. Althusser writes that the media transmission and the arts themselves work as a transmission of ideology favoring the ruling classes.

What are the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)? They must not be confused with the (repressive) State apparatus...Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question 'functions by violence' – at least ultimately...I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialized institutions. I propose an empirical list of these...-The communications ISA (press, radio, and television, etc.), - The cultural ISA (Literature, the Arts, sports, etc.) (143).

In this sense, Chrétien's work can be understood as performing a larger function.

Chrétien's work not only reflects and affirms Butler's theory of gender and Althusser's theory regarding State Apparatuses in their relation to maintaining the current class system, but in itself as a text also works as an Ideological State Apparatus in the form as both a cultural ISA in its role as literature, as well as a shared role as a communicative device.

Thus Chrétien's stories can be viewed as mechanism which in itself is promoting ideology surrounding gender role expectations and other ideology meant to keep the ruling class intact through the very stories included in the text.

Only when Chrétien's work is viewed as an ISA in of itself does it become possible to see the relation between the problems the characters face in the stories, and their intended purpose by the author. By the very nature of an Ideological State Apparatus, Chrétien need not have even been aware the ideological effect the text would have upon its reading by the public. Thus, the stories of Erec & Enide, among others written by Chrétien, can come to be seen more as just a tool in which Butler's and Althusser's theories can be examined, but can be seen in of themselves as a tool to promote the continuance of such ideology in the future. For, as Butler notes, it is simply not enough for the public to hear such ideology once. It must be repeated and ritualized in everything the public does — their dress, their personality, their literature, etc. Arthurian legend certainly seems to have fit the standard of repetition as the stories were told not once, but over and over across oceans and immune to national boundaries. Chrétien seems to have secured this repetition through the ages by copying the stories down for the consumption of generations to come. It seems to have worked as to this day both genders still strive to meet many of the same performative ideals as calling a man a girl still seems to elicit a similar desired response as Enide expected when she used the word on her husband.

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Capstone Project

Queer Austen: Male-Male Intimacy in *Pride and Prejudice*

Known as one of the Western canon's greatest heterosexual love stories, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* concerns marriage, and the pursuit of marriage, between men and women. The famous first sentence of the novel crystallizes these concerns quite memorably: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (Austen 5). This sentence makes heterosexuality compulsory and universal: a wife for each man. Given this situation, *Pride and Prejudice* may not, at first glance, provide space for homosexuality. The situation, however, is more complex: the heterosexual relationships in Jane Austen's novel are based upon a heteronormativity that is itself hatched from homosexual desire. Not only does Austen subtly stretch the concepts of love and desire to include homosexuality as a possibility, but homosexual passion lays the very foundations for the novel's heterosexual attachments.

This feature of the text, however subtle, is pivotal in the context of a Regency Britain that combined "sensibility, effeminacy, and ambiguity...in a powerfully defensive, reactive mix that catalogue[d] virtually every descriptor in the Regency arsenal of homophobic discourse" (Nagle 90). While homosexuality was a sensitive topic for any writer in Regency Britain, it was especially so for a potentially conservative woman writer such as Austen. Despite and perhaps because of these contexts and limitations, Austen describes an implicit homosexual desire that reinforced, even produced, society's heteronormative expectations. Far from broaching any taboo, Austen creates a model of

desire that reinforces heteronormativity and indeed heterosexuality. The heterosexual economy that she takes part in, as well as writes about in her novels, is built upon the ideals of queer attachment. I see this as a significantly progressive view of sexuality, even in the wild context of second-generation Romanticism, in that Austen not only insists that homosexuality should be accepted, but also redefines what should be considered “normal” within Regency society.

In his book, *Sexuality and the Culture of Sensibility in British Romanticism*, Christopher C. Nagle studies the expression of heterosexual desire through an analysis of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*. Through this study, Nagle scrutinizes Anne and Wentworth’s relationship, noting every “rare socially appropriate means of touching” (Nagle 107). It is through the idea of societal rules that Austen defines desire; because Anne and Wentworth are of opposite genders, they can never speak completely honestly with one another due to always being in the company of others. I agree with Nagle’s analysis of *Persuasion*, in which Austen reshapes a queer history of sensibility into a fiercely homophobic and therefore properly “Romantic” paradigm, but I am struck by the extent to which its insights into heterosexuality are quite inapplicable to *Pride and Prejudice*. Unlike Anne and Wentworth, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley can converse freely in *Pride and Prejudice*: social situations produce an intimacy of language even while the two, by virtue of their mutual masculinity, cannot physically touch one another. Because they cannot find “socially appropriate means of touching,” Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley must express their reciprocal desire through deeply coded speech and actions, as well as their views, and choices, regarding the courting of the opposite, and socially acceptable, gender. As I will show in the analysis to follow, this model of homosociality propels the

plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as serves to imply that heteronormative relationships are built and premised upon relationships of the homosexual nature. This changes the novel's meaning, and message, completely: whatever the famous first sentence would suggest, the novel does not *begin* with compulsory heterosexuality: it arrives at it gradually, contingently, and only by first carving out an authorized space in which queer relations may, or indeed must, take hold. Austen essentially implies that without queer attachments, heterosexual attachments would cease to exist.

Consider, for instance, the way in which Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy interact at the ball. I choose this scene because, in many ways, it establishes the paradigm for enforced heterosexuality that the rest of the plot will inherit: it is precisely a scene of compulsory courtship, and its frustrations are focused on Mr. Darcy's unwillingness to play by the proscribed rules of Regency courtship. Although Mr. Bingley is described as being "lively and unreserved, danc[ing] every dance, [and] was angry that the ball closed so early," Mr. Darcy is described as "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" because he "danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, [and] declined being introduced to any other lady" (Austen 14). Mr. Darcy must watch Mr. Bingley dance with women, knowing that there is not a possibility for his own relationship with Mr. Bingley ever to be that public. Austen stresses the fact that Mr. Darcy dances with both of Mr. Bingley's sisters. He dances with them because it would not be acceptable in society to ignore them; because Mr. Darcy is heavily scrutinized by the public, he must conform to society's rules publically in order to break them privately. However, he dances only once with each of them, eliminating any chance that he may be sexually interested in Mr. Bingley's unmarried sister. In my view, the fact that Mr. Darcy

refuses to be introduced to other women implies a pivotal situation in which his primary focus remains always on Mr. Bingley, and his surliness is a product of his jealousy for Mr. Bingley and envy for his dance partners.

