Cover art: WVC Hummingbird is used by gracious permission of Karen Wallace, a 40-year veteran of the English Department who continues her love affair with West Valley College in retirement by teaching one class a semester and serving as campus chaplain. She feeds her passion for nature photography by taking classes on campus and selling enlargements and notecards of her work. All proceeds benefit the WVC Student Assistance Emergency Fund. WVC hummingbird, her best-selling image, was shot near the Campus Center. For information about her photographs, email her at karen.wallace@wvc.edu.
We are pleased to present the Best Essays Anthology 2013-2015. It is through such an anthology that we are able to honor our finest writers. These pages are the work of students enrolled in the WVC English Department’s English literature and composition courses. The focus of these courses is mastering several varieties of essays. The West Valley College English Department privileges and supports good writing; that is why this collection of student essays is so important. Together they illustrate that students work diligently to understand, master, and hone the skills that enable them to write perceptively and creatively. The panel of judges was composed of three English faculty and two students who read and rated the essays anonymously.

You may access this anthology, as well as the Honorable Mention essays at http://www.westvalley.edu/academics/language_arts/english/
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The essay I chose to submit was a response to a reading assigned in my English 1A class last fall. It was an article arguing against the institution of marriage, a theme I found myself regrettably familiar with. English was one of the first courses I enrolled in at West Valley after a twenty-three year hiatus from college. I returned to school, after mothering four children and working as a pre-school and elementary performing arts teacher, with the intention of finally finishing my degree in Child and Adolescent Development. English offered me a happy transition between the familiar world of being a teacher, and the awkward, unfamiliar world of being a (less youthful) student. Here I’ve been able to hone the skills necessary to not only write plays about Tugglefracs, Snibblings, and Alice-esque rabbit chases as I’ve been doing, but also to communicate about ideas and beliefs on a whole new level. I’m so grateful for the opportunity I’ve been given to stretch and grow.

I plan to transfer to a University to obtain my degree when my general education requirements have been met. In the meantime I will attend West Valley, while working, living, and chasing rabbits in downtown San Jose with my youngest, Aubrie, and our two cats Gypsy Luna and Little Bit.
Why I Might Again. Again.

I’ve been married. Twice. Neither one took. I could probably explain why using a lot of scientific jargon that I picked up from Psychologytoday.com, along with some cussing. But I fear revealing too much about my humiliating attempts at “happy ever after” could only be met with pity, and the sort of awkward unease that follows a confession nobody really wanted to hear. But for the sake of reference I’ll offer this grossly oversimplified synopsis: I failed to convince my people that monogamy was sort of the point. I share this reluctantly in order to demonstrate that I would probably be justified if I hardened my heart, rejected the notion of marriage, and rode alone into the sunset with songs of male loathing on my lips. But I won’t.
I believe in marriage. I believe in everything about marriage. I believe in an unwavering commitment and the deep sense of place and belonging that it uniquely affords. I believe in the sort of deep companionship that opens to raw, uncomfortable intimacy. I believe in monogamous sex; that it is spiritual and sacred and has the power to heal, even when it involves clown suits or spurs, or when there is a four year old knocking on the door. I believe that healthy partnerships and a safe homes allow for the greatest sort of freedom to discover oneself; to try and to fail, to spread ones wings knowing there is a sheltered nest to return to no matter what one has faced in the world. And I believe that healthy marriages are the most fertile, quiet, and sound places for new human life to begin and to grow.

However, stating that I believe in marriage is not the same thing as stating that I believe in everything associated with marriage. I don’t. Marriage has a lot of baggage, so to speak. There exists an unfortunate history of cultural and religious ideologies concerning marriage that has left a bad taste in many a mouth. These ideologies are reflected in numerous wedding rituals; rituals that seem to do nothing to portray, lay a foundation for, or celebrate what a marriage really is, or what the marrying couple even hopes it will be.

In her essay I Do. Not. Catherine Newman offers several of these historic ideologies as reasons why she will never marry. And though I would also like to distance myself from some of these, I’ll be honest, the essay made me sad. Marriage has gotten a bad rap. And
not just from the establishment as described by Newman, but also from married people themselves. We all suck. Current divorce rates can attest.

