Preface

We learn about writing by studying models. Sometimes nothing helps the novice writer so much as the chance to observe the technique of a skilled one. But even the student who has been successful at writing in one mode may have trouble with another. One student may write exceptional literary analyses, but has not mastered sociology papers; the student who excels at a laboratory report may struggle with a paper assignment in an Art history class. In all these situations, model essays can perform great instructional service. The "eureka!" moment — "So that’s a specific thesis!" or "That’s how you use and explain supporting evidence!" — is often all it takes to help students begin to raise the quality of their own work.

Model Student Essays is intended for the entire Franklin and Marshall College community. Faculty may use it during an in-class workshop or an individual conference to illustrate a principle of effective writing. Writing Center tutors will find these essays helpful in coaching their tutees about the writing process. And, because faculty members have submitted these essays as examples of the best work they received during the past academic year, students can turn to this booklet to gain an understanding of the qualities of writing we value here at F&M.

The essay that closes this year's Model Student Essays is worthy of special mention. John Parsley’s “Huck and Huck: Anti-American Dream?” was the winner of the 2001 William Uler Hensel English Prize.

My great appreciation and thanks go to Valerie Muller ’02, the summer office assistant in the Writing Center and student writing assistant, for her invaluable help in compiling and for her careful editing of this booklet.

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An Obscene Abstraction of War

(Linda Cunningham’s War Memorial)

“A true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior. … If a story seems moral, do not believe it. If at the end of a war story you feel uplifted, or if you feel that some small bit of rectitude has been salvaged from the larger waste, then you have been made the victim of a very old and terrible lie. There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a first rule of a thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil.”

In “How to Tell a True War Story,” Tim O’Brien proposes an image of war that many modern “war-artists” try to recreate, whether in literature or in the fine arts: namely, war as horrific rather than heroic. I guess after the Vietnam experience, American artists have reconsidered the idea that going to war is courageous and patriotic. In this context, Linda Cunningham’s War Memorial stands as an “anti-monument” in that it exposes the absolute physical and moral devastation of war.

The War Memorial, approximately 12’ high, 14’ long, and 10’ deep, comprises four abstractions of human figures. The figures are not individualized, but convey a general attitude of despair, sorrow and death — by which we recognize them as soldiers, veterans, or victims of war, and probably of the Vietnam War, since it was the most recent one to inspire this
monument. Beyond what it literally depicts though, this monument is an abstract image of damaged identities; it represents not so much the visible devastation, but rather the collapse of individual systems of belief as a consequence of war.

Linda Cunningham based her work on Rodin’s monument *The Burghers of Calais* (bronze, 1886-88), which was supposed to “honor the heroes who offered to sacrifice their lives to save the city from destruction in the fourteenth century” (Champigneulle, Bernard, *Rodin* 75). Rodin’s burghers are heroic figures, and his monument inspires a feeling of patriotism and promotes self-sacrifice in the name of the public as a virtue. Linda Cunningham reinterprets the issue of self-sacrifice in a way that reveals it not as heroic and virtuous, but as pointless. So while the War Memorial recalls Rodin’s *Burghers* visually, it advances a completely different message, and in this way it could be seen as criticism of its own prototype.

The difference in ideology between Linda Cunningham and Rodin is expressed in their use of materials for their sculptures. Rodin worked with bronze, a noble metal classically used for the depiction of grand-historical subjects. Linda Cunningham created her work from rusty iron sheets that appear to be corroding. Drawing attention to the unattractiveness of the material, she promotes a hideous, shocking image of war. It looks as if the sculpture is actually built from junk materials, which once again points out the moral obscenity of war.

I guess the choice of ugly material to begin with was part of the artist’s plan to create an aesthetically repulsive work as an anti-war monument. The larger-than-life-sized figures are roughly handled; the iron sheets are twisted in amorphous shapes with jagged contours, and occasional ruptures appear in the bodies. All these formal elements suggest physical as well as moral degradation. Tim O’Brien, the war writer, often speaks about the general “moral aimlessness” in Vietnam: how the soldiers were killing and dying not out of personal conviction.
In this regard, Linda Cunningham’s hollow figures could represent the lack of ideological commitment of the soldiers in Vietnam — which is what makes their self-sacrifice for their country pointless.

The War Memorial poses the problem for the artist of choreographing the figures so that they work as a group and not as four separate sculptures. The figures aren’t elevated on a podium that would separate them from the surroundings. Instead, they are plugged directly into the ground, which is part of the artist’s wish not to glorify the subject in any way, but to approach it from a realistic perspective. One thing that keeps the figures together is the ring of trees and bushes around them; they create a private space for the veteran group as a way of reconciliation.

It seems that the artist has striven to convey the vulnerability of the soldiers (the holes in the bodies, the drooping postures, the thinness of the iron sheets so that they look fragile from a distance). The figures aren’t standing straight up but tilt and bow as if they were about to collapse under the abnormal pressures in warfare. Also, in her interpretation of Rodin’s *Bughers*, Linda Cunningham introduces a new character, the dead soldier, who represents the ultimate violation of war.

Part of what makes this work of art so expressive is its abstract quality, which makes it look unfinished. Linda Cunningham leaves it up to the American viewers to complete the memorial by adding to it something of their own experience of the Vietnam War.
Alright, Professor Whiteside, Locke and Load. Equality Marx the Spot.

Both Locke and Marx would agree that a truly just society must treat individuals as equals. Despite this agreement, however, there is a fundamental difference between the thinkers as to what each believes constitutes equality. In the mind of Locke, equality exists at the individual level and is automatic due to the fact that each individual belongs to the same species. Universal rights apply to all individuals and all must be impartially subjected to laws. On the other hand, there exist no eternal truths for Marx, whose equality is collective because it is realized at the communal rather than the individual level. Additionally, it is also important to note two significant features that both thinkers include in their development of equality: that of property and that of government. Locke’s equality requires private property, whereas Marx’s forbids it. Similarly, the government of Locke must protect private property, albeit that of Marx must destroy it and centralize all means of production.

Locke believes that “all men are by nature equal” (Reader 197), and “every man is born with [two] right[s]” (Reader 246). The “equal right that every man hath to his natural freedom” is that he must not be “subjected to the will or authority of any other man” (Reader 197). Locke establishes a “fundamental law of Nature” (Reader 236) and says that there exists an “equality of men by Nature” (Reader 181). On the other hand, Marx sees no equality automatic upon birth
and believes that a “selfish misconception…induces [people] to transform into eternal laws of nature and reason the social forms” (Reader 280) and that “communism abolishes [these] eternal truths” (Reader 282). Whereas Locke sees individuals as equal because they are human, Marx does not regard the individual. Locke views man as “providing for himself,” (Reader 224) with “an intention in every one the better to preserve himself” (Arnhart 224), but Marx sees that “freedom can consist in socialized man, the associated producers,” and that the “free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Reader 284).

The members of a Lockean society are subject to “good and equitable laws” (Reader 229). They choose governmental representatives by “undeniably equal measures,” but are allowed to reap the rewards of their labor (Reader 236). A Marxist society, on the other hand, grants the individual the capacity to produce only as much as it benefits society. Its slogan reads “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need” (Reader 295). Despite the rights that members of a Lockean society are granted, “right” for Marx “can never be higher than the economic structure of a society” (Reader 295). “Safety and security…is the end for which [Lockeans] are in society” (Reader 257). Despite individual equality, personal advancement is permissible. A Marxist society, however, instills communal equality.

A key element in each thinker’s aforementioned foundation of equality is that of property. As Arnhart describes, “Locke contends that if government is to secure equality of rights, it must protect the private property rights” (227). The most fundamental aspect of Marx’s equality, however, is the “abolition of private property” (Reader 278). Not even a remote consensus exists between the Lockean equality that is established upon private property and that of Marx, which prohibits it. Locke argues that God has “given [to humans] reason to make use of [the world] to the best advantage of life and convenience” (Reader 188). He believes that men
have property “in their persons as well as goods” (Reader 241). Locke even states that there exists a “fundamental law of property” (Reader 230). Marx, on the other hand, wants to “destroy all previous securities for, and insurance of, individual property,” believing that property is the root of inequality, just as Locke believes it is fundamental to equality (Reader 277). Marx asserts that property “is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labor” (Reader 279). Although “Locke promotes competition rather than cooperation” (Arnhart 232), Marx contends that “each person [should] cooperate with other human beings for common purposes” (Arnhart 330). Locke sees a situation in which all people are equal because they all have similar means of production. Rational and ambitious individuals will toil to great lengths and acquire more than others, but this does not make them unequal, despite an inequality of possessions. Marx, however, believes that the ambitious are the capitalists, who establish inequality by their acquisition of property, which is the “final and most complete expression of…the exploitation of the many by the few” (Reader 278).

In addition to the different role that property plays in equality, the government of each thinker would have a different function. “The great and chief end” of a Lockean government “is the preservation of…property” (Reader 223). Marx, conversely, advocates a “formation of the proletariat into class” and its “conquest of political power” (Reader 278). This “dictatorship of the proletariat” (Arnhart 339) would then “wrest…all capital from the bourgeoisie” and “centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the state” (Reader 238). Exactly opposite this idea is Locke’s argument that “nobody has an absolute arbitrary power…to…take away the…property of another” (Reader 226). A Lockean government, possessing both a legislature and an executive that should “be always in being” (Reader 233), must “govern by declared and received laws” (Reader 228), whereas a Marxist government, following the
centralization of all property, will have “no political rule at all” after the “proletarians…abolish the state” (Arnhart 335). In the Marxist society, “politics…[would] disappear” (Arnhart 335). Interestingly, Locke would argue that a society having no rule would be the State of Nature, and it was to “secure…against those defects…that made the State of Nature so unsafe and uneasy” (Reader 224) that people first consented to live under some type of rule. Locke believes the government must have a “settled legislative and a fair and impartial execution for the laws made by it” (Reader 256), but Marx thinks that “in true democracy the political state is annihilated” (Arnhart 336).

“Capitalism stresses individual freedom, while socialism stresses collective solidarity” (Arnhart 341). This is an effective sentence to quote in the context of this argument, as Locke’s equality rests more on the individual level and Marx’s on the societal. Although people can be equal in Locke’s society despite the fact that some may have more property than others, this is not the case in Marx’s community. Consequently, the government must have different roles in different societies. A Lockean government must protect equality or opportunity, whereas a Marxist government compels equality in all respects. Perhaps the most interesting sentence I have read in this entire course is Arnhart’s statement that “economic determinism is self-contradictory” (326). This is almost comical. From this view, economic determinism is decided by the economy and is, therefore, senseless. One must wonder if this simply did not cross the mind of Marx or whether he hoped others would not notice.
Myths and Cultural Identity in India

Every culture has stories that are passed down from one generation to the next. With its many different myths usually involving Hindu gods, India is no exception. Siddharth Sheth and Smriti Gupta are both sophomore Franklin & Marshall students from India. Sid is from the city of Bombay, and Smriti is from the town of Lucknow. They were more than willing to share legends and stories that are important to their culture. Two selections follow, each integral to the national identity and heritage of the Indians:

The Hindu god Rama had a beautiful wife named Sita. One day, when Rama was not home, there was a knock at the door. Sita answered it, and there was a holy man asking for food. Sita did not know that this was the god Ravana in disguise, but she could not turn him away hungry, for that was not the custom in those days. Ravana’s only fault was that he was in love with Sita. When Sita stepped outside the house to give him the food, Ravana quickly kidnapped her, taking her to his island (present-day Sri Lanka). Sita refused to look at Ravana’s face because it would be disrespectful to her husband. Rama could not rescue his wife on his own, for Ravana had a well-fortified island, and Rama was alone. Rama enlisted the help of Hanuman, the god with a monkey’s face on a man’s body. Rama did not have an army because he had been previously exiled, but Hanuman had a large monkey army. So Rama and Hanuman went to
Ravana’s island to rescue Sita. Rama tried to kill Ravana with a bow and arrow, but every time Ravana was shot, not only would he not die, but another head would appear. Rama tried everything he could think of to kill Ravana, but he simply could not. At this point, Ravana had ten heads. Finally, Ravana’s brother betrayed Ravana, telling Rama that the only way to kill Ravana was to shoot an arrow into his navel, for it was the only weak place on his body. Rama did this, and Ravana fell dead. Rama rescued his wife Sita, and flew, along with Hanuman, back to India, a ten-day journey. When they arrived home in India, the townspeople welcomed them with a party. It was the middle of the night, and there was no moonlight, so the houses all had lanterns lit in celebration of Rama and Sita’s return.

Ravana’s death is commemorated each year by a festival called Dussehra. The community comes together and builds mock-Ravana heads out of whatever materials they have. These heads can be up to 15 feet high and are burned as a symbol of Ravana’s death. Ten days later, Deepavali, or the Festival of Lights, is celebrated with fireworks. Deepavali is a celebration of the victorious return of Rama from Sri Lanka and always occurs ten days after Dussehra because that is how long it took Rama, Sita, and Hanuman to fly home from the island. It is also the largest of the Indian festivals, and it is one of the most important.

This story has several underlying themes that give the listener a glimpse into the values that the Indian culture upholds. For example, Smriti made it quite clear when telling the story that Sita did not look at Ravana throughout her ordeal, for to do so would have been disrespectful to her husband. This is an indication of the role of women in the Indian culture, as well as an indication of the importance of the institution of marriage. Ravana is not necessarily considered an evil god, since he only has one fault. This fault, however, is his love for another man’s wife, which is forbidden in the Indian culture. The story of Rama and Ravana provides a way for
these values to be passed on to the next generation, without coercion. They are subtly woven into the plot and can therefore be stressed and taught without fear of rejection.

Another myth involves a very powerful king who had a young son named Prahlad. A holy saint told the king to be careful because someday Prahlad would overthrow his father and take over the kingdom. This prophesy troubled the king greatly because he did not want to lose his power. The king decided that the only way to keep his power was to kill his son as a child, so the king enlisted the help of his sister, Holika. Holika was blessed with a gift from the fire god — she could sit in fire and never be burned. Prahlad was fascinated by his aunt’s ability. So Holika offered that the next time she demonstrated her gift to the town, Prahlad could sit on her lap. Soon it became time for Holika to sit in the fire while the town looked on. A large pyre was built, and Holika sat in the middle with Prahlad on her lap. The townspeople all knew that Prahlad would be killed, but they could not oppose the king’s wishes; not even Prahlad’s mother could defy the king, as that was not the custom. The pyre was lit, and as the flames got closer and hotter, Prahlad, who was very religious, began to pray to Vishnu. The hotter the flames became, the more Prahlad prayed, for he was frightened. Suddenly, a wind sent from Vishnu blew Holika’s sari off her shoulder and over Prahlad’s head. Holika lost her power over fire, and she burned to death, but Prahlad was spared because he had prayed to Vishnu.

Prahlad’s miraculous survival is celebrated during Holi, or the Festival of Colors. It is a joyful celebration, especially to the children. Each person has packets of colored powder, and they dab a little bit on everyone they meet. The children pour colored water on each other and over everything. All generations take part in Holi, although it is focused mainly on the young people. Smriti did not know why Holi is called the Festival of Colors, since the story behind the festival did not involve color, but it has been celebrated in this way for many generations.
This story emphasizes the significance of religion to the Indian people. Prahlad is regarded as a religious young man who is saved because he prayed. This story encourages a standard of what children should emulate. It is also emphasized in this story that Vishnu punished Holika for her actions, thus setting an example of how a person’s deeds have consequences. Holi itself serves to bring together the family as well as the community as they celebrate the holiday.

These stories play an important role in the culture of India beyond conveying important values to younger generations. Dussehra, Deepavali, and Holi are celebrated by people of all ages and backgrounds, and they serve to unite the country. It is difficult to bring people together in a country like India, with a population of more than 1 billion, but these festivals serve as a means of preserving a national identity nonetheless. Generations pass down the stories upon which the celebrations are based. As Sid and Smriti told the stories, they each became increasingly excited, and they began to interrupt each other when they felt that the story was being told too slowly or incorrectly. As Sid told about Hanuman, the monkey god, he was not embarrassed to be telling an outsider, as one might expect. Instead, he spoke with great pride about Hanuman’s army of monkeys and their power. This was striking in that the story was told in a way that made it seem as though it were historical fact.

Smriti, too, added to the stories without apparent worry about whether they might be perceived as silly or implausible to a foreigner. This sense of pride is a compelling piece of evidence that a group identity can be formed through the telling of stories. Although Sid and Smriti are from different towns and communities in India, they knew the same stories. When asked how they first heard them, they were each unable to give an answer other than that they had heard these stories, and others, their entire lives. Interestingly, when it was pointed out that
the story of Holika did not involve color, even though Holi is the Festival of Color, Smriti appeared puzzled and said that she had never thought about this discrepancy before, but that this was how her parents always told the story. Clearly, these were not simply stories told as a means of entertainment, but they are an essential link to the past as well as a way to join together as a community and even a nation.
Degrading the Earth in Search of the “American Dream”

The film *Earth and the American Dream* clearly depicts the earth as the victim of Americans’ quest for wealth and power. Many Americans saw each systematic destruction of a part of the wild as a blessing, with only a few humans defending nature. People generally did not realize the impact of their actions on the environment. Often, it was not until years later that humans saw the effects of abusing nature. *Earth and the American Dream* develops this argument through statements made by various people during each time period explored, effective cinematography, and music that exemplifies the situations.

The first major time period in American history the film explores, 1492-1850, consists of European settlers populating America. The settlers thought that God gave them the land to exploit. They cut trees and used fire to clear the land; they rejoiced when smallpox killed many Native Americans. As they rendered land useless, the settlers continued moving westward and clearing more land for themselves. The second time period, 1850-1900, saw Americans, with the railroad, move in bulk to the vast West. As they saw the Native Americans as both a threat to safety and a hindrance to development, Americans systematically eradicated buffalo and, in turn, Indians. The years 1900-1950 witnessed the use of technology that further degraded nature. The widespread use of electricity developed during the early part of the century. Then came the
production of steel, World War I, mass production, the introduction of the automobile, and the
beginning of consumer culture. Next came the Great Depression, the dust bowl of the Midwest,
massive unemployment, and then, a return to mass production with involvement in World War
II. Additionally, this era witnessed the dawn of the nuclear age. The era from 1950 to the
present saw a population explosion in the United States and the return of the consumer culture.
Nuclear energy burgeoned, and the world experienced numerous instances of massive pollution.

The film *Earth and the American Dream* uses personal statements, poignant pictures, and
appropriate music to powerfully describe the many ways Americans, beginning with the first
settlers from Europe, used and abused the land to realize their dreams, be they riches or might.
At the end of each era the film presented, a few defenders of the environment made personal
statements. The placement of these statements is effective because it puts into perspective the
damage done in that era. In most cases, the descendants of those who abused the land see the
consequences. Additionally, the staggering data given in the film evoke a sense of awe about the
fullness of the defilement of the earth.

The settlers of the early era, along with Andrew Jackson, wondered, “what good man
would prefer a country covered with forests?” (*Earth*). Consequently, they logically cleared and
developed the land. Historian Alexis de Tecouville commented, “Americans were not phased by
the destruction” (*Earth*). Instead, the settlers saw themselves performing God’s will, creating
what Massachusetts Bay Governor John Winthrop called a “new heaven and earth” (*Earth*). One
can understand why the settlers thoughtlessly cleared the land; only in retrospect can we see the
repercussions of their actions.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Americans became more enthusiastic about
clearing the land. William Gilpin, a territorial governor, urged Americans to “subdue the
continent” and “confirm the destiny of the human race” (Earth). The Americans naively trusted businessmen and industrialists such as railroad booster Sam Wilkerson, who told them North America was inexhaustible. Again, one can see why Americans eagerly abused the land, and the film continues to show the extent to which this destruction was carried.

The old footage of the moving train and the increasingly frenzied music foreshadows the examples of consequences to the earth that resulted from the human migration West. Buffalo Bill Cody proudly reports that he alone killed 4280 buffalo (Earth). Teddy Roosevelt then proclaims that “from the standpoint of humanity at large, the extermination of the buffalo has been a blessing” (Earth). Only with the picture of the mound of buffalo skulls that appears to be six times as high and many times as wide as the man standing next to it can film viewers begin to get an impression of the magnitude of the carnage. Though Americans at the time were pleased with their actions, we can now see the full, harrowing extent of these actions. The statements, which clearly show the extent of the damage, impart that there were sixty million buffalo and two million Native Americans in America when Columbus arrived. By the dawn of the twentieth century, only five hundred buffalo and 390,000 Native Americans lived (Earth).

The situation became even more appalling in the first half of the twentieth century. Political Economist Simon Patten said, “Man’s forces will be used to hasten dominion over nature,” and “man’s victory over nature’s materials is the next step in evolution” (Earth). Actions taken by Americans in this era exemplified Patten’s statement. As the film depicts the construction of buildings, industrialist Andrew Carnegie explains that four tons of material need to be mined, transported, and manipulated to make only one ton of steel. The song played in the film at this point, “Bigger and Better than Ever,” certainly represents the attitude of the time (Earth).
Sociologist Edward Ross suggested that people tolerated industrial pollution because it symbolized prosperity. During World War I and the period following it, the idea that more is better seemed to prevail. During the war, people cut many trees to build ships. Only after the war could man realize the number of trees cut that went unused. The pictures of the timber cut but unused and the panoramic view of the graveyard show viewers the waste of natural resources and life. Perhaps people also tolerated this waste because it showed America as a world power.

During World War I, the government urged farmers that “wheat will win the war” (*Earth*). The farmers, for patriotic and monetary reasons, plowed “60 million acres of the best land” (*Earth*) in the Midwest. These actions led directly to the Dust Bowl in the 1930’s, a prime example of humans exploiting the earth for power and wealth only to find the consequences outweighed the gain. The introduction of Ford’s automobile¹, affordable to most middle class families², led to more waste. Political scientist Stuart Chase called Americans the “most careless, improvident people” (*Earth*) because they wasted three barrels of oil for every one that went to the pipeline (*Earth*).

Following this period of waste came the Great Depression and WWII, another waste of natural resources and human life. Americans developed atomic energy and again asserted themselves as a world power. Yet again, Americans exploited nature to exert power. Chemical Engineer Clifford Furnas characterized the era by saying, “whether we like it or not, we are on our way” (*Earth*). The statistics given in the film reinforce the idea that Americans increasingly continued to use more of nature’s resources, and, in turn, extended pollution to the earth. In the first half of the twentieth century, America’s population rose 100%, mineral production rose 500%, consumption of goods increased 5600%, electricity use increased 6000%, and the number

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¹ A Detroit News Tribune editorial dubbed the automobile “the sound of the 1920’s” (*Earth*).
² One homeowner even said that she would rather go without clothes and starve than not have an automobile(*Earth*).
of motor vehicles rose 600,000%. Americans consumed more nonrenewable resources than ever before (Earth).

Since 1950, consumption has been the American way. The song “I want a Corvette,” the numerous type of packaged foods and appliances shown, and the American obsession with these articles in the film reinforces the existence of the consumer culture. The film also stresses the increased use of nuclear power and gives numerous examples of widespread pollution and destruction such as nuclear and toxic waste, oil spills, and the clearing of the rainforest. The film also shows nuclear testing on pigs in which the pigs’ bodies were completely destroyed. Similar to early Americans, Americans of this era were not shocked by the destruction; it is only in the aftermath that one really understands the consequences. David Brower, a conservationist, explains that if the history of the earth were one week, the industrial revolution would have taken place one-fortieth of a second before midnight on the last day (Earth). This implies that Americans began the lifestyle they now live in only the most recent fraction of a second of the metaphorical life of the earth. That this lifestyle already seems to exceed sustainability suggests that continuation of this lifestyle will be deadly to the earth. Oceanographer Jacques Cousteau reminds viewers that we fail to live as one people, and we fail to realize we have only one planet. We cannot continue this lifestyle.

The majority of the people who speak in the film, especially the government officials and the general public, hold very anthropocentric ideas; they focus on interests of Americans without regard to nature or the rights of other people. They also focus on money; economics is intrinsically anthropocentric. Those who criticize the Americans but were not defenders of nature (for example, sociologist Edward Ross) demonstrate holistic ethics. They stress the importance of the integrity of the Earth and its ecosystem, even if some nature needed to be
destroyed for human use. The Indians and those who explicitly defend nature hold biocentric ethical values, regarding all beings and things in nature as having equal rights. On the whole, Americans use utilitarianism, a system in which one chooses the option that proves to be most useful or “good.” Humans often place monetary value on nature to make environmental decisions, substituting money for what should be “good” or useful. As Joseph Des Jardins stressed, the use of technology only creates more environmental problems. The film reiterates this point consistently.

The film *Earth and the American Dream* persuasively argues that Americans have degraded nature in the interest of wealth and power. Through the visual and oral inputs given to viewers, one can see that Americans used and abused the land and were contented with their actions. Only in retrospect can they see the consequences of their actions.
Assignment

In 2-3 pages, compare Bolt's portrait of Sir Thomas More in the film version of *A Man for All Seasons* with Roper’s portrait. You might wish to consider how Bolt's More seems especially modern. You might wish to consider how the portraits differ because Bolt’s is dramatic (i.e., film) and Roper’s prosaic (i.e., written prose). You might wish to analyze any particular aspect of the film *per se* (i.e., costuming or staging) or any scene in the film that is notably indebted to Roper’s narrative. The point of this homework is to compare/contrast the two biographical representations of More.

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Professor Tamara Goeglein submitted the following three essays because she was impressed with the markedly different ways these students found to respond to the assignment. All three wrote excellent papers, but each writer approached the subject from a different angle. Chris Chappell chose to discuss the film *A Man for All Seasons* as a modern-day adaptation of Roper's biography, one that secularizes More to make him more sympathetic to a modern audience. Shira Rubinstien presents a sharp metaphorical analysis of "retreat as a literary conceit" in Roper's biography and in Bolt's screenplay. Finally, Jonathan Strout offers a sustained, detailed comparison between two characters — what he calls the "Rich/More" juxtaposition" — as a way of understanding Roper's *Life of Thomas More* and Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*.

These essays provide clear evidence that there is no one right answer in academic writing. Model student essays can be as distinctive and individual as the persons who write them.
A comparison of William Roper's *The Life of Sir Thomas More* and Robert Bolt's screenplay *A Man for All Seasons* provides insight not only to key distinctions between film and prose narrative, but between Renaissance and 20th-century conceptions of a fascinating historical figure. One can be subtly troubling to a modern audience, the other more palatable. We can begin with one feature that the works share: both Roper's biography and *A Man for All Seasons* imbue More with a certain purity and etherealness. From the outset, Roper describes his father-in-law as "a man of singular virtue and clear, unspotted conscience . . . more pure and white than the whitest snow" (197), and later remarks that his life's efforts were "without regard of earthly commodities either to himself or any of his" (210). Similarly, the film draws an obvious visual contrast between More's relatively humble appearance and the frippery of more worldly figures such as Richard Rich and Orson Welles's corpulent Wolsey. The more indistinct and dun-colored More's garb becomes throughout the film, the more pale and attenuated the man becomes, until by the end he seems all but a wisp.

What does More's wispiness betoken, however? This question points the way to some key differences between the film and the biography. In *A Man for All Seasons*, Wolsey bemoans More's "moral squint," advising him to "come down to earth," and that "with a little common sense you could be a statesman." More responds by drawing a distinction for the Cardinal between "private conscience" and "public duty" — by withdrawing to some degree from the
world around him, he creates a private space apart from the vagaries of worldly ambition and secular politics. And he guards this space with silence. "None of you knows what I think!" he roars at one point, and he subsequently tells his wife, "in silence is my safety in the law." Paul Scofield's More treats his family with great care and tenderness and doesn't wish to alienate them. Rather, his silence is a necessary measure for protecting them and himself from the political sanctions that his conscience could incur.

In the biography, we find a somewhat different picture. Roper's More does not so much grudgingly withhold his inner life as he obscures it with a variety of masks, a mutability at which the title *A Man for All Seasons* only hints. Early on, More, despite his affection for the second daughter of a certain family, marries the eldest to avoid her embarrassment. Roper describes this with a peculiar phrase: "he then of a certain pity framed his fancy towards her" (199). This "framing" suggests a powerful self-control which manifests itself later, when Henry VIII's frequent pestering prevents More from seeing his family. Here Roper writes that his father-in-law "began thereupon to dissemble his nature, and so by little and little from his former accustomed mirth to disuse himself" (202).

The film's emphasis on silence and private conscience informs its depiction of religion as well. Scofield's More may gently chastise a treasonous would-be witch or forbid his daughter to marry a Lutheran, but he is not in any real way a model of religious judgementalism. As he tells his inquisitors, "I do not have a window into men's souls." More's purity in the film derives not from his intense piety but instead from a more abstract devotion to a given ideal. Roper is, of course, less hesitant to develop the religious specifics of More's life. We see him lecturing his family on the devil (211-2) and the agonies of martyrs (227), which can be accepted to some degree by modern readers. We are perhaps less able to sympathize with More's intolerance of
heretics (216-7) or the divine inspiration which convinces him that his daughter must be cured
with an enema (212-3). In the final analysis, we can see that both The Life of Sir Thomas More
and A Man for All Seasons are products both of their respective times and genres. Whereas
Roper's biography offers a picture of a sometimes inscrutable, manipulative and intolerant More,
Bolt's screenplay give us a More who, if sanitized and rendered more sympathetic, remains
nonetheless a poignant example of great devotion and willpower.
Religious and Political Tension in Thomas More’s Biographies

William Roper reveals the contentious politics, religion, and indelible spirit of his father-in-law in his 1557 biography The Life of Sir Thomas More. The narrative historically documents early English society’s complex nature and establishes both author and subject as valuable witnesses to Henry VIII’s imperial corruption. Playwright Robert Bolt reintroduced Thomas More over four hundred years later with A Man for All Seasons, adapting Roper’s antiquated text to a modern screenplay. Each work effectively portrays Thomas More’s life and death under Henry VIII’s powerful regime, which forcefully shifted primary power from Church to State. This political and religious reform intentionally diminished papal authority to enable the King’s sacrilegious divorce and remarriage that severely challenged More’s personal politics and piety. Roper and Bolt illustrate this dedication both to law and to faith with More’s literary sanctification as a Catholic martyr and Bolt’s greater focus on More’s devoted civic duty.

Spirituality leads Thomas More to various levels of retreat from his social, political, and religious environment within Roper’s narrative. Numerous devout anecdotes exist to emphasize More’s introspective journey, which ultimately removes him spiritually and physically from his surroundings. For instance, More’s self-built chapel, the New Building, intended to "sequester (More) from worldly company" and allow for "godly purposes," "devout prayers and spiritual exercises" (211). More’s construction of this distinct religious space separate from his other
political realm as Lord Chancellor reveals an inherent need for spiritual renewal. More also "secretly next to his body wore a shirt of hair" to imitate Christ’s suffering and serve daily penance (224). The New Building and religious-oriented apparel provided highly intimate and private opportunities that helped More retreat further from the public sphere and devoutly observe the Catholic faith. Roper’s biography underscores More’s religious priorities and highlights a radical disjunction between his pious inner-self and outer political role. The narrative clearly associates More’s inward retreat to Henry VIII’s imperial coerciveness, which restricted More’s solitude, piety, and spirituality.