Although Mr. Bingley participates in heteronormative society by way of dancing with women, he cannot remain unaffected by Mr. Darcy's jealousy. Mr. Bingley "came from the dance," trying to persuade Mr. Darcy to adjust his behavior (Austen 15). In this moment, Austen emphasizes their queer attachment; Mr. Bingley leaves a situation as rare and valuable as the scenes of touching between Anne and Wentworth in *Persuasion*, one in which society deems it appropriate for men to touch women for the purpose of eventually seducing them. He withdraws from that scene in order to conduct a conversation with Mr. Darcy, a man. But, I read this scene not as Mr. Bingley's withdrawal from erotic enjoyment, but as his immersion within it: it is more erotic for Mr. Bingley to converse with Mr. Darcy than to engage in socially accepted means of touching with a woman. Mr. Bingley has not been nearly as interested in dancing with women as the public gaze might believe; Mr. Bingley is able, for instance, to note that Mr. Darcy was standing alone for extended periods of time, which implies that though Mr. Bingley participated in the act of dancing with women, his mind and attention were consistently elsewhere. Mr. Bingley states, "I must have you dance. I hate to see you standing about by yourself in this stupid manner. You had better dance" (Austen 15). In stating, "I hate to see you standing about by yourself," Mr. Bingley is offering not disapproval but reassurance to Mr. Darcy: the statement implies that he wishes that he could be standing with him, conversing, instead of touching women in a socially prescribed manner. The fact that Mr. Bingley is driven to use the word "hate," despite his

“easiness, openness [and] ductility of...temper,” implies that seeing Mr. Darcy standing alone in a social setting upsets Mr. Bingley more than his actions could convey in a public setting (Austen 21). It is the only place within the novel where Mr. Bingley asserts his opinion so strongly. Standing with Mr. Darcy at the very forge of heterosexual attachment, Mr. Bingley here bridges the gap between what is acceptable in private and in public. The repeated requests for Mr. Darcy to dance stem from Mr. Bingley’s guilt, as he is participating in the “uniquely socially sanctioned erotic activity,” i.e. dancing, while the man he wishes he could be dancing with is simply watching (Nagle 113). By dancing with women, Mr. Bingley is publically conforming to society’s erotic demands, essentially attempting to sever his queer attachment to Mr. Darcy. However, Mr. Bingley “came from the dance,” which implies that although he realizes that he cannot maintain his queer attachment to Mr. Darcy, it will not be an easy task for him to end their connection. This internal struggle is depicted through the passionate idea of “hate” contrasted with the statement of compulsory heterosexuality, “You had better dance.” The very statement resonates with coercion, even as it claims for itself the very intimacy of the advisor’s position. Through the repetition of asking Mr. Darcy to dance, Mr. Bingley subtly reminds him of their heterosexual obligations to their families, as well as that they are in public and therefore are being heavily scrutinized. The juxtaposition of the emotion that motivates Mr. Bingley to use the word “hate” and the compulsory heterosexuality of the last sentence implies that although it may be Mr. Bingley’s first impulse to act passionately with Mr. Darcy, he realizes that society deems it impossible and that he must erotically conform to a heterosexual relationship.

Responding angrily to Mr. Bingley's suggestion of conforming to society's expectations, Mr. Darcy refuses to dance, saying, "You know how I detest it, unless I am particularly acquainted with my partner... your sisters are engaged, and there is not another woman in the room, whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with" (Austen 15). By saying, "You know how I detest it," Mr. Darcy immediately establishes a form of intimate conversation with Mr. Bingley, implying that they may have already argued several times about the fact that Mr. Darcy dislikes dancing with women, and that he dislikes it even more when Mr. Bingley participates. This suggests that something similar may have occurred before; perhaps we are supposed to believe that the two have accompanied each other to other balls. The only dancing partner that would satisfy Mr. Darcy, he claims, would be someone he is already "particularly acquainted with," a claim for intimacy that refers to Mr. Bingley. In this way, the intimacy of male friendship becomes the precondition for, even the wished alternative to, heterosexual courtship. In this economy of intimacies, Mr. Bingley's sisters received preferential treatment by Mr. Darcy because they are related to Mr. Bingley. In an attempt to not offend Mr. Bingley as he insults the rest of the females in the room, Mr. Darcy makes a point to say that both of the Bingley sisters are busy. Tellingly, Mr. Darcy insists that "There is not another woman in the room whom it would not be a punishment to me to stand up with." With this, Austen does not merely suggest Mr. Darcy's self-absorption and misogyny: indeed, he directly specifies here that heterosexual courtship with women is the very form of social punishment that one might expect from someone in his situation. He is explicitly rejecting the women in the room; he leaves his feelings for men directly unmentioned. As he rejects the women in the room, Mr. Darcy essentially forces Mr. Bingley to make an

erotic commitment. He states, "Return to your partner and enjoy her smiles, for you are wasting your time with me" (Austen 15). There appears to be no chance to completely withdraw from erotic possibilities, as Mr. Bingley is given the choice of dancing with women, or further conversing with a man. Mr. Bingley must choose an erotic commitment; he does not have the option of leaving or participating in a nonsexual activity. Both of his choices have sexual connotations which force Mr. Bingley to choose a sexual identity in public. Mr. Bingley chooses to return to his dance partner, essentially conforming to his society's prescribed heterosexuality.

Homosociality is not the universal condition in *Pride and Prejudice*, but it does seem to signal that characters are significant and will be desirable, ultimately. Even before Mr. Darcy is given a name, Austen seeks to differentiate him from other men through his intimate connection with Mr. Bingley. She notes that he and Mr. Bingley are the only unmarried men in their party of five, and take note that they are five instead of the party of twelve that had originally been intended (Austen 14). Through noting this, Austen suggests that each member of their party must have a significant role, or attachment, to one another; they are five, instead of twelve, indicating that their party was organized of the few people that Mr. Bingley cared for more than the seven people they had left behind. Because the remaining members of the party consist of "Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, [and] the husband of the eldest," Austen sets Mr. Darcy apart as the only one without a blood relation. She insinuates that Darcy may have a private attachment to a member of his party, specifically Mr. Bingley (Austen 14). We are encouraged to think of Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley as together as Mr. Darcy talks of intimacy and Mr. Bingley is the only one whom he is intimate with.