And yet I have hope for marriage. I believe it’s worth fighting for. So after reading Newman’s article I wondered if perhaps there might be a way for humanity to keep from throwing out the baby with the bathwater. A way to ceremonially celebrate marriage and family without inadvertently making oppressive statements that replicate it as “a tool of the patriarchy” as Newman put it (61). Since most of Newman’s arguments were leveled at how marriage is represented in our culture rather than at the union itself, perhaps a marriage/wedding overhaul is the way to go. Instead of allowing bad historical practices to define the thing, why not just reinstate the rites that reflect what it was originally meant to be?

A wedding makeover might not seem like a serious way to insure that people like Newman will not be mistaken for someone “possessed” by her husband (64), or to weed out, as in my case, the short-termers from the lifers. How can a ceremony, after all, cause a wandering libido to want to stay home? If a guy is set on breaking his vows, does it really matter what pants he’s wearing when he says them? Probably not. Likewise, even if Newman made a big deal about refusing to be “handed off like a baton from her father to her husband” during her ceremony, someone might still be tempted to think of her as the prize in some male-centered transaction (61).
But if we made a serious attempt to allow a wedding to actually reflect marriage, I think it would look a lot less like a grown up quinceanera and probably a little bit more like Newman’s own arrangement. Because, let’s face it, she’s married. In spite of all her objections and declarations to the contrary. And though she wants nothing at all to do with the religious right, or what she perceives as their use of marriage to further their homophobic agenda, she is probably even married in the original, biblical sense (62). Much, given her apparent loathing of all things Judeo-Christian, to her own horror.

And in her defense, the idea of a biblical marriage has been horribly misrepresented throughout history. Countless political and social agendas have laid siege to the Bible, claiming it championed their own cause. Think Inquisition. The fact is, however, that while we all probably know someone who’s used the Bible to smack us upside the head yelling “god hates gays,” there is one thing that cannot be dismissed: the Bible contains the most original narrative concerning this thing we call marriage. It’s been so long buried beneath cultural association and religious tradition that we all have a hard time seeing it for what it is. So maybe it’s time to take another look.

Of course an exhaustive survey of Biblical marriage would fill volumes, and would probably turn everyone off. Nothing can kill tender hope more swiftly than an academic dissertation. What I can offer instead is just a tiny peek. Enough, I hope, to show that we’ve all probably made horrific leaps in our assumptions. The passage I would
like to briefly consider is found in Malachi 2:14 in the Old Testament of the Bible. It was written nearly four hundred years before Jesus was born to a very broken, very patriarchal Hebrew society.

Side note: the God of the Bible did not invent patriarchy, people did. We’ve often tried to imply that since historical events and social orders have been recorded in the Bible that they are, therefore, mandates from God. When, in fact, they simply describe what went down. This is not to say, of course, that the God of the Bible did not make himself known. He did. And one can easily identify when, in the Old Testament, God is speaking His mind because these passages usually begin or end with “thus sayeth the Lord.” Furthermore, God is not a ‘he.’ God is spirit, and therefore, genderless. But since humanity has, thus far, failed to envision and create appropriate pronouns for a genderless and unimaginable God, he allows us to use whatever sort of lame word our linguistic limitations come up with. But that is another paper for another time.

Back to Malachi 2:14. In this passage God is pissed. His heart is broken and his anger burns over the adultery and divorce (among other things) rampant among his people. He explains himself “It’s because the Lord is witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.” (Holy Bible, NIV) This short narrative suggests three things about marriage. 1) God advocates it. 2) Marriage is a partnership. 3) Marriage is a covenant.
Already these points fly in the face of the oppressive, patriarchal paradigm typically associated with the God of the Old Testament. The marriage expressed here seems to speak, rather, of equality. Presenting it as something precious and to be fiercely guarded. God later states in verse 15 that divorce amounts to “violence against the one you were meant to protect.” A sentiment as counter-cultural today as it was when it was written.