Roper uses retreat as a literary conceit throughout the biography to repeatedly emphasize More’s sanctimonious nature. The narrative perpetuates More’s pious spirit, which strives for a "painful life religiously" so that God will ultimately receive him lovingly in heaven (242). Roper portrays More’s imprisonment within the historical Tower of London as a physical and mental isolation that deepens More’s spirituality, rather than wounds his inner conscience. As biographer and close family relation, Roper includes personal speculation “that the love (More) had to God wrought in him so effectually that it conquered all his carnal affections utterly” (238). This conflicting devotion delivered More to accept his imprisonment as an act of God. More proselytizes the Tower "as nigh heaven as my own" (243) and reveals inherent desires to additionally confine himself "in as strait a room — and straiter too." Through More’s holy acceptance, Roper reveals the arrest’s implicit irony, which absolved More from all civic duties and allowed for perpetual prayer, study, and contemplation that "were to him no painful punishments but, of his patience, profitable exercises" (239). Within the Tower, More safeguards his spiritual self-identity and metaphysically removes himself from Henry VIII’s Catholic irreverence and imperial corruption. More’s retreat is therefore both a means of self-
preservation and personal protest against the existing social and political structures.

Robert Bolt’s dramatic screenplay primarily derives from Roper’s historical biography. Similar to Roper, Bolt threads his own creative voice into the play’s essential fabric to best connect More’s story to modern audiences. *A Man for All Seasons* engages twentieth-century viewers with a compelling chronicle of bureaucratic scandal in sixteenth century England. The play adopts politics and law as the dominant theme, unlike Roper’s literary motive, which illustrates More’s unequaled spirituality and Catholic devotion. Bolt eliminates the New Building and pious hair shirt and modifies More’s tower experience from spiritual renewal to a physical and emotional disturbance. Specifically, Bolt’s More views the changing environment and happenings from the Tower’s window with a dramatic musical accompaniment that suggests a poignant longing for physical freedom. Bolt also exhibits an affectionate and sensible More who communicates a compulsory need to have his family understand his cognitive reasoning and religious incentive. This alternate Thomas More better harmonizes with Bolt’s viewers, who possess greater influence and understanding in modern political systems. Bolt’s portrayal allows More’s life to unify individuals through modern admiration for a political hero.

*A Man for All Seasons* concentrates on More’s retreat from his absolute commitment to English law and authority. The screenplay’s progression towards the eventual imprisonment and execution continuously isolates More within his own political values, which condemn Henry VIII’s sacrilege and corrupt politics. Bolt discloses how the inability to separate law from religious morality influenced More’s political decisions and rendered him a stranger among his contemporaries. This alienation initiates a willing introspective journey that ultimately removes More politically and religiously from the public realm. More’s astute understanding of the volatile times also placed him in an autonomous mentality that acknowledged the English
people’s greater faith in himself than the King. More also viewed the royal officials as persistent “huntsmen” determined to “minimize inconvenience” about the King’s controversial situation. This heretical attitude required that More maintain extreme caution, about which More commented “I like to keep my affairs regular.” A Man for All Seasons characterizes this political faith and awareness that fell victim to structural reformation between Church and State relations.

Sir Thomas More generates extensive analysis and interpretation of both his personal life story and general historical setting. More’s religious and political persona struggles within prevailing tensions during Henry VIII’s reign in both the literary biography and screenplay. Roper’s hagiography writing intentionally venerates More as a Catholic martyr, while Bolt’s drama effectively communicates More’s political acumen and dedication. Both works exhibit a simplistic More whose actions attempt to dispute the human vanity and fallacy of his time. Roper’s sanctification motive, coupled with Bolt’s recognition of More’s commitment to civil service, reveal the strong dichotomy that establishes Thomas More as one of history’s most intriguing figures. Roper and Bolt’s writings offer much insight into one of England’s most volatile periods typified by political and religious disarray. Yet despite the negative delineations of sixteenth century monarchy, both works weave altruism and benevolence into their storylines through Thomas More’s exemplary life. This combination of corruption and compassion sheds optimism on both antiquated and modern audiences. Together, Roper and Bolt’s historical timepieces perpetuate the memory of early England’s most memorable political and religious martyr.
Of Saints and Statesmen:  
The Many Faces of Thomas More in Roper’s Life  
and Bolt’s A Man For All Seasons

All the world’s a stage,  
and all the men and women merely players  
They have their exits and their entrances,  
and one man, in his time, plays many parts. . .

Jaques, As You Like It, Shakespeare  
II.vii.139-142

Sir Thomas More’s supercilious understanding of social propriety — his ability to shift his persona to fit his audience (to “dissemble” his nature as Roper would have it) — creates a dilemma for those who would seek to know the man several centuries after his death. As a conscious actor on life’s stage, More was able to manipulate those around him, and as a result, the biographer or playwright who seeks to immortalize More is forced to grapple with the vexing question of who the real Thomas More actually was. Such a malleable personality provides fertile ground for the artistic imagination, and depending upon the author’s intent (realized or subconscious) particular aspects of subject’s personality are wont to be emphasized at the expense of others. Complete objectivity proves impossible, even when it is the goal. One suspects upon reading William Roper’s The Life of Thomas More — a pithy document that eschews compendious exposition for careful anecdotal selection — that More’s native ability to turn the dramatic moment to his advantage is more a manifestation of the inner-self enveloped in the timeless domain of sacred longing and humble piety, than the legalistic wordsmith plying his trade in a swiftly changing temporal world. But Roper’s rendering need be suspect, despite his
claim that “no one man living” was better qualified to be More’s biographer; *The Life of Sir Thomas More* is born of the imagination of a man whose motives appear to by shaped by fawning admiration for his father-in-law, as well as by a political climate (Queen Mary reigned when Roper wrote *Life*) ready, if not eager, to embrace a Catholic martyr. On the other hand, Robert Bolt’s rendering of Thomas More sublimates the protagonist’s piety, while emphasizing his legal acumen. This is not to say that both Bolt and Roper somehow misread More, only to suggest that the true nature of the man lies somewhere in the shadow-land between these two renderings — he was both a statesman and a saint. Neither work pretends to completely dismiss either dimension of his complex personality, but, in the name of drama and biography, specific aspects of that personality prove more conducive to the respective author’s ends.

Although at its core, *A Man For All Seasons* borrows heavily from Roper’s dualistic vision of More, the emphasis is shifted from the religious (More as saint and martyr), to the secular (More as the consummate lawyer and statesman). To be sure, he is both, but the question then becomes one of degree for both the biographer and playwright: If the two roles together form the composite of the man, how should the two roles be balanced, and which, if any, should be brought to the fore? Ultimately, the role the author or playwright seeks to highlight becomes, in part, a function of both the time in which the biographical sketch was rendered, and the audience for which it is intended. The modern sensibility — namely the audience Bolt addresses via his play — is informed by governmental paradigms that, as a matter of central principle, dispense with religious tenets, and derive their basis, instead, from dispassionate legal constructs and philosophical convictions (i.e. separation of church and state); bearing this in mind, one cannot help but observe that Bolt’s latter day rendering of More places special emphasis on the protagonist’s role as a stalwart legal champion of *individual* rights: More’s struggle may be born
of personal religious convictions, but his battle is waged purposely in a legal arena where semantics and careful interpretation of the law not only provide him with a shield against Henry VIII’s sycophantic minions, but also exemplify the importance of broad-based legal protection for the individual against potentially fickle political factions. Hence, Bolt’s early infusion of Richard Rich into Man serves as a countervailing, dramatic device to illustrate the very political nature of More’s complete persona — Rich’s ascent to lofty political heights varies inversely with More’s precipitous fall. The greater Rich’s willingness to compromise the law, the greater his political rewards; the greater More’s adherence to the letter of the law, the more perilous his position.

Bolt wastes no time in initiating the Rich/More juxtaposition. Telling, indeed, is More’s response to Roper when he implores More to arrest Rich upon no other grounds than he is a “dangerous man”:

‘and when the last law was down and the devil turned round on you, where would you hide Roper? . . . the laws all being flat? This country is planted thick with laws coast to coast—mans’ laws, not God’s—and if you cut them down. . .would you be able to stand upright in the winds that would blow then?. . .I give the devil the benefit of law for my own safety’s sake.’

Herein lies the motivating force behind Bolt’s rendering of More. Note particularly that More makes a clear distinction between laws of man and God, a distinction made all the more important because, while it is implied, it is not evoked so overtly in Life. More’s philosophy of law and his deep-seated morality will not allow him to bend the law against even a rogue like Rich because by taking liberties with the law, he does injury to the law’s legitimacy, and, in turn, his ability to use it to protect himself (or others), if the occasion should ever arise. Within this
strategically-placed upbraiding of Roper is the seed of irony that slowly unfolds throughout the whole of the play. More, in trying to protect himself and his privately-held religious convictions, is ultimately protecting the form of government upon which Henry VIII derives his legitimacy. A government of appetite, sans clear-cut codes of conduct, is no government at all. In this light, Rich’s rise to prominence appears all the more pathetic — he is merely a small symptom of a malignant cancer that starts with Henry VIII and works its way down through the echelons of the government. Certainly, Bolt took a nod from Roper’s Life in which More describes his unworthy nemesis as: “‘esteemed very light of [his] tongue, a great dicer and of no commendable fame.’” Also, Roper reveals that the two men had lived for many years in the same parish together. But whereas Rich is a specter that haunts the whole of Man, he is conspicuous by his absence in Life. This absence illustrates Bolt’s interest in the temporal More, and, in part, Roper’s emphasis on the pious More.

Gone from Man are any references to More’s hair shirt, his self flagellation, and his reclusive monastic retreat, the New Building. These medieval survivals form a curious contrast to the amiable lawyer whose social deftness made him a favorite of the King. Furthermore, Roper depicts a scene redolent of martyrdom, which More views from the Tower:

As Sir Thomas More in the Tower chanced on a time…to behold one Master Reynolds, …and three monks of the Charterhouse, for the matters of the Matrimony and Supremacy going out of the tower to execution—he, as one longing in that journey to have accompanied them, said unto my wife…: “Lo, dost thou not see, Meg, that these blessed fathers be now as cheerfully going to their deaths as bridegrooms to their marriage?”

What is more, he evokes the scene when appearing in court:
But if I should speak of those which already be dead, of whom many may be now holly saints in heaven, I am very sure it is the far greater of them that, all the while they lived, thought in the case that way that I think now.

Thus, Roper’s More is poignantly cognizant of his membership in an extended religious community that died before him, undoubtedly due in no small part to their legal naiveté in the face of Henry VIII. (Perhaps More even envies these men for their lack of duplicity, as they are free to die for their convictions and their convictions alone.) But this nod toward martyrs, and More’s empathy for them, does not go the distance of wholly sanctifying his memory, as Roper is careful to maintain the protagonist’s humility in the face of real saints. Yet the very evocation of such imagery proves powerful. Despite his rapacious clinging to the shield of the law, More knows his heart. When juxtaposed with Man, Life is rife with concrete examples of More’s religious longing, whereas one can only surmise by very few symbolic cues as to just how deeply his pious convictions run in the play.

Ultimately, these two versions of More form the composite of the man, and one must conclude that both the biographer and the playwright are guided and confounded by two factors: the subject’s real life ability to change masks, and the respective writer’s audience and time. Ultimately, one is forced to conclude that More is truly both a statesman and a saint, and as a man with variable personas on the stage of life, he could be more-or-less one or the other, depending upon the moment. As such he provides a fertile artistic subject, just as malleable on the page or stage as he likely was in actual life.
At the End of the Season

Truth was, I thought it would last forever. But there I stood, watching the roof fall first. With one crushing blow from the wrecking ball, it fell with a crash that reverberated out into the noise of the city streets. Next, the walls on both Loudon Road and Waverly Place were pushed in, tossing up a storm of dust and dirt that had collected there for almost fifty years. It was summer, but all five of us had come to school that day to pay testament to the end of an era. Around us, it felt as if the city we lived in and the world as a whole had come to some absurd stopping point, but the realization of something greater was stirring in our minds. The afternoons we had spent in the gym fooling around, bickering and laughing were meaningful because it was a time in all our lives when the peaceful youthfulness of place, camaraderie, and sport had come together to forge something constant in our ever-changing lives.

Each day for four years, we had gathered together on the gym floor with nothing more than a soccer ball, two indoor goals, and our love for the game. My excitement as I walked down the twenty steps to the gym floor was so great that it felt at times like my heart was going to beat right out of my chest. For an hour each day, all my assignments and responsibilities dissipated in a wave of sprints, goals, and verbal jostling. With the ball at my feet I felt invincible, untouchable, perfect, and free. The overhead flicks, the Cruyff turn, the Di Canio volley — I had mastered them all. But playing the game was not what kept me coming back.
In the summer, when the haziness of city living became too much, we would open all the doors on the upper and lower levels of the gym and let the breeze float in and mingle with the sounds of a city that was only a scant distance away. In the winter, when the rain would deluge for months at a time, the gym was the only place to go in the school where one could neither hear nor see the liquid depression. The main reason that I was so endeared to the gym was the fact that, apart from the other, soccer mad, die-hard enthusiasts and myself, no one else ever came there to enjoy its ambiance. Often, to get away from the pressures of human interaction, I would escape there to eat my lunch, wait for my friends to arrive, and piece together the events of the day in anxious anticipation of soon being able to feel the leather of the ball on my foot and the wooden floor below me.

The surface was smooth, having been worn away through decades of basketball and volleyball and gym class. Years of dirt caked its every nook and cranny, and the blue pads against the lengthwise walls were black in the places where we had set up the goals, the color having been chased away through infinite amounts of goal-scoring practice on our part. The walls of the gym were mounted by oak bleachers that could be pushed in or pulled out depending on the event. To fully extend them across the floor meant that the playing surface was diminished, but when in use, they served all the social functions of school life. Pep rallies, the occasional all-school meeting, not to mention all the times any amount of spectators were due to arrive to watch ISST (International Schools Sports Tournament) basketball. Behind them, there was a narrow ocean of open space, most likely filled with the dust and litter of the schools inhabitants. Yet that space must also have held something of the people who used the gym as well. Any of the real emotion in a sports event comes from the fans, and that emotion then becomes allied with the venue. Those bleachers seemed to have absorbed all the emotion of the
events they had been used for. I would often sit atop them when they lay in the retracted position, imagining all of that rage, joy, and frustration, seeped behind the bleachers, not stopping until it reached the outer wall, leaving the gym with the ambient emotion it needed to fuel my frenzy for lunch time soccer.

The ceiling was high and adorned with large fluorescent lights that hung like bats. They were a testament to the longevity of the place. Replacing one of those light bulbs must have been impossible, and, taking into consideration the level of voltage just one of those lights must have produced, dangerous. However, the amount of illumination cast on the floor was gentle without ever being too dim.

Above the upper level were the Sports Administration offices that looked down over the gym floor through two large windows. At the beginning of each year, all the sports team players made a ritualistic journey up the long, narrow, wooden staircase in order to have their physicals verified. Otherwise, the offices were generally unvisited, left to the secretaries designated to organize tournaments and coordinate interested parents. Often, in the middle of a game, I would stop and look up, longing to one day work in one of those offices so that I could watch school kids play lunchtime soccer.

As aesthetically beautiful as the gym was, it would never have seemed the same without us being there every day. Away from the pick-up games, each of us was a personality unto ourselves. Yet we all comrades in that we shared a common passion: the distracting, poetic sport called soccer. I met Dan Featherly the first time I entered the gym’s hallowed halls. He and a couple of the other guys had passed me while I was eating my lunch, bouncing a soccer ball, and chatting about the Liverpool/Coventry match from the night before. In what was a moment of unusual bravery and confidence on my part, I decided the opportunity to have a kick-about was
too good to pass up, so I downed my lunch of Marmite sandwiches and milk, and followed behind the group of four.

Being in the gym was not a new experience — I had been there before, just not in this capacity. Already, Dan and the lads had descended the steps to the floor and were smashing the ball against the walls, passing it off to one another. In a nervous but sprightly manner, I sat in a corner for ten minutes, watching, hoping, confident in my ability to play well for the first time in front of complete strangers, but unsure about how to exactly get into the game.

“You all right there, mate,” Dan inquired.


Then, the breakthrough I had been waiting for materialized. Dan, in a fit of his usual banterish manner, decided to smash the ball right towards my head. Realizing I was supporting my body against the wall and that the impact of the ball hitting my head would cause it to jerk backwards, I chose to catch it. Not the best of reactions in that situation, but one that seemed logical at the time.

“Then come play you fairy,” Dan said. “Never seen such a pretty fecking fairy in my life!”

I assumed this to be an invitation. Later I was to see that the invitation I received to join in was actually lightweight in comparison with Dan’s usual standard of conduct. But that was Dan. His infectious brutality filled any room with the pure youthfulness of his existence. Dan was seventeen, but acted like a ten year old, never working, always playing soccer or sitting around, mocking his friends who all knew him well enough to know he was relatively harmless if you could just see past the fact that whenever he decided he didn’t like something you did on the gym floor, he was going to smash a soccer ball at you.
That day, I also met Dan Montalbano. He was a gifted player who never shied away from hard tackling — a rarity in the sport. Born to an Italian-American father and an Argentinean mother, Montalbano had soccer in his genes and romance on his mind. Often, I would notice a row of girls at our lunchtime matches, standing on the upper levels, watching Dan play. At those times, we would all try our hardest to embarrass him, and he would always play with an extra bit of panache and adventurism. Both he and Dan Featherly were true friends, not purely because of their shared first names, but because of the similarities to each other’s attitudes. Both filled a room with their smile and laughter, and both never let their guard down, always keeping the outside world at arm’s length while embracing the friendship of our little group.

Spencer and Evan completed the group. Spencer and I had what I like to think of as a friendship in reverse. In the beginning, it was all laughs, but slowly, Spencer grew more and more withdrawn from the group as a whole, and even though he played every day, he said less and less as the years went by, choosing instead to follow his own path. He was short and skinny, with a shaved head of blonde hair and an aggressive air of dislike in his eyes. Whenever I was around him, I felt the need to prove myself, to earn his respect. He was a much better player than I, yet I learned very little from him — he never trusted me enough to connect on the deeply personal level that is skill sharing. Evan, on the other hand, was never one to question my presence on the gym floor, and he and I fast became friends.

On what was only my second day of lunchtime on the gym floor, I committed the cardinal sin: I managed to injure another player — Evan. Although I was always careful never to over impose my height on my opponent, I simply couldn’t help but kick out for a loose ball that afternoon and jar Evan’s ankle into the floor. He writhed in pain for a minute or two, then picked himself up and hobbled off. The looks I got from the rest of the group grew increasingly
menacing. I called Evan that night offering an apology. We ended up speaking for half-an-hour about our love for soccer, both playing and watching. He told me he was a Tottenham Hotspurs fan; I told him I supported Newcastle United. By the time the following weekend rolled around, we were standing outside the gates of Whitehart Lane, the Tottenham home ground, waiting for the stewards to let us in to see the match I had bought us tickets to. It was a cold October afternoon, but the atmosphere at the ground was electric, brimming with the raw emotion of thirty thousand other soccer fanatics, and tickets to a live game were never something to pass up. For the following three years, our link to each other grew to become the soccer we played everyday on the gym floor.

Over those next few years, there were several additions to our group. Pepe arrived in ’97 from Madrid, Spain, along with the two brothers from Ghana, Lloyd and Andrew ‘Jojo’ Sam, as well as Chris Scharer and the mighty Jeff Coombs. Kanawa, Philip Bou-Habib, and Alex Guiney all showed up at the end of my junior year. All of them were welcome additions to the circle of friends, and quickly, they all became like a second family to me. They were my core, and at any time, in any given situation, I would associate with them freely. We all shared memories of nights on the town together, of ditching exams together, of sneaking out of class early to meet on the gym floor. All of it seemed golden at the time, but none of it would have been were it not for the suspended-floor, American School in London gymnasium.

Once, on the afternoon before Christmas break, we all assembled on the gym floor after school, feeling unfulfilled from the usual lunchtime game. It was three o’clock, and none of us were in any rush to get home. For the next six hours, we played like we had never done before. We played until Security came and took away the ball, telling us to get home and be with our families. The school was well heated, and the air was filled with the friction of hours of play.
When I looked at my watch, I realized not only how late it was, but also how absolutely shattered I felt. But it had been worth it. That day we had all played without a care, free from the pressures of school for two weeks. The ball seemed to float from our feet, our movements were smooth and fluent, and our aim was nothing short of wanting to stuff as much enjoyment into our last few hours together before the separation of Christmas unfurled before us. After our ball was taken away, we collapsed on the floor in a fit of delayed fatigue, panting like dogs, our school clothes dripping sweat. I will never forget the scowl on my mother’s face upon arriving home. I ignored her and headed straight for the bathtub. I stripped off my soaked clothes and sat in the tub running cold water over my body for almost an hour. At that moment, I felt completely liberated. For days afterward, that afternoon with my friends refused to leave my mind. It felt good to be home for Christmas, but it was the memory of that afternoon which brought the real smile to my face. Sometimes, sitting amongst all my relatives, I would chuckle to myself, safe in the knowledge that soon I would be returning to the gym, returning to my personal theater of dreams.

About a month later, we were down to literally the last ball any of us owned. The gym teachers, generally untrusting of students, refused to loan us soccer balls on a day-to-day basis and only grudgingly allowed us the use of the indoor goals. These were essentially large hunks of formed metal that had just about all of the paint blasted off of them from our soccer balls. So it was down to us to supply our own fun.

Pepe, in his strong, Spanish accent, volunteered to be the supplier for the next day after our most recent ball had been mysteriously stolen. The following afternoon, in walks Pepe with the most incredible PVC ball I had ever seen. I mean, this thing was shiny, and light too. For a couple of minutes we all admired the novelty of this incredible ball — its perfect Nike swoosh,
the Real Madrid crest emblazoned just above it, the new season design of lines around the ball, and the ESP logo next to the air hole. This ball was straight off the store shelf and ripe for our game that afternoon. ‘This thing is going to get smashed,’ I thought with glee.

Once we started playing, I realized the ball really wasn’t going to last very long. The PVC coating made it so smooth on the hard wood floor that it ricocheted with every shot or pass. When we tried kicking it against the wall, it came back at us in such sleek, speedy manner it was almost too difficult to control.

Of course, Featherly decided that the whole passing lark was too much for this ball. So he let loose with one of his trademark smashed shots and that new ball traveled so fast and hard (but straight) that it came off of the corner of the opposite goalpost, ricocheted over all our heads while swerving sideways, and ended up somewhere behind the bleachers. We searched for it, but couldn’t see it, and after a while, we were sure it was unreachable, even for little Lloyd, who we usually stuffed just about anywhere. Another casualty was added to the long list of lost soccer balls, and Pepe was left with a scowl on his face.

Away from the gym floor, soccer became something all too serious. At the beginning of each school year, we all trundled out to Canons Park, the school-owned parkland, to play for the school team. Our coach was Bob Hackett, a gritty and joyless personality, totally unaffected by the pleasure that coaching soccer to enthusiastic kids would have brought to almost all other men of his age. With his running drills and his practice matches, Hackett managed to draw all of the excitement I associated with playing and turn it into dread. Surprisingly though, he was able to whip us all into shape in order to form a unit that enjoyed a variably high amount of success.

Ultimately though, it was the sport that held us all together. Just as the boards of the gym floor were tightly wedged together to make a surface, so too were our friendships formed by our
dependence on soccer. It was there for us when we needed it, calling to us to put off growing up
and urging us to enjoy just one more moment in the gym, just one more moment in each other’s
company. It was there for good, embedded in our souls, and will never stop calling me for the
rest of my life.

Even now, I cannot help but think of the special times that those walls were present for.
Not just the special times, but the everyday moments, the continuity of our presence.

There was no fear on that last day. We played like we had for so many years before. At
the end of the day, we all took turns scoring penalties against the walls we had used as
backboards for the goals. With each smash of the round, rubber object against the smooth
padding, with each celebration echoed through the walls, we signed our names to the ground, to
the earth on which the boarded floor lay.

A month later, we all watched in sadness as the place where so many months of
happiness, so many years of collective aging, so many minutes of laughter, was torn down. At
that moment, there was nothing left to do but leave. That night we all sat around in the pub
contemplating what to do in the coming year. Little did we know that the loss of the gym was to
signal the end of our assorted bunch. In July, Pepe’s father was unexpectedly transferred to
Bolivia. Featherly’s family moved back to Virginia when his parents had completed their
political duties. Spencer moved to Hamburg, Germany after his dad lost his job, and Chris’s
family moved on to Glasgow with the rest of the Oil Company.

Looking out over the rubble, I noticed a white, rubbery-looking object peeking out from
the mounds of concrete and wood that looked suspiciously like the ball that had been long ago
lost behind the bleachers.
Andre Aciman

I was seated in the back of my parents’ Oldsmobile, and the rhythm of the Belt Parkway pulsated through my small body when I caught glimpse of a human truth. My lower legs were dressed in shin guards, and I must have been eight or nine, the year I gave up my soccer ball for the baseball glove necessary to play shortstop in a local little league. My eyes traced the Atlantic, with its multitude of crests, curved to the horizon. I looked to the Verazzano Bridge, where ant-like specks of cars glided across what appeared to be narrow ropes superimposed on air. Then I noticed it — swirls of gray on pink and magenta, the traces of a hidden illuminating force just beyond the bridge.

It was as if I discovered the sky for the first time. I remember feeling that an extrinsic magical force had affected it — the sky felt alive. I realized then that something new and wonderful seemed to take hold of the sky not because of any radical change; instead, with the setting of the sun, the sky had merely been painted with a different brushstroke. Few moments from my childhood were as poignant as when I saw the beauty of that slightly altered sky.

Andre Aciman knows the secret of that sky. His newest collection of essays, False Papers, is about his exile from Alexandria and his attempt to make sense of being torn between cherishing and mourning his lost homeland, and he writes each of the essays with a different tilt to his pen. He knows that he can throw a singular light onto something familiar to make it seem
fresh and new and above all, to create beauty of the highest order. He writes, “Over the years the old cobblestone pavement had turned into an undulating terrain of dents and bulges, mostly cracked, with missing pieces sporadically replaced by tar or cement, the whole thing blanketed by a deep, drab, gray.” Few things are less interesting than a worn down and insufficiently maintained park pathway, but Aciman looks at it from a different angle, a five-degree deviation that makes it seem glorious in its decadence. Sometimes there is only a slight aberration between the ordinary and the beautiful. Aciman knows how to revert from the former to the latter. He writes, “Passing by so extended a seascape was like passing by Alexandra, the way we do in dreams, waving hello to a house that is no longer ours, that belongs to others but might revert to us any moment now, because the universe would make so much sense if it indeed did.” The image, as seen through Aciman’s eyes, is so true it makes me want to scream. After all, having a unique vision and capturing it on paper is what writing is all about. His sentence dances across the page with life because of his unique perspective that, like a specter, hangs over every description he makes, every portrait he paints.

Aciman is a keen survivor in a hazardous trade. Every writer must know that in order to stay alive, he must combat that infamous slayer of hacks: the threat of disinterest or even the lull of sleep. What is Aciman’s trick? He says things in ways that have not been said before. He writes, “It came about two hours, perhaps more, into the trip from Rome, when our train began to elbow the Tuscan and Ligurian coast, racing past large mansions and castles and unending stretches of cypress trees, all of them overlooking what seemed to be the most placid coast in the world.” In Acimanian prose, trains “elbow” and unending stretches of cypress trees “overlook” bodies of water, and I could not imagine words of a better fit.
He continues to work his verbal magic when he writes, “Aunts and uncles, friends, grandparents, some of whom hadn’t been expelled, read the writing on the wall and left within a few years of the 1956 war, abandoning everything they owned.” Attention should be drawn not to the bleak subject matter of the quote but to its latter part, where the words “read the writing on the wall” gleam with freshness. It is easy to let your eyes run over those words, but that is not to say they are not particularly noteworthy. There are hundreds of different ways to convey the same information, but Aciman pays the alternatives no heed. Instead, he chooses to write with a constant originality, which sets him a level above other writers and had me looking at the familiar in exciting and new ways. A good writer, like Aciman, infuses the ordinary with the glow of a halogen bulb.

Vladimir Nabokov says “caress the details,” and for Aciman, the advice does not fall on deaf ears. All of Aciman’s essays are built on a foundation of beautiful description, resplendent with detail. It is a sheer impossibility that the beauty and richness of the fields of Chambery do not mirror that of Aciman’s description:

One of the most beautiful moments of the train ride came toward dawn, when through the steamy windows you felt the train speed along the silent fields of Chambery, where the fog rose between the trees, blanketing the landscape like white tempera. As far as I was concerned, this was the heartland of the wonderful, beguiling continent called Europe.

Speaking of Nabokov and Aciman in the same breath is utterly appropriate. Both were born overseas and came to America late in life. Both have a soft spot for the French language but published their best work in English. Both, and this is the greatest correlation, are master language stylists. One reads Nabokov and Aciman with an eye attuned to the beauty of their prose, the rhythm and fluidity of their word choice. A reader who does not appreciate their fine
feel for language should simply stop reading. He would be missing half the beauty of their writing, half of the pleasure in it.

Like Nabokov, Aciman is never hesitant to write a long and florid sentence. He evidently loves language and uses it lavishly:

And 106th, as it descended toward Central Park looked like the main alley of a small town on the Italian Riviera, where, after much trundling in the blinding light at noon as you take in the stagnant odor of fuel from the train station where you just got off, you finally approach a cove, which you can’t make out yet but which you know is there, hidden behind a thick row of Mediterranean pines, over which, if you really strain your eyes, you’ll catch sight of the top of striped beach umbrellas jutting beyond the trees, and beyond these, you could just take a few steps closer, the sudden, spectacular blue of the sea.

Little more needs to be said about a writer who can pull off writing a sentence of that magnitude. Words like “trundling,” images like “blinding light at noon,” “thick row of Mediterranean pines,” and “striped beach umbrellas jutting beyond the trees” are enough to make any writer jealous, and the ease in which Aciman incorporates all of the above into one sentence is astounding. It is hard to imagine Aciman topping such a feat, but he manages to do so.

In another essay, four words are all it takes for Aciman to put a perfect spin on a poignant moment and reveal a plethora of emotions: “Are you happy now?” He asks this of his grandfather, a man who lived and died an oppressed Jew in Alexandria. In a few short words, Aciman, an agnostic, is contemplating the afterlife, asking his grandfather whether he finally finds solace in death, and he pleads for some connection, as adults, as equals, with his lost relative. Aciman is writing in four words what most lesser writers could not hope to do in one
thousand. Few things are more impressive than a writer who can put an economy of words to use to create an abundance of emotion.

But what keeps us flipping the pages is the tensions that abound in Aciman’s essays. His pages are dripping with rue and discontent. Aciman has a constant feeling of dissatisfaction with place; wherever he may be, he longs to be somewhere else. While in Manhattan, he imagines Rome. In Rome, he dreams of Paris. Aciman realizes that his exile from his Alexandria has left him with a sense of displacement and without true belonging. He writes, “An exile is not just someone who has lost his home; he is someone who can’t find another, who can’t think of another.” But when he does finally return to Alexandria, his believed homeland and lifelong haunt, in his marvelous essay “Alexandria: The Capital of Memory,” Aciman is disappointed, because he feels devoid of the potent emotions he had hoped to uncover.

When there, he rests his arms on the balustrade outside his hotel in Alexandria, gazing out upon the city, hoping for the moment when remembrance becomes recovery. But instead of emotion seizing him, “the small, Moorish/Venetian-style balcony is entirely taken over by a giant compressor unit; it’s impossible to maneuver around it. Bird droppings litter the floor.” He is more overcome by the encumbrance of the compressor and the filth of bird feces than by the glory of a panoramic view of Alexandria and the memories it may summon. Throughout his trip, the proverbial bird droppings are scattered everywhere; nothing is quite as beautiful, satisfying, or moving as he had imagined. Aciman’s revisiting all of his childhood haunts in Alexandria amounts to eight minutes of unfulfilling meandering. His visit to his grandfather’s tombstone, “which feels as warm and smooth to the touch as [he] knew it would each time [he] rehearsed this moment over the years,” develops into a moment of reluctance, where he feels ashamed in the presence of the warden’s family for his lack of ceremony.
Nothing in Aciman’s life seems complete or ultimately satisfying. He writes, “Besides, this is how I always travel: not so as to experience anything at the time of my tour, but to plot the itinerary of a possible return trip. This, it occurs to me, is also how I live.” A major theme in the book is the conscious barrier that Aciman experiences between emotion and experience. Circumstance, of course, limits him from achieving true bliss. But he also finds that he confines himself; “I was in the most perfect spot on earth,” he writes of the beaches of Nervi in his essay “In Search of Blue.” “I wanted it more diluted, more fragmented, oblique, obstructed — as it had been on my train rides to Paris so many years earlier … I wanted to close my eyes.” But then in Manhattan, he dreams of a place of belonging, an imaginary city — “another unknown city, the real city, the one that always beckons, the one we invent each time and may never see, and fear we’ve begun to forget.” The place, of course, does not exist, and Aciman is left wandering through Alexandria, Paris, Manhattan, and Rome, hoping to find a sensation that will make him feel whole. The reality is that though he will never feel complete or fully satisfied, that is precisely why the reader is attracted to him. It makes him seem human, someone we can empathize with, and, subsequently, someone we would like to read more about. When Aciman is speaking of his inability to achieve satisfying responses, he strikes his most authentic note. His unwillingness to be all in one place at one time is what makes him entirely present to the reader. If he is wholly present anywhere, it is as a writer, in the pages of his essays.

When I think of my past, memories of a pampered childhood in a red-brick home in Brooklyn, a few short blocks from the beach, come to mind. Nothing from my own life bears similarity to Aciman’s exile from Alexandria. I have lived all my life in the tri-state area, while Aciman has lived in Paris and Alexandria and Rome. Topically, our life experiences could not be more different. Yet I still devoured Aciman’s book, taking pleasure in its every page, finding
passages that had me enthusiastically nodding my head in agreement. That is because Aciman is an unrequited master of the territory where memory and place and time and the dream of our “other, imagined lives” overlap. Although based on unusual experience, his essays piercingly address the gray area of all of our lives.
A Serious Implication of Communism

It is no surprise that Communist authorities prevented the publication of Milan Kundera’s novel *The Joke*. All of Kundera’s major characters are negatively affected by the regime controlling Czechoslovakia. The Communist movement tries to strip them of their individual, human identities and seeks to transform them into a faceless, uniform mass of humanity. Anyone who deviates from Communist ideals or practice is punished in the novel, and Kundera’s main character only truly regains his individuality by renouncing the Communist Party at the end of the book. The book is especially dangerous to the Party because the non-Communist characters are depicted most favorably, making the alternatives to Communism appear all the more desirable.

Kundera’s main character, Ludvik, evokes readers’ sympathy because he is excommunicated from the Communist Party for daring to express his individuality. The humorous postcard he addresses to his girlfriend, Marketa (Kundera 47), immediately indicates that the Party will not tolerate any views other than its own. Ludvik writes the postcard merely to chide Marketa, to “pull [her] down a peg” (Kundera 42), but in the hands of the Party members, it is seen as powerful anti-Communist propaganda. Ludvik is accused of being a
Trotskyite (Kundera 42) and is quickly stripped of his individuality and his future, being not only expelled from the party, but also from his university (Kundera 47). All of this occurs because of a supposed act of insubordination that was actually just a joke. The Communist Party members will not entertain any opposing views or jokes about their government. They have placed Ludvik’s individuality on trial. Because he dares to demonstrate his sense of humor, he is immediately labeled as a possible political threat. Readers surely will side with Ludvik, as it is almost impossible to imagine a situation in which such an excessive response to humor is validated. This is the first attack against the Party in Kundera’s book, and it immediately paints the Communists as members of a cold, unsympathetic mass who cannot tolerate any viewpoint that does not neatly align with their own agenda.

After making an attempt to eliminate Ludvik’s individuality, the Communists then try to take away his humanity. To avoid the obligatory military service designated for all opponents of the Party, Ludvik decides to enlist at a labor mine (Kundera 48). The conditions in this mine are strikingly similar to those in Auschwitz, as described by Primo Levi. Ludvik and his fellow workers have their heads shaved and are forced to squeeze many people into small bedchambers. They are also given uniforms (Kundera 48-49) and must bribe mine workers in order to gain many privileges (Kundera 98). Through all of these methods, the Party tries to break the wills and destroy the individual opinions of the workers. The shaving of the heads and distributing of uniforms makes all of them look the same, and they are all treated identically — as enemies of the Party. To dehumanize the workers further, the mine leaders force them to succumb to special Sunday duties and beg to receive passes that grant leave for one day a month (Kundera 89). Adding insult to injury, a person described as a “boy commander” (Kundera 89) takes over control of Ludvik’s unit, forcing men to plead for privileges from someone who is younger even
than themselves. Although many workers resist this attempt at conformity by making a mockery of the relay races (Kundera 95) and continually bribing officials to gain more privileges, at least one man, Alexej, despairs and kills himself (Kundera 114).

Alexej’s suicide and the presence of the boy commander are important to Kundera’s critique of the Party. Alexej enters the labor camp as a lover of the Party, one who will do anything to get himself back into its good graces. He is imprisoned not because of his own wrongdoing, but due to that of his father (Kundera 88). Therefore, the Party has actually imprisoned a passionate supporter, not caring at all about a person’s own views. This indicates that the Party will jail people for absolutely no good reason whatsoever. All the leaders need is a hunch or even a desire for revenge, and action will be taken. This forces loyalists to the outside and spineless, inexperienced runts like the boy commander into positions of power. On top of making the Party look cruel, these two facts also make it appear ridiculous. Anyone reading through those eyes will come away with an extremely negative viewpoint of the Party. In a way, this is Kundera’s own “joke,” and it could not get past the Czech Party censors.

The Party also nearly turns Ludvik into an animal. During his time in the mines, a bestial desire for Lucie rises within Ludvik, culminating in a violent near-rape. While working in the camp, Ludvik “is cut off from the world and women” (Kundera 103) and feels he must try to relieve his stress and tension by forcing himself sexually on Lucie. He does not have the ability to seek out any women he desires; instead, the Party barely allows him enough time to cultivate relationships, so his desires and “forced celibacy” (Kundera 102) eventually lead to this animalistic episode with Lucie. Before entering the mining camp, Ludvik did not demonstrate such a dangerous streak. His relationship with Marketa remained mostly tame, as it consisted of “walks, talks, a few kisses” (Kundera 34). Despite his desire for her body, he backs out and does
not follow through in his lust because he does not want to admit any wrongdoing involving the postcard (Kundera 45). While with Lucie, Ludvik says, “Either she gave herself to me, or I never wanted to see her again” (Kundera 111). This is so markedly different that it suggests that a fundamental element of Ludvik’s being has changed, something that can be directly attributed to his treatment by the Party.

The Communists label Ludvik a lost cause because of his individualism and intelligence, yet retain such uninteresting and impotent figures as Helena and Marketa. Marketa is depicted solely as a trooper for the Party; she seems to have no mind of her own and clearly does not have a sense of humor. She responds to Ludvik’s joking postcard with only a “brief and banal note” (Kundera 35), suggesting that such humor either offends her or is beneath her. She appears only for a fraction of the book, and during her brief appearance she is trotted off to a Communist Party training course (Kundera 34). It is here that she loses all remains of her individual identity, which Ludvik notices when he reads her letters:

She sent me a letter that was pure Marketa: full of earnest enthusiasm for everything around her; she liked everything: the early-morning calisthenics, the talks, the discussions, even the songs they sang; she praised the “healthy atmosphere” that reigned there. (Kundera 34)

Ludvik believes that she seems different, somehow more aloof and more indifferent to him. It is almost as if the Party has brainwashed Marketa, stripping her of the personality that made her attractive to all of the university males.

Kundera describes Helena as “a Party bloodhound,” a woman who devotes all of her free time to working for the Communist Party. She has even less individuality than Marketa, and her situation can be metaphorically summarized when she first fell in love with Zemanek. In the
square, while singing to the Italian man, all of the voices become one, a unified chant of support for the Party (Kundera 16-17). No one has any individual characteristics; the people become indistinguishable. Even those who do not sing at first eventually join in, until everyone is participating. Helena is the one character most aligned with the Party, and she is also the most desperate. She lusts after Ludvik because of her loneliness (Kundera 260) and ends up broken and desperate on a toilet seat, still alone. If Helena and Marketa represent the ideal women of the Party, the lines for registration will not be too long.

While the female Communists reek of conformity and desperation, Lucie most earnestly commands reader sympathy and interest. Kundera describes her as living in a perpetual world of gray (Kundera 72). Gray is a neutral color, halfway between black and white, and implies that Lucie has no strong opinions, no strong views; it is as if she exists in a world of her own, where political parties do not matter. This is best shown when Kostka asks her about God, and she replies that she neither believes nor does not believe (Kundera 227). She exists outside of the normal framework of human society. However, Lucie does eventually shift away from her perpetual grayness; she chooses God over the Party (Kundera 245). This decision is most likely influenced by a past experience and Lucie’s desire for healing. A gang of six men who violently rape her (Kundera 232) literally force her into the world of gray. These men could and should be seen as the Communist Party in microcosm, and they create Lucie’s permanent aversion to it. They speak of the rites of Christening and Initiation (Kundera 232), using the language of Ludvik’s old classmate when the children are brought into the Party earlier in the novel (Kundera 172). They leave Lucie branded in her community, viewed as a whore and treated accordingly; no one views her as a victim of the gang’s heinous desires (Kundera 233). Lucie abandons this Party-fostered lack of individuality and sets off on her own, ultimately turning to God for
Throughout the book, icons and religious imagery surround her (Kundera 233), allowing readers to more confidently think of her as a strong Christian icon. In her Christianity and independence she is the ultimate enemy of the Party, in her rape she is ultimate victim of the Party. Through Lucie, Kundera best establishes the evils of the ruling Party and advocates alternatives to it.

Another character involved in an alternative to the Party is Kostka, the Christian. Kostka is also ostracized from the Party for daring to be different, another victim of individualism. Throughout his section, he openly professes his faith in God, which immediately puts him at odds with all members of the Party, who want assurances that he is an atheist (Kundera 210). Because of this belief, Kostka is forced out the university (Kundera 214) and the farm job (Kundera 239), as the members of the party do not fully trust him. He learns that it will be hard for him to get a job as a schoolteacher for the same reason (Kundera 244). Kostka does have an identity and even some basic human compassion. He converts Lucie to God and listens to her, helping her finally overcome her fears of physical intimacy (Kundera 245). Kostka is not without his faults, although his failings are minor compared to some of the other characters. He claims that he only used God to seduce Lucie (Kundera 238), and he eventually abandons her (Kundera 246). When these flaws are contrasted against Ludvik’s, however, they seem pardonable. He never attempts to violently rape her and he remains compassionate towards her at the end of the novel (Kundera 246), long after Ludvik has become indifferent. Yet, it is precisely because of his compassion and faith that Kostka does not have any chance to truly be an important member of the Party. Instead, he is merely left on the periphery, another example that conformity and coldness define the Communist leadership.
Jaroslav, Ludvík’s best childhood friend, becomes a conforming musician after joining the Communist Party. Jaroslav’s primary love is ancient Moravian folklore and folk music (Kundera 128). After joining the Party, however, Jaroslav tries to compose new folk music, taking advantage of the fact that “No one had ever done so much for folk art as the Communist government (Kundera 141). Ludvík hates the music. He says that it has no identity of its own and that it exists solely to cater to public tastes (Kundera 154-155). The Party has politicized the folk culture to use it for propaganda. Instead of expressing his originality and individuality through the new music, Jaroslav’s music discusses farm collectivization and other Party influenced topics, making him another faceless instrument of Communist ideology.

Jaroslav’s other undying passion, The Ride of Kings, also ends up serving the Communist Party. After the Party, with its interest in culture, takes over the ride, it becomes hollow and soulless, with a pathetic bunch of people trailing along after it (Kundera 266). The Party elected Jaroslav’s son, Vladimir, as king in repayment to Jaroslav, but Vladimir would not ride. Instead he goes off to watch the motorcycle races (Kundera 306), a decidedly Western activity. Vladimir and his Western leanings command the sympathy of the readers, as he refuses to compromise his own ideals to participate in an event that only demonstrates just how much control the Party actually has over the State.

Nearly all of Kundera’s characters demonstrate something negative about the Communist Party. Some suggest that it is faceless and conformist, others that it cruel and excessively repressive. However, the most dangerous weapon Kundera uses against the Party is strongly advocating its alternatives. At the end of the novel, Ludvik rediscovers his cimbalom band roots by finally renouncing the Party (Kundera 311). Kostka has a successful job, his independence, and a new girlfriend. Lucie may have married an abusive man, but God has provided her with
solace from the dangerous world. Finally, even Zemanek rides off into the sunset of the counter-culture with the beautiful young Miss Broz on his arm (Kundera 283). Everyone who turned away from the Party has at least something positive happening in his or her life. Helena, on the other hand, a staunch Communist, is left emotionally broken on the toilet seat after a failed suicide attempt. Kundera does nothing in this book to defend the Communists. He attacks their Party seemingly at every chance, with every event and every metaphor. This book could never have cleared the Communist censors, as it would have poisoned people’s minds with the happiness of a path different from the harsh Party mentality.
The Effect of Urban Sprawl on the Natural History of Lancaster County

The American landscape of fifty years ago was composed of large stretches of open countryside intermingled with small, neighborhood towns and the occasional large metropolises. Slowly, however, this American landscape is fading into oblivion. The last fifty years has seen a rapid transformation of the American landscape due to a phenomena commonly referred to as suburban sprawl. Millions of people have migrated out of large cities and into sprawling suburban housing developments. The suburban lifestyle, with its big yard, swimming pool, and new house, has come to represent the epitome of the American dream. Only recently, however, have people begun to realize the detrimental effects sprawl has on agriculture, communities, the environment, and the economy. Efforts to contain suburban sprawl, preserve agriculture, and revitalize cities are gathering momentum all over the country. Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, has been at the forefront of this issue. Lancaster County has realized that sprawl poses a serious threat to its community, and, in cooperation with the private nonprofit Lancaster Farmland Trust, has begun to implement one of the most comprehensive farmland protection plans in the nation. It is important for all citizens across the nation to realize that suburban sprawl, once thought to
be the realization of the American dream, is a serious problem with serious consequences that must be addressed in order to preserve the posterity of America for future generations.

A variety of diverse factors contribute to the spread of suburban sprawl; these include rapid population growth, migration from urban centers, a rising dependence on automobiles, and the positive public perception of suburbs (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Rapid population growth has become a pressing world problem in recent years. World population is currently six billion and is expected to reach nine billion by the year 2050. The population of the United States also continues to expand rapidly. There are currently over 260 million Americans, and the US Census Bureau estimates that by the year 2050, the population will have reached over 383 million (Population 1994). Rapid population growth has resulted in an increased demand for land and homes across the country. This demand is further compounded by the large rise in the number of households the country has experienced. Single parent families and the shrinking size of the typical American family increases the number of homes demanded by the population (Daniels and Bowers 1997). As this growing population expands outward from largely urban areas, it is becoming increasingly concentrated in suburban areas.

These population migration patterns have contributed greatly to suburban sprawl. “The movement into large urban concentrations has been especially accelerated in the last century. In the United States, about 6% of the population lived in urban areas in 1800, 15% in 1850, 40% in 1900; and today, nearly 75% live in cities or their suburbs” (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1972). In the last fifty years, this trend can be elaborated even further; people are migrating out of large metropolitan cities and into their surrounding suburbs at unprecedented rates. Cities across the country are experiencing little to no growth, with some cities losing large portions of their population. Evidence of this trend can be found in the reports of The Census Bureau:
By the end of the 1970s...for the first time since the depression ‘areas defined as metropolitan had a lower percentage population increase than non-metropolitan territory.’ Both the 1970 and 1980 censuses, furthermore, reported that in certain parts of the country...not just central cities but whole metropolitan areas were losing population (Platt and Macinko 1983).

Virtually every Pennsylvania city has lost residents since the 1950s, with Pittsburgh losing nearly half of its population (Hylton, 1995). This mass migration to the suburbs is largely the result of two factors: the increased availability and affordability of the automobile, and the perception that suburbs are safer, cleaner, and more desirable.

The rise of the automobile as a means of transportation has perhaps irrevocably altered the American landscape with an extensive system of interstate highways weaving their way across the countryside. The emergence of this complex network of roads and the amazing growth of the auto industry has greatly facilitated suburban expansion. It is no longer necessary to live in the immediate vicinity of a city. Commuting has become an accepted part of the American lifestyle. In Pennsylvania, the average single-family household generates ten trips a day in the car, and the average worker spends forty-five minutes a day in the car commuting (Hylton 1995). The rise of the automobile has allowed not only the expansion of residential areas, but of business and commerce as well. Between 1970 and 1990, over 25,000 shopping centers were built across the country, with a large percentage of them being located in the suburbs (Hylton 1995). The expansion of business and commercial areas has resulted in an enormous amount of space being dedicated to parking lots. Highways and parking lots are paving over some of the nation’s most valued land. The automobile has truly altered the American lifestyle and the land as well.
In the United States today, there is a widely-held perception across the country that suburbs are the most desirable place to live. They are viewed as cleaner, safer, and less congested than large urban areas. Suburbs also provide many conveniences not available in primarily rural areas. Suburbs are seen as an ideal place to raise a family due to their relatively lower crime rates and higher quality of educational facilities. Television, movies, and popular culture have idealized suburbs into the representation of the American dream. This perceived view of suburbs as an indicator of success and affluence has contributed greatly to the rise of sprawl while ignoring the many detrimental effects of sprawl on agriculture, communities, the environment, and the economy. If these effects continue to go unchecked, they could pose a serious threat to the future posterity of America.

Agriculture has been adversely affected by suburban sprawl in numerous ways. Agriculture has suffered primarily because the land most productive for agriculture, flat land with a mild climate, is also the most attractive land for non-agricultural development. According to a National Agricultural Lands Study, since the mid 1960s, American farmland has been converted to nonagricultural uses at a rate of three million acres a year, with one million of these acres taken from prime farmland (Population 1994). The development of some of America’s prime farmland has been accelerated because the value of this land is significantly higher in non-agriculture uses, such as development, than for agriculture. Farmers are therefore deprived of financial gains by continuing to farm — unless they are compensated (Population 1994). Once the process of suburban development begins, it often results in higher land prices, typically prices beyond those that farmers could afford to purchase the land for agricultural use. Current farmers are tempted to sell their land to developers at the higher land prices, particularly those farmers who are retiring and have no family who wish to continue farming. Unfortunately, the
sale of one farm to development can have a domino effect, significantly impacting the rural character of a community (Hylton 1995).

When agriculture and development collide, many conflicts can occur between farmers and their suburban neighbors. These conflicts often include complaints from non-farmers concerning manure smells, chemical sprays, dust, and slow-moving farm vehicles. Farmers often suffer crop and livestock loss due to trespassers and dog attacks on their livestock. Storm water runoff from developments is also a major problem because it can wash across farmland and lead to topsoil erosion (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Development also tends to alter the character of a rural community. Farm support businesses are pushed out, and open spaces are gobbled up by businesses and commercial ventures to serve the needs of non-farmer residents, such as shopping malls, restaurants, and offices. As a result, the community slowly becomes less rural and increasingly more suburban.

Suburban sprawl not only alters agricultural communities, but urban communities as well. Suburban sprawl has been linked closely with the growing urban decay taking place in many of the nation’s cities. Urban decay results from a population decline and a loss of business and commercial interests. The growing loss of population from cities is often accompanied by deteriorated neighborhoods, abandoned buildings, increased poverty, and rising crime rates (Hylton 1995). As a consequence, many once-vibrant cities have been reduced to dangerous slums. Urban decay and suburban sprawl have also led to an increasingly fragmented population. Poor minorities are often isolated in inner city areas, while affluent whites concentrate in largely suburban areas (Platt and Macinko 1983). This population fragmentation only serves to increase the growing divide between the haves and have-nots in the United States, and it does nothing to reduce radical and ethnic tensions.
The environmental effects of sprawl have been diverse and widespread, including negative effects to an area’s water, air, and wildlife. One of the major environmental effects of sprawl is its effect upon the water table. The heavy increase of water usage associated with development diminishes the ecosystem’s ability to recharge the water table. In the state of Pennsylvania, the water table has been significantly lowered in many areas (Hylton 1995). The reduced water table level is due in part to the watering of large lawns and gardens, the presence of swimming pools, and the general water usage associated with a large population concentrated in a small area in suburban developments. Ground water pollution is also a major concern, with the failure of private septic systems polluting local ground water with sewage. The quality of the air can also be affected in these areas by the increased use of automobiles associated with suburban sprawl; this results in increased levels of air pollution and acid rain (Platt and Macinko 1983). The spread of development into previously rural land can destroy the habitats of many organisms, and it is detrimental to specie diversity. In Pennsylvania alone, development has been linked to the extinction of eighty species and currently threatens thirty more (Hylton 1995).

There are also economic concerns surrounding the spread of sprawl. Suburban sprawl is not the most cost effective method of growth, and consequently, it has hurt the economy in a variety of ways. The sprawling nature of suburbs makes them expensive to provide services such as water, sewage, police, fire, and ambulance protection. According to a report by the Urban Land Institute in 1992, the cost of providing the necessary services to suburbs is 40% - 400% greater than providing the identical services to a similarly sized urban population (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Since many suburbs do not pay as many taxes for these services as city residents, a tax disparity results. This leads many cities to believe that people living in the suburbs benefit from the city’s infrastructure and services, which leaves the city to bear an
unequal share of the tax burden. Therefore, many cities have begun annexation and tax base sharing programs to help alleviate this disparity and curb growth. These programs are occurring primarily at a local level.

Suburban sprawl is a local issue with global consequences that must be addressed. Growing concern about the loss of some of the nation’s prime farmland has prompted action on the national, state, and local level in the area of farmland preservation. Beginning in the 1970s, farmland preservation and land use legislation began to get attention at the federal level; however, little was able to get accomplished due to gridlock and indecision (Lehman 1995). Farmland preservation has therefore become largely a state and local issue. State and local efforts to preserve farmland have included agricultural zoning, the purchase of development rights from farmers, preferential taxation rates, and urban growth boundaries (Daniels and Bowers 1997). As concern about world hunger and world food shortages continues to rise, the issue of farmland preservation can be expected to increase in prominence and importance.

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania has been at the forefront of a growing movement to curb sprawl and protect farmland. Lancaster County consists of 603,000 acres of southeastern Pennsylvania and covers some of the most productive farmland in the United States. It is the leading agricultural county in Pennsylvania and the northeastern United States, with over $680 million in farm products sold each year (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Lancaster County has 4,700 farms with 380,000 acres in farm use. The county’s agricultural output is extraordinarily high. Lancaster County alone outproduces thirteen other states combined, including New Jersey, Hawaii, Utah, and all of New England (Hylton 1995). However, even this predominantly agricultural county has been adversely affected by rising suburban sprawl and tourism. In 1950, Lancaster County’s population was 234,000; today, in the year 2000, that population has doubled
to 480,000. This population increase has led to a rise in developmental pressure and the loss of 3,250 farms in the last fifty years (Klimuska 1998). Lancaster County’s efforts at community and land use planning are at the cutting edge of farmland preservation and urban growth strategies.

Lancaster County government officials, in cooperation with the private nonprofit Lancaster Farmland Trust, have instituted an aggressive, comprehensive plan to contain sprawl and preserve prime farmland. This plan includes: comprehensive planning by townships or counties, urban or village growth boundaries, agricultural zoning, the purchase of development rights, preferential farmland taxation, relief from sewer and water assessment, the Right to Farm law, and agricultural economic community development (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Lancaster County is the only jurisdiction in the nation with all nine of these strategies in place, and in 1996, it was recognized for its efforts by the American Farmland Trust with a national achievement award (Daniels and Bowers 1997).

Urban growth boundaries are a primary component of Lancaster County’s effort to curb sprawl. Urban growth boundaries serve to direct growth to urban areas where public facilities and services already exist, and to protect agricultural and natural resource lands (Lancaster 2000). These goals were articulated in the county’s 1992 Growth Management Plan, which provided a comprehensive method of creating a more compact, less expensive pattern of development.

The county planning commission made projection of population growth over the next twenty years, and then computed how much land would be needed to accommodate the expected population. The County then shared the projections of population and land
needs with the townships and boroughs, along with maps of suggested urban growth boundaries (Daniels and Bowers 1997).

By the end of 1998, 22 out of 26 townships identified in the study had established urban growth boundaries. Lancaster County is the only jurisdiction in the nation that is purchasing development rights in cooperation with community-planned urban growth boundaries (Daniels and Bowers 1997). These boundaries resulted in the preservation of 13,610 acres of farmland and parkland between 1994 and 1998 (Lancaster 2000). However, development still poses a serious problem. Of the total land developed between 1994 and 1998, 4,806 acres, or 61% of development, occurred outside of proposed growth zones, resulting in the conversion of 2,8220 acres of farmland (Lancaster 2000). Urban growth boundaries should, therefore, constitute one part of a larger comprehensive plan.

In recent years, the purchase of development rights has gained prominence as an alternative method of farmland preservation. The purchase of development rights, or PDR, has secured public support over alternatives such as zoning because it is a voluntary program and does not involve government regulation. PDR is a method of compensating farmers for the higher land prices they could realize by selling their land to developers. Farmers sell the right to develop their land to the local government but retain all other rights in regards to their property (Hylton 1995). The average price per acre of land for PDR in Lancaster County is two thousand dollars, much lower than in other regions of the country. Over $20 million has been allocated to Lancaster County through a state program to help its efforts to buy development rights, and through their own funding, the county commissioners have increased this amount by over $7 million. This concerted effort to purchase development rights has resulted in the preservation of over 23,000 acres of farmland (Daniels and Bowers 1997).
Zoning is the most commonly used method of land use control in the United States. Zoning serves to separate land uses that pose a risk to safety, threaten the public’s health and welfare, or reduce a property owner’s enjoyment of the land. Agricultural zoning helps preserve and protect some of the nation’s most productive agricultural soils for future use. Agricultural zoning works to separate farmland from non-farm purposes and aids in reducing conflicts between farmers and non-farmers. Shopping centers, housing developments, and industry are typically forbidden to be built in agricultural zones. Lancaster County has stressed agricultural zoning as a means of preserving both its rich soil and its unique rural lifestyle. In Lancaster County, agricultural zoning is found in 39 of 41 townships and includes 323,000 acres of land. This is 54% of all the land in Lancaster County (Klimuska 1998). Several townships have enacted laws that allow one building lot per 25 acres, and this building lot can be no more than two acres in size (Daniels and Bowers 1997). This policy is to prevent the spread of large housing developments. By setting aside land for strictly agricultural uses, Lancaster County hopes to curb the spread of sprawl into the countryside.

Lancaster County has also benefited from a variety of other measures to help aid farmers and preserve farmland. These include Pennsylvania’s Right to Farm law, differential tax assessment laws, and water and sewage relief for farmers. The Pennsylvania Right to Farm law provides farmers with legal protection from nuisance complaints from surrounding non-farm neighbors (Proceedings 1986). This helps place a priority on farming and a rural lifestyle. Differential tax assessment laws allow farmland to be taxed for its agricultural value instead of at its developmental value for property taxes (Daniels and Bowers 1997). Differential tax assessment helps keep property taxes for farmers at an affordable level and helps make it possible for farmers to continue farming. Since 1976, Pennsylvania has also provided water and
sewage fee relief for farmers when lines are extended past the farmer’s property. Typically, fees are accessed on a per foot basis; however, in Pennsylvania, farmers are required to pay a fee based only on the road frontage of their home (Daniels and Bowers 1997). The program results in significantly lower water and sewage costs for farmers. These state programs, when paired with extensive community-based planning, have helped Lancaster County become one of the foremost jurisdictions in the nation for land use control and farmland preservation.

Although agriculture has been the primary area affected by suburban sprawl in Lancaster County, evidence of sprawl’s detrimental effects can also been seen in the City of Lancaster, the environment, and overall community atmosphere. Lancaster City is a classic example of suburban sprawl’s influence on urban decay. It is a city largely composed of poor minorities surrounded by prosperous white suburbs. Lancaster City schools rank as one of Pennsylvania’s worst-performing districts. More than half of the students score in the bottom 25% on Pennsylvania’s System of School Assessment tests (Stauffer 2000). In reaction to these scores, Lancaster has developed a plan to save its city schools from a state takeover. The plan includes all-day kindergarten, encouragement of more high school students to take middle and high level classes, and initiatives on attendance (Stauffer 2000). The decaying nature of Lancaster City can also be seen in the opinion Lancaster residents have towards it. In a recent survey by the Hourglass Foundation, more than one half of respondents viewed the city’s quality of life as growing somewhat or much worse since 1995. Also, 68% of those surveyed thought that crimes, drugs, violence, guns, and gangs were a serious threat in the city (Rutter 2000). Urban decay has truly paralleled the rise of suburban sprawl in Lancaster County.

The environmental effects from sprawl in Lancaster County can primarily be seen in the County’s high levels of air pollution. The County ranks in the worst 20% of counties in the
United States in terms of average individual’s added cancer risk from hazardous pollutants (Environmental 2000). Mobile sources, primarily automobiles and semi trucks, result in 55% of this risk (Environmental 2000). Suburban sprawl increases the need of people to commute, and it raises the level of emissions from cars into the atmosphere. Overall, the County’s level of air pollution is more than 100 times the goal set by the Clean Air Act (Environmental 2000). Suburban sprawl is not the only factor leading to these levels, but it has played a significant role.

Controlling the spread of suburban sprawl is a major issue not only in Lancaster County but in thousands of communities across the nation. Many communities are beginning to take steps to engage in community planning to encourage responsible, controlled growth. People are finally beginning to remove their rose-colored glasses and are taking a long, hard look at the serious problems for which suburban sprawl is responsible. Sprawl is simply too expensive and inefficient to continue growing at its present pace. The United States and the world do not have the resources to maintain a suburban society. Too much of America’s prime farmland is being gobbled up by development and sprawl, and too many of America’s cities are being left to decay. A concerted effort must be made to restore and preserve the traditional character of America, its small towns, and its farmland. In order for this preservation to occur, more communities must follow Lancaster County’s lead and engage in comprehensive community programs in cooperation with state programs to help control sprawl in their communities. It is time for Americans to rethink the suburban American dream and realize its potential for nightmarish consequences.
References


Platt, Rutherford H. and George Macinko, eds. *Beyond the Urban Fringe: Land Issues of*


Sociology 100C
First Paper

Length: 3-4 pages (750-1000 words)

Topic: Please analyze yourself sociologically. You may focus on either some central identity or status (e.g., what it means to be Korean, Irish, female, working class, etc. in American society and how this helps to make you who you are), or some interesting experience or episode in your life (e.g., a summer job, changing schools, divorce, peer group, encounter with another culture, etc.) which has had a lasting impact on who you now are, and which you can now make sense of by examining it sociologically. You may make use of any of the perspectives that we have discussed in class (Whyte, Liebow, Anderson, Goffman, Durkheim). Concepts such as “role,” “status,” “class,” “performance,” “social structure,” “values,” etc. may prove helpful. Questions which may be worth considering in order to get you started include the following: what are the various social roles and statuses which you perform? Do they conflict? Do they create strains and tensions? How are your likes and dislikes, your beliefs and values, your choice of friends and careers affected by these various forces and social affiliations? Does the sociological perspective successfully capture you an individual? What is missing?

Style: It is often easier to write about yourself in the 3rd person, as if you were observing and analyzing someone else.

Purpose: The purpose is not to be encyclopedic, i.e., using as many perspectives and concepts as possible, nor is it to write your autobiography in 1000 words or less. This assignment is intended to give you an opportunity to try out some of what
you have learned on yourself. My hope is that there is something which we have read or discussed which has resonated with your own experience and which can help you understand something about yourself in a new way.

Julie Takacs
SOC 100C
Professor Kaye

Like most other children, my exposure to social situations was largely based on my elementary education. Because of the way the district chose to construct boundaries, in kindergarten through third grade, my school was predominantly white, upper middle class professionals with graduate level education. When I reached fourth grade, all four of the elementary schools within the district were fused into one school. Suddenly, I was immersed in a population that was composed of a greater diversity of children with whom I would interact on a daily basis for the next eight years of my life. In these years, I began to notice differences among various social groups within my class. As we progressed through the educational system, the differences between honors classes and classes that met the minimum graduation requirements became increasingly noticeable.

In my eighth grade accelerated math class, my friend Keith, the only African American student in the class, sat right behind me, and we soon became friends. I noticed that he seemed very discouraged, yet he was a smart person. One day, as he handed me his test to pass to the front of the room he mumbled under his breath, “I’m taking ‘integrated one’ next year.” “Integrated one” is the math class required for minimum graduation requirements. I saw no reason why he would want to do this because his grades were no different than anyone else’s in the class, and he was not treated differently than anyone in the class. There was obviously some
force that was telling him he could not succeed; at the time I could not understand why he would even want to consider such a line of education because his potential was so great. As I got to know Keith better over the years, I learned that he lived in the most dangerous area of town called “The Greens.” The streets of this neighborhood are literally lined with mostly lower class minorities constantly dealing drugs and causing violence. It is rare for a child to be a product of this neighborhood and not fall into this pattern of drugs and violence. But Keith was not from the single parent home that is typical of “The Greens.” He lives with both of his parents, and they are deeply involved in the Muslin faith. They support him in all the various activities in which he participates. Yet his African American peers and the large majority of the general public who did not know him expected him to be like the rest of the lower class African Americans with whom he grew up. Graduating high school was a huge accomplishment for the children of this neighborhood, and college was rare. His social group deliberately pressed the social forces that discouraged education upon Keith by simply giving him threatening glances in the hallway because he was not taking the “normal” path. At times, like that day in math, the forces seemed to get to him, and he would almost be convinced that he could not succeed.

When Keith expressed his discouragement, I began to realize why all of my honors classes were predominantly white. It was not that the “minority group” was not capable of getting into the classes, but it was not socially acceptable to be “smart.” Academics were not a priority according to the unwritten social laws because academics were considered a ‘white thing.’ Everyone within this group — in other words, any minority students — were pressured not to excel academically by their fellow minority students by teasing and excluding individuals from the “cool” group. While Keith knew he was capable of achieving academic success, he felt as if he was pulled in two different directions. His peers were discouraging him from scholarly
excellence, while his teachers and parents were encouraging him to study. While this realization disturbed and upset me, it helped to explain the social divisions within my town and how they are passed on to new generations.

In my town, there is a definite social structure based on economic class. While the children of these classes grow up together, they are unaware of the differences that will grow to exist between them. In kindergarten, skin color or the type of clothes we wore did not matter, just as long as we were having fun. Yet as we got older, we all began to take on the traits of the social group into which we were born. These include characteristics such as style of clothes and speech patterns. While these aspects alone do not cause great differences, they represent much greater divisions. When people dress in a similar manner or speak with the same accent or tone, it sends out messages that imply they are similar and can associate with each other. These subliminal forces pressure us to associate with people who are like us and separate from those who are different. While I do have friends from social groups other than my own, the people I consider to be in my close social circle are all similar to myself in social status. The majority of my closest friends are all from white, middle class, nuclear families. We all have similar tastes in clothes typical of our social status, such as J. Crew and the Gap. While I grew up with and was friends with several people such as Keith, I don’t wear the brands that he wore, such as Fila and Fubu, which are typically African American brands. Fubu is an acronym for “For Us By Us,” which demonstrates the social divisions that are encourage by the media and major businesses. Keith strayed from the social group with which he as associated by excelling academically, but the type of clothes he wore enabled him to be accepted in the social group that he was ‘supposed’ to associate with.
The individual families within my larger social group encourage academic excellence. Positive reinforcement of academics in the home pressures the young students to get A’s. The Honor Society at my high school was mostly white, middle class students, with Keith as one of the exceptions. My friends within my social group were mostly in the top quarter of our graduating class and were involved in a particular extracurricular activity at which we each excelled. Because of the heavy social influence upon me, I felt I always needed to try my best at everything I did, especially school. Consequently, I graduated second in my high school class. Since second grade, I have also been playing the violin and have been expected to compete in annual solo competitions and county festivals, even though I despise the competitive attitude of the festival environments. Because of social forces from my teachers and peers, I felt that I had to participate in the festivals; otherwise, I would no longer be considered a good instrumentalist by my fellow musicians. My family and social group expected achievement and excellence of me in a competitive environment.

When I was exposed to the African American culture on a daily basis, I listened to much more rap and hip hop than I do here at F&M. Now that I am at F&M, my musical taste has become much more typical of a white, middle class female, as I am listening to such artists as Billy Joel, Dave Matthews, and other pop rock artists. When I return home, even for short breaks, I find myself listening to hip hop because of the influence of a particular social group at home that is not nearly as present at F&M: lower class African Americans in relation to my educational and economic status. By listening to “black music,” I am attempting to break social barriers and be accepted by my African American peers. Listening to the music of another social group makes me feel more comfortable in an area where there is a large population of people
from other social groups. Yet being exposed to various social groups has not caused me to drift far from the influence of my social group.

The walls between social groups may have small holes where aspects of one society are able to drift temporarily in to another, but the forces pulling people apart remain strong. Few people are able to overcome them completely, yet Keith has succeeded in pursuing his interests after high school by joining the Naval Academy on a full scholarship. Because of support from his family, he did not fall victim to social stereotypes from his peers and society in general. By watching Keith struggle to succeed, even just academically, I realized that America is not the land of opportunity. By being born into a particular family or living in a particular area, a person is expected to fit a particular mold predetermined by society. As I watched Keith create his own mold, I realized that I have not strayed from my predetermined one.
Huck and Huck: Anti-American Dream?

Huckleberry Finn is strong, free, and above all, fiercely independent — a classic literary prototype of a real American living out the ideals of the American dream. Or is he? For a first-person narrative, Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is surprisingly void of personally-released information about Huck himself. Markedly more modest than a character like Tom Sawyer, Huck gives us fewer specifics about himself than we might expect. But Huck does wrap us in layers of his self-definition through an alternate method; he spends a great amount of time telling us what he is *not*, through both his words and actions.

By contrasting himself against various characters within a social matrix, Huck tells us that he is *not* like the widow Douglass or Miss Watson, pap, or the people on the river’s shore. Unlike Tom Sawyer, who mischievously bucks society but returns to it repeatedly, even down to modeling European tradition for his boyhood games, Huck is a social outsider whose primary "‘function ... is to demonstrate the absolute incompatibility of the sort of self he is and the sort of world in which he tries so hard to live’" (Emerson 152). Huck is like the huckleberry itself, which Hana Wirth-Nesher reminds us resists attempts at domestication and successful transportation to the city (Wirth-Nesher 260). We know him more for what he is not than what he is.
Huck really seems like an outsider, but as an outsider with the method of defining himself 
*against* society, a question inevitably rises: Is Huck a rebel, for some reason defying institutions 
and the "establishment," or is he a fugitive, a social outcast who is insoluble with his society and 
accordingly withdraws from it? While these explanations for Huck’s reaction to his society are 
opposites, both fit him pretty well — Huck both wants his independence *and* is pushed into it. 
He feels a rush of excitement when the opportunity to leave the structure of the widow’s house 
presents itself, but at the same time the widow’s society pushes him away — he "couldn’t do 
nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up" (Twain 2) in the clothes she makes him 
wear. Even more complicating is the fact that on some level, Huck seems to need the society he 
cannot join.

It wouldn’t be out of order to expect Twain’s ending for *Huckleberry Finn* to resolve 
these tensions and complications. In a cursory — almost hasty — way, it does; the societal 
influences of both Miss Watson and pap are neatly negated by their convenient deaths, and 
Huck, with the two main influences he may have been running from gone, decides to refuse aunt 
Sally’s "sivilizing" influence and "light out for the Territory" (362). It’s a famously vague plan 
which doesn’t quite clarify whether Huck is rebelling or running; Twain’s more important 
avvocacy seems to be for the American ideal of independence. It seems that Huck’s independent 
spirit — seen in his pledge to "light out" — outshouts the now inert likelihood that he was 
actually either acting out or *forced* out.

Unfortunately, while this reading of the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* is more satisfying 
both in terms of Huck, whom I’ve come to love, and of the sense of nationalist ideal effused by 
Huck’s character type, textual evidence suggests an entirely opposite reading. While we come to 
perceive Huck as a naturally-inclined boy who pursues the American dreams of independence
and fresh starts, Twain is in fact tearing down the realities of those dreams right under our very noses. As George C. Carrington suggests, "Without committing himself or forcing us, Twain allows us to identify contentedly with Huck; then he disillusion us, and we howl" (qtd. in Hoffman 1). Huck’s rejection of aunt Sally’s plan to "adopt me and sivilize me" (362) is actually ironic in its futility; sadly, Huck is both civilized and socialized by the novel’s end, and his downward spiral to this depth, as Twain sees it, is catalyzed by Tom Sawyer at the Phelps farm. Because, as Joyce Rowe suggests, "Huck is denied the option of consciously rejecting Tom as a social model and, therefore, of entertaining any alternative shore identity for himself” (Rowe 55), Huck’s time there tastes bittersweet and reeks of failure.

When Huck decides to light out for the Territory, he only "reckons" he will. He’s holding on to his dream of independence and autonomy — the dream Twain makes us hope he’ll experience — by the only thread Twain hasn’t cut, and if he does go to the Territory, the journey will be a hollow fulfillment of the dream. Huck’s last words in the text may reflect his distaste for civilization and society — he states that he’s "been there before" (Twain 362). But sadly, I’m not sure he’s truly ever left.

Although the novel’s last ten chapters may suggest such a cynical reading regarding the possibility of being independent in modern American society, Twain pits Huck against society for most of the text. Huck does not understate his intent to wriggle free from the social influence of the widow Douglass and her sister, Miss Watson, who works Huck "middling hard" (3). In Chapter 1, which begins with Huck living in the widow’s house under all the social influences that entails, Huck finds it "rough living in the house all the time ... so when I couldn’t stand it no longer, I lit out. I got into my old rags, and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied"
(1). The benevolent widow and Miss Watson do not have it in mind to corrupt Huck or to hurt him, but their imposition of social graces and methods rubs against Huck’s grain.

Surprisingly, Huck seems to flirt with a partial acceptance of society early on in the work — not what we might expect from someone we view from the work’s start as a nonconformist. We might think of the Tom of *Tom Sawyer* as the real rebel, but even *he* encourages Huck to "go back to the widow and be respectable" (2) — indeed, that’s the only way Huck can play robbers with Tom. Huck does go back to the widow’s to "be respectable," and by Chapter 4, after he has spent three or four months in the great socializing vehicle of school, he concedes that "At first I hated the school, but by and by I got so I could stand it" (18).

But he can only "stand" school, not accept it, and he continues to state that "Whenever I got uncommon tired I played hookey" (18). Similarly, Huck admits to "getting sort of used to the widow’s ways," (18) but he handles his cabin fever by sliding out of his window at night and sleeping in the woods. Huck does concede that although he likes his old, pre-widow life best, "I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit" (18). But just as Huck seems to be slowly on his way towards becoming just another socialized boy — another Tom Sawyer — Twain steps in with a plot complication which suspends the socializing process: the reintroduction of Huck’s father.

Pap is a drunk vagrant who holds court at the opposite end of the social spectrum from the widow and Miss Watson. With them, pap serves as one half of a set of bookends to Huck, presenting Huck with a radical but nonetheless potentially appealing alternative model for one who is anti-social. Pap is a true social outcast, a wanderer who bucks society and whose character poses a dilemma for Huck — what should Huck model, the widow’s example or his father’s? Huck initially indicates that he may be choosing society over the life of an outsider,
continuing to attend school despite pap’s warning that he would "lay for me and lick me" if he didn’t quit attending (26).

Twain doesn’t let Huck make this decision so early in the text, though; pap kidnaps Huck and takes him to a hidden Illinois cabin. Although not immediately, Huck does reacclimate to his father’s reclusive ways soon after pap reclaims him. Huck himself says that "it warn’t long ... till I was used to being where I was, and liked it, all but the cowhide part" (30). But being "all over welts" (30) soon grows old for Huck, and as Carol Strickland suggests, "When Huck is kidnapped by Pap to resume the role of son to a cruel and selfish father, he again feels alienated from this externally imposed identity" of his father (Strickland 50). A harrowing showdown with his drunk father finally catalyzes Huck’s escape plan. Huck’s aversion to pap’s beatings prompts Huck to take the drastic measure of faking his own death; only after this symbolic suicide can Huck begin afresh, independent of the opposing influences of pap and the widow. As Strickland observes, Huck arrives at a crossroads at which he can finally seek "an independent fate and identity" beyond the influences of pap and the widow (Strickland 50).

Thus far in the novel, Twain has contrasted Huck against two manifestations of society which we might have expected to define the poor, motherless boy — the life of a schoolboy (the role the widow’s society expects of him) and the life of an abused outsider (the example his outcast, alcoholic father sets for him). Huck avoids both sets of influences and journeys across the river to Jackson’s Island, where he and Jim initiate their mutually independent journeys. Jim is obviously fleeing slavery, with the admirable hope of rejoining his family constantly in mind, and Huck’s journey can be read as an escape from his father. However, it is not to be overlooked that Huck chooses this escape. Certainly, pap’s drunken but frightening murderous intentions don’t warm Huck to sticking it out with his father, but it is significant that while the choice was
made for him (by pap’s kidnapping) to leave the widow, Huck extricates himself from his father. He chooses a new identity and a new life.

It is premature to say that Huck’s new life isn’t difficult; Strickland notes that "Huck’s fate is loneliness, even in freely chosen identities" (50). We see Huck’s loneliness at the widow’s house, where he sits in his room at night and says "I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead" (4). We see it when Huck is under pap’s control as well — Huck calls his time in the cabin "dreadful lonesome" (31). But although Huck does feel the pangs of loneliness, they don’t cripple what we still see as his independent spirit, which seems unchallenged on Jackson’s Island. Liberated by the understanding that the townspeople will think he is dead and "won’t bother no more about me" (41), Huck points himself towards the Island because "nobody ever comes there. And then I can paddle over to town, nights, and slink around and pick up things I want. Jackson’s Island’s the place" (41). One might argue that Huck is inexplicably tied to the society his town offers because even in this, his opportunity to go anywhere and live completely on his own, he reserves the option to return to the town. The argument is there — he might seem like he cannot cut his ties with society — but in fact, his reservation of his right to travel freely may only further reinforce what we know even this far into the text: Huck defines himself against institutions. Just as Huck is neither like the widow nor like pap, he may not be wholly satisfied by the raft or by the shore. We know Huck is a lonely individual; if he needs human interaction, he can get it on his terms by going to the shore and abandon it on the same terms by retreating to the raft. He leaves himself options, as any character with foresight would do.

So we see that Huck has established precedents for himself, which he follows for a good part of the text. He defined himself against the opposing ends of the societal spectrum, a behavior he continues as he moves with Jim down the river. He has also established his own
model of independence towards which the raft offers flexibility; he can go ashore when he wants and retreat to the solace of his freedom by getting back to the raft. Much of the episodic nature of *Huckleberry Finn* is based in these two precedents, with Huck repeating a cycle of shore-going and hasty raft-retreat.

What fuels Huck’s recurring vacillation between the shore and the river? It might seem that if Huck were a true model of independence who was comfortable with his new life, he would seem more sure of himself, not needing to make such frequent trips off the raft. I would argue that contrary to what we might believe about Huck’s self-acceptance and his happiness on the raft, Huck’s vacillation indicates an inner-incompleteness which underlies his ultimate failure as a personification of independence by the novel’s end.

Huck’s very first return trip to society serves as a sort of model for the rest. While Huck had told Jim "‘I wouldn’t want to be nowhere else but here’” (60), Huck’s inclinations have apparently changed only a few days later when he says "it was getting slow and dull, and I wanted to get a stirring up, some way. I said I reckoned I would slip over the river and find out what was going on" (66). Huck’s decision to venture to the shore seems incompatible with the independent spirit we’ve been seeing because the shore represents social conformity, but the methods he employs to make the trip are all the more tantalizing; Huck puts on a disguise. Huck’s masking serves a utilitarian purpose on the level of plot because as Huck says, "people might know my voice and find me out" (67). As far as Huck knows, he is obviously taking the risk of being returned either to the widow and Miss Watson or to pap. I find it difficult to overlook the implications of this masking act, though; if we consider the Huck of Jackson’s Island the real Huck, the Huck whose inclinations for survival are strong, whose prejudices are minimal, and whose love of independence seems to burn red hot, his masking reveals at least his
subtle need to hide this real self — an obvious complication. Huck must disguise himself because he knows that his true self — his independent self — is incompatible with the society he feels strangely compelled to rejoin. While unmasked, he does risk being returned to the widow and pap in a physical sense, an unwelcome event with which comes resocialization. Huck’s understanding of this danger, whether conscious or unconscious, is the last thread Twain leaves Huck to hold onto his independence.

Of course the thread wears, because Huck doesn’t pass very well in his disguise of choice — a girl’s clothing — and the woman he visits, Mrs. Judith Loftus, sees right through his mask. Huck makes a hasty retreat, stating that he "slipped back to where my canoe was" and "jumped in and was off in a hurry" (75). In a frenzy, he finds Jim and urges him to help get their possessions in the raft, saying "‘Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain’t a minute to lose. They’re after us!’" (75) This event can be read as Huck’s flight from society; the raft seems to be the locus of his personality, which even here is established by his defining himself against society, represented by people on the shore. It may seem on the face of the situation that Huck is incompatible with society and that he needs the raft to transport him back to his center in independence. But he doesn’t seem as much a rebellious independent now as he does a scared boy. Huck’s longing to get to shore and see what’s going on is completely incompatible with his independent streak; the balancing act he established early on during his arrival at Jackson’s Island falls apart. Indeed, Huck cannot negotiate both worlds, although he is mysteriously compelled to keep trying.

What keeps Huck at this futile effort? What within him fosters this "need" for the same society with which he is so obviously insoluble? It seems to me that Huck’s need to find people like him propels him in his cyclical returns to the shore and that his disappointment with what he
finds scoots him right back to the river. But his continued failures at finding people like him on the land, when mixed with the river’s ceaseless propulsion of both Huck and the runaway Jim deep into the South, bring an unmentioned but explicit sense of doom to the text. Twain makes a climactic event, most likely involving Jim, feel inevitable.

Huck’s relationship with Jim plays integrally into Huck’s longing and his search for companionship. Twain’s use of irony here is brilliant; while Huck devotes inordinate amounts of time to his search, scouring the shore and even other boats and rafts for people like him, the real catch is right under his nose: Jim. Jim, like Huck, has initiated a flight, and he is also the most nurturing, selfless character in *Huckleberry Finn*. Despite events like Huck’s prank on Jim involving the dead snake (a joke which turns cruel when the snake’s mate arrives and bites Jim), Jim is perpetually loyal and concerned for Huck’s well-being. When Huck and Jim become separated on the river in the snags and finally relocate each other, Jim’s remonstrations upon deciphering Huck’s mean lie demonstrate his nurturing nature and Huck’s blind, inconsiderate treatment of him:

> When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin’ for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos’ broke bekase you wuz los’, en I didn’ k’yer no mo’ what become er me en de raf’. En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun’, de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss’ yo’ foot I’s so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin ‘bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren’s en makes ‘em ashamed (105).

Huck gets up the gumption to apologize to Jim fifteen minutes later, but the damage is done — it is clear that Huck doesn’t appreciate or return Jim’s basic care for him.
Before I make Huck seem misanthropic for not supporting or appreciating characters in *Huckleberry Finn*, I must point out the obvious exception: Tom Sawyer. From the novel’s very first sentence, Huck establishes a connection with Tom, which continues throughout the work, stating, "You don’t know about me, without you have read a book by the name of ‘The Adventures of Tom Sawyer’" (1). When Huck despairs under the structure of society in the widow’s house, it is Tom who rescues him by calling him outside. Huck’s words upon hearing the code — "and sure enough there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me" (8) — imply some sense of relief on Huck’s part. Perhaps his insecurities, those same insecurities which perpetuate his cycle of searching for companionship, are nullified in Tom’s presence. Joyce Rowe states that "Throughout the journey Tom has served as Huck’s social alter-ego, an image of competence and survival to which Huck turns whenever anxiety, aroused by loneliness and home-longings, threatens to entrap him" (Rowe 65). Early on, when Tom decides to play a prank on Jim (before Jim and Huck begin their journey down the river), I get a sense of the integral part Tom plays in Huck’s self-conceptions. As Tom plays his prank, Huck "waited, and it seemed a good while, everything so still and lonesome" (Twain 7). As soon as Tom returns, though, the two are back in action, cutting through yards and organizing the band of robbers. The early timing of this episode, and Huck’s continual references throughout the text to Tom, indicate that Huck doesn’t feel like himself when Tom is not around. Huck even thinks about Tom while he is placing the props that will indicate his false death — arguably the liberating event which only Huck should own. As he goes about the arrangements of the death scene, Huck says "I did wish Tom Sawyer was there, I knowed he would take an interest in this kind of business, and throw in the fancy touches. Nobody could spread himself like Tom Sawyer in such a thing as that" (41). Similar examples abound in the text, and they really draw Huck’s tradition of defining himself against a
social matrix into question. More importantly, Huck’s portrayal of the independent spirit is threatened by this clinging to Tom’s persona; it seems unlikely that Huck could be truly independent with so much of his self-perception based in Tom. It is ironic that Huck rejects Jim, the person who seems most willing, able, and likely to provide him with healthy companionship. Even more ironic is Huck’s following and idealizing of Tom; Huck’s connection to Tom — a card-carrying member of society — is really a rejection of the independence he seems to have yearned for throughout the entire text.

The complex tension between Huck’s defining himself against and his conflicted approaches to his loneliness and independence begins a more rapid unraveling once the king and the duke sell Jim, for forty dollars, to the Phelps family. Huck again puts on a facade when trying to elicit Jim’s whereabouts from the duke. He cries "‘Why, he was my nigger, and that was my money. Where is he? — I want my nigger’" (273). Of course, we’re to think that Huck is merely doing some solid acting on Jim’s behalf, with the sole, noble intent of finding Jim and retrieving him from his new state of bondage. But by the end of Chapter 31, I begin to wonder how noble Huck’s intentions actually are. He starts off quickly towards the Phelps farm "because I wanted to stop Jim’s mouth till these fellows could get away. I didn’t want no trouble with their kind. I’d seen all I wanted to of them, and wanted to get entirely shut of them" (275). Where is Huck’s concern for Jim’s welfare? Huck seems distracted, blind to the gravity of Jim’s situation and intent only on saving his own hide.

When Huck arrives at the Phelps farm, the environment "casts an ominous shadow over his intentions," according to Rowe (Rowe 60). Huck notes that there was them kind of faint dronings of bugs and flies in the air that makes it seem so lonesome and like everybody’s dead and gone; and if a breeze fans along and quivers the
leaves, it makes you feel mournful, because you feel like it’s spirits whispering — spirits that’s been dead ever so many years — and you always think they’re talking about you.

As a general rule, it makes a body wish he was dead, too, and done with it all (Twain 276).

It doesn’t seem out of line here to suggest that the spirits are whispering about Huck because his arrival creates some sort of disturbance in the energy of the farm. Even the dogs on the farm sense something, surrounding Huck until they are driven away.

Huck has arrived at a place antithetical to ideals we saw earlier in the text — notably the abolitionist resolve Huck summoned up in his decision to "go to Hell" (271) and not turn Jim in to slave catchers. As Rowe states, "The authentic feeling which has arisen between Huck and Jim, based on mutual respect for one another’s integrity, dies on the Phelps Farm" (Rowe 53). At the Phelps farm, aunt Sally asks Huck if anyone was hurt in the boating malfunction (which Huck invents as an excuse). After Huck says that a "nigger" was killed when asked if anyone was hurt, aunt Sally says "‘Well, it’s lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt’" (Twain 279). Aunt Sally implies that black people don’t count as people, and this second-class opinion of blacks permeates both the farm and the text’s end.

Finally, Huck realizes where he actually is — at Tom Sawyer’s aunt’s farm. Huck initiates his final disguise here, pretending that he is Tom. Twain’s construction of this internal conflict is masterful; Huck must pretend to be the only person he looks up to, and concordantly, his recusal of his own independent, Jackson-Island-self begins to cement. The internal conflict is memorable; Huck states that he "was feeling pretty comfortable all down one side, and pretty uncomfortable all up the other" (282). I get the impression that an internal battle rages within Huck between the independence he has sought throughout the novel and the sheer ecstasy
actually living in Tom’s shoes produces. Of course, independence and conformity to society are irreconcilable within Huck, and we soon see the results of this raging inner contradiction on Huck’s dreams of his independent self.

We would have expected — at least hoped — that the Huck of Jackson’s Island would have neatly saved Jim and been quickly away from the Phelps farm. But when Tom Sawyer arrives at the farm, Huck’s noble traits take another turn for the worse. After Tom and Huck incriminate the king and duke to an angry crowd, Huck feels somehow to blame. He states that the conscience "takes up more room than all the rest of a person’s insides, and yet ain’t no good, nohow. Tom Sawyer he says the same" (290). If we extrapolate Huck’s opinion and extend it to his current situation at the farm, we can see his own admission of the growing moral cavity inside him.

Huck’s former independent strength has neared zero here — when Tom first proposes his ridiculously drawn-out plan for saving Jim in the most difficult way possible, Huck doesn’t reject it. Instead, he says "So I was satisfied, and said we would waltz in on it" (292). These aren’t exactly the words of a strong character in defense of a friend. Instead, they are the words of a character in the presence of another character of bad influence: Tom. Tom’s ideas seem to intoxicate Huck into acquiescence.

Few episodes in the novel frustrate me more than Tom’s idea concerning the grindstone. Tom thinks that a prisoner should have a grindstone to carve on and file while in captivity, but the grindstone on the farm is too heavy for he and Huck to lift. What do Tom and Huck do? They release Jim through the hole they’d dug into his hut and employ him, along with Huck, in transporting the stone. As Tom oversees Huck and Jim at work, we can see that Tom has finally won the battle for Huck’s spirit, although we don’t know the finality of this victory yet. As Rowe
states, Huck "can only rejoin society at the Phelps Farm by dying to himself, to be reborn as that Sunday-school bad boy Tom Sawyer" (Rowe 48). Tom has brought Huck’s spirit from the realm of independence back to the realm of society.

Twain reinforces the contrast of Jim with Huck and Tom when Tom is shot in the madness that ensues after they finally free Jim. While Huck goes back to find a doctor for Tom, Jim stays with Tom. Jim is eventually recaptured when the doctor finally brings Tom home, but the doctor’s account of the situation redeems Jim. He says that he’s never seen "a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was risking his freedom to do it" (Twain 352). Jim’s nobility in the situation only contrasts him with Huck and Tom more fully — we can’t believe the insane cruelty of their plan to free him, and we can’t fathom the very liberty of someone so good being mocked so thoroughly. Huck and Tom only descend further down the ladder of morality and into the grip of society that Huck had originally shunned.

Of course, being on a slave plantation, Jim is promptly locked up upon his return. Huck has failed, by now, resocialized by his short time with Tom and completely void of his formerly appealing yearning for independence. He doesn’t complain about Jim’s re-enslavement, instead offering what he thinks is an impressive gesture: "I hoped they was going to say he could have one or two of the chains took off, because they was rotten heavy" (354). Of course, this is no extension of empathy or thanks for all Jim has done for Huck. To add insult, Tom pays Jim forty dollars for his troubles, the same amount of money for which the king and duke had sold him. In effect, Tom’s gesture symbolically affirms that Jim is worth a fixed amount of money to him. Tom is not the glorious emancipator he imagines himself to be, and Huck does nothing to inhibit him.
Even more appalling is the fact that Miss Watson had died and freed Jim in her will. Not only was Jim actually free throughout his entire ordeal, but Huck learns right at the text’s end that both Miss Watson and pap have died. Their deaths are so deflating to Huck’s former purpose — he didn’t have any need to run away down the river because the two biggest socializing influences he’d been running from were dead anyway. Huck, like Jim, had been free all along.

The last paragraph of Huck’s narrative has undergone a complete metamorphosis for me — I’d always felt a sense of completion and satisfaction upon reading it previously, because it seems on the face to effuse such a prototypical example of resilience and independence in Huck. Huck reckons that he will "light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can’t stand it. I been there before" (362). Now, I have a different, though certainly not as clear, understanding of the ending to Huckleberry Finn. The ending seems deeply ironic; Huck has been civilized before, but he seems more civilized and socialized now than he ever did in his brief interludes of conformity to the ways of the widow and pap. He meekly "reckons" that he will follow his original dream and head to the suggestively ambiguous "Territory," but because his self-conceptions have changed, his new adventure seems destined for failure. Huck no longer employs the method so integral to his earlier independence: he cannot define himself against anything or anyone, especially with Miss Watson and pap dead. Instead, he defines himself as Tom Sawyer — both literally and psychologically — for the last ten chapters of the text. By the time we reach the text’s conclusion, it is plain to see that Twain has been working right under our gaze for its entire progression, building more and more dark layers into what seems like a happy reaffirmation of all that is great about the American dream of independence and fresh starts. The text actually presents a serious criticism of the dream,
suggesting that the human tendency to recenter is more likely to wake us from the ideal dreams of independence and individuality than to keep us dreaming.

Works Cited