Stressing that both men are “handsome and gentlemanlike,” Austen emphasizes that they are considered to be desirable (Austen 14). Austen gives both men the status of “gentleman,” which not only shows the reader that they are also restrained by their ideas of duty and responsibility, but also seems to hint at their queer attachment. It is important to note that gentlemen such as William Beckford and Horace Walpole made the term “gentleman” notoriously queer in the late eighteenth century; these gentlemen made Lord Byron’s scandalously homosexual activities more acceptable during the time in which Austen lived. In my view, when Austen describes Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley as “gentlemen,” she is not simply making a reference to the privileged class; instead, she references a figure for the open secret of aristocratic homosexuality, a term that could not, by Austen’s time, be divorced from queer desire in a literary context. However, unlike William Beckford and the “gentlemen” of his ilk, the male protagonists within Austen’s novels would have too much of a sense of responsibility and obligation to indulge themselves in what would be considered as selfishness. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley experience reciprocal desire; however, in the world that Austen creates, they must also recognize that they must eventually find a heterosexual relationship to partake in due to the familial obligations that come with being the head of each household. Horace Walpole never married, therefore negating his familial obligations to procreate, where William Beckford appeared to succumb to society’s prescribed procreation after fleeing to Europe due to a homosexual scandal. However, Rictor Norton noted that Beckford collected “newspaper cuttings about homosexual scandals until the very year of his death... about notable gentlemen, usually by means of innuendo” (Norton). *Pride and Prejudice* seems to follow this tradition of innuendo; the novel acknowledges queer

attachments by way of actions and implications, but it never blatantly labels or defines them. Elfenbein notes “the keys to the good man’s virtue were moderation, self-discipline, and restraint” (Elfenbein 20). Austen has written Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley as “good men”; therefore, they do not have the capacity to be like Horace Walpole and negate their familial obligations. Due to their “good men” virtues, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley realize that their queer attachment is temporary and must be hidden, as they will participate in society’s prescribed heteronormativity; both men will eventually marry and eventually procreate.

In her book, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, Eve Sedgwick acknowledges the logic of closeted homosexuality, as well as links it to homosocial bonds. She explains that these bonds concentrate “the fantasy energies of compulsion, prohibition, and explosive violence,” stating that homosocial bonds are “structured by the logic of paranoia... [and] mapped along the axes of social and political power” (Sedgwick 162). In his letter to Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy recognizes his tie to Mr. Wickham, stating that he had “the opportunity of seeing him in unguarded moments” (Austen 173). This serves to not only underline that Mr. Wickham feels as though he must be emotionally guarded, but also to reiterate the separatism between the public and private realms. It is significant that these words occur in a letter that Mr. Darcy has written; through the use of the word “opportunity,” Mr. Darcy blatantly implies that he took pleasure in seeing Mr. Wickham during these moments of intimate vulnerability that were exiled into the private realm of secrecy and domesticity. This is the only point in the novel where Mr. Darcy seems to disregard the logic of closeted homosexuality, as he hints at his queer past to a woman. This moment is significant because it signifies Mr.

Darcy's gradual identification as a heterosexual, one who doesn't necessarily have to abide by society's strict rules of private and public realms. Sigmund Freud inadvertently links the private and public realms through the concept of jealousy. Essentially, Freud noted that jealousy is the purest hint of homosexuality that can exist in the public realm, as he believed that jealousy is the projection of denied homosexuality. Mr. Darcy must publically deny his queer attachments in order to participate as a member of the nineteenth century society in which he lived. However, although Mr. Darcy cannot act upon his queer attachments in public, his jealousy remains apparent.

Darcy's jealousy represents the hinge between homosexuality, homosociality, and heterosexuality in this novel. Playing upon the idea of familial obligations, Austen uses Mr. Darcy's jealousy to propel the plot of her novel into its fully heterosexual regime that will be familiar to most of its readers. Mr. Darcy is provoked into insulting Elizabeth by Mr. Bingley's declaration of Jane being "the most beautiful creature [he] ever beheld" (Austen 15). Because Mr. Bingley uses the word "creature," a term that includes Mr. Darcy, instead of "woman," Mr. Darcy feels as if his position as Mr. Bingley's object of affection is threatened. Had Mr. Bingley used the word "woman," instead of "creature," Mr. Darcy would not have threatened: in his view, women are obviously inferior to men. Elfenbein notes this link between homosexuality and misogyny, stating, "Although masculine women are abnormal, only they can achieve anything valuable because merely feminine women are worthless" (Elfenbein 5). Mr. Darcy not only feels that his attachment to Mr. Bingley is threatened, but he is also offended that the woman Mr. Bingley has chosen as his partner in a heterosexual relationship is so feminine. Mr. Bingley uses the word "creature," which causes Mr. Darcy to feel as if he is in

competition with Jane for Mr. Bingley's affection, and will automatically dislike anything that may be associated with her. Mr. Bingley states, "One of [Jane's] sisters [is] sitting down just behind you... Do let me ask my partner to introduce you," encouraging Mr. Darcy to dislike Elizabeth before even laying eyes on her (Austen 15). Motivated by his jealousy, Mr. Darcy looks "for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, [and] he withdrew his own and coldly" insults her (Austen 15). Austen uses the word "coldly" to underline that Mr. Darcy is experiencing more emotion, specifically jealousy and anger, than simply the distaste at looking at an unattractive, inferior, woman. The fact that he must snub her, by both refusing to be introduced to her, as well as catching her eye and then looking away, suggests that he feels some sort of malice towards her; I think this malice stems from Mr. Darcy's homoerotic jealousy and paranoia pertaining to the possibility of Mr. Bingley forming a heterosexual attachment to her sister.

Sedgwick notes that "Freud's study of Dr. Schreber shows clearly that the repression of homosexual desire in a man who by any commonsense standard was heterosexual, occasioned paranoid psychosis" and irrational malice (Sedgwick 20). This irrationally stems from negating the unacceptable idea of homosexuality through masking, and replacing, the object of the subject's affection. Freud's analysis states that the subject moves from homosexuality, "I am a man and I love him," to projected heterosexuality, "I don't love him, she loves him," to self-heterosexuality, "I am a man and I love her," and, finally, to irrational rage, "I am a man and I hate him, a man." I believe that *Pride and Prejudice* reformulates Freud's analysis: the subject of Freud's analysis already had a heterosexual sexual identity, whereas Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley ultimately sacrifice their queer attachment in order to gain heterosexual sexual identities.

Because Mr. Darcy does not, yet, identify heterosexually, he progress immediately from “I am a man and I love him,” to irrational rage towards the woman, not the man that he desires, “I am a man and I hate her.” Following this example, Mr. Darcy relays his irrational rage toward Jane through insulting her sister, Elizabeth; he states, “she is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me*; and I am in no humour...to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men” (Austen 15). It is significant that he insults her appearance, calling her “tolerable,” as beauty seems to be the only commodity that the Bennet women can offer in this society. Using the word “handsome,” a term that applies to men and women alike, serves to suggest that Mr. Darcy is not attracted to females exclusively. Through recognizing the opinions of other men, Mr. Darcy emphasizes his views pertaining to women, as well as juxtaposes his disinterest with women and his interest, and respect, for men. It is important to note that Mr. Darcy does not, yet, identify as a heterosexual, which underlines that Mr. Bingley is not the first man with whom he has experienced reciprocal homosexual desire.

Through his complicated history with Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham serves as a second example of Mr. Darcy’s queer attachments that pave the way to the obligatory heterosexuality of both characters as the novel progresses. Mr. Wickham essentially becomes Mr. Darcy’s nemesis; they appear to be fundamentally different, as “one has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it” (Austen 194). However, they are essentially mirror images of one another, containing similarities that revolve around the paranoia and jealousy that stem from their queer attachments. Describing his initial relationship with Mr. Darcy, Mr. Wickham states, “The greatest part of our youth was passed together; inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements” (Austen 78).

This direct statement of male-male intimacy provides a basis for their intimate relationship. Mr. Wickham underlines his attachment to Mr. Darcy through the phrase “sharing the same amusements.” The word “sharing” emphasizes a bond, a certain intimacy of shared resources, a certain affinity and understanding for the other’s perspective. Their activities are presented as those that were shared, that they could not, or had rather not, do alone. Through describing these activities ambiguously, using the term “amusements,” Mr. Wickham refuses to define them. The very term “amusements” implies a certain leisure, a certain strain of activity that cannot be rendered useful or necessary, and as such, the very queering of the social relation. These amusements may or may not have been sexual; they most certainly were “shared” queer acts of pleasure. Mr. Wickham’s description of childhood hints at oppression; he describes them as “inmates,” perhaps implying that they were prisoners of a compulsory heteronormative society that demanded such intimacies to be kept in the private, domestic, realm. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner’s article “Sex in Public” argues that “[heteronormative culture’s] conventional spaces presuppose a structural differentiation of ‘personal life’ from work, politics, and the public sphere” (Berlant and Warner 553). Mr. Wickham seems to recognize this, as his description of “inmates of the same house,” appears to insist on a realm of intimate domesticity that cannot venture into the public sphere. It is due to this rift between the public and private realms that concealment becomes necessary; in order for both men to actively participate in public society, they must conceal their queer attachment from scrutiny. However, Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham’s queer attachment was only strengthened by the feelings of necessary concealment; both men felt as if they had to conceal their true identity and sexual nature. In essence, the

camaraderie and intimacy between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham was built upon the idea of concealing an attachment that society deemed unacceptable.

Berlant and Warner delve into the question as to why homosexuality seems to be exiled into the private realm, stating, “national heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship” (Berlant and Warner 549). *Pride and Prejudice* was written in the nineteenth century, a century obsessed with purity and sanitization. In her book, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Anne McClintock analyzes the motivation behind the nineteenth century fetishism of cleanliness. She is interested in the way that soap and soap ads represent and analyze issues of nineteenth century race and imperial progress. However, it is necessary to extend McClintock’s analysis to other aspects of the nineteenth century that were considered vulgar and unclean. McClintock’s analysis seems to forget sexuality, something that I believe cannot be divorced from race or social politics. McClintock mentions an ad where a “black boy sits in the bath” and “a white boy bends over his ‘lesser’ brother, bestowing upon him” soap, describing the soap as “the commodity [that] can wash from the skin the very stigma of racial and class degeneration” (McClintock 214). Again, I believe that this can be applied to the idea of sexuality, specifically homosexuality. Similar to having colored skin, homosexuality was seen as unclean, vulgar, and unacceptable. *Pride and Prejudice* acknowledges this through Elizabeth, who states, “Mr. Darcy may perhaps have heard of such a place as Gracechurch Street, but he would hardly think a month’s ablution enough to cleanse him from its impurities, were he once to enter it; and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him” (Austen 126).

Elizabeth inadvertently juxtaposes Mr. Darcy's conformity to society's public demands of cleanliness to his private, queer attachment to Mr. Bingley. Through saying "and depend upon it, Mr. Bingley never stirs without him," Elizabeth is not only noting that the men are friends, but through her use of humor, she is also implying that there is something unnatural about their friendship; she underlines that they may be too attached. It seems as though Mr. Darcy conforms to society's public demands of cleanliness almost excessively; perhaps he is compensating, as he knows he is privately participating in what his society deems as vulgar and unclean. Andrew Elfenbein notes that "arrests for sodomy rose dramatically at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth," inferring that homosexuality pollutes what Berlant and Warner describe as "a space of pure citizenship." Elfenbein states that "the admired behavior of the man of feeling ... was only a hair's breadth away from the most despised behavior of the sodomite" (Elfenbein 27). The heteronormative society in which Mr. Darcy participates dictates that homosexuality must be kept away and excluded from the public society. Berlant and Warner's idea of national heterosexuality dictates that homosexuality is fundamentally wrong and must be kept in the private realm; this societal attitude propagates not only shame, but also the logic of closeted homosexuality.

*Pride and Prejudice* encourages its readers to think in terms of secrets, as both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham exemplify the logic of closeted homosexuality. This is underlined when Elizabeth states that Mr. Darcy should be "publically disgraced" due to his malice toward Mr. Wickham, who replies, "Some time or other he will be –but it shall not be by me... I can never defy or expose him" (Austen 77). Although in this moment Elizabeth believes that they are discussing Mr. Darcy's attitude, it becomes obvious that

Mr. Wickham is discussing an entirely different subject, one that would be more damaging to one's participation in society if it was "exposed." Through using the word "expose," Mr. Wickham implies that Mr. Darcy is vulnerable, that he has a secret. However, it can also be inferred that Mr. Darcy's secret includes Mr. Wickham, who refuses to expose Mr. Darcy, even though it appears as though he has nothing to gain by keeping Mr. Darcy's secret. This moment serves to not only underline the vulnerability of bonds built upon the idea of secrecy, but also to reiterate the idea that homosexuality could not be brought into the public realm; it must always stay in the realm of domesticity and secrets.

Again, the idea of secrecy propels the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley must keep their reciprocal desire hidden in order to participate within their society. Thus, at the ball, Mr. Bingley essentially denies his homosexuality, which inspires Mr. Darcy's irrational jealousy. Without this irrational jealousy pertaining to Mr. Bingley's attention towards Jane, Mr. Darcy would not have been provoked to insulting Jane's sister, Elizabeth. This insult later issues Elizabeth the ability to ignore Mr. Darcy, which in turn, sparks his romantic interest; Elizabeth is not actively pursuing him and his ten thousand dollars a year, as the stereotypical female would, which allows Mr. Darcy to see the potential of finding a proverbial man within a woman. Elizabeth's masculinity, prompted by Mr. Darcy's rudeness at the ball, gives Mr. Darcy the ability to see himself in a potentially successful heteronormative relationship. Mr. Darcy realizes that through pursuing a relationship with Elizabeth, a masculine woman, he is not altogether conforming to society's rules; because Elizabeth is female, Mr. Darcy becomes able to break society's rules in public, something he could never do with a man. However, their

heterosexual relationship is still abnormal; Elfenbein notes that “even as [novels of this time period] made mental energy a heroine’s most attractive quality, they forced her to lose it in order to become a suitable wife” (Elfenbein 26). Within *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. Darcy encourages Elizabeth’s “mental energy,” because it is what allows their relationship to succeed.

Elvira Casal also analyzes the dynamics of Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth’s heterosexual relationship. Her article, “Laughing at Mr. Darcy: Wit and Sexuality in *Pride and Prejudice*,” follows Mr. Darcy’s transition from conforming to societal rules to rejecting them through analyzing his expression of humor. Casal argues that this change in character is spurred on by Darcy’s gradual attraction to Elizabeth. She notes, “We never see Darcy laugh, but his smiles—which usually take place in the course of his exchanges with Elizabeth—suggest...a growing receptivity to Elizabeth’s love of laughter” (Casal 4). Although Casal’s article shows how Elizabeth’s laughter pervades societal stereotypes and expectations, as laughter “in either men or woman [was] vulgar,” it fails to make the extra step of considering that the reason for Mr. Darcy’s change in personality is due to his rejection of queer attachments as he gradually engages in a heteronormative relationship (Casal 2).

Although Mr. Darcy harbors his queer attachments, he must publically conform to them. Through conforming to society’s expectations, Mr. Darcy must reject the idea of laughter and link it to “irreverence towards authority and lack of proper self-control” (Casal 2). This, argues Casal, is the source of Mr. Darcy’s famously stoic, almost humorless character throughout the majority of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is significant, however, that he proves his tenderness precisely through private acts that fashion sex

publicly, especially in arranging for the legitimate marriage of Lydia and Mr. Wickham. However, as he gradually becomes more intimate with Elizabeth, and participates in a heterosexual and a socially sanctioned relationship, Mr. Darcy gains the ability to reject some of society's conventions in public.

Mr. Darcy's smiles, which Casal underlines happen mostly in the proximity of Elizabeth, serve to demonstrate Mr. Darcy's rebellion against what societal rules. It is important to note that Mr. Darcy rebels against society mostly when he is with Elizabeth; she personifies his heteronormative relationship and therefore his ability to break conventions in public because he is erotically conforming to them.

If Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley had not felt homoerotic feelings for one another, Mr. Darcy would not have been upset at the ball, and Elizabeth may have found him pleasant to be around and allowed herself to smile and flirt; if Elizabeth had smiled and flirted, Mr. Darcy would have despised her for it and would have never thought of her again. He would have remained stoic and unsmiling in public, as he would find it necessary to conform to societal rules publically in order to break them privately. Instead, as a result of queer attachment, both Mr. Darcy and Mr. Bingley are happily married by the end of *Pride and Prejudice*. Underlining the idea that homosexual attachments lay the very foundations for heteronormative relationships, Austen redefines what should be accepted, and considered normal, within society.

Through the redefinition of desire, Austen also redefines herself. Known as a writer of distinctly heteronormative novels, the discovery of plot-driving homosexual desire encourages the idea that Austen belongs to a category within Romanticism. It also promotes the progressive idea that society should accept homosexuality. Austen also

questions the idea that heterosexuality is normal, as well as reinvents the idea of attraction; although each couple in her novel ends up in a successful heteronormative relationship, she suggests that the only reason these marriages occurred was because of the homoerotic attachments that also took place. Through Mr. Bingley and Mr. Darcy, Austen essentially carves a space for homosexual desire within the heteronormative world, perhaps making a statement that homosexuality is more common than her society would believe. The pre-requisite for a successful heteronormative relationship is a homoerotic attachment; because of this, the supposedly heteronormative novel *Pride and Prejudice* is also fundamentally queer.

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Despair: Reading *Pierre* Through *The Sickness Unto Death*

Anthropologists have long known that disparate and distant cultures can create similar artifacts, be they material, linguistic, or conceptual. Depending on the likelihood of knowledge or practices being transmitted between groups of people, the artifacts can be said to have been acquired through “diffusion” or “independent invention.” So, for example, where pyramids in South America may have been conceived independently of Egyptian pyramids, trickster narratives could likely, over several generations, have been transmitted as migration and trade brought previously isolated or unfamiliar cultures into contact.

T.S. Eliot has remarked on a similar phenomenon in literature (which Hedrika Neuberger recognizes in her comparisons of Kierkegaard and Melville). In his “The Function of Criticism,” Eliot says that “[a] common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously: it must be admitted that the union is mostly unconscious. Between the true artists of any time there is, I believe, an unconscious community” (68). The concept of an “unconscious community” is a useful tool in comparing international and cross-cultural writings, particularly if the works were being published at a time when immediate access to translations and reviews was not possible. By exploring the concerns of writers seemingly unknown to one another, texts can be read with a larger cultural context, adding valuable perspectives to the works themselves.

One such relationship that has received critical attention is that between the works of Soren Kierkegaard and Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Though they differ, ultimately, in their goals and

intentions, it is their unique brand of what we now know as Christian existentialism that allows modern critics to read each with new insight. Yet there was another author writing at the same time as these European thinker-authors who seems to have been struggling with similar existential concerns. Like Kierkegaard, he ruined his reputation as an artist when he could not decide to tone down his criticism of the values of his culture and times, but instead adhered to his principles.

Herman Melville additionally resisted commercializing his art. When *Pierre* was published, he already knew the risks of writing a book like his earlier and poorly received *Mardi*. His response to that novel's reception was *Redburn*, in which he decided to write "a plain straightforward, amusing narrative of personal experience—the son of a gentleman on his first voyage to sea as a sailor—no metaphysics, no conic-sections, nothing but cakes & ale" (qtd. in Braswell 247). So why would the story of the land-bound son of a gentleman, Pierre, career so wildly off this course of obeisance to public tastes? Theories that *Pierre* was a product of exhaustion and near madness, or Melville's attempt to spleen his anger at the publishing industry, are supported by strong evidence. Less supported, though, is the idea that Melville had unresolved metaphysical issues, issues Kierkegaard was struggling to resolve at the same time in Copenhagen—a city bachelor living as far as anyone from the domestic environment of Arrowhead. Credence should be given to the idea that *Pierre* may have been the vehicle in Melville's own attempts at resolving, one way or another, his intuition of a sickness unto death that Kierkegaard had already identified and named some three years prior to the publication of Melville's, as one critic called it, "stupid book."

Regardless of motivation, examining Pierre's short life through the Kierkegaardian model of existence provides insight into the hero's ultimate failure (and, perhaps, tangentially points at concerns Melville himself had about being human in the fundamental and ultimate sense).

Reading Melville through the lens of Kierkegaard—particularly his *Sickness Unto Death*—is most instructive if one realizes they shared the central preoccupation of how to properly be Christian in Christendom. Both were in their own way attacking the flaccid Christianity of rote and tradition that had fallen away from the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount and the life of Christ; faith had been subsumed in practices that had largely given up on living a life Christianly in lieu of being perfect in the life hereafter. Essentially the Church and religious forms had replaced Christ as the way to salvation. Neuberger has noted that both writers “employed kindred ideas with a view to, in Kierkegaard's words, ‘a condemnation of Christendom, as an attempt to introduce Christianity into Christendom’” (189). She cites *Pierre* as one of the works where this is evidenced in addition to other parallels in the works of Melville and Kierkegaard.

Geoffrey Clive makes a less overt comparison of the two writers in his ranking Ahab along with Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man*, Macbeth, and Milton's Satan “as one of the supreme characterizations of despair in western literature” (166). And though it may be argued that Ahab and Pierre cannot represent the same figure<sup>1</sup>, the ranking of Ahab shows the validity of exploring Melville's characters through despair.

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<sup>1</sup> Though this is not the proper place to do it, I think there is enough evidence to make the argument that Pierre and Ahab do represent versions of the same figure. Key in my consideration is how the two men declare their dedication to the pursuit of truth: Ahab claims that “All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks . . . If man will strike, strike through the mask!” (140). Pierre confronts an imaginary “Black Knight, that with visor down . . . Lo! I strike through thy helm, and will see thy face, be it Gorgon!” (65-6). Both characters conceive of truth as as something hidden by a “reality” that must be broken through before one can apprehend the truth wholly—a recipe for madness, surely.

*The Sickness*

In short, the “sickness unto death” is despair. Yet despair is no simple concept in the hands of Kierkegaard, and he thought it important enough to give it a book-length treatment. Even still, his formula is the most succinct and sufficient introduction to a topic that would take more pages and time than are here available to make his arguments wholly transparent. For a comparative reading of *Pierre*, the acting definition is as follows: “Despair is a sickness of the spirit, of the self, and so can have three forms: being unconscious in despair of having a self (inauthentic despair), not wanting in despair to be oneself, and wanting in despair to be oneself” (Kierkegaard 43). To slightly heighten the complexity of his definition, it is helpful to know the role that self-awareness plays in contributing to the degree of despair; the relationship is direct, so the more awareness or consciousness of self, the more despair.

For the sake of elucidating what may appear to be inconsistencies in *Pierre* the novel and Pierre the character, these, as Barrett calls them, “various modalities of despair” are all that need to be explored in depth (169). It should be noted, however, that the modalities themselves are only a description of the attempts an individual makes to confront the paradox of his or her simultaneously temporal and eternal nature, and my present explication should in no way be construed as a definitive or complete interpretation of Kierkegaard’s work on despair.

There is the potential for resistance to the paradox of temporal/eternal essence of oneself because it presupposes a belief in the ultimate eternality of self. But Kierkegaard never intended to imply that his philosophy was anything other than Christian at its foundation. So despair, a condition shared by all, whether consciously or unconsciously, can only truly be cured by the individual eventually giving the self up to God through conscious choice. In fact, as Kierkegaard would have it, “every means we have of coping with despair, short of religion, is either

unsuccessful or demoniacal” (Barrett 169). Barrett’s use of “religion” may be too sloppy a shorthand for what Kierkegaard truly intended, but evokes the religious life Kierkegaard put forward—as unorthodox (that is, potentially *too* orthodox) as it may have seemed in a pre-Nietzschean world.

The first “modality” of despair is the simplest form, simple inasmuch as the person is unaware that he suffers. For Kierkegaard this “inauthentic despair” is actually the worst type of despair. If one is unconscious of despair, one is unconscious of his eternity. The sybarite, the child, and the mentally unstable person may be categorized by this form of despair. But again, this can only apply if the person in question remains unaware of their eternal aspect.

The second form of despair involves recognition of the eternal in self. In recognizing this, the person then denies the eternal by attempting to subsume it in the temporal. “For example,” say Guignon and Pereboom, “an aesthetic person who is aware of her eternal nature might resolutely attempt to disavow her eternal aspect and persevere in living for the momentary pleasures of sport or social life” (8). The recognition and consequent denial of the eternal self is what Kierkegaard refers to as “not wanting in despair to be oneself.”

The third modality, “wanting in despair to be oneself,” is the recognition of the eternal that one consciously denies in the second form, followed by the subsequent attempt “to express the fundamental tension [of the temporal/eternal] through one’s own power. It is characterized by the attempt to express the eternal through one’s own will alone, while ‘detaching the self from every relation to Power which posited it’” (Guignon and Pereboom 9). Kierkegaard provides Stoicism as an instantiation of this modality. And though he regards it as the highest form of despair (a good thing, ironically), it is bound to fail as an attempt to reconcile the tension. An

added contingency to the stiff-upper-lip approach to dispel despair is the relative passivity or activity by which one exerts the will. Kierkegaard calls the most active expression “defiance.”

### *Pierre*

As *Pierre* opens in its florid setting and florid language, Pierre cannot be thought to be in despair as any reader would understand it, ostensibly placing him within the bailiwick of the first modality. He rides, swims, and fences; he eats a good, large breakfast as all young men should; he reads his books; he has a charmingly whimsical (unless one reads it as disturbing) relationship with his mother that precludes any sort of domestic strife. Pierre’s life is one of aesthetic pursuits—and one of inauthentic despair. That is, if he experiences despair at all, it is a garden variety sort of despair most clearly seen in typical reactions to the loss of a loved one or even the loss of a treasured object. This despair is quickly smoothed over by projecting it onto that which was lost. According to Kierkegaard, this is legerdemain. The true source of the despair is not that which is lost, but rather the feeling of loss within the despairer. The true eternal/temporal nature has not been illuminated; the sufferer returns to his breakfast.

The most important element of Pierre’s “inauthentic despair” has to be his facile Christianity. For if Kierkegaard is to be believed, only faith has the power to heal us of our despair. Furthermore, the faith is a process. It is not once decided and maintained, but regenerated every day through conscious individual choice. Pierre has not even consciously decided on Christianity. Like Saddle Meadows, like the family war regalia, and like the family name, Christianity is a heritage.

It had been a maxim with the father of Pierre, that all gentlemanhood was vain; all claims to it preposterous and absurd, unless the primeval gentleness and golden

humanities of religion had been so thoroughly wrought into the complete texture of the character, that he who pronounced himself gentleman, could also rightfully assume the meek, but kingly style of Christian. (6)

So for the Glendinnings, Christianity is a learned behavior that comes part and parcel with their social and economic standing. Perhaps the reader is misled about the theological rigor behind this family tradition, but Pierre gives no indication that he is any more than pious on the most superficial level. There is no evidence of a deep faith.

The recurring vision of the dark face could be the one hitch in the theory of inauthentic despair Pierre seems to be “suffering” in the opening of the novel. For surely the vision causes him an unusual degree of consciousness. This increase in consciousness inches even deeper at Lucy’s request: “Tell me once more the story of that face Pierre,—that mysterious, haunting face, which thou once told’st me, thou didst thrice vainly try to shun” (37). He has tried to “shun” the vision in the past, an action, when taken with the “mysterious” and “mystically pale” nature of the face, hint at Pierre’s recognition of the eternal. The distinctly non-temporal aspect of the vision—that he has never seen the face in real life—begins to show the dalliances Pierre has made on the edge of his inauthentic despair to “not wanting in despair to be oneself.”

Since he has clearly shared the story with her before, his reaction seems out of proportion. “I have bared myself too much to thee” (37). His response to Lucy is an awakening to the frightening reality that despair is solitary. After further imploring Pierre on the belief that love shares all, the shift begins to occur in earnest as something “seizes” Pierre: “Thy inexplicable tears, falling, falling on my heart have now turned it to stone. I feel icy cold and hard, I will not swear!” (37). He will not swear to full disclosure of self to another person, not even in love. He warns off the external forces causing him this iciness, and the scare passes.

(Pierre continues to ignore the internality of self and blames Fate throughout the novel.) On the way back to town Pierre assures his Lucy he has only suffered the “merest, idling, wanton vapor” (38). He is able to obscure the eternal with a diagnosis of the temporal, and he can again fool himself in his aesthetic pursuits—an approach to denial he can only employ for so long.

Pierre experiences the consciousness of the other part of self too plainly for easy dismissal when he sees Isabel for the first time. He tries to compose himself enough to conceal the awful truth from his mother but cannot chase the specter of the “sad-eyed” girl from his mind. Despite his efforts at absorbing himself in the temporal, he is repaid with recognition of the soul, the eternal self:

Hitherto I have ever held but lightly, thought Pierre, all stories of ghostly mysticalness in man; my creed of this world leads me to believe in visible, beautiful flesh, and audible breath, however sweet and scented, but only in visible flesh, and audible breath, have I hitherto believed. But now!—now!—and again he would lose himself in the most surprising and preternatural ponderings, which baffled al the introspective cunning of his mind. Himself was too much for himself. He felt that what he had always before considered solid land and veritable reality, was now being audaciously encroached upon by bannered armies of hooded phantoms, disembarking in his soul, as from flotillas of specter-boats.

(49)

Pierre, who could once take for granted that self was body; Pierre, who secretly questioned the veracity of the eternal elements of self; Pierre now has to face the ultimate paradox—and with it, the ultimate tension—of reconciling the two innate aspects of self, seemingly incompatible, one for here and one for There. Or perhaps one for now and one for Later.

Again, good aesthete that he is, Pierre vigorously applies himself to the physical. “Once more, the sweet unconditional thought of Lucy slid wholly into his soul, dislodging thence all such phantom occupants. Once more he rode, he walked, he swam, he vaulted, and with new zest threw himself into the glowing practice of all those manly exercises, he so dearly loved” (50). Even when he questions the deeper mystery in the dark face, he couches the terms of his inquiry in the physical girl. Only the narrator has true insight, the true understanding that “[f]rom without, no wonderful effect is wrought within ourselves, unless some interior, responding wonder meets it” (51). Pierre cannot escape the fundamental aspect of Christian humanness, only avoid consciously recognizing it. He can continue to will to not be himself. Despair, however, cannot be outwaited.

Isabel’s letter becomes the fork in Pierre’s metaphysical road. He sits, letter pressed to his chest as if staunching blood from a physical wound, and the narrator intones, “now indeed art thou hurt with a wound, never to be completely healed but in heaven, for thee, the before undistrusted moral beauty of the world is forever fled, for thee, thy sacred father is no more a saint. . . . Ah, miserable thou, to whom Truth, in her first tides, bears nothing but wrecks!” (65). The implication here is that Pierre ultimately does not have a way out of his despair. He must wait till heaven before he is completely healed. Not only that, but the tradition of “undistrusted moral beauty” and a sainted father—the very tradition on which his Christianity was founded and supported—have been taken away. Truth is—what is truth? Upon what is a truth that brings nothing but “wrecks” built? So Pierre is unmoored.

Still, left without God, left without father, left without a firm grasp of the meaning of truth, left to question the benignity or malignity of the world anew, the hero has options. If his Christianity had been anything other than rote, had he held a true faith in Christ, Pierre could

make an immediate appeal; he could save himself from despair. Either way, he can no longer sustain the game of hide-and-seek between the eternal and temporal aspects of himself. He can no longer sustain the second modality of despair.

So he takes the further step of “wanting in despair to be oneself,” a step that is taken actively, a decision made in what Kierkegaard calls defiance. The decision comes naturally. “Myself am left, at least. . . . With myself I front thee! Unhand me all fears, and unlock me all spells! Henceforth I will know nothing but Truth, glad Truth, or sad Truth, I will know what *is*, and do what my deepest angel dictates” (65). Granted, this in itself does not sound like a resounding rejection of God. Yet it conspicuously absents God from the invocation. Pierre will look inside to find Truth, into his own newly recognized soul, and away from the Truth of the temporal world that has led him to this place of doubt and uncertainty—despair.

Kierkegaard makes clear that the stages of despair are not static. Nor are they like the rungs of a ladder or the floors of a multi-story building. They should be considered more as concentric circles. One form is never completely abandoned, one just moves closer to or farther from the center. And though Kierkegaard views despair as an advantage inasmuch as it offers an opportunity to resolve the paradox and turn to God, it has its obvious drawbacks because “[e]thically-religiously speaking to fall into despair can have the most serious consequences for the individual as, like [Dostoyevsky’s] *Underground Man*, he succumbs to nihilism in reflection as well as in deed” (Clive 148). Here is the Truth of “those Hyperborean regions” where the seeker loses the “directing compass of his mind” (Melville 165). To Pierre’s credit, he does attempt one more appeal to the God he knows before committing himself to open defiance.

Pierre’s visit to Reverend Falsgrave is the nearest he gets to realizing the way out of his despair. The temporizing and equivocating displayed by Falsgrave to Pierre’s direct questions as

to the decision on Delly Ulver's future result in an unequivocal and critical response: "But a hint from heaven assures me now, that thou hast no earnest and world-disdaining counsel for me. I must seek it direct from God himself, who, I now know, never delegates his holiest admonishings" (164). This seems the ultimate point of Kierkegaard's philosophy: the conscious decision to accept God, decide upon *faith*, not the dictums of the Church. In fact, Andrew Delbanco points out that during the interview "Pierre has discovered what Harold Bloom, in his book *The American Religion*, calls 'the immense difficulty of becoming a Christian in any society ostensibly Christian'" (191). Bloom's formulation sounds much like Kierkegaard's central concern of bringing Christianity to Christendom.

But, as the conscious decision must be continually renewed, the despair prevails; and on his return from breaking the news to Lucy of his "marriage," Pierre uses startlingly similar language to Kierkegaard in an exchange with his man Dates. In response to the servant's inquiry as to whether the master is "sick," Pierre answers immediately and firmly: "To death! Let me pass" (184). The sickness has taken hold, and Pierre has chosen despair.

Neuberger compares Pierre's later acts of defiance to the Apostles—when he declares his intention to "gospelize the world anew"—by analyzing Kierkegaard's designation of the Genius (that which is of itself) and the Apostle (that which is called and defined by divine authority) (194). Geoffrey Clive's explication of the Underground Man's defiance, however, seems more applicable to Pierre's case. The Underground Man "wants to experience being god, but a very particular kind of god: his will should be done at everybody else's expense. There is no mercy, no forgiveness, no justice, grace or love to be expected from his throne" (Clive 159). Pierre uses similar imagery when he vows to Isabel he will make the "world acknowledge thee, or by heaven I will crush the disdainful world down on its knees to thee..." (160). With his gospels, Pierre

will also “show [the world] deeper secrets than the Apocalypse” (273). The will to be oneself becomes a near will to power in its heedless drive to subsume the whole temporal world in a final nihilistic expression of resolving the interior tension. Pierre completes his descent into nihilism with his cell-bound hell pact full of as much shame-pride as Milton’s Satan and in defiant reaction to the realization of his fate after murdering his cousin Glen. It is the final shout of the despair of willing to be oneself: “Now, ‘tis merely hell in both worlds. Well, be it hell. I will mold a trumpet of flames, and, with my breath of flame, breathe back my defiance!” (360). The sickness unto death, the inability to die, can be expelled with one final act—suicide. And so Pierre dies, aware of his eternal self, but unable to live with the temporal self.

### *Melville*

Pierre’s descent into nihilism is not a forgone conclusion, even were he to not hold Kierkegaard’s Christian tenets plausible. He could easily have prefigured Nietzsche and Sartre, for whom the defiance is ultimately a creative act, the propulsion into authentic existence. God, however, was not dead yet—at least in the popular consciousness. More likely, Pierre’s creator (with a small “c”) had himself not devised the system in which despair so called could be reconciled.

It is arguable that Melville saw the “problem” differently than Kierkegaard saw it. Kierkegaard presupposed Christian faith, albeit a Christian faith that went counter to the mid-nineteenth-century norms. Melville could not necessarily presuppose such a foundation in his attempts to discover the ultimate condition and destination of human beings. In a letter to Hawthorne in early 1851, what begins as a review of *The House of the Seven Gables* becomes a lengthy metaphysical exploration.

By visible truth, we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things as they strike the eye of the man who fears them not, though they do their worst to him,—the man who, like Russia or the British Empire, declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell, and earth. He may perish; but so long as he exists he insists upon treating with all Powers upon an equal basis. If any of those other Powers choose to withhold certain secrets, let them; that does not impair my sovereignty of myself; that does not make me tributary. And perhaps, after all, there is *no* secret. We incline to think that the Problem of the Universe is like the Freemason's mighty secret, so terrible to all children. It turns out, at last, to consist in a triangle, a mallet, and an apron,—nothing more! We incline to think that God cannot explain His own secrets, and that He would like a little information upon certain points Himself. We mortals astonish Him as much as He us. But it is this *Being* of the matter; there lies the knot with which we choke ourselves. As soon as you say *Me*, a *God*, a *Nature*, so soon you jump off from your stool and hang from the beam. Yes, that word is the hangman. Take God out of the dictionary, and you would have Him in the street.

(37)

His preoccupation with Being and the “problem of evil” seems to have been strong enough that he could not make the leap, even the absurd leap, of faith required to then follow Kierkegaard's steps in making sense of existence. Instead, it seems, Melville resigned himself to a near-Manichean world in which evil exists, perhaps in equal parts with good. So, the truth that one must seek is uncertain, if one holds as possible that truth is not God.

Much of the analysis of Pierre's despair may hinge on how readers interpret Melville's personal metaphysical stance in regards to the Plinlimmon Pamphlet. If pursuing one's own way will end necessarily as an Ahab or Pierre, perhaps he did see the Horological approach to life in Christendom the only tenable way for humans to exist. Or he just continued to ask the question and continued to be stymied by nihilism. His own conclusion (tongue and cheek as it may be) is that the Pamphlet "seems more the excellently illustrated re-statement of a problem, than the solution of the problem itself" (qtd. in Hillway 205). As revealing as this statement may be, the most helpful words are not Melville's, but those in Hawthorne's journal for 20 November 1856.

That November Hawthorne was acting as American Consul in Liverpool, and he and Melville were able to meet for a few days before Melville continued on to his tour of the Mediterranean. After the visit, Hawthorne wrote that

Melville, as he always does, began to reason of Providence and futurity, and of everything that lies beyond human ken, and informed me that he had 'pretty much made up his mind to be annihilated'; but still he does not seem to rest in that anticipation; and, I think, will never rest until he gets hold of a definite belief. . . . If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential; he has a very high and noble nature, and better worth immortality than most of us. (232)

It was the last time they would see one another, and Melville never corresponded with Hawthorne again.

One can only speculate whether Melville wasn't already attempting the Chronometrical life, if he, like Kierkegaard, had not already fashioned a system of belief that could not be accurately or justly described to anyone else. Or perhaps he had just beat Nietzsche to the punch

and laid aside the trumpet, feeling that the truth beyond the pasteboard mask was too grave for bombast. According to Hillway, “Melville presents moral and spiritual problems; her rarely solves them” (201). Could it be that he just showed more restraint than his Continental counterparts? Maybe he just saw himself as an artist and not a philosopher. We know he did not leave behind a set of philosophical doctrines; but we can work with the tools at hand, and *Pierre* dovetails well enough with Kierkegaard that it may prove a fruitful avenue for further comparative studies in Melville.

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