But it’s the third point that stabs me through the heart. Marriage was meant to be a covenant. The idea of covenant is so foreign to most of us that we can only equate it to making a promise. I think back to my first vow exchange in the eighties. I stood glowing in a spotless, glittering white gown with the poofiest shoulders man had ever seen, while my bridesmaids looked on in peach taffeta and my groom smiled down at me, his mullet perfectly gelled. We spoke things like “til death do us part” and felt very serious. But when I look at what a covenant is, and the ancient rites associated with it, I wonder how in the world we have come to equate our bedazzled, narcissistic, DJ’d, salmon croquette laden events with something that carries the depth of meaning that covenant does. That’s not to say a post-covenant-ceremony party isn’t in order. It is. After all Jesus’ first miracle was to turn water into wine at a wedding. And really good wine, if you know what I mean. But it’s the covenant part that we seem to have lost.

And again, while this isn’t the time to present exhaustive surveys, least of all exhaustive surveys of ancient covenant rites, I think it might
be appropriate to glance at just a few, if only to contrast them with current wedding practices. A covenant, whether between individuals, people groups, or between God and man, was always represented by a series of exchanges. Often the first exchanged would be of clothing. Parties would literally take off their garments and exchange them. The cloak was a symbol of their identity, and the trade depicted their willingness to share all that they were and all that they possessed. It brought the covenant partner into full access of any power, status, wealth and/or prestige belonging to the other. They would also exchange names, in whole or in part. Even in the biblical record of God’s covenant with Abram, the man’s name was changed to Abraham, adding in part of the name for God, and God was henceforth identified as “the God of Abraham,” among the people. Weapons were also exchanged, in many cases. Not only would this represent the taking on of each other’s battles, but also to show an equal distribution of power.

Pause for a moment and imagine a wedding ceremony that incorporated the above exchanges. Or imagine one in which espoused parties would, instead of exchanging rings, take out a big gruesome knife, slash their own hand, raise it and make their vows while blood flowed all over the place, leaving a very nasty, very permanent scar. This was a common practice, and probably better represents the magnitude of the marriage commitment than some sparkly jewelry. But there is another covenant practice that offers an even more disturbing and vivid image. After exchanging things, the parties would cut animals in half
and walk between the bloody carcasses stating something like, “may the same death be applied to me if I fail to keep this covenant.” Wow. Not only was it an agreement that breaking covenant was deserving of death, but it was also a picture that undoing covenant was as impossible as putting the dead animal back together. How’s that for a wedding ceremony?

Ok, so maybe we can’t and shouldn’t apply these ancient practices today. But I believe we would all do well to take the spirit behind them into careful consideration. Especially before we decide to wed, or to cohabitate, or to procreate, or to even just jump in the sack together for funsies. I believe humans lose so much when we fail to take seriously the making and keeping vows, and when we refuse to see marriage as the spiritual and societal-healing thing that it can be. For whether our marriages include a documented stamp of approval from the government or not, the result of breaking them up amounts to the same thing: the destruction of people’s lives and an obstacle to the safe development of the children involved. (Again, another paper for another time)

And still, I believe in marriage. And I wish Catherine Newman could, too. And in spite of my bad track record, I might even be persuaded to try again, provided I find a covenant keeping, like-minded soul. If that happens, I hope our ceremony would reflect the above sentiments. Only without the dead animals.
Works Cited


Rebecca Moody

The paper assignment was clear; select and analyze any poem from the Romantic period. Simple, but I was surprised where it took me. With all that I had to choose from, I did not expect to spend the following weeks dissecting Lord Byron’s “Darkness.” However, I found myself drawn to it—enamored with the language, and inexorably driven to consider the apparent darkness of the human condition. I admit, my fascination with the nature of evil is rather odd for someone of my circumstances, but somehow, I appreciate the truth of that.

I was born into a family of San Jose suburbia; the bottom-bunk, middle-child in a family of six girls. Rather than assemble our very own basketball team, we were each individually schooled in the arts of music and movement. Characteristically off key and a half-step behind, I found my place in a crossover point between fine art and sport: synchronized swimming, an activity that I have treated as a full-time occupation for the past ten years. With my competitive career coming to a close, I look to the bright lights of Las Vegas and the opportunity to perform as a professional athlete in an aquatic show. With this, I intend to transfer to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, carrying light-hearted hopes to further my academic career while feeding my soul’s appetite for life, love, and of course, literature.
The Animal Inside

Bound by humanity, we have no possible way of foreseeing the eventual end of the world, but still, this lack of information has not kept inspired individuals from trying to imagine what it might be like. This kind of post-apocalyptic theory is not a new invention and, in fact, centuries of thought have yielded to the exploration of various ideas and scenarios regarding the topic. One such idea was composed nearly two hundred years ago, when Lord Byron’s “Darkness” told of a world with no humanity, no sun, and ultimately, no hope. While the title of the poem is relatively simple, it is incredibly appropriate, as we are ultimately given nothing but a blackened landscape and a dark perspective of
human nature. As Byron sends mankind into the climactic end of life on Earth, the lines between man and beast are gradually blurred until the reader is forced to consider whether or not there ever truly was a distinction between the two.

In Byron’s world, where darkness is everything, the regular patterns of life have screeched to a halt: “Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day,” and the previously predictable cadences of nature are completely thrown out of rhythm (Byron, line 6). In the unimaginable emptiness of this landscape, “Men forgot their passions in the dread,” and suddenly, rather than living, the people have resorted to surviving (Byron, line 7). In other words, the beauty of life has been lost, and because it has been “forgotten,” it will never be remembered in such a desolate place. Unfortunately, without “passions,” there is almost nothing left for the people to live for—no true reason to survive except to evade death. Left alone with nothing to grasp but hope for the future, men become so lost in the infinite darkness, and all hearts are centered upon the “selfish prayer for light” (Byron, line 9). It is notable that this wish for light is a “selfish” desire, as this suggests that it is exempt from concern for others, and therefore serves to suggest just how far men might be willing to go to find it. As it turns out, it is in this quest for warmth and the fleeting experience of light that the fall of mankind ultimately begins.

We come to find that under such circumstances, human life takes
on a very different shape, and when fire becomes one of the largest commodities on the planet, the man-made structures of society become absolutely irrelevant. Throughout history, people have been defined based on their outward appearances, as they are typically used as indications of one’s place in society. However, without illumination, there is little left to distinguish one person from another. Suddenly, there are no kings to sit upon thrones, no possible way to govern the land, grand palaces are burned alongside humble huts, and the backbone of society is quickly cleared away by the thick blanket of darkness. In addition to this sudden loss in societal structure, we find that individuals are lost within the whole, as homes are referred to as “habitations,” and the vast diversity of mankind is collapsed and contained in the word “men” (Byron, line 12, 7). Perhaps Byron recognized that in this world without law, love, or light, there is neither a way nor a reason to differentiate between individual people. Or, maybe this was simply done to provide a broad overview of the world. Regardless of the reason, this generalization has a subtle sort of de-humanizing effect, one which is carried on and expanded as the poem progresses and we discover that the humans are becoming increasingly inhumane.

There are various ways in which the people react to the loss of their moon and sun, but Byron places an emphasis on those who react in negative ways, only briefly glazing over those who have accepted their demise in peace. From this, we can assume that the apocalypse, in By-
ron’s mind, is not met with a sense of peace, but with chaos. As dire circumstances drive people to extremes, it is as though the clock has been turned backwards and the world regresses back to a more primal time where the only options were to either kill or be killed. In this theoretical scenario, there is so much fear of the unknown, that rather than rallying together for comfort or support, the people actually feel much safer being apart from each other. Because of this incredible tension between, “War, which for a moment was no more, Did glut himself again” (Byron, lines 38-39). “War” is introduced into the poem as a gluttonous and greedy entity, and this persona’s presence is part of a continuing theme of consumption that exists throughout the poem. For instance, just the natural world is gradually burned and ‘eaten’ in fire to make light, mankind is, in a sense, violently consuming itself. In short, the world has become little more than a melting pot of distrust and desperation, and everything in it is actively consumed by those whom have always called it home. Therefore, “War” is not the sole cause, but simply more of a catalyst for destruction in a world that has already been doomed. Death is omnipresent in the minds of the people, and as civilization continues to crumble, morality- a sense that has often been thought to separate man from the animals, is nowhere to be seen.

Not only do the humans lose many of their defining characteristics in their desperate efforts to stay alive, but Byron also shows ways in which other living creatures lose theirs. For example, the birds in
their blindness cease to fly and so wings are suddenly “useless,” as the vipers “twined themselves among the multitude, Hissing, but stingless” (Byron, lines 33, 35-36). In this place where birds are afraid to fly, and one might trust a viper not to bite, nature has already been turned on its head, but Byron still takes this idea even one step further. As people “gnash’d their teeth and howl’d” in response to their circumstances, the “wildest beast came tame and tremulous,” therefore suggesting that in the face of disaster, the apparent gap between man and animal is diminishing (Byron, lines 31, 35). As the poem progresses, we see that the animal kingdom is becoming relatively quiet, but human beings are the exception to this trend, as they only seem to become wilder and more inclined to battle each other as the days pass.

In the end, it seems that there is little left that is worth salvaging, for nothing in this dark world stands more prominent than the final actions of its inhabitants. “Holy things” are burned, either out of spite or blatant disregard for religious beliefs, and “funeral piles” are added to the heaps of fuel as just another way to show just how far the value of life has fallen (Byron, lines 59, 27). In a way, life on Earth has become nothing more than a brutal game of survival, one in which the rules have been so neglected that they have practically gone extinct. Unfortunately, there are no winners in this morbid rat race, because actual the cost of surviving is paid in blood at the expense of humanity. When all is said and done and human beings have broken all of the “rules” of society and morality,
when the cities have been reduced to ashes and the starving feed off of each other, there is precious little left to separate men from animals. This is where Byron leaves us; swinging blindly through the heavens on a lifeless “lump of death—a chaos of hard clay” (Byron, line 71). The suffering has finally ended and the Earth is quiet, but not before life has consumed itself and not before all traces of humanity have been lost to the distinc-tively animalistic tendency to survive against all reason, despite any cost.
Works Cited
This story may belong to Charlotte Michaelson, but it is the story of many daughters. Domestic violence has many faces and many names. Ms. Michaelson could be anyone. She could be your sister, your friend, or your neighbor. She is not just a number or a statistic or a scary story. She is a person who may be in your class or sit next to you in the cafeteria. Her name has been changed to preserve her privacy.
This I Believe: Cleansing Poison

I believe in the destructive, poisonous nature of anger and the healing, cleansing power of forgiveness. Anger is a vile poison that will consume anything that retains it, and there is, in my experience, a consistently successful cure that cleanses even the most severely compromised victims. The miracle cure is clemency, forgiveness and time to rid the poison from the soul. It ought to be said that clemency is an uphill battle; similar to any recovery, it is not instantaneous. Forgiveness and the alleviation of built up emotions take time and considerable effort; while taking an even longer time to purge the lingering effects.

It was easy for anger to burn like a raging inferno within my
veins. Cleansing the fiery anger that burned and consumed me and the poisonous resentment that corroded my spirit, took time and endless exhausting energy. I was six years old when I first felt the harsh sting of caustic words. My father flung each venom laced word like a shard of glass and each tore a jagged hole in my psyche and my fragile young little soul absorbed each sharp, agonizing, soul shredding word. I allowed his venom and anger to penetrate my protective walls and for the first time in my young life, I felt resentment and anger. That afternoon I was given my first dose of poison. Though I didn’t know it at the time, I embodied Mark Twain’s words, “Anger is an acid that can do more harm to a vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it was poured.” The moment I was dosed with my first taste of vile poison, it burned within me, searing scars into my soul, scars that could not be washed away, invisible scars that I could not cure with an ointment or a cast. I absorbed the poison and I allowed it to cripple my soul. I let it debilitate me. It was Buddha that said, “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one that gets burned.”

I held on to the anger, and it built over years of insults and demeaning comments. Layer after layer of cold, harsh words acted as a funnel for poison, each dose corroded a piece of my soul until I lost sight of who I was. It was so easy to get lost in every negative thought or feeling that I had about myself. I would lie awake at night thinking about weakness and anger and truth. My father’s words
would resonate within my mind. I sought respite from his poison in slumber, but even there I could not find solace. Each venomous word haunted my nightmares, and for months, I would shut my eyes every night, hoping for respite, and instead I would hear his angry drunken voice, “Disgusting unlovable, worthless pig. Sickening pathetic weak, trash.” His words still echo in my head when I’m having a particularly bad day. Recovery is a process, three steps forward, two steps back is my constant mantra. I lived as a ghost in my own body for five years. I was a stranger walking around unrecognizable to my family and unrecognizable to myself. I was living an inauthentic life and when I looked in the mirror, I couldn’t find the unfailingly kind, charismatic forgiving person I knew myself to be.

It took five years of constant work and forgiveness to wipe out all of the accumulated hatred, resentment anger, and poison and it is a continued effort to keep cleansed of that poison. Anger is a natural response to pain. The difference between my case and other cases of anger is the vessel. I allowed rage to overtake my life and consume everything that I am. Negativity, allowed to run rampant, is worse than a forest fire; it demolishes everything in its path with little to no room for rebirth. I was a sinking ship and my saving grace was forgiveness. Most importantly, I forgave myself. My crime was not trusting myself and my grieving process. Forgiveness is earned, and my father has not earned my complete forgiveness, but I no longer allow myself to be ruled by anger and resentment. When I look at my father, I feel pity, because he
will never understand his crimes, or the impact of his actions.

Police talk about victims in cold, unfeeling terms, to distance themselves from the gruesome realities of the horrors they witness day to day, therapists talk about letting go of the victim mindset. Just like snowflakes, no two victims are alike, therefore it cannot be expected that their healing process is the same. I felt an immense pressure to stop being the victim, but with time and forgiveness I learned that I was a victim and there is nothing shameful or wrong with being the victim. The key is to heal and evolve. I was a victim, and now I’m a survivor.
In this essay, I explore the connection between Hemingway's narrator's diction and characterization of the ethnic characters and how these aspects of the writing are revealing of the narrator's racial bias. This topic first piqued my interest after a discussion with classmates regarding how Hemingway's story was an old-time example of racial profiling. Writing and thinking about racism always brings biases of my own to the forefront, which I am always thankful to be able to recognize and then work through. An essential component of my writing process is making sure to devote a great deal of time to editing and tightening up the mechanical and logical flow of each paragraph. I love creating sentences that not only express unique and worthwhile ideas but sentences that are also beautiful to the eye and ear, a goal that takes time and dedication to accomplish.

Born and raised in San Jose, I was homeschooled from the very start through the entirety of high school. I credit homes-
schooling with giving me time to pursue a love of reading throughout my childhood that added greatly to my fondness for school and learning. After attending West Valley, I have dreams of transferring to UCLA or UC Berkeley to study economics. Thoughts of one day studying abroad in Asia also occupy my dream space and hanging out with friends, dancing, cooking, and baking fill up my free time.
Two prejudice-fueled killings are briefly recounted in “Chapter VIII” of In Our Time by Ernest Hemingway. Two Hungarians are seen burglarizing a cigar shop in the middle of the night by Drevitts and Boyle, a pair of police officers. Boyle, mistakenly assuming the Hungarians to be Italian, shoots them to death without a hint of hesitation. Drevitts is greatly perturbed by Boyle’s swift, violent retribution, while Boyle expresses indifference and wonders aloud who in the world would make a fuss over the deaths of two “ ‘wops’ ” (Hemingway). While the prejudice of Boyle and Drevitts is evident, there is a third unnamed presence who displays a great deal of partiality as well: the narrator. A marked difference in the portrayal of the Hun-
garians compared to the representation of Drevitts and Boyle is indicative of the bias held by Hemingway’s narrator. As a result of the chronicler’s strategic characterization and language, the delinquents are dehumanized and their presence is downplayed, lessening the impact of the atrocity Boyle commits.

As soon as the story begins, a bias against the two Hungarians is patent from how they are named and identified. In the opening sentence, the apparent intruders are introduced as “two Hungarians,” and are later erroneously denoted as “‘wops’” (Hemingway). Apart from a cursory note of their criminality when Boyle denounces them as “‘crooks,’” the two burglars are recognized solely by their ethnicity (Hemingway). In comparison, the racial backgrounds of Drevitts and Boyle are never afforded any mention. Electing to exclusively identify the intruders by their race places excessive emphasis on their cultural background and bases their identities in their outward physical features. This devalues them as human beings and minimizes their humanity. By placing an inordinate amount of attention on the racial backgrounds of the intruders, the narrator effectively softens the brutality of what befalls them.

Another of the narrator’s degradation tactics is to be found within the method of naming the robbers as a set. Looking to further understate the role of the two robbers, the narrator
constantly uses the collective terms, “Hungarians,” “’wops,’” or “they,” to designate the thieves (Hemingway). The employment of plural nouns and pronouns joins the identities of the thieves in a way that de-emphasizes their distinctness and value as individuals, making it harder for the reader to recognize and sympathize with them in their tragic plight. Contrastingly, the trigger-happy Boyle and his hesitating partner, Drevitts, are clearly delineated and are never referred to as a unit of any kind during this exploit. Instead of being well-developed characters with whom the reader can easily empathize with and connect with emotionally, the Hungarians are painted as an indistinct, impersonal, human-like entity, which diminishes the effect of their cold-blooded murder. The narrator uses deliberately vague diction to blur the humanity of the thieves in the hopes of deflecting attention away from the brutal actions of the cops.

As the saying goes, there is an exception to every rule and other than a passing reference to the “two” burglars, there is but one instance where the storyteller directly refers to the robbers as distinct individuals, but it’s not in an especially dignifying fashion (Hemingway). The narrator succinctly and impassively records, “Boyle shot one off the seat of the wagon and one out of the wagonbox” (Hemingway). Referring to each of the shot Hungarians as a “one” in the context of what is transpiring is horribly debasing. Such language conjures up mental images of a recreational target practice, complete with clay disks, a neat row of bottles and cans, and perhaps a pheasant or two. For Boyle, it was
nothing more than an excuse to practice his marksmanship, no different than hunting a defenseless fox in the woods. Conversely, the two police officers are never alluded to by anything apart from their proper names. The burglars are being debased to an almost inhuman, animalistic level by each being referred to as “one.” This continues the process in which the narrator tries to degrade the criminals and shift focus away from their unjust murder.

Just as revealing as how the narrator chooses to illustrate the robbers is what the storyteller decides to overlook in his account. In the narrator’s attempt to moderate the presence of the Hungarians, he allows one of the most humanizing facts about them to go unstated: their personal names. Contrastingly, the cops’ names are obviously disclosed and their individual identities and personalities are clearly defined. Left without a humanizing, unique name for each burglar, readers are more likely to merely disregard their deaths as merely unfortunate incidents. One meager implication that does illumine the Hungarians personas is gleaned from the line, “The Hungarians were backing their wagon out of an alley.” (Hemingway). A wagon is certainly a poor mode of transportation likened to the “Ford,” Drevitts and Boyle are cruising around in (Hemingway). Owing to their supposed robbery of a cigar store and their humble getaway vehicle, it is safe to say that the two Hungarians are not particularly financially secure, shedding possible light on their motive to commit such a crime. Even counting this paltry allusion, many telling details are withheld about the Hungarians circumstances, provid-
ing no context for the reader. What are the criminals’ ages? What are their background stories? Are they reckless teenagers looking for a bit of fun and adventure or are they frightened and starving, clad in ragged garments and looking for a way to fill their empty stomachs? Are they a father and son duo, taking desperate measures to maintain a livelihood for their family? Ultimately, readers are left in the dark concerning the burglars’ motives and much more. Why so little description or character development surrounding the Hungarians? The fact that the narrator knows the criminal’s true ethnicity while Drevitts and Boyle do not proposes the narrator’s omniscience, hence, pure ignorance might not be the culprit. By choosing to withhold their very names along with other valid data, the narrator keeps the nameless Hungarians at a comfortable emotional and mental distance. This engineered space greatly hinders the reader’s ability to feel sympathy for the mysterious Hungarians, and makes their bloody, violent deaths less shocking and easier to swallow.

Through this story, Hemingway takes a stab at a subject not lacking in coverage or opinions of late. While the storyteller’s methods of narration effectually lessen the Hungarians’ roles and humanity, they also act as an example of our own aggressions and hidden biases of any size. In noting the narrator’s partial modes of character development, the reader may in turn ