

# *Best of Freshman Writing*

## Volume 12

# Student Voices

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**Best of Freshman Writing: Student Voices** is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University. All of the student essays contained herein were produced by students registered in English 004, 015 and 030, within the campuses of The Pennsylvania State University, during the academic year of 2006-07, and the essays appear here with the writers’ express written permission. No portion of **Best of Freshman Writing** may be reproduced in any fashion without the express written permission of the authors.

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# *Best of Freshman Writing*

## Volume 12

WELCOME to the twelfth volume of *Best of Freshman Writing*. For the past several years we have been publishing student writing with the intention of celebrating the work that our students do and of sharing it with others for a variety of instructional purposes. We accept student essays from nineteen PSU campuses (see the list on the back cover), from students in English 004, 015, and 030.

Many of our readers have asked about our editorial guidelines, which we publish on our web site ([www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/bof.htm](http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/bof.htm)). We only accept essays produced in the courses listed above, and the essays must be submitted by faculty members from the campuses. In other words, *Best* is not an “open submissions” publication.

Some faculty have asked if we will accept short stories or poems or essays produced in other courses. The answer is quite simply no. Other Penn State publications are better suited for this purpose.

At the end of each fall and spring semester, we send out an email call for papers to the various campuses within the university, but our final deadline for papers is May 15 of each year. The papers must be typed and double-spaced, with the student’s name on them. All documentation should be in MLA parenthetical style and verified by the student’s instructor. Faculty should gather the students’ papers and send them in one envelope from each campus, along with a signed publication agreement form, which can be downloaded from our web site. (*See above.*) The student’s return address should also be included so that we can send him or her a copy of the publication in which his or her essay appears.

We hope you like this edition of *Best* and that more of you will participate in its production in the future by submitting essays to us. We are all very curious about student writing throughout the system. *Best* provides a meaningful link between faculty and students throughout the state. Let us know what you think about it. We want your suggestions and help.

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## The Importance of Pie Dough

I HAVE MANY INTERESTS that make up the person I am today. I have worked as a machinist for over seven years. I love to work on machinery because I like to know how things work. I also collect redware pottery and throw my own. Of all the activities I enjoy, I would say the one that I am best known for and enjoy the most is cooking.

I have always loved to cook. When growing up I would help my dad make his delicious onion home fries, bacon and eggs on Sunday mornings. Often the eggs would be soft boiled and then served on toast and topped with browned butter. The butter would have a wonderful nutty smell to it. We knew the butter was ready to top the eggs when it bubbled up like suds and sizzled in the pan. Mmmm, I can taste it now. Mom also had an important effect on me in the kitchen. Every fall when the farmer would come around in his old red pickup truck filled with corn, pears, apples, tomatoes and all kinds of produce from his farm, Mom would buy a basket of some good, green tart apples. Then we would make the best apple pies. Mom taught me to make and roll pie dough. I would lay the rolled dough over my own little pie pan. My personal pie pan was no bigger than four inches in diameter. After we filled our pans with dough and cinnamon apples, they would be topped with a sweet butter crumb topping. Then into the oven they would go. The best apple pies are the ones I remember making with my mother.

Today, my goal is not only to create an enjoyable meal but also to make comfort food healthy. It's the way that I take care of my husband. I collect healthful cooking cookbooks, and I read them from cover to cover as if they were gripping novels. I always like to try new things, so one by one I test the recipes, making notes, comments, and changes in the margins. I plan out our dinner menu two weeks in advance. I find that planning meals in advance helps to limit our intake of red meats and helps to mix things up. We have one vegetarian meal per week. Usually, on vegetarian night we have a big salad, but sometimes I cook veggies in a stir-fry or make a pasta dish. My husband was not initially excited about the vegetarian meal, but once he saw that I was not serving tofu I

think that he warmed up to the idea.

I would never go so far as to say that I have a trained palate, with the ability to critique my or other people's cooking; I am not that high brow. What I bring to the kitchen is my heart. I cook not only because I like and need to eat but also because I love the feeling of taking care and pleasing the people that I cook for. I wish that more people looked at cooking not as a chore but as an event, or better yet, an opportunity to share with and make a lasting impression on the people they love.

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## The Scent of Green

IN MARCH OF 1997, I moved into my first home, but I never could have imagined how the hard work I was about to undertake would nurture my body and soul. The biggest attraction of the 100-year-old stone dwelling was the property that it sat on. The three-acre patch included five apple trees, one cherry tree, three types of berries, and ample room for a garden. The outside property had been without a caretaker for quite some time and was in need of work.

Once the inside of the house was settled, the landscape called me out to where the real chores would begin. I knew that I had to prune to let air and light into the apple trees that had overgrown from neglect. Suckers, the undesirable upright growing shoots and sprouts, were thick and woody from years of growth. Many branches had sores from constantly rubbing against each other in their fight for space. I worked several weekends in the cold weather pruning the trees to alleviate their symptoms. In spring I chose a sunny spot just behind the house and staked out about a fifty-square-foot area that would be the garden. After a friend roto-tilled the hard ground, broke up the solid earth, and crumbled up the large clods of dark rich soil, I began to plant. To create straight rows, I ran butcher's twine between the stakes. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, Brussels sprouts,

eggplant, watermelon, cantaloupe, and zucchini seedlings were tenderly placed into the ground. Once all of the vegetation was in place, I used some of the long apple branches discarded after the pruning and built trellises to support my charges. The work I did made me feel alive and at the same time dead tired. My exhaustion felt honest; I knew that after each day of working in the yard I had earned a good night's sleep.

The constant maintenance of the garden kept me active. I looked forward to clawing and raking the earth to keep the ground loose around plants, hauling buckets of water to the dry raspberry beds and the daily walks through and around the garden to harvest any ripened fruits. An abundance of fresh produce from the garden led me to eat almost a vegetarian diet. The exercise, produce and fresh air, over time, strengthened my body while my complexion brightened.

Every day a tour around the yard made my worries disappear. I inspected the progress, growth, and condition of the garden and tiny orchard. I watched as tree buds turned to tiny pink and with apple blossoms. The pedals were not long-lived and soon were taken down by late spring breezes and scattered to the ground like confetti. Blossom petals made way for swollen spurs that in months grew into delicious apples. Every day the garden plants were developing, becoming taller and stronger. When I walked through the garden, I could smell the greenness of the plants. Every day there would be a new blossom or a new baby vegetable to welcome into the world. On rainy days I could still enjoy the outside by sitting in the enclosed porch. There, while relaxing in my chair and sipping my tea, I could view my cloud-covered Eden. On those days the dark and rainy skies would soften the hue of green vegetation. At the same time, however, there was an illuminating enhancement, a kind of brightness which was not a result of shade alone. Ultimately, this let me know that the sun was still on duty.

The hard work and love I put into my retreat came back to me. I nurtured the land, and the land nurtured my body, mind, and soul. Unfortunately, it was not long after that summer of bliss that I had to move away from the property that freed my spirit in many ways. All of the time and hard work I put into the garden and orchard has surely been erased by the elapse of time. Only God knows if I will ever again have a garden like the one I fostered. The soil was right, the weather was right, and it was the right time in my life.

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## Epiphany Essay

WHEN I WAS ASSIGNED to write a paper on an epiphany, I thought the teacher was nuts. I am seventeen years old, way too young to have had an epiphany. It was assignments like this that made me question why I was in college. Why am I paying money, which I don't even have, to write papers on topics that don't even exist? I wanted to be learning new techniques, have different perspectives on ideas and events. But I thought about it, and I realized I have had an epiphany. Here it is.

I come from a large family, and it is hard for my parents financially. My mom is the sole provider for my dad, my four siblings and me. We can barely make ends meet. So, of course, we don't live in a "good" neighborhood. Truthfully, we live in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The thing is, in our neighborhood, there is no hope, no motivation, no desire to do better. Parents in this neighborhood stay home and collect welfare because it's easier than finding a job and working five days a week. The kids walk around in the streets with bare feet and ripped, raggedy clothes, and no supervision. The teenagers, instead of going to school, stand on the street corner selling drugs, starting fights, or are somewhere getting pregnant. Not having any money and not being able to travel, drugs, violence, and poverty is all I have ever known. My only escape was the love of my family.

I used to visit my grandmother, with whom I am very close, every weekend. She lived only a few blocks away. During these visits she would tell me stories of a better life and tell me that I could move away from this. I trusted everything else she told me—how could I not?—she was the head of the family, knew everyone's secrets, and always had a bed and a warm meal for me or anyone who visited her. Despite these things, I couldn't see this better world she was talking about, a world where kids can play in the park without worrying about drug needles or being kidnapped, a world where the neighbors got along and the neighborhood was clean. I couldn't believe her because I only knew what I saw. And what I saw were kids on the corner, harassing people as they walked down the street, and drug needles on the ground that everyone knew had been used by an addict hours before. I saw beautiful, colorful, stained glass church windows destroyed by graffiti. I saw abandoned buildings and buildings destroyed by fire. All of this destruction be-

cause some kids just wanted to have “a little fun.” The walk to my grandmother’s house was a reminder every weekend of what was in store for me.

One day my grandmother decided it was time for her to move into a different neighborhood. It wasn’t too far away, just a twenty minute bus ride. I wasn’t going to let the distance interrupt my visits. So, one weekend, I went to visit her to help her settle in. I was waiting for the bus a few feet from my home, when I was reminded of the disgusting situation that I live in. While I was waiting, it wasn’t the trash all over the sidewalk or the smell of unwashed clothes and old garbage or the kids selling drugs behind me that held my attention, it was the conversation of two girls. Their conversation consisted of the benefits of welfare, how they were going to drop out of school and wait until they are eighteen to collect it, how if they became pregnant it would be “okay” because welfare would help them support the baby, how high they liked to get because being high takes away the reality that they were in, how there was no hope for them. They knew they were “stuck” in this unhealthy lifestyle, but the thing that struck me the most was that they weren’t sad about it. It sounded as if they accepted it. As I got on the bus I started to wonder if I was like them. Would I end up with the same fate?

On the bus ride to my grandmother’s house, I looked out the window and saw more and more trash and wasted lives passing by. However, when I stepped off the bus into her neighborhood, it was like stepping right into a Thomas Kinkade photo. Even in the snowiest picture there is warmth, love, togetherness, and hope. These are all things I felt in those seconds. The bus stop is right across the street from a playground, which was filled with laughing children and proud parents. Everything my grandmother told me about was flowing through my mind. The walk from the bus stop to her home was just a few blocks. This walk was as insightful as the walk from her old house, except this walk was filled with hope and, most importantly, optimism. I was greeted with smiles and “good mornings” as couples walked their dogs. There were beautiful trees that lined the cleaned streets. And the smell! There was this beautiful mixture of the scent of flowers and the scent of cakes from a nearby bakery in the air.

The environment was different in this neighborhood, compared with my own. Some time went by, but as I continued to regularly visit my grandmother, I found that it was easy to make new friends here. People were easy to talk to, and they were able to have intelligent, thoughtful conversations. Some have said that I only liked this neighborhood because it is wealthier. However, not

only do these people have money, they are educated, and they have respect, not only for themselves, but for property and others as well. They have the will to work, and above all, even through hardships, they know they will make it. Realizing that there are better opportunities available to me if I work for them and realizing that I’m not “stuck” in my neighborhood, and being able to have a positive attitude, even in hard times—that’s my epiphany. I realized I can have this.

This epiphany helped me to see the world with new eyes. I’m more optimistic and appreciative. As a result of my epiphany, I made the decision to go to college. Not just any college, one that had a good reputation and that I could be proud to say that I go to. At first I was just going to go to my local community college because I believed that it was all I could get into and afford. While talking to some of the people around my grandmother’s neighborhood, they told me not to worry about finance or the people that are more advantaged than I am; they encouraged me to take a chance.

So, it turned out my teacher wasn’t so crazy after all. There were drastic differences between my neighborhood and my grandmother’s, both financially and socially. As a result of seeing what is out there, seeing the good and the beauty in people, I made it a goal to do my best and to move away from a world with no possibilities. I realized to do this I have to be educated. I want to hold intelligent conversations. I want to be able to emotionally and financially support my family. I want to work hard—so that I can show my children one day what my grandmother was able to show me.

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## I Ate the Turtle

I WAS ABOUT FIVE when our pet turtle disappeared in front of my eyes. I still cannot explain what happened to the poor thing because he was never found. The unbelievable fact is that I watched as this tiny turtle, who was only slightly bigger than a Matchbox car, walked around a rock in the middle of his aquarium, somehow crawled under the rock, and disappeared forever. What happened next I never will forget and is in fact a family legend, one of those stories that is recited to children and grandchildren for years to come. After the turtle vanished, I called for my mother to help me investigate.

Once I told her that the turtle was gone, her first question to me was shocking to my ears. “Did you eat it?” she asked with a smile on her face and a giggle in her throat. Of course I did not! She thought this was somehow funny. Mom sent me to tell my father about the missing turtle. I found dad in his basement workshop, and I again repeated the story of the missing turtle. Immediately a grin came to his lips, and he asked, “Are you sure you didn’t eat it?” What was going on? Why would I eat our pet turtle? Why would this question keep coming up again and again? I was confused and not humored!

After the family had a good laugh, my mother told me that this was the second turtle that had gone missing in our house. The first turtle I did not remember because I was just a tot. Apparently, when this first turtle went missing I was asked if I knew what happened to it, and my response was to point to my mouth. When I was asked if I ate the turtle, I responded with a nod of the head. We will never really know if I had eaten the first turtle, although I can say without a doubt that I did not eat the second. What is known is that the missing turtle events prompted an unspoken family rule that we would own no pet so small that it could be eaten in one bite.

## Joni

JULY 1967.

It was a beautiful afternoon on the Chesapeake Bay. The water was somber with a copper overcast sky. As she strolled the dock with her sister Kathy, preparing for a leisurely swim, Joni Eareckson Tada didn’t realize she was about to dive into shallow water. Her delicate body gently punctured the skin of the water and shattered against the sand beneath. All was numb. As Joni recalled, “In a jumble of actions and feelings, many things happened simultaneously. I felt my head strike something hard and unyielding. At the same time, clumsily and crazily, my body sprawled out of control. I heard or felt a loud electric buzzing and an unexplainable inner sensation. It was something like an electrical shock, combined with the vibration of a heavy metal spring suddenly and sharply uncoiling. Yet, it wasn’t really a sound or even a feeling—just a sensation. I felt no pain.” She was injured and she couldn’t move. At that moment, Joni understood life wouldn’t be the same ever again. She would press on, however; her life was anything but complete.

To Joni, that July afternoon should have been like any other day, not the turning point of her life. In a matter of seconds, she became a quadriplegic. This knowledge would drastically alter anyone’s outlook on life. Often, in cases of highly traumatic events, individuals will become emotionally scarred and lose a sense of self worth. At her lowest point, when she had emotionally collapsed, contemplated suicide and thought there was no way of escape but death, Joni made a life-changing decision. In the midst of her agony she prayed to God, saying, “God, if I can’t die, then please show me how to live, because I can’t do this thing called paralysis. I can’t, I can’t do this. I have no strength for this. But you do, and I need you big time.” Little did she realize a single prayer could restore her heart and soul. With a renewed hope, Joni chose to use her injury to benefit others with similar disabilities, rather than giving up.

It wasn’t long before Joni Eareckson Tada realized how fortunate she was despite her physical disability. Though she was provided with the resources she needed to accommodate her situation, there were still over 18 million people worldwide who needed them as well. Whereas her relationship with her husband thrived, such disabilities were the cause of many family separations.

Thus she began a crusade to help others overcome such obstacles. An international disability center called Joni and Friends (JAF) was the result of this pursuit. To this day, the JAF ministries have touched the lives of thousands of disabled families throughout the world. Among the many ministries included in the JAF program are family retreats, Wheels for the World and the “Joni and Friends” radio program, which has over one million listeners each week. Through the Wheels for the World program, Joni and many others have been able to collect over 30,000 wheelchairs and ship them to families across the globe. Despite an injury that could have easily allowed her to wallow in self pity, Joni does not focus on herself. This year alone, she will serve over 800 families through her family retreats.

Educationally, spiritually and physically, Joni has not let her disability confine her. She has received four honorary doctorates from colleges including Westminster Theological Seminary and Gordon College. Also, she has written over 35 novels and children’s books, which have received several awards including the Evangelical Publishers’ Association’s Gold Medallion. Throughout her life Joni has received recognition and leadership positions far beyond the Christian community. In 2005, she was appointed to the Disability Advisory Committee of the U.S. State Department with Condoleezza Rice to help with disability programs and policies around the world.

Aside from her vast array of awards and accomplishments, Joni Eareckson Tada’s life has been testimony to families worldwide. Her valiant display of strong will, courage and perseverance far exceed that of any robust individual. Though I do not know her personally, the life of this renowned Christian evangelist has given me the encouragement and hope to overcome any trials.

Joni Eareckson Tada used to be a young, healthy girl until July 1967 when she severely severed her spinal cord and became a quadriplegic. Never has she used her injury for self pity. Never has she found herself too limited to achieve her goals. Her purpose in life was to help strengthen the lives of disabled person while spreading the word of the Christian Gospel. She has far exceeded any expectations that could have been given to her as a healthy person. Joni Eareckson Tada has never lived as a helpless quadriplegic but rather as an encouraging spirit in the lives of others.

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## A Period of Consequence

“The Era of Procrastination, of Half-Measures, of Soothing and Baffling Expedients, of Delays, is coming to its close. In its place, we are entering a Period of Consequence.”

– Sir Winston Churchill

ON NOVEMBER 12, 1936, Sir Winston Churchill presented this argument to Britain to educate the people on an unprecedented storm that was forming in Europe. Many people in Britain didn’t believe the warnings because the government failed to acknowledge the facts presented to them. Close to eighty years later, it’s interesting to see a similar act in the government. Many scientists are presenting weighty arguments about Global Warming, which much of the government and the people don’t want to give attention to (Gore *et al.*). Collectively, as a world, we can not continue to act on the situation with tentative decision making and undiscerning awareness.

Global Warming seems to be a topic that people know something about but aren’t quite sure what it means to them personally. These people feel they don’t have a lasting effect on their environment, but they are wrong. Because of the recent decades of pollution, our earth’s thin, precious atmosphere has been thickened. This causes the majority of the infrared rays from the sun to become enclosed, which traps carbon dioxide, essentially while bringing the globe to a higher temperature. [Editor’s Note: *Most authorities define global warming as an increase in average temperature as a result of increased levels of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide.*] Because of this higher temperature and more CO<sub>2</sub>, many adaptations and changes have occurred. One noticeable effect is that most of the glaciers have started to melt and have increased sea level. When this happens, the temperature of the ocean changes and this has lasting effects on the sea life and environmental patterns. Some scientists believe this to be the cause of widespread coral loss, as well as the cause of many more hurricanes, tornadoes and typhoons.

Just in the past few years, these unusual catastrophes have changed the lives of many people on earth. In an *Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore presents facts, that in 2005, India recorded a rainfall of over 37 inches in only 24 hours, whereas at the same time, Africa’s Lake Chad completely dried up due to severe drought. This warm-

ing problem seems to have caused a paradox. While one area has heavy rainfall, a neighboring province has a brutal drought. These were the stories that were not told because America's media were reporting on their own natural disaster that year, Hurricane Katrina.

The many scientists who have studied Hurricane Katrina know that it wasn't just an environmental fluke; they have seen the evidence that links it to Global Warming. Because of the change in temperature in the ocean, the Gulf of Mexico became unusually warmer than normal and this caused any storm voyaging there to become stronger. This theory held to be true when the small hurricane Katrina, from the Atlantic, became a much larger one as soon as it swept through warmer water of the Gulf. There were many warnings, but many political leaders and Americans failed to listen. If America were better prepared, how much loss could have been avoided?

With every bold scientific statement made, there will always be skeptics. Many of these people believe that Global Warming isn't a big problem. While running against the Clinton/Gore campaign in 1992, President George H. W. Bush stated that under his opponents' campaign for environmental remodeling, America would be "up to our ears in owls, and out of work for every American" (Gore *et al.*). Many voters believed this argument and decided not to act on the proposals of the Clinton/Gore campaign.

Now, over 15 years later, these same Americans are surprised when they see a beautiful 60° afternoon, followed by a foot of snow falling the next morning. The message is unmistakable; if these aren't sure signs for Americans to realize that we are the ones being naïve, then what future crisis will prove it?

Embodying only four percent of the world's population, the United States accounts for 22 percent of the global pollution, which, per person, is highest in the world (*Learn More*). Many countries have already changed their daily production of this pollution by using such technologies as gas efficient cars, energy saving light bulbs, or more effective use of mass transit. Along with the other countries, America needs to understand the severity of this environmental crisis and act on it soon.

Many of the leading companies of the world have already tapped into the expansive economic opportunities in the clean energy act. If we help to cut the emission of CO<sub>2</sub>, the heat-trapping gas, we can help to save our environment, our home, our Earth. Many deniers believe that this will cost too much money to solve, but in comparison to the billions of dollars spent to ameliorate these situations, in the end, it will cost far less than to greedily avoid them. Even insurance companies across the world have realized the patterns in the weather and

have started to alter their policies to prepare for this loss.

Doing the right thing is one thing that pushes people collectively forward. We, as a planet, have to come together to do the responsible thing and stop our energy waste and carbon burning. Saving our delicate, irreplaceable marvel, our environment, which we take for granted, can only be the right choice. Global Warming is an issue that we all need to confront, and work towards preventing. This is not the future we want, and it is certainly not the future we want to give our children, but if we don't act quickly and globally unite, by then it might already be too late.

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## An Influenza Pandemic: Are We Prepared?

RING! RING! RING! The fire alarm is going off in the school. Is it a drill or is it real? Are we prepared? Will the children and staff make it out safely? What if an influenza, flu, pandemic strikes? Is our school district prepared? How can we possibly be completely prepared for a crisis of that magnitude?

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
<b>Respiratory illness; transmitted from person to person. Most people have some immunity; vaccine available.</b>	<b>Human flu that causes global outbreak of serious illness; little natural immunity; spreads easily from person to person.</b>
<b>Occurs annually during winter.</b>	<b>Occurs approx. three times/century, at any time of year.</b>
<b>Affects approx. 10 % of population.</b>	<b>May affect 25% of population.</b>
<b>Very old and immune deficient most at risk.</b>	<b>People of all ages at risk.</b>
<b>Vaccines available.</b>	<b>Vaccines may not be available immediately.</b>

Fig. 1 (“Key Facts about Pandemic Flu” 2)

The avian, or bird, flu presents a real possibility of a pandemic. The H5N1 virus has resulted in the deaths of chickens, migratory birds, and 153 humans in the past three years (“Cumulative Number of Confirmed Human Cases of Avian Influenza A (H5N1) Reported to WHO” 1). Fortunately, this problem has remained in Asia, but it is thought that eventually the migratory birds will carry it along their migration paths, causing it to spread (Appenzeller 4). This, along with modern transportation, could cause the virus to escalate to a pandemic rather quickly.

Over the last century, three pandemics occurred

(Hilton). In 1918, the Spanish flu caused over 40 million deaths worldwide; 500,000 of those were American. This started in Europe at the end of World War I. As the war ended, soldiers brought the sickness home with them, thus causing the rapid spread (Hilton). The Asian flu of 1957 and 1958 caused many more deaths: 70,000 Americans and two million people worldwide. The Hong Kong flu killed 34,000 Americans alone. It is probable, when the avian flu pandemic comes, one third of the sick will die (“School Officials Begin” 11).

When a pandemic strikes, all organizations must be prepared, from the international down to the local ones, such as school boards and districts. The United Nations has two such groups. The World Health Organization (WHO) along with its sub-committee, the Epidemic and Pandemic Alert Response (EPR), work on tracking potential pandemic causes, scientific studies of the viruses, international training programs, standardizing preparedness and response plans, and various other programs (“Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response” 1).

The United States government has set up a Website ([www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov)) to help individual states plan. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has come on board the project too. Michael Leavitt, the secretary of DHHS, along with Pennsylvania’s governor, Gov. Rendell, hosted a statewide Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Planning Summit in March of 2006. One thousand officials attended this event. At the summit, Leavitt pledged \$3.5 million for Pennsylvania and, Rendell pledged \$500,000 toward planning efforts (“Pennsylvania Conducts Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Planning Summit” 8). Money will play a key role in how much a town or state will be able to prepare, plan, and even stockpile items such as non-perishable foods and antiviral medicines. Rendell also unveiled two mobile medical units capable of responding to a biological emergency anywhere in Pennsylvania within three hours (“Pennsylvania Conducts Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Planning Summit” 8).

When the next flu pandemic strikes, local school districts and boards, being the hubs of their respective communities, need to be prepared. There are many tools available to help districts. Many district personnel will be needed to help formulate and carry out the plan. When it strikes, everyone from the administrators to the janitors will be paramount in the plans working smoothly and effectively. Local school districts should already have an Emergency Procedure Manual, which outlines emergency response procedures. This should cover any emergency from school violence to fire to communicable diseases. The manuals are usually designed and maintained

with the help of the local Emergency Management Agency (EMA). In planning for a flu pandemic, there are four basic steps to follow: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery (Dillon 1).

Prevention is the first step in the pandemic plan. Districts should actively plan and participate in this. Rapid spreading can occur at schools because of the simple fact that children contract and spread sickness at a faster rate than adults (Dillon 1). Schools' health service departments, following the directives of WHO, have several suggestions for precautions to take. When someone coughs or sneezes, he or she should cover his or her nose and mouth with a tissue or the upper part of his or her shirtsleeve. Immediately afterwards, the tissue should be thrown away. Hands should then be washed thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol wipes or gels. Alcohol is very effective in killing the germs. These preventative measures will not only help lessen the spreading of a pandemic but colds and seasonal flu as well. The community should be made aware of these procedures so they can follow them. Schools must actively practice them (Health Services 2). School cleanliness is another important factor. Each night after the children and staff leave, the classrooms, bathrooms, and other heavily used areas should be vigorously cleaned.

Preparedness comes next. DHHS and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have published a suggested plan and checklist, in a joint effort, to help aid districts ("School Officials Begin" 13). Policies and procedures can be created or modified. Some decisions need to be made regarding authority, chain of command, and back-ups. First and foremost, if there is a public health emergency, the authority and responsibility to call it needs to be identified. A designee needs to be identified to notify and co-ordinate with local businesses, emergency personnel, private schools, county intermediate units, boroughs, townships, staff, students, parents, and anyone else deemed necessary. Someone will need to report absenteeism of more than 10 percent, as required by the Pennsylvania Department of Health. If a school unit must shut down for an extended period of time due to the high number of sick people, a back-up plan for home education must be in place, with the possibility that assignments for school work be made available through a designated Website ("PSBA Testifies" 14).

A number of questions need to be answered. What happens when things escalate and local businesses, such as stores, pharmacies, and banks shut down? What can the school do to help the community? Can the cafeteria help with food? Can the bus drivers transport people or supplies? Can the school be used as a makeshift hospital?

Where will the money come from if extra costs are incurred? Each district will differ from the next in what they can and cannot do. They must each analyze and plan accordingly. Some other questions that must be answered are 1) If the flu pandemic has struck in a district's state or local region, do they start stockpiling items such as food, water, and medicine? 2) Who will be responsible for the initial and continuing updates to the public? 3) What type of media will be used? Once all of this and much more have been planned, a district should then educate and train the staff, and test certain aspects of the plan ("PSBA Testifies" 15).

In a pandemic, response would be the next step. Response would basically consist of the implementation of the plan. The key factor in all of this is communication. The more communication among all the involved parties, the smoother and more efficiently things should run.

The last step is recovery. In a flu pandemic, there is a probability of a high rate of mortality (Hilton). Grief counseling will be much needed. Students and their families and maybe other community members will be in need of these services. Some temporary modifications in the school day may need to be implemented. For example, students and staff may tire easily; therefore, half days of school may be the best way to ease back into the schedule. The whole experience should be documented. The plan should then be re-evaluated and updated.

In speaking with the board members of the Mahanoy Area School District, administration, the district's EMA, and health services personnel, regarding flu pandemic planning, our district has a long way to go to be prepared for a pandemic. We have a solid start with our Emergency Procedure Manual (Cadau). All our policies have just been reviewed and revised recently but should be updated to incorporate a pandemic. We have procedures, but many are not written down. Preventative measures, such as hand washing, are currently taking place. A packet of information was sent home by health services regarding coughing, sneezing, and hand washing to inform parents (Health Services 2). The facilities director and his staff are meticulous in keeping the school clean. He is also researching special products and procedures to be used for avian flu prevention and cleanup afterwards (Pastucha). Money would be available from the district's fund balance, if needed (Hurst).

One of the principals suggested the possibility of having our schools designated a "Pod" or an area to isolate the sick (Golden). The superintendent, along with the crisis intervention specialist, has been attending meetings to form the Safe Schools Coalition. This group will consist of county fire companies, schools, and police.

They will look at a countywide response plan for any type of emergency (Mahanoy Area School District 5). These are small steps to reaching our gargantuan goal of a Pandemic Preparedness and Response Plan. Our district, along with many others, has a large task to perform. No matter how much planning and preparation is completed, there will be many other unexpected problems that arise in an actual crisis. We can never be totally prepared, but we can be better prepared.

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## A Sunny Summer Day

IT WAS A SUNNY SUMMER DAY. The sound of birds chirping filled the air, but the boy had not noticed. Wooden steps, flying past, were all that filled his vision, as he sprinted up to the second floor. Shattering glass and dead weight crashing on the floor above was the only sound that filled his ears. The boy thrust the bathroom door open and stepped through the threshold. He saw an array of twinkling glass and white pills strewn across the floor next to his sister's lifeless body. He paused for a second to take in the entire scene. Her eyes were closed and her face was pale and streaked with tears that glistened in the soft light. Her delicate face resembled that of a fallen angel's resting on a cold hard bed of broken glass.

The boy quickly scooped up the sleeping angel, and held her close to his chest. He carried her fragile body to the nearest bedroom; her arms and legs swung, uninhibited. The boy carefully laid the wilted figure on the bed, and rushed to the nearest phone. His hands were steady, and his mind determined, though his heart told a different story. The boy picked up the phone and dialed 911. An ambulance quickly arrived, and whisked his sister's inexpressive body away in a storm of flashing lights and blaring sirens.

The boy slowly walked to his room and gently closed the door behind him. His knees weakened and his body slumped against the door. Slowly he slid down the solid wooden surface to the wintry floor below. A silent tear wandered down his face and wavered for a second at the bottom of his chin before falling to the floor. His body began to shudder as he tried to choke back the hot tears. The image of his sister and those pills was freshly etched into his mind. His emotions and anger were too great to suppress, and he drove his clenched fist into the nearest wall. Warm blood slowly trickled down his rapidly swelling knuckles, and gradually rolled off his fingertips onto the hearth. The pain in his heart was too unbearable for the pain in his hand to redirect his thoughts from that harried scene. As the boy sat there on the cold bare floor, his mind slowly shut down; his body would surely follow. The only thought that remained was how could he have stopped this from happening?

The next day the boy awoke to another sunny summer day. The sound of the birds chirping filled the air, but he did not give the slightest indication that he had

noticed. With much effort the boy rose from beneath the covers and sat at the edge of the bed. His feet were firmly planted on the cool ground; his eyes remained glued to the floorboards of the empty room. His brain seemed to have ceased functioning, and his body was unresponsive. Finally, a voice summoned the boy to breakfast, and he mechanically followed the voice downstairs. As he choked down his cold cereal, his parents told him he could visit his sister at the hospital. His eyes looked up from the bowl for only a second. For the first time the boy noticed that the chair sitting across from him was unoccupied; he stared at it without a trace of emotion, and then resumed eating his breakfast.

Later that day the family (minus the sister) got into the car and drove to the hospital. The family did not enter the hospital; rather they made their way across the lush green lawn to a building sitting in the shadow of the hospital. It was a plain brick building with large steel doors, which could only be opened from a button located behind the receptionist desk; its overall size and appearance was diminished by the towering hospital. Upon entering the building, the boy was met by a couple of security guards. As the boy shuffled past the two men, his eyes always at his feet, his parents talked in hushed voices with a doctor. After a few minutes the boy was pressed to move on into his sister's room. A nurse with a key had let them onto her floor. He could not even bring himself to look at his sister; his eyes lingered on the cold linoleum tiles, and occasionally glanced at the blank faces of the other patients, some of whom were smiling for reasons unclear to the boy. He wondered how anyone could wear a smile in such a frigid sterile environment, even if the smile was empty and delusional. After a brief stay, the boy and his parents returned home.

Seconds after walking through the front door, the boy disappeared into his room, and crawled between the covers of his bed. He made no sounds except for the occasional muffled cry as he tried to rest his eyes.

For the next couple of days the boy's parents returned to the hospital to visit his sister. The boy refused to return to that place with the cold steel doors and dreary white walls. He refused to look at those bleach-white tiles that scorched his eyes, and listen to the sounds of shoes, loosened without laces, slap against the soles of the patients' feet shuffling by. As soon as he heard his parents' car accelerate out of the driveway, he would pick up a drink, and before they returned he would already be passed out in an alcohol-induced coma.

The image of his sister's pale face and those scattered white pills was forever burned into his retinas. The more he tried to drown his emotions, the more they tore him

apart inside. He could not come to terms with what had happened that sunny summer day. All he could think of was how could he have prevented that hellish nightmare from occurring. The only sight he looked forward to each day was the bottom of a whiskey bottle.

The boy peered out of the window and observed his parents' car speeding off to the hospital. He looked at the empty bottle lying next to his bed, and then slowly meandered into the bathroom. Sitting on the counter, taunting him, was a sickly yellowish colored container. Enclosed were little innocent-looking white pills. Slowly he unscrewed the cap.

It was a sunny summer day. The boy felt the warm rays of the sun tanning his face. The birds' sweet melody floated through the air, and filled his ears. The boy was at peace for what felt like the first time in ages.

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## Influenza: What to Do When the Winter Months Set In

"MOMMY, I do not feel very well," a child cried out in the night. As his mother rushed to his bedside, she immediately pressed the back of her hand to his forehead. She knew in an instant that something was wrong when his flesh felt as though it were on fire. Without a moment's hesitation, she flew to the phone and dialed the local hospital's number. As soon as she heard a voice on the other end of the line, the young mother began to cry. "My son is sick. I do not know what to do."

The receptionist responded calmly. "Just relax. Take a deep breath and clam down. Does he have a fever?" (Roche Laboratories 1).

"Yes, his skin feels as though it is on fire. He is burning up," the mother cried.

"Is he extremely tired?" the nurse continued (Roche Laboratories 1).

"He did not wake up all day. I think the first time he opened his eyes, for more than a few minutes, in the last twenty-four hours was about an hour ago. I just thought that he needed the rest, but each time I tried to wake him, he simply rolled back over and went to sleep. I am becoming really worried."

"Okay, so he has a fever and is excessively tired. Is your son suffering from severe chills?" the nurse then asked (Roche Laboratories 1).

"Well," the mother thought for a moment, "he can't seem to get warm. I have piled numerous blankets on him, but he still cries that he is cold. I then tried wrapping him in an electrical blanket and turned it on high, in addition to the mountain of covers. However, he can't seem to stop shivering."

By this time, the mother was wailing hysterically. "What am I to do?"

The receptionist took another deep breath, "Ma'am, I need you to calm down. Now, can you tell me about his cough? Is it dry and raspy? And is he sick to his stomach? Is he vomiting, suffering from nausea, or diarrhea?" (Roche Laboratories 1).

\* \* \*

Influenza is a virus that is common during the winter months. More commonly known as the flu, this illness is “a contagious respiratory illness caused by viruses” (“Influenza: Influenza Most Deadly for the Very Old, AHRQ Report Finds” 1). Studies have shown that in one year, 20 percent of the population will contract the flu. This is largely due to the fact that it is during this particular season that people spend a majority of their time inside, therefore increasing their risk of catching the virus. “The flu virus is usually spread through droplets that are in the air as a result of coughing, sneezing, and talking. However, you can be infected by touching objects such as a door handle that someone with the flu has touched” (“Influenza” 2). Probably the easiest way to protect one’s self from becoming contaminated with this illness is to remain at home. The less often one is exposed to the bacteria that causes the flu, the less likely one will catch it. Also, when one is forced to become exposed to the illness, the best thing to do is remember to constantly wash one’s hands (“Influenza” 2). When we are not at a location which has immediate access to a sink, we should be sure to keep our hands away from our noses and mouths. This will cause the bacteria to remain on our skin until they can be exterminated.

Yet another possible way to make an attempt to prevent the nuisance of influenza is to receive a flu shot. This causes the body to “make substances called antibodies, which help protect against viruses” (“Influenza” 2). It is recommended for a small group of individuals to make sure they receive the shot each year, including people over the age of 50, those who live in nursing homes, health care professionals, and people who have chronic lung disease, heart or kidney disease, diabetes, severe anemia, or cancer (“Influenza” 2). Each year new strands of the virus are discovered; therefore, it is necessary for this particular group of individuals to make sure they receive the vaccine annually. Because it takes around two weeks for the vaccine to take effect, it is recommended that people who wish to receive it make sure they have it between October 15 and November 15 (“Influenza” 2). This way, the chemicals in the medication have a chance to make their way throughout the entire immune system before flu season begins. This will greatly reduce the risk of becoming infected with the virus. Although this vaccine is necessary to build the body’s immune system so that it fights against the invader, a small percentage of people do have mild side effects to the medication. One in four people will experience redness and swelling in

the area where the shot was injected (“Influenza” 2). A small number will also have a fever, chills, a headache, and body aches for a few days (“Influenza” 2). Although this form of prevention has proven to be extremely effective, there is a small group of individuals who must be extremely cautious when deciding to receive the vaccine. These are people who are allergic to eggs. What most people fail to realize is that the vaccine virus is grown in eggs, which cannot be completely eliminated from the shot (“Influenza” 2). Consequently, anyone with this allergy should consult with a doctor before receiving the shot.

For most people, influenza is harmless. They catch it, wait it out, and then go about their daily lives. However, what most people fail to realize is that this illness can be fatal, depending on the person who catches it. Between 5 and 20 percent of the United States population typically becomes infected with the virus, and more than 36,000 individuals die from it each year (“Influenza: Influenza Most Deadly for the Very Old, AHRQ Report Finds” 1). In 2004, of the 21,000 people hospitalized for influenza, most were elderly patients. For every 100,000 people admitted, 28 were over the age of 65 (“Influenza: Influenza Most Deadly for the Very Old, AHRQ Report Finds” 1). Once calculated, this rate is figured to be over three times higher than the rate for children. Eight in every 100,000 patients are under the age of eighteen. The final age group hospitalized included people between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five. Two to four of the population of 100,000 was included in this age range (“Influenza: Influenza Most Deadly for the Very Old, AHRQ Report Finds” 1).

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After several minutes, the doctor finished his call with the upset mother and her child. With great difficulty, he managed to calm her down to a point where he could explain the situation to her. He said that her son did indeed have the flu. He then continued to clarify that he had more than likely managed to pick the virus up from school, where everyone remained inside. In the past month, he had seen numerous cases in the school environment that were almost identical to this particular one. It did not matter how much the teachers emphasized the importance of washing their hands often; the children continued to cough without covering their mouths to capture the germs and to sneeze all over the toys that they were playing with. This caused the virus to spread rapidly. There is not really any way that parents can be positive that their child is not going to pick something

up in their learning environment. The only thing that they can do is to keep their child at home throughout the season. However, this would still not ensure that the child would not catch the virus when he or she went into the public.

“I know that most children are probably not fond of needles. However, the main way to prevent a child from becoming infected once again after he is cured is to make sure he receives a flu shot,” the doctor instructed. “This will allow his immune system to build a resistance against the particular strand of the virus that is sweeping the country that particular year. However, he cannot be allergic to eggs if he is to receive the shot because the virus is grown inside of them and they cannot be completely eliminated from the vaccine.”

As the mother hung up the phone, she could still hear the soft cry of her son in the room next to her. “Mommy, I still do not feel very well.”

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## To Be Someone

EVERY MORNING, I wake up, eat the same breakfast, wear the same kind of clothes as the day before, take the same pills, and head into a day that will consist of class and work, just the same as the day before, and the day afterwards. Sometimes, I catch myself staring off into space, wondering what it would be like to be someone else, if just for a day. After all, the Jam said that “to be someone is a wonderful thing,” and those words certainly ring true for me. When I’m wishing that I was someone else, I always wish to be someone who does not exist, yet someone whom I know better than anyone else ever can. The person who I wish to wake up as is myself as I’d like to be.

First of all, I love my life. There are aspects of it that I would never want to change. I live in a beautiful part of the world, Northeastern Pennsylvania, where the rural and urban lifestyles meet and coexist within sight of each other. My home is located in the country, far enough away from humanity to be quiet and relaxed, yet close enough that anything needed can easily be obtained. I have a large family that both supports my dreams and helps me remain grounded and whom I love and care about very dearly. All of us help each other out, and we can always count on one another. I attend school at a local college, Penn State Hazleton, which is a small branch of a very large system. This allows me to enjoy the familiarity of a small college campus while simultaneously enjoying the benefits of belonging to an enormous educational institution. To support myself financially, I have what I consider to be the greatest job in the world: teaching guitar. Showing others how to do something that I love to do, sharing this love with others, and helping them find the same joy that I myself do is a very rewarding experience, which I would do for free. Being paid is a bonus. My job is not all about the money, but about how I feel when I am done working at the end of a day. My life is wonderful, and I am very happy and satisfied with it.

But sometimes I wish that my life wasn’t mine, but my dream’s. There are things that happen in life that I cannot control right now but I dearly wish that I could. I have been to paradise when I visited my sister Jill, who lives on Maui, and I often wish I were there right now. I fell in love with the island and with the ocean. The ocean especially is what I fell in love with, and I’ve dreamt about

returning to it almost every day.

Sometimes, I find where I live currently to be too close to the metropolis that is the northeastern United States. I would love to live somewhere a little more remote, where I have the room and the freedom to truly live. My family, while a source of support, is also a source of frustration. Besides the usual annoyances one receives from family, my younger brothers, Joe and Chris, provide a particular degree of frustration. Chris, Joe, and I play in a band together, which is both an amazing yet terrible experience. The music can be amazing, yet practicing to sound good is usually very trying. We fight, goof around, and generally waste time. If we concentrate, we could be the best band in the area, if not the state. If possible, I would change their attitude about the band to one that is more productive and enjoyable to work with.

My college experience so far has been less than satisfying. While I usually enjoy the atmosphere, there are too many times when I am annoyed by the antics of those around me, and the educational standards leave me very disappointed. My mind is seldom provoked into deep thought, but instead my mind is faced with mere memorization of laws, rules, theorems, and how to apply what I've learned to solve the problems to receive a good grade. Part of this is practical, but the lack of intellectual stimulation is something that truly bothers me, and I believe it to be detrimental to my intellectual development. I wish that I had more classes based on discussion of ideas, not recitation of facts.

As much as I love my job, there are nights when it only makes me feel tired. Watching a student play the same song and make the same mistake as the last few weeks is very frustrating. Watching a student try and have some difficulty is tolerable, but watching a student who could and should be able to play what he or she is told to practice not be able to play it due to a lack of practice is very irritating. I wish that all of my students would make measurable progress each week, or that I could support myself by only playing guitar and performing. Either way, I will be able to keep the music that I love so much as a major part of my life.

Besides these aspects of my life, I would also like to wake up as the man I wish I could be. I wish I could open up and talk to people. I keep almost everything inside of me, both the good and the bad. No one actually knows me because of this. I wish that I was braver and had the courage to let others know me. I wish I could find a way to relate to others, to find something to talk and laugh about. I have an incredibly difficult time being in touch with any emotions, which causes me to be

distant and detached from almost every single person I ever meet. Even when I want to say how I feel, I can never find the words to do it, and instead say nothing. I wish there was a way for me to overcome my emotional detachment. I wish that I was stronger physically, and did not need to take medications that I am supposed to take everyday, for asthma, allergies, and other ailments. I have back and neck problems, which I wish would simply go away. I wish that I was more successful in my attempts to do anything, be it socialize, write a song, or work on something mechanical. I wish that my mechanical ability was much greater than its current state. Most of all, I wish that I could find the best way to make as many people as happy as possible, and have the ability to do it.

"It's easy to live in your imagination when you can't control the situation," John Entwistle states in his song, "Too Late the Hero." That line is how I live my life. While I am very happy, too often I find myself imagining what it would be like if the situation were different, if it worked out the way I had hoped that it would. Every morning I wake up as me, and I would never want to be anyone else but me. However, every morning I wake up, and I think how differently life would be if I truly was the me I had dreamt about.

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## The Night My Life Changed Without My Knowing It

It's 10:00 A.M. ON A FRIDAY evening, but the day and time are actually quite irrelevant. I am being told of a mission that is going to embark later in the night. The mission seems like all the rest: drive into town, kick in a couple of doors, search some houses, then come back to the base. In late June, I reported to my armory for the "trip across the pond," as they put it. I met about twenty new guys, who I was told would become my family. Within this group were eight guys, who would begin to feel like blood to me, my squad.

Over the next couple of months I spent 24/7 with my squad. I learned to trust them. I knew they always had my back, because they knew I had theirs. It was a tough thing to have done, but we bonded in a way I had never thought strangers could have. We went through a ton of drills. One of these drills was how to enter and search a house. I was the first guy to enter the house. This was the most dangerous position but also the most crucial. I was the guy who paved the way with my team leader right behind me.

One ordinary night after our mission brief, we started to get ready. By now it had become a simple routine to check over all of our gear, then load up and get ready to move. My team leader asked me a few reminder questions—"Did you check your batteries? Do you have your knee pads?"—just making sure we were ready because everyone slips once in a while. Once all the checks were done, we started getting into the vehicles. That night we were in the passenger seats because we were going to be the ground troops.

This is where my heart started to pump, even though I had done at least a hundred of these missions. However, I have learned that the nervousness is what keeps me sharp, that makes sure my squad and I get back to the base after the mission; it also ensures I keep my wits about me so I don't let down my new family.

After a couple of minutes of driving, we arrived at our drop point. I got out of the vehicle and started running to the closest wall for cover. I located my team leader,

and he told me to move out; then I led the team to our destination. We arrived at our target building, moved into the courtyard, and then I looked for the closest door.

Our mission plan was different this time than what we were used to. We were planning to use a new battering ram, which my battle buddy was going to ram into the door. The plan was for me to give him a signal, and then he was going to bang the door open. He looked at me and mouthed, "Are you ready?" and I gave the count down with my hand. He hit the door with the battering ram; however, not much happened, and we lost the element of surprise.

My team leader told him to hit it again and again. With every hit, the tension grew stronger. Finally, the door flew open. However, as the door went in so did my buddy with the battering ram, and I jumped into action. I ran through the doorway, and I saw him sprawled on the ground scrambling to grab his weapon, but he didn't need to worry because I was in the mode. My weapon popped up, and I was in my ready position to take on whatever came at me.

Within seconds a man appeared from around the corner; I saw his white dress covering him from shoulder to toe, his black hair and thick black mustache, although none of this is important. I looked for his hands and what they were doing. I found them, and they were slowly rising in the air. I pulled up my weapon. As my sights drew down on him, I moved my weapon to fire. Then I saw his hands were empty and he was unarmed. I started yelling at him, "ERFA EDICK, ERFA EDICK!" which is "Hands up!" in Arabic.

He looked stunned and quickly dropped to the ground with his hands up in the air. Once I got him under control, I passed him to the search team outside. I then checked the rest of the house to ensure that it was safe. Afterwards, I made sure that my battle buddy was okay, and then I went outside to help search the detainees. We loaded them into the truck, and we took them back to the base, where we handed them off to the people who interrogated them. The mission was successful, and everyone made it back to base without any harm.

Some time later, when I rotated back home, one of the main questions everyone has for me is, "Did you kill anyone over there?" Every time I am asked this question, this incident pops into my mind, a situation where I could have easily shot a man, but due to my training, did not. When asked that question I can respond simply with a smile and say, "There was a time when I was close, but, no, I didn't."

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## Aliens for Americans

THE VISUAL IMPACT of the White House blowing up in the film *Independence Day* was the birth of a classic movie moment, not only because the special effects are impressive, but because it triggers the deep-seeded patriotic reflex in all of us as Americans. From the day we first recite the Pledge of Allegiance in elementary school, we are reminded regularly that we do in fact live in a great and powerful country. Popular movies such as *Independence Day* play into our American ideal of being the hero. This movie proudly declares that there is no force in all the universe that can take over the human race. There is no superior technology which, with the help of the United States, Earthlings cannot overpower. As American audiences, we love to see ourselves as the shining beacon leading the way for the rest of the nations of the world, especially if the way includes very large explosions.

A completely different version of a human-alien encounter is imagined by author Octavia Butler in her short story "Bloodchild." Narrated by a young boy named Gan, the tale takes place on a distant planet ruled by insect-like creatures called Tlic. Humans arrive on the planet as refugees of oppression only to find themselves in a complex subordinate relationship with the Tlic. A story like "Bloodchild" is much less likely to be made into a blockbuster movie because it compels us as both Americans and human beings to rethink our status in the universe. It shows humans as mortal, vulnerable creatures. "Bloodchild" forces its readers to focus on the gray area between "the good guys" and "the bad guys." Texts like this that challenge our assumptions about our society are thus much more valuable than cookie-cutter big-budget Hollywood movies, because they clue us in to how others may view us. While patriotism is certainly not a sign of ignorance, stepping outside the patriotic box can heighten social awareness and expand one's perspective.

Let's begin by examining how the humans are portrayed in both stories: in both cases, the humans are presented with the threat of being overtaken by a race from another planet. The most basic difference between the two stories, however, is precisely who is the invader in the first place. The humans in *Independence Day* face the stereotypical threat of alien invasion. They are simply minding their own business on their own planet when these hostile creatures appear on NASA's radar. That is

to say, Jeff Goldblum's character David explains that the invasive ships in question are so mammoth that they block all the man-made satellites and confuse the radar. Portrayed as victims, *all* Earthlings are a metaphorical David and the aliens are Goliath. We as audiences love stories such as these, because being the underdog will make the inevitable triumph of the human race only that much more satisfying.

Conversely, the humans in the story "Bloodchild" play the confusing role of both humans and aliens. Main character T'Gatoi explains to narrator Gan, "Because your people arrived, we are relearning what it means to be a healthy, thriving people. And your ancestors, fleeing from their home world, from their own kind who would have killed or enslaved them—they survived because of us. We saw them as people and gave them the Preserve when they still tried to kill us as worms" (2518). Instead of dominating this new planet, the young human males become hosts for Tlic larvae. The idea of such a failed conquest can be somewhat unsettling to the average American reader because our country was founded on a policy that is the polar opposite. The humans, or "Terran," arrive and attempt to kill the dominant species on the planet, only to be knocked down and essentially turned into slaves (2526). Apparently, manifest destiny does not translate on an interstellar basis. On this new planet they are even renamed "Terran" and submissively call themselves by this name. In keeping with this is the reoccurring cage motif that appears throughout the story. Six times the humans in the story make different references to a cage. Most often, Gan speaks of the many-limbed embrace of T'Gatoi in this way. Gan explains, "I was first caged ... only three minutes after my birth" (2518). In a certain light, they see themselves as prisoners. They are denied guns, automobiles and even the option of leaving the Preserve. When recalling a rebellious time in his life, Gan's brother admits that he had attempted, in vain, to flee: "Yeah. Stupid. Running inside the Preserve. Running in a cage" (2524). Aside from the occasional rebellious run around the Preserve, the humans of "Bloodchild" make no heroic attempts to save themselves.

Next, let's analyze the few similarities and enormous differences between the aliens. The aliens (or non-humans in the case of "Bloodchild") in both tales of science fiction share a similar aggressive trait. In simple terms, the aliens in *Independence Day* are on the offensive, whereas the Tlic in "Bloodchild" are on the defensive. As the movie makes entirely clear, the *Independence Day* aliens seek out new worlds to take over and destroy. They are a sort of inter-planetary virus that spreads from planet

to planet, using up the resources of each. The Tlic, however, were not seeking out the humans as surrogate hosts; when the humans arrived, they immediately attacked the native species, the Tlic. Ergo, everything the Tlic do to and for the Terran is in response to their hostile and unexpected arrival. The actions and even appearance of the aliens are drastically different because they were created to serve two entirely different purposes by the minds behind the texts.

Simplified for Hollywood, the thoughts and intentions of *Independence Day* aliens are black and white. When the captured alien is confronted by Bill Pullman's character, the ever-so-dashing president of the United States, he asks the creature "What do you want us to do?" When it replies "die" with a menacing hiss through the vocal chords of a recently deceased scientist, there is little confusion about its sentiments toward the human species. Just as the alien in *John Carpenter's The Thing* or the creatures in the *Alien* movie series, the *Independence Day* alien gives us no cause to delve deeper into its character because its intentions are made abundantly clear. It wishes only to exterminate humans and take over its territory. This simple-minded take on the villainous alien does not ask audiences to step out of the safe box of "us versus them" logic (a pre-packaged mentality that is occasionally present to Americans in our foreign relations policies). Reinforcing the ultimate "bad guy" idea in *Independence Day* does not help the average American to detect these problems within our society.

The Tlic, on the other hand, seem to both protect and take advantage of their human visitors. The Terran are given a "preserve" by the Tlic for "protection" (an idea that may have been borrowed from the Native American chapter of our history books). T'Gatoi calls it a "refuge," yet the Terran are treated as "necessities, status symbols and an independent people." In the city, Gan is stared at by Tlic with "desperate eagerness." The human boys are "sold... to the rich and powerful" (2517). A Terran lives the contradiction of being both an object and a person. A fair question to ask, however, is who is this supposed refuge protecting? The aggressors from the start were the Terran. It could surely be argued that the Tlic relocated the new arrivals to a preserve purely out of self-defense. On the other hand, the Tlic clearly need to ensure the survival of the human race in order to continue to reproduce. The Tlic are cast in a selfish and pitiless light by keeping the Terran in a hostile and oppressed condition.

Yet, there seems to be a bond between the Tlic and their chosen hosts, the N'Tlic. "Bloodchild" ends with Gan being implanted with T'Gatoi's first egg. The scene

between the large female insect and the boy becomes uncomfortably intimate. They confess their love for each other and much of the language used to describe the moment is tender. "I undressed and lay down beside her ... The puncture was painless, easy. So easy going in. She undulated slowly against me, her muscles forcing the egg from her body into mine ... I leaned my forehead against her. She was cool velvet, deceptively soft ... She made a soft hum of contentment" (2528). Readers could be torn between the sentimental and even erotic language used to describe the scene and the mental image of an enormous insect crouching over a prepubescent boy, impregnating him in the abdomen with a large, sharp tail.

Furthermore, before they even commit such an action, the appearance of the two different alien species speaks volumes about how the audiences and readers will react to them. On the outside with their "biometric technology," the *Independence Day* aliens are several repugnant creatures melded into one. They have shiny squid-like tentacles and long spider-like feet, with a strange shell reminiscent of a crab. But on the inside, they are the epitome of the tabloid stereotype of little green men: the large, black, almond-shaped eyes are set above tiny nostrils and slits for mouths. All of this is combined onto a frail frame, which is precisely what the typical western viewer would expect. They are cold and distant. They do not communicate with voice boxes, only with telepathy, an ability which is inherently frightening to audiences. These aliens are described as merely parasites and come off as such, which is an idea about alien beings that the majority of Americans are likely to accept.

A less comforting thought to Americans might be the idea of being the abused and helpless ones at the hands or claws of giant caterpillars. Technically, the Tlic are not caterpillars; they are Tlic. However, the mental image a reader has is most likely to be some combination of different insects. T'Gatoi, for example, has "three meters of body ... She had bones—ribs, a long spine, a skull, four sets of limb bones per segment" (2519). Caterpillar legs and scorpion tails are much more earthly to the reader than the *Independence Day* aliens. We as humans are challenged to imagine ourselves as submissive to creatures that are normally one one-thousandth of our size. They also speak to the Terran with normal voices, not telepathy. This is a more familiar means of communication to us and thus could be considered all the more disturbing. The Tlic have the appearance of monsters, yet they share many characteristics with humans.

All of these characteristics of the aliens and humans are meant to bring the audience to a conclusion of who is the "good guy" and who is the "bad guy." The humans

of *Independence Day*, and more importantly the Americans, are led by a strong-willed, brave and Sexiest Man of the Year president. He wakes up in the morning with perfect hair and by the end of the day will look an enraged alien right in the eye and demand peace. This movie was clearly made to portray America in the best light possible. It begins with the title itself, referring to a day of absolutely no relevance to any other country but our own. American audiences would not have been able to identify with this same plot taking place on April 18<sup>th</sup>, independence day in Zimbabwe. Sure, the movie shows countries of the rest of the world pulling together to defeat a common enemy, but it is made abundantly clear that this is only possible through the grand plan of the Americans. Upon hearing the news of the upcoming attack, a British military leader says "It's about damn time." It's as though every country on the planet was just sitting around waiting for America to come up with an answer. Leading the counter-strike attack with guns blazing, the President of the United States dodges through the oncoming green-laser beam fire, because on top of being a fantastic father, president, and husband, he is an equally excellent fighter pilot. Even the missile that blows up the evil mother ship is branded with an American flag.

In "Bloodchild," there are no missiles. Terran are not allowed to have guns (a humiliating proposition to gun-loving Americans). Even more humiliating is that they are only protected from involuntary impregnation by laws voted on in a democracy much like our own. "T'Gatoi was the Tlic government official in charge of the Preserve," explains Gan (2516). They are put on preserves not unlike the Native Americans were moved to reservations. It seems Octavia Butler is turning the tables on a usually dominant nation. The Tlic's planet is also run by the females of the dominant species. On Earth, women of many nations are simply fighting for equality, so this foreign concept may feel almost ideal to feminists. The Tlic are so like us with their cars, cities, and similar system of government that readers could become conflicted over whom they should sympathize. At first the arrangement seems unfair and one-sided. However, after taking into account the fact that the humans themselves invaded, and in a hostile manner, it is almost a surprise that they were not just killed or sent back from where they came (2526).

Instead, while the Terran are not tortured into submission, they are sedated in a drug-like haze by the liquid form the Tlic eggs their captor-caregivers give them to drink. But Gan's mother refuses to ingest the eggs in a silent protest. Without them she grows older than she otherwise would and T'Gatoi resorts to stinging her by

surprise to get her to submit (2517). T'Gatoi asks, "Why are you in such a hurry to be old?" but it seems it is the involuntary obedience that Gan's mother dislikes, not the anti-aging benefits (2516). So the Terran are not treated cruelly, but they are not close to being treated as equals.

Hollywood tends to reduce their protagonist and antagonist labels to very two-dimensional criteria. The "good guys" are unreasonably good-looking and the "bad guys" get blown up in the end. Will Smith can do little else but be the lovable protagonist that the audience roots for. More complicated stories like "Bloodchild" do not define these labels for the reader. Being allowed to draw one's own conclusions about the morality of a character's actions is a valuable story-telling technique, which will likely never be common in big-budget alien movies. As American audiences, we enjoy the idea that we can be the beginning and end of all that is important in the galaxy. Texts like "Bloodchild" are vital to our culture, because they open our minds to the idea of more powerful forces in the universe. Said forces could be anything from a divine power to just very, very large insects. Deviating from an ego-centric world view is essential to broadening a reader's perspectives.

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## Conscience, Morality, and Justice: A Literary Perspective.

### I

MANY OF THE WORLD'S literary masterpieces are devoted to the study of the human mind. These works seek to shed light on the "why" of things, and in their explorations many conclusions are reached. Two recurring topics presented in a number of works are the intertwined ones of conscience and morality. In addition, justice, which is closely related to conscience and morality, is an idea often presented in these same works. How, then, are morality, conscience, and justice related? In examining many works of literature, we come to the conclusion that violation of one's morality will inevitably lead to punishment by one's conscience with the end result of such punishment being true justice.

This idea of punishment by one's conscience, and the justice a guilty conscience can bring, is found in the literature of many cultures. We find evidence of this in the ancient Greek trilogy of plays *The Oresteia* by Aeschylus. We find American author Herman Melville's "Billy Budd, Sailor," a short story, concerning itself with this point. We find this idea to be central in Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. We find German-born American Hannah Arendt's nonfiction work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* presenting a pertinent facet of this idea. We find French author Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger* in line with a study of conscience and guilt. It is clear that across the lines of language, history, culture, and even genre, that the subjects of morality, conscience, and justice have received much attention. Studying these works will help us see that violation of one's morality will result in punishment by one's conscience.

Before beginning the examination of the aforementioned works, it is necessary to come up with definitions of conscience, morality, and justice. It is clear that by all accounts "conscience" is quite a complex aspect of the human psyche and could undoubtedly constitute the subject of an essay all its own. However, a fairly simple defini-

tion can be derived for conscience and will be used to help facilitate the following discussion. Conscience can be said to be that which "constitute[s] the disposition to integrate or harmonize moral knowledge ... with the appropriate moral action" (Fuss 116); whereupon, it can be conjectured that this "disposition" is a "binding force ... which must be broke through in order to do what violates our standard of right" (Mill 26). That is to say, conscience acts in order to prevent a violation of morality. This disposition must be an effect of some sort; for example, if a marble in a bowl does not jump out, we can say it is disposed to remain there, but we also know that the force of gravity is holding it in. In the same way, it is mental suffering in the form of remorse that acts to hold our actions within the bounds of morality (Mill 26). It is also important to note that this disposition does not arise because we derive pleasure from acting morally. Rather, if a person acts morally and receives pleasure from doing so, it is most likely because the moral act is also in some way pleasurable. It is highly unlikely that one receives pleasure by not killing his or her mother, although the opposite action would generally entail great suffering. Therefore, pleasure is merely a consequential component of a moral act. Conscience, then, uses suffering to make one act in terms of one's own morality.

The idea of morality is certainly a complex one as well. Morality, as will be used in this essay, is the sum of moral knowledge, and is the basis for defining what an individual views as right and wrong. Like many other human beliefs, an individual's morality is a personal belief, an idea. As an idea, we must then note "that all *ideas* are derived from experience" (Swabey 575), and therefore that morality is derived from one's collective experiences. As a result of morality being derived from the sum of one's life experiences, after a few years this sum suffers from what is known as a "cancellation error," by which is meant that the larger of the two items, the pre-existing morality in this case, completely marginalizes the effect of the smaller component when the two are added. We see then that after the first few years of one's life, enough moral knowledge has been accumulated to make changing one's morality a difficult process, and therefore that one's morality is relatively invariable. We see then that the mind develops an "*ideological immune system*: 'educated, intelligent ... adults rarely change their most fundamental presuppositions'" (qtd. in Shermer 60). Furthermore, the conscience actively resists changing one's morality because thinking or behaving outside the and her lover Aegisthus, and sparked by the killing of Aegisthus' sibling by Agamemnon's father, is avenged by Agamemnon's son Orestes. Though Orestes thinks that he is in the right,

bounds of one's morality is subject to punishment by one's conscience. In that way, behaving in a manner incongruent with one's morality is limited, and this limitation of new behaviors constrains changes in one's morality. Morality, then, is the aggregation of a set of moral beliefs and is relatively invariable.

Justice, working from our above definitions of conscience and morality, is the end result of one overstepping one's moral boundaries and being made to suffer for it. This of course addresses only the individual level of the matter, as the collective body of society can have a set of moral codes, which may be codified as laws, for which one will be brought to justice if one violates them. This justice of society is of course justice in the traditional sense, but not the justice which will be discussed in this essay. This essay will concern itself with the justice experienced by an individual, which is brought about by that individual's own conscience. This punishment serves to teach us not to violate our morality again. Much as one learns rather quickly from the experience of grabbing a hot pan, suffering makes the lesson quite clear: Do not do that again, or you will suffer. This, in essence, is the function of justice. However, as long as a man has not transgressed his own morality, he will never truly be brought to justice, no matter what a court says. Dostoyevsky, who spent many years in prison in Siberia, remarks that "I never saw one sign of repentance among these people [convicts], not a trace of despondent brooding over their crime, and ... the majority of them considered themselves absolutely in the right" (qtd. in Squires 819). These men that Dostoyevsky speaks of did not violate their own sense of morality, albeit a morality perverted from societal norms, and therefore do not feel any guilt and consequently do not suffer in their minds for committing their "crimes." This too presents the notion that criminality of an act is determined on the level of the individual, and fits well with the idea of justice being manifested on the individual level. In summation, justice is the end result of being made to suffer for overstepping one's moral boundaries.

## II

Aeschylus' *The Oresteia* is a tale of cyclical revenge that continually drains away the blood of the House of Atreus and ends with a peaceable resolution to the bloodshed. Underlying that, however, is an illustration of conscience, morality, and justice. Agamemnon's brutal murder at the hands of his wife Clytaemnestra and her lover Aegisthus, and sparked by the killing of Aegisthus' sibling by Agamemnon's father, is avenged by Agamemnon's son Orestes. Though Orestes thinks that he is in the right,

we will see quite clearly that Orestes is made to suffer for violating his morality.

In examining *The Oresteia*, we must first understand the conscience of Orestes. No sooner does Orestes kill his treacherous mother and her lover than the Furies come upon him; Orestes exclaims, "No, no! Women—look—like Gorgons,/ shrouded in black, their head wreathed,/ swarming serpents!" (Aeschylus 225 L. 1047-1049). These women, the Furies, are gods who punish matricides, the killing of one's mother. *The Oresteia* being a myth, or a "traditional story... ostensibly with a historical basis, serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people" (Webster's 942), leads us to the assertion that the Furies are no more than conscience personified although their highly specific nature in this case should merely be considered a function of the crime committed. If the crime had been different, perhaps another god or set of gods would have intervened. To continue, the idea of the Furies as conscience is further reinforced by the fact that the Furies are not even visible at the end of the "Libation Bearers," which is the point where Orestes murders his mother (Brown 13). Orestes exclaims, "You can't see them/ I can" (Aeschylus 225 L. 1060-1061), leading us to believe that the Furies are a representation of Orestes' conscience. Of course, the Furies become visible later on, although with this visible manifestation the idea of the Furies as conscience is still plausible, especially when again *The Oresteia* is considered to be mythological in nature. Further reinforcing the idea of the Furies as conscience is that they do not act arbitrarily; rather, they distinguish between good and bad. In becoming the Eumenides, the former Furies still possess "a standard of right and wrong" (Sayre 326). This standard of right and wrong is the judging of one's morality against one's actions, which is how the conscience decides whether or not to function.

Now that we understand Orestes' conscience, we must move on to his morality. The Furies physically drive Orestes to justice, chasing him first to the shrine of Apollo and then to the Temple of Athena, where Athena presides as justice over a court to decide the fate of Orestes. The driving of Orestes, when considering *The Oresteia* on a mythological level, represents the suffering imposed by conscience due to a violation of morality. This, however, necessitates an explanation of the morality of Orestes. Orestes possesses an upright morality; this idea is reinforced by his hesitation before killing his mother. Orestes exclaims, "What will I do, Pylades?—I dread to kill my mother!" (Aeschylus 217 L.886), and only after being convinced to Pylades, can Orestes kill his mother. In light of this, why then does Orestes kill his mother?

There are two reasons for this. The first is the god Apollo, who promises a punishment so terrible for Orestes if he fails that Orestes “can’t repeat the punishment” (Aeschylus 225 L.1030). The second reason is that Orestes thinks he can avoid a “mother’s curse” (Aeschylus 217 L.899) because Clytaemnestra has been no mother to him. Orestes states, “Mother? You flung me to a life of pain” (Aeschylus 217 L.900). We must also note that man is a creature quite capable of ignoring and denying the obvious (i.e. people who deny the Holocaust), and this makes it quite plausible for Orestes to deny that killing his mother will bring any harm to him. We see then that Orestes’ morality does not condone the shedding of blood, although he may think himself able to do so.

The above mentioned hesitation for Orestes to draw blood is a sign that Orestes’ conscience is inhibiting him. Though it seems the best course for him to shed blood, the morality possessed by Orestes is clearly not in favor of doing so. This hesitation also brings up a point pertinent to this essay. One may try to view the hesitation as either the actions of conscience or as the logical effort to avoid punishment, and this creates some complications. The latter viewpoint, however, cannot be sustained, for Orestes expects to be punished for not killing his mother rather than killing her (See discussion above concerning Apollo and Clytaemnestra). After the murder, it is quite clear then that Orestes has violated his morality and is being punished by his conscience for doing so. As a result, Orestes is being “driven,” both on the physical and allegorical levels, to justice.

Aeschylus makes a point about the nature and role of suffering which can help us further understand the concept of justice. From the chorus we hear “Zeus has led us on to know,/ the Helmsman lays it down as law/ that we must suffer, suffer into truth./ We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart/ the pain of pain remembered comes again,/ and we resist, but ripeness comes as well” (Aeschylus 109 L. 177-182). This clearly indicates that the function of suffering is to teach, in line with our concept of justice. *The Oresteia* then is “a grand parable of progress” (Fagles and Stanford 16), chronicling the lesson learned through suffering. So as Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother, the suffering he is subjected to makes it quite certain that he will not draw blood in revenge again. Suffering teaches us to not violate our morality again.

Orestes has been driven to justice by his conscience, as represented by the Furies, for violating his morality. This rendering of justice has not been without a purpose, as a court of law has been established in Athens. Presiding over this court are men who “cast” their honest

lots as conscience may decide” (Aeschylus 261 L. 685-686), and whose actions can be considered more equitable than the brutality associated with *lex talionis*. Thus, with the suffering that has driven Orestes to justice, wisdom has been obtained, in the form of a more perfect way to render justice. In violating his morality, Orestes has been made to suffer by his conscience, has been brought to justice, and by his suffering, has gained wisdom.

### III

A man is impressed onto a ship of the British Navy, a man so innocent he has earned the appellation “Baby” (Melville 3). As fate would have it, he ends up dangling from the hangman’s rope at the end of a yard-arm for killing a man. In studying three important characters in Herman Melville’s “Billy Budd, Sailor,” we can understand why this has happened and also further understand conscience, justice, and morality. The first character is Captain Vere, who, in sentencing Billy Budd to hang, suffers for the rest of his life after he violates his morality. The second character is Billy, who, though he kills a man, does not feel guilty. Third in this mix is the character of John Claggart, who accuses Billy of mutinous intent because of his completely unreasonable hatred for Billy. These three men and their actions will all serve to illustrate the relationship between violation of one’s morality and conscience.

In the case of Captain Edward Fairfax Vere, we clearly see that he is quite distraught over sentencing the innocent Billy. During Billy’s trial Vere exclaims, “I believe you, my man” (Melville 55) in response to Billy stating that he is “true to the King” (Melville 55), meaning Billy possesses no mutinous intentions. The narrator of the story tells us that at this point Vere’s voice “indicat[es] a suppressed emotion not otherwise betrayed” (Melville 55). This emotion is sympathy for Billy and his plight and indicates the aspect of Vere’s morality most important in the case. This aspect is the one that is intended to prevent Vere from being wrong. This would be the case with Billy, as he is characterized as the “handsome sailor” (Melville 3), a figure whose “moral nature is seldom out of keeping with the physical make” (Melville 3), whose make is described as “more or less of a mighty boxer or wrestler” (Melville 2). As a person of a strong moral nature, there is no doubt that murder to such a person as Billy Budd would be wrong. How then, does Claggart end up dead? Claggart lies “foully” (Melville 56) in accusing Billy of mutinous intent, a charge which carries the penalty of death. Billy, in defending himself, knows

judging an obviously innocent man guilty. Why then does Vere sentence Billy to hang? This question is most directly answered by Vere himself, who states "in . . . military necessity so heavy a compulsion is laid" (Melville 61). In essence, Vere has substituted the state-sanctioned morality of the Navy for his own, which compels him to sentence Billy to hang. In addition, we must also consider what would happen if Billy is not punished. What effect could such an action have on the minds of the crew? The crew might obviously take clemency on Vere's part to be a sign of clemency in general and may very well rise up in mutiny. Vere is already concerned about the quite recent widespread outbreak of mutiny at Nore, and the "panic it struck throughout England" (Melville 61). So to preserve the integrity of the military and the stability of society as a whole, Vere has no choice but to execute Billy. Here it is not possible to protect the innocent Billy, for the preservation of military order comes first and foremost. To put it another way, "justice to the individual is not the ultimate loyalty in a complex culture; the stability of the culture has a higher claim, and when the two conflict justice to the individual must be abrogated to keep the order of society intact" (Glick 104). Vere then has no choice about sentencing Billy. Society and the military necessitate the hanging of this innocent man. Though the execution of Billy is a necessity, Vere will still suffer because his morality is not that of the Navy. Vere's conscience throughout the trial is attempting to "harmonize his moral knowledge . . . with the appropriate moral action" (Fuss 116), as evidenced by how Vere feels about Billy. But Vere comes to the conclusion that "private conscience should . . . yield to that imperial one formulated in the code under which alone we officially proceed" (Melville 60). As we have already seen Captain Vere's feelings during the trial, we can now turn to how he feels afterwards. The most lucid example of this is Vere's last words. Shortly after the execution of Billy, the ship is attacked by a French vessel, and Vere is mortally wounded (Melville 75). Just before his death, Vere is heard to utter, "Billy Budd, Billy Budd" (Melville 76), and so we can see then the memory of Vere's error is sharpened by his conscience. Vere would certainly have never made the mistake of executing an innocent man again. Vere's conscience is making him suffer for failing to obey what he knew to be morally right; it is also bringing him to justice for doing so.

The case of Billy Budd represents an interesting point in the workings of morality and in conscience as well. Under a normal morality, the killing of a person is wrong. This would be the case with Billy, as he is characterized as the "handsome sailor" (Melville 3), a figure whose "moral

nature is seldom out of keeping with the physical make" (Melville 3), whose make is described as "more or less of a mighty boxer or wrestler" (Melville 2). As a person of a strong moral nature, there is no doubt that murder to such a person as Billy Budd would be wrong. How then, does Claggart end up dead? Claggart lies "fouly" (Melville 56) in accusing Billy of mutinous intent, a charge which carries the penalty of death. Billy, in defending himself, knows he has done nothing wrong; though a man is dead by his hands. We can even see that Billy did not even want it this way; he states "I had to say something, and I could only say it with a blow, God help me!" (Melville 56). Billy can only say it with a blow because of his stutter, and in lieu of lashing out with his tongue, he lashes out with his fist. Though he kills a man, Billy has done nothing to violate his morality. As a result, he does not suffer, even though what he has done has been labeled a crime.

In examining John Claggart, we find aspects of morality and conscience not yet discussed. In doing so, we can make two generalizations about Claggart: That he lives in a distorted reality and that he ascribes to a perverted morality. Both of these are very powerful influences on the actions of a man. In particular a perverted morality is of great concern from a societal standpoint because of the danger it presents to society. A distorted reality only then serves to magnify the problem. As the master-at-arms, a person who functions as a sort of chief of police aboard ship, Claggart possesses a degree of power over others, additionally compounding the problem. Further compounding the problem is Claggart's intelligence. "His general aspect and manner were . . . suggestive of an education" (Melville 20), says the narrator, and Claggart's intelligence will only allow him to plot more meticulously any plan he may wish to carry out. Due to Claggart's distorted reality, he is a figure who "make[s] ogres out of trifles" (Melville 33), in which the most insignificant acts become serious. A case in point is the spilling of soup by Billy in the newly cleaned mess. Claggart perceives Billy's spilling of the soup not as an accident but rather as "the sly escape of a spontaneous feeling on Billy's part more or less answering the antipathy of his [Claggart's] own" (Melville 32). We know, however, that the spilling of the soup is only an accident, and the fact that Claggart cannot see that it is, combined with the fact that he sees it as an affront to his person, a clear indication of his distortion of reality. On his perversion of morality, the aforementioned accusation of Billy is the strongest indication of this perversion. Throughout the accusation, Claggart's voice remains "silvery and low," indicating that he believes himself to be totally in the right. Morally, Claggart views himself as

innocent and Billy as guilty, although we clearly know where the guilt would lie in a conventional morality. Claggart's perverted morality prevents his conscience from acting to punish him when he dreams up contemptible plans, and his distorting of reality only aggravates the problem. Claggart's morality then makes it quite clear that he will not suffer for accusing Billy. We see then quite clearly that if one's morality is violated, one will suffer; but if one's morality is not violated, one will not suffer, no matter what type of morality it may be.

#### IV

Thus far in this discussion there has been no mention of reason and its relation to conscience, morality, and justice. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* serves as an excellent basis upon which to discuss these relationships. *Crime and Punishment's* anti-hero Raskolnikov is a mercilessly intellectual, but poverty-stricken student, whose reason interferes with his ability to correctly recognize his own morality. Raskolnikov, in what could certainly be called a compromised physical and mental state, manages to reason that the murder of a despicable old pawnbroker-woman would be beneficial to society. Even more than that, though, Raskolnikov reasons that he is some sort of superman, able to "step over" (Dostoyevsky\* 276) and do what he sees as right. As a superman, then, he could step over and benefit society. Raskolnikov will violate his morality in an attempt to prove his theory, which he has derived via reason.

First, we must paint a picture of Raskolnikov's morality. We can see that, in general, Raskolnikov's morality is one of an upright man. One of the most telling illustrations of this is his inability to stand cruelty. Raskolnikov dreams he is a young boy back in his hometown and witnesses the beating to death of an old, broken down mare. He exclaims with tears in his eyes, "[W]hy—why did they kill the poor little horse?" (Dostoyevsky 78), which is certainly quite an emotional outburst from a man who has managed to reason away the value of a human life. Based on our findings of the general invariability of morality, we see that an upright moral nature must then exist within Raskolnikov. In addition, the fact that this is a dream makes the finding that Raskolnikov is upright in his morality all the more convincing; we see that "the psychological value of a dream is evident, since the dream allows the portrayal of the unconscious of a character. *Unconscious*

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\* Wherever Dostoyevsky is cited, it will be taken to mean the Magarshack translation.

motivation...[is]... much more significant than *conscious*" (Mortimer 107). Raskolnikov's dream is a powerful example of the morality which he possesses. Of course, there are many examples to prove that this is not just a subconscious phenomenon, including Raskolnikov's "assist[ance] of one of his poor consumptive fellow-students" (Dostoyevsky 545), the care of the student's father once that student died, paying for the old man's funeral when he too died, the fact that Raskolnikov "had saved two little children from a house that had caught fire at night, and was himself burnt in doing so" (Dostoyevsky 545), and the fact that Raskolnikov exclaims, "Good Lord, how disgusting it all is! And will I—will I really ... No! It's impossible! It's absurd!" (Dostoyevsky 26). These examples all illustrate that Raskolnikov is a man of upright morals.

We must also come to an understanding of Raskolnikov's superman theory. Central to this superman theory is the idea that one may step over and do harm in order to bring about good. This superman theory is basically explained by Raskolnikov when he states,

If for some reason or another the discoveries of the Keplers and Newtons could not be made known to people except by sacrificing the lives of one, or a dozen, or a hundred, or even more men who made these discoveries impossible or in any way prevented them from being made, then Newton would have had the right, and indeed would have been in duty bound, to—*eliminate* the dozen or the hundred people so as to make his discoveries known to all mankind.

(Dostoyevsky 276)

It is also important to note that this was not a very radical idea; in fact many ideas like this were circulating in Russia at the time (Walicki 6). With his superman theory, Raskolnikov believes that he can step over and do what he believes is right.

Raskolnikov murders the old pawnbroker-woman Alyona then because of his theory. His theory, by way of reason, has interfered with Raskolnikov's ability to correctly recognize what is right and what is wrong and has, in essence, distorted his reality. That is why he commits the murder, because as a superman, his "reality" is that he is above all others. A number of circumstances help bring Raskolnikov to the conclusion that by murdering Alyona he can test the efficacy of his theory. Raskolnikov's

sister, Dunya, is to be married to a well-off man named Luzhin, and Raskolnikov sees this as an act of prostitution in an effort to save Raskolnikov from poverty and destitution. With the murder of the old pawnbroker-woman, Raskolnikov can take her money and prevent this catastrophe from happening. Moreover, Raskolnikov overhears a conversation in which two men discuss the efficacy and possibility of the murder of the old pawnbroker-woman, where it is said that “hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives could be saved” (Dostoyevsky 84) with the old woman’s money. We see that in killing the old woman, Raskolnikov has the perfect opportunity to test the theory. Raskolnikov then, on the force of his theory, takes the final step and murders the old pawnbroker-woman.

Immediately, however, complications arise and he accidentally murders Lizaveta, who is a “simple, child-like person” (Marchant 7), in the process. It is doubtful that even the murder of Alyona alone could have left Raskolnikov’s conscience at rest, but with the murder of Lizaveta, he has no chance of escaping his conscience. It is important to note that his thoughts about Lizaveta are not overwhelming. In fact, Raskolnikov thinks very little of her following the murder. This however is not very important, because what is at stake here is whether or not Raskolnikov was right in taking a human life at all; that is, whether his theory is correct, not whether or not he was right in murdering Lizaveta specifically. To continue, Raskolnikov, at the same time of the murder, does not see Alyona as a human being. Rather he sees her as “a useless, nasty, harmful louse” (Dostoyevsky 430). In viewing Alyona as a louse, we see that he is applying his theory. More importantly, however, Alyona’s status as a worthless creature still would not let Raskolnikov’s conscience rest; note the way he behaves when he witnesses the beating of the old mare. Before the murder, Raskolnikov believes that “there could be no question of his suffering ... and there was consequently no danger of his reason ... being in any way affected ... because what he intended to do was ‘not a crime’” (Dostoyevsky 90). Immediately following the murder, however, we see Raskolnikov’s conscience begin working, and this violation of his morality brings about adverse effects. The narrator states that “no sooner has the crime been committed than repentance begins to gnaw at his heart like a serpent” (qtd. in Magarshack 11). His hands begin to shake and he cannot control himself. He makes his way home in a delusional fit with “his thoughts ... in a terrible muddle” (Dostoyevsky 106). Somewhere later, Raskolnikov “thought he would go mad” (Dostoyevsky 107). Raskolnikov’s conscience is punishing him and

making him suffer; it has taken away his prized ability to reason and to think and replaced it with nothing at all. Throughout the rest of the novel Raskolnikov continues to suffer as long as he believes that he was right in committing the crime. We see that Raskolnikov confesses his crime to Sonia, whence she consequently exclaims, “How you suffer!” (Dostoyevsky 433), but even with this admission he has not purged himself of guilt. He continues to suffer as long as he believes himself to be right. Raskolnikov’s theory eventually begins to break down; he even admits that Alyona “wasn’t a louse” (Dostoyevsky 430). It, however, takes a horrible nightmare to finally convince him that he has transgressed his own moral code, and that his theory has failed. Raskolnikov dreams of a world in which “Universal war is envisaged ... [;] The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride forth” (Squires 821) and “of a world in which *everyone* becomes infected with the virus of believing themselves to be ‘extraordinary people’” (Frank xxi). Finally, Raskolnikov relinquishes his theory and, believing himself to be wrong, his conscience rests. Raskolnikov is brought to justice through his suffering. That is to say, he has finally learned to obey his conscience. In violating one’s morality, one inevitably suffers.

## V

The Nazi war machine has engulfed Europe, and a man is tasked with shipping the Jews of that continent to their deaths in concentration camps. Not only that, this man carries this task out to the best of his abilities. How can this be? Adolf Eichmann is the culprit of the atrocity, and it is his morality that answers this question. One might think that Eichmann is clearly in the wrong, and this is certainly the case in a conventional morality. Eichmann, however, possesses an unconventional morality, one that is a perversion of the moral code by which most of the world lives, and, therefore, he fails to see that he has done anything wrong.

Hannah Arendt, in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, makes very clear this unconventional morality of Eichmann. Eichmann’s morality can be viewed as a sort of hierarchy, at the topmost level of which Eichmann is an opportunist. All of Eichmann’s actions function around gaining an advantage for himself and in doing so getting ahead. Arendt states, “except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all” (Arendt 287). Eichmann was not “Iago and not Macbeth, and nothing would have been farther from his mind than to determine with Richard III ‘to prove a villain’” (Arendt 287), Eichmann

merely “never realized what he was doing” (Arendt 287). It never occurred to Eichmann that, in the best interests of someone else, he should prevent what was happening, rather than to commit to his own best interest and go on continuing what he was doing. Eichmann once tried to both help others and help himself, so he may have realized in part what he was doing, although it may be that he thought by helping others he could be doubly getting ahead. This attempt, however, was out of line with accepted policy, was met with reprisal, and as a result this was “the first and last time’ [Eichmann] took an initiative contrary to orders” (Arendt 94). It is also important to note that Eichmann would never have resorted to criminal activity to gain an opportunity. Arendt explains that “he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post” (Arendt 287), and we see that Eichmann lives within the law. Eichmann, as an opportunist, merely tried to gain advantage for himself and ignored others. This is in part the morality, perverted as it may seem, of Adolf Eichmann.

The next tier down in the hierarchy of Eichmann’s morality is concerned with performing his tasks to the best of his abilities; and, though of an opportunistic nature, this is not fully explained by an opportunistic characterization. This tendency towards thoroughness is explained best by the ingrained tendency of the German people to perform their tasks with a ruthless sense of purpose. Eichmann, being no exception to this, sees it as his duty to carry out his task to the best of his abilities. In essence, Eichmann, with his combined “opportunistic” and “thorough” tendencies, carried out the Final Solution to the best of his abilities, which is in concordance with his morality.

The lowest tier of Eichmann’s morality, and in part a manifestation of his “thoroughness,” is his incontrovertible sense of duty. Eichmann claims, again and again, that “he did his duty, . . . he not only obeyed *orders*, he obeyed the *law*” (Arendt 135). Arendt explains:

Much of the horribly painstaking thoroughness that usually strikes the observer as typically German, or else as a characteristic of the perfect bureaucrat—can be traced to the odd notion, indeed very common in Germany, that to be law-abiding means not merely to obey the laws but to act as though one were the legislator of the laws that one obeys.

(Arendt 137)

In light of this, it is of little surprise that Eichmann acted

in the way he did. Furthermore, in Nazi Germany, an order from Hitler carried the force of law, and Eichmann could even be comforted by the fact that he had obeyed these orders and therefore the law. Complicating Eichmann’s case is the idea that “what has to be considered as morally good, virtuous or meritorious is normally defined in conjunction with the image of the political order protected as ‘just’” (Heller 48). The Nazis were considered, certainly by Eichmann, “just,” that is to say, they had the right to rule. Certainly while the Nazis were in power, Eichmann would never have been considered in the wrong by most others, much less by himself. Eichmann did his duty, no matter what it was, and this too is, in part, the morality of Adolf Eichmann.

Now Eichmann sits in the court of the victors, and the political order under which he acted no longer exists to justify his deeds. Eichmann, however, does not suffer because he did not violate his own sense of morality. We can therefore reason that ideally he has not been brought to justice, no matter what the court has decided.

## VI

In our discussion of morality thus far, we have encountered many of the aspects of morality. We have seen those upright in morals, those upright yet unrealistic, those perverted in morals and possessing a distorted reality, and those upright in morals and possessing a distorted reality. What, then, does this leave us to explore? The answer to that question is quite simple—the man without morality. In Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, we are presented with the case of Monsieur Meursault, a young man who, on a hot summer day, shoots a man because he is hot, and the sun is in his eyes. How could this be? In looking at Meursault, we can see that it is his morality, or rather lack thereof, that is the root culprit. Meursault is a man so apathetic that it is readily apparent that morality does not exist within him, and that somehow he has escaped developing feelings towards or about others or himself.

How could a man be without a morality? In light of our definition of morality, we find that this seems paradoxical. Since morality is the sum of our moral knowledge and created by our interactions with the world, it seems unlikely that a man could be without a morality. To exist, Meursault must interact with the world. But Meursault has not developed a morality because he closes off the world completely, and, to him, there is nothing but himself. This is not to say he is an egomaniac, Meursault is even somewhat apathetic towards himself, as evidenced by his inability to focus on his own trial for murder. He is

happy being apart from others, unlike Raskolnikov, whose separation from society brings him nothing but misery: "People mean so little to him [Meursault] that he has nothing to lose; why, then, should he create or maintain a façade?" (Hackel 193). This of course helps us to see that in his apathy towards people, Meursault does not develop a morality like a person normally would.

Meursault has no feelings towards people one way or the other. When viewed in light of his actions at his mother's funeral and his relationship with his mistress, Marie, we can better understand why Meursault has failed to develop a morality. The death of Meursault's mother has little effect on him; he even says, "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.' That doesn't mean anything" (Camus 3), and this is a clear indication that he does not care about his mother, let alone people in general. This quotation is also the opening paragraph of the book and sets the tone of Meursault's actions throughout the rest of the novel. Meursault's relationship with Marie is also typical of the way he feels about people. It is also important to note that Meursault starts his relationship with Marie the day after his mother dies, spends the day at the beach, and watches a comedic movie before taking Marie home with him. Later on when Marie asks Meursault if he would like to marry her, he says, "[I]t didn't make any difference to me and we could if she wanted to. Then she wanted to know if I loved her. I answered the same way I had the last time, that it didn't mean anything but that I probably didn't love her. 'So why marry me, then?' she said. I explained to her that it didn't really matter" (Camus 41). This again indicates that he truly does not care about people. As a result of this apathy, Meursault does not extract anything from his interactions with people; to him, other people are merely an inexplicable fact of existence to which no attention need be paid. Meursault, then, in failing to interact with the world, fails to develop morality.

Without a morality, the conscience then has no function. Meursault does not feel bad about the murder he commits; in fact, he feels nothing at all. This is illustrated quite clearly when at his trial the prosecutor asks, "Has he [Meursault] so much as expressed any remorse? Never, gentlemen. Not once during the preliminary hearings did this man show emotion over his heinous offense" (Camus 100). Furthermore, the value of a human life is almost completely inconsequential to Meursault. He even states, "What did other people's deaths ... matter to me?" (Camus 121), and this is certainly not a typical belief. Furthermore, it indicates that

he has no morality, because if he did, someone else's life, even a single life besides his own, would certainly be given some value. Meursault even has trouble *remembering* that he has committed a murder. He states, "When leaving [the examining magistrate], I very nearly held out my hand and said 'Good-by'; just in time I remembered that I'd killed a man" (Hackel 192). Clearly, his conscience is not at work at all, because in having difficulty remembering he has committed a murder, we see that the suffering that would normally accompany a murder, and sharpen the memory of it, is nonexistent. Penal servitude is also of little consequence to Meursault. It is not so much punishment for him as it is a distraction from his former life. Even his own death sentence does not produce much effect on Meursault; immediately after the sentence, he states, "I wasn't thinking about anything anymore" (Camus 107). Meursault is completely unaffected by his conscience, which cannot act on his nonexistent morality, and therefore cannot render any justice. We must note, however, that this complete lack of morality need not produce criminal behavior. Rather, the extreme apathy on the part of Meursault, whether criminal or legal, towards another person means little to him. Unable to believe that he has done anything wrong, by his own standards at least, no court judgment can truly bring Meursault to justice, in the traditional sense of the word. We see then that without a morality, there is no wrong, and without an action to be considered wrong, the conscience has no function.

## VII

Our exploration of morality and conscience has brought us across thousands of years and thousands of miles, and has shown us many diverse aspects of the basic human quality of morality and its partner, the conscience. We have seen that the punishment by one's conscience is what justice really is, and that justice is served when a man believes that he has done wrong. There has been much violence in this discussion, although what better than the extremes to help illustrate a point? It has even been said, quite appropriately by Dostoyevsky, that "what most people regard to be fantastic and lacking in universality, I hold to be the inmost essence of truth" (qtd. in Mortimer 106). In this way, we see that the extremes of human action most effectively illustrate that which is most essential to human nature, which morality and conscience certainly are.

Now that we know the relationship between conscience and morality, we must decide what to do with this knowledge. We could explore the relationship of le-

gality and morality. Perhaps a more perfect justice can be produced, as a better understanding of what justice really is could help us reform the penal system. In the film version of "Billy Budd, Sailor," *Billy Budd, Foretopman*, the fact that Billy is not being brought to justice is quite clear. Lieutenant Ratcliffe states, "We are not dealing with justice here, but with the law." Maybe then we should look at reforming the law as well. Maybe we will have a better understanding of the mind of the criminal who does not repent, for now we know that his morality does not deem his "crime" as wrong, and can then explain why the prisons of the world are so full of unrepentant souls. Maybe we could further explore other works, and in doing so shed further light on the subject. Hopefully, we can take away from this discussion a better understanding of our own inner workings, and why many of us do what we do. If the arguments above have not been convincing, at least maybe they have been educational. If that much has been accomplished, then this essay has not been written in vain.

Throughout this essay it has become quite clear that not only does a violation of morality produce suffering, but that by not violating one's morality, one does not suffer inwardly, no matter how society may view one's actions. People, certainly incredibly varied and complex entities, have this as their common denominator: Violation of their morality inevitably leads to suffering imposed by their consciences.

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## Losing Faith

LOSING ONE'S FAITH is like losing one's life. Existence holds no meaning, and reality seems futile and detestable. This is what happens to young Goodman Brown in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "The Young Goodman Brown." Unable to cope with the pressures of Puritan society, he ventures into the "dark forest" of his heart. There he dreams his neighbors and loving wife "Faith" sell their souls to the devil. As a result of this dream he becomes forlorn, unable to accept that the remarkably flawless people around him might not be as devout as he thought. Consequently, he loses his own faith and dies unable to believe that people can be both good and evil.

Upon meeting the devil, Brown divulges the reason he is late. He declares, "Faith kept me back a while" (888). While traveling through the forest, he tries to call out to save his spouse. On finding her pink ribbon, he cries, "My Faith is gone!" (892). These examples are symbolic. Technically, he is referring to his wife whom he thinks has been tempted to the dark side. However, his "Faith" can also mean the actual trust he has in God and his religion. It took him some time to get to the forest because he still had his "Faith" by his side. Brown's vivid dream represents a turning point in the young man's life. He addresses his wife "Faith," but he is unknowingly speaking of his inner values.

It is not surprising that the traveler in the forest looks like an older version of Brown. In the dream, his subconscious makes a connection between himself and the devil. It is plausible that the ruler of Hell would bear some resemblance to the person whose soul he is trying to steal. He tries to make the idea of turning evil into something familiar, something that has been inside Goodman Brown for a long time. The young gentleman notices similarities between his aged companion and the elder members of this family that surprise him. He does not wish to believe that his most upright relatives socialize with the devil.

The dark forest is symbolic of the deepest depths of Goodman Brown's soul. He travels down a lane that represents his existence, and he confronts the dilemma of forsaking the straight and narrow path for a life that is less than virtuous. Disheartened by the belief that the entire town has joined forces with the devil, he becomes reclusive and creates a barrier between society and himself. What affects him most, however, is his wife's turn

toward evil. In his mind, she represents his belief in a greater good and watching her disown all that is sacred is disconcerting.

Anyone with strong principles who experienced this dream could proceed with life by dismissing the experience as a nightmare. Unfortunately, Brown cannot do this because he questioned his convictions before that evening. The nightmare affects him powerfully, and he never recovers from his vision. He continues through life without faith or the comfort of close friends. He dies a wretched creature, unable to accept that people are not merely good or evil, that human beings possess flaws which make them neither saints nor sinners.

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Editorial Note: This essay was written in response to a text used within the course, and the instructor did not require the students to document their papers because the audience for the papers is the class.

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## The Importance of *Common Sense*

For years, the American colonists were continually restricted and impeded in their progress by the throne of England. As the injustices continued in this important time, powerful individuals made it their duty to right these wrongs. The Declaration of Independence was more than a complaint; it was the product of years of maltreatment from the Empire, which led to overall dissatisfaction among the citizens of the country. However, this maltreatment was unspoken and merely accepted by Americans because they thought any radical proposals of freedom would leave Americans unprotected. It was the specific purpose of Thomas Paine's publication of *Common Sense* to show the American people how unacceptable the current situation actually was. By completely exposing the injustices of King George III and the English Parliament, Paine was able to rally supporters. George III, once revered as the best of kings, became the incarnation of evil, which worked quickly to dissolve the infallibility of his throne. Serving as a catalyst to a nationwide acceptance of necessary change, this publication was the sole document responsible for the initial education of the people about their corrupted mother country.

The Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 became one of the primary sources of injustice committed against the American people, which Paine used to incite revolution. *Common Sense* stated that possible reconciliation between the American people and their enemy Britain could never be made. Paine said no American could "love, honor, and faithfully serve the power that hath carried fire and sword into the land" (Miller 496). Some believed the situation was fixable, but Paine regarded this idea as "repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things; to all examples from former ages" (Miller 474). The purpose of Paine's publication was to demonstrate to the American people the degree of separation the two countries had reached. It was impossible, given the severity of past events, to advance with hopes of resolution. Instead, Paine was dedicated to persuading the American people that they should prominently declare their independence and no longer whine over the lost connection with Britain. The significance of this pub-

lication is that for the first time in American history, a notion of complete independence was placed before the people (Miller 467). If the people were unsatisfied with the present condition of their state, it was within their means to act out. *Common Sense* worked as a tool to educate the citizens of America to the injustices of Britain's throne. It specifically brought to light the corruption of King George III, "the Royal brute of Great Britain" (Paine 25), and his complete infiltration of the Parliamentary system. Paine's primary assertion was that the King was a "hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh" (Paine 33), with a focused determination to remove liberty throughout his lands. Through means of pensions and land, George III made the ministry his tool. With a deterioration of the British Constitution under the King's rule, Britain became no better than any other European despotism.

King George III was once seen as the embodiment of virtue, but became the sole cause of the deterioration of his empire. British propaganda led Americans to see an incomplete perspective of facts to evaluate their leader upon. As truths were exposed regarding his empire, unrelenting criticism was aimed at the King, and he could no longer regain the status he once had (Horton McGee 144). King George III was neither an innocent man misled by evil ministers nor a tyrant with a covenant for the destruction of liberty. Instead, the truth behind King George's inability to resurrect his state lay in that he was no more an imperial leader than he was a country gentleman in England. He was guided by the solid foundation he had in British prejudice, and his leadership reflected these ideas. He was often persuaded in his decisions by public opinion, and instead of resisting it, he was led by it (Becker 477). When his country needed a leader of imperial vision and power, they had a man with the same insular, narrow-minded ideas as his citizens. He was surrounded with contempt for colonists and let it become his principle directive instead of attempting resolution.

With Tom Paine's publication, the iniquity of King George III was laid before the American people. The timing of events led to the complete dissolution of belief in the British Constitution and rattled its sanctity in the eyes of Americans. Tom Paine and fellow propagandists were able to show colonists the need for independence through completely exposing the lie behind the British monarchy (Miller 480). The British Constitution was once respected, but was now thought to make "some wallow in luxury to destroy the pressure on Americans regarding British Commercial Law, and the riches of the world would now be available to them. No longer would the colonists be restricted from westward expansion, which was restricted by the Proclamation of 1763 and

themselves, and forces the greater part to live in poverty. And hence innumerable robberies and executions, which have scarce made their appearance in the Colonies, except imported from the British Constitution” (Becker 44). Paine regarded the Constitution as a tool used by the rich to make exploiting the poor even easier.

The demand for independence brought change in American ideology. According to North Carolina colonial records, America’s destiny was “to arrest the hand of tyranny, and to save even Britannia from shackles” (Friedrich 117). But the new push for independence meant a retreat from this concept of America’s purpose. As it was once the struggle to make the British Empire safe for liberty, the American Revolution was now specifically for saving liberty in America alone. Since the ideals and goals of a free country were still fresh and thriving in America, it was vital to stop as early as possible the spread of despotism, which was seen in Europe with specific malignity.

The reason for America’s openness to *Common Sense* lies in the steady death of liberty in the European countries. In all the European countries, “tyranny seemed in the ascendancy” (Paine). As a nation not yet affected by these evils, Americans saw that the only way to thwart growing tyranny is by doing so in its beginning stages. Americans realized that the growth of triumphant tyranny had left the American continent alone as the last stronghold of freedom (Miller 472). This helped tremendously with an American goal of defending freedom in this hemisphere. After the British Empire lost England and Ireland to the infectiousness of absolutism, the American colonies alone were free, and colonists intended to keep it that way.

At this point in history, Tom Paine had started a literary revolution among the radicals who had once felt as though they could not publish their thoughts on such extreme ideas like independence. As these wholesome truths were surging into the minds of the American people, it showed them that they had to choose between slavery and independence. However, others tried to emphasize that a split would mean no longer having security and protection from the Empire and a safe trade network (Becker 477). The radicals disregarded this safety network and pictured the wealth awaiting them when America could trade freely.

This grand idea was said to be the reason that the Americas could attain “a state of eminence and glory, and became the envy and admiration of mankind” (Horton McGee 128). Independence would relieve the pressure on Americans regarding British Commercial Law, and the riches of the world would now be available to them. No longer would the colonists be restricted from westward expansion, which was restricted by the Proclamation of 1763 and

the Quebec Act (Miller 479). Instead Americans would take ownership of these lands to be free of slavery and taxation in the future. With innumerable benefits to freedom, many citizens and great thinkers quickly aligned themselves with this progressive goal. Benjamin Franklin said this would stop Englishmen from being able to “drag us after them in all the plundering Wars, which their desperate Circumstances, Injustices, and Rapacity, may prompt them to undertake” (qtd. in Miller 465). It would essentially allow America to achieve its true greatness.

Though *Common Sense* was effective, a patriot observed it as “trifling compared with the effects of the folly, insanity and villainy of the King and his Ministers” (Miller 466). The folly of the King and his Ministers is more specifically the prohibition of Colonial trade, withdrawal of protection and the seizure of American ships at sea. Edmund Burke said these acts made England “like a porcupine, armed all over with acts of parliament, oppressive to trade and America” (qtd. in Miller 465). To some these acts might have been necessary to show America the necessity of remaining in the empire; however, they were more effective at solidifying the desire to end dependence on the mother country.

While Britain employed German mercenaries to “civilize” the people of America, it showed the citizens what peril they were in. This acted as the last straw from which colonists could no longer bear the pain of remaining in the empire, and they sought help from a European country as well. Soon after the hire of German mercenaries, the colonists called on the French to counteract the effects of Britain’s move, and redress a balance of power on the American Continent. To do this it was crucial to appeal to the French Government in the most effective way.

In what is considered the most cherished symbol of liberty in the U.S., Thomas Jefferson brilliantly drafted a list of grievances and complaints which had been festering in the minds and hearts of American citizens throughout the country. In powerful and unforgettable phrases, Jefferson left his monument to the world and forever changed the history of America. The document’s success is attributed to the fact that there was substantial precedence to the “self-evident truths” that he cited. Unlike a radical new approach for the future, Jefferson and others created the document used to separate America from the Empire. Setting forth this list of grievances against the King justified the need for breaking ties, and started one of the most politically active 100-year periods in history. Changes enacted thereafter are the specific by-product of ideas prompted in *Common Sense*.

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## An Anti-Clockwork Tomato

THE FILM, *A Clockwork Orange*, is ultimately one of the most well put together films I have ever come across. Its vivid characters, deep-seated messages, plot twists, ultra-excitement and ultra-turmoil give it the Grade A quality that most movies lack.

At the start the viewer is immediately drawn to the attention getting title, *A Clockwork Orange*. Upon further research I found that the title has a distinct meaning. "Clockwork" signifies mechanical, artificial or robotic, and "orange" means a human being similar to orangutan, a hairy ape-like creature. In addition there's the Cockney phrase from East London, "as queer as a clockwork orange" indicating something bizarre internally, but appearing natural, human, and normal on the surface(Dirks). So in layman's terms "clockwork orange" means a human with internal issues that do not surface and allow him or her to be viewed as normal. This view brings us to the main character Alex.

Alex is a fifteen-year-old teenager who has a secret criminal lifestyle. He lives in a failed community, has no parental supervision, no proper schooling, is subjected to perversion and even dabbles in drugs. Alex is a basic case of a child gone wrong; he displays all of the "normal" characteristics. The screenwriter decided that Alex will be violently stimulated by the classical music of the great Ludwig van Beethoven, who, coincidentally, after a concert of his Ninth Symphony wanted to commit suicide after his acute hearing loss caused him to believe that no one was clapping for his performance. The Ninth Symphony happened to be the song that triggered suicidal and forceful feelings in Alex. Beethoven also had a taste for high class women, women that he could not have. I think that is why Alex was made a rapist taking what he wanted from whatever woman he pleased. The choice of the name Alex associates him with Alexander the Great, a man of immense power. Alex is the leader of his gang and makes sure when his power starts to diminish that everyone knows who is in charge. The name Alex, when broken down, is A-Lex, meaning without law and that is exactly the life that Alex lived.

The development of the character Alex is very pro-

found. Characteristics easily found in everyday life that are actually true makes the story surreal. The connections with Beethoven make Alex an intellectual when we have already labeled him a criminal. Thinking the two cannot go hand in hand excites the senses and allows us to look more into the plot.

Alex's idiosyncrasies (defiance of the law, criminal behavior, sexual habits) are those that cause him trouble. His friends betray him and he is captured for murder and sentenced to time in prison. Alex learns of a treatment that will allow him to be released sooner. He's brainwashed with reenactments of his activities to the point where sex and violence make him sick. To make sure Alex is cured, he is put to a physical test and his actions make the chaplain furious. "Choice! The boy has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, the fear of physical pain drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrong-doer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice." This is where we learn Alex has become putty in the hands of society and is no longer able to stand up for himself.

Alex is released to the free world but is overcome by karma when the people he has done wrong to rise up against him. Alex is physically incapable of defending himself and curls up as his body shakes in physical agony. As he struggles to cope with his new treatment, Alex comes across the husband of the woman whom he brutally raped and murdered. The depiction and meaning of that scene is incredible. Alex sings "Singing in the Rain" as he strikes the couple along to the rhythm of the upbeat and well known tune. The camera spans across both victims' faces as they grimace in pain, and the look on the wife's face as Alex goes about the "old in-and-out" leaves the viewer in total shock. One winces as thoughts of disgust and remorse for her pass through the mind.

The husband knows that Alex killed his wife, but Alex does not know that he remembers. This little bit of irony puts the viewer on edge as we wonder what crazy plan of revenge the husband has concocted. We soon find out that he forces Alex to try to commit suicide but even that fails.

After Alex's "accident," he is placed in the hospital and de-brainwashed. The minister comes to him and apologizes for his reaction to the treatment and promises him a good job and salary as long as he helps to change the public's view of the government. This scene is a little disturbing as the thought of the government buying someone's help puts a notion into the viewer's head about today's government.

A very touchy subject in the production of *A Clockwork Orange* is its use of graphic imagery and whether it

was necessary. Some viewers find those scenes abhorrent and perverse, and despise the movie because of it. I think those scenes are absolutely necessary or the movie will not reach the depths intended. To understand what would be missing, imagine a horror story without some sort of creature. The story would not be compelling and its point lost.

*A Clockwork Orange* is a gripping story with an enriching plot, unforeseen twists and turns, and futuristic but true messages. It's filled with action, drama, laughter, turmoil and has a way of making the audience wonder. *A Clockwork Orange* surely makes a lasting impression on those who watch it. If viewers cannot understand why the movie reaches the lengths that it does, then they are simply missing out.

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## A Sense of Awe

IT HAS BEEN almost twenty-four hours since the space shuttle *Discovery* lifted off from the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida. Aboard the flight are two veteran astronauts: Mark Polansky and Robert Curbeam, and five rookies: William Oefelein, Joan Higginbotham, Nicholas Patrick, Sunita Williams, and Christer Fuglesang. The main mission of the shuttle crew members is to dock with the international space station and continue to build on to the station itself. While they are there, the astronauts plan to drop off Sunita Williams for a six month stay on the station and bring home Thomas Reiter, who has been living in the space station for several months.

The latest mission of the space shuttle program is geared to continue the building of the international space station before the shuttle fleet is retired in 2010. Many people wonder, however, exactly what NASA is accomplishing through these million dollar shuttle missions. Although it is great that there is a permanent port in space where astronauts can stay for extended periods of time, how exactly is the space station furthering the quality of life on Earth? One of the reasons the space station was created was to be able to conduct scientific experiments and see how the outcome is affected by a weightless environment. Yet, we haven't heard of any big discoveries since the station was built. Many people are left puzzled about why the U.S. government pours billions of dollars into NASA, yet there has not been anything really significant to show for it in the past several years.

In fifteen years, NASA plans to return to the moon and possibly to Mars. It would like to establish a permanent station on the moon. Whether NASA can do this depends largely on the funding it will receive from the U.S. government. With the shuttle fleet retired by 2010, NASA should be able to save some money, but it will need to use that money for the new vehicle that will take humans back to the moon. The fascination with the space program today is not anywhere near the fascination that the space program held over thirty years ago, when it conveyed a sense of awe and mystery, as we tried to accomplish a daredevil feat by launching men into the outermost edges of the Earth.

In the mid 1950s, the Soviet Union launched the satellite, *Sputnik*, into space. This was the first time an

object had ever been sent into space to orbit the Earth. After that successful launch of *Sputnik*, the United States became greatly concerned by the fact that the Soviets had the rocket capability of sending a satellite into orbit. This meant that they could have the capability of launching missiles at the United States. The U.S. decided that it needed to meet and exceed the Soviets' rocket capability. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration was formed, and a large group of men from different branches of the military were called on to be possible astronauts. Only seven men were chosen: Alan Shepard, John Glenn, Gordo Cooper, Wally Schirra, Gus Grissom, Scott Carpenter, and Deke Slayton. These seven men came to be known as the Mercury Seven.

After many unsuccessful rocket launches, the German rocketry scientists and technicians finally believed that they had a successful rocket to carry Alan Shepard into space. After the successful launch and splash-down of Shepard's flight along with those of his fellow astronauts, NASA launched the Gemini program. New astronauts were brought on to undertake this program, which was an important step in the race for the moon. After the successful completion of the Gemini program, the Apollo program was started to become the program to put a man on the moon. Sadly, tragedy struck the first Apollo flight while the capsule sat on the launch pad during a test run. Fire broke out in the cabin, which burned very quickly in the oxygen saturated atmosphere. Three men were lost on that terrible day: Ed White, Gus Grissom, and Roger Chafee. Interestingly, Gus Grissom had said before he died that the exploration of space was worth the risk of life.

Despite the damper that the Apollo 1 fire had on the space program, many believed that it actually helped accelerate the Apollo program's race to the moon. After several missions into space by the Apollo program with an eventual orbiting of the moon, Apollo 11 had the finale when it touched down on the moon in July of 1969. The U.S. seemed to have beaten the Soviets in the space race to the moon. Soon, however, the launch of capsules seemed to become humdrum, and many Americans lost interest in the space program until the "successful failure" of Apollo 13's flight. Apollo 13 had planned to go to the moon, but, instead, was troubled by an explosion and a series of engine failures with the possibility that the three astronauts aboard would not make it home. The public waited, praying and keeping watch, until the brilliant minds of Mission Control and the astronauts themselves were able to bring the crippled ship safely home. After several more flights in the Apollo program, the program was canceled, and no one has been to the

moon since.

It seems that Americans lose their fascination with space until something new happens or a tragedy strikes such as the explosions of the space shuttles, Challenger and Columbia. Many people see these tragedies and losses of life as reasons to stop the shuttle program. They think that we are not making any headway in the exploration of space, yet the U.S. is pouring billions of dollars into NASA. I, myself, am a space program enthusiast. I do not know exactly what great significance the space station holds and how our life on Earth is being furthered by it, but I do believe in the space program, and I am looking forward to the day when man walks on the moon again. Although, conspiracy theorists do not believe that man ever actually walked on the moon, I want to believe that they did. I wish I could have lived in the glory days when the Mercury and Apollo program, especially, were running.

After the Columbia tragedy, there seems to be a renewed interest in shuttle launches now. Everybody is watching for that precarious foam falling and hitting the heat shield of the shuttle. More cable news stations are giving live coverage of the launch of the shuttle, but some have seemed to trickle out after succeeding launches since Columbia. I hope one day that America will regain the sense of awe that it once held for the space program. I somehow doubt that it will, however, unless something absolutely extraordinary happens. I hope NASA will be able to reach its goal of landing on the moon and Mars, and maybe, space will regain at least half of the wonder it once held nearly forty years ago.

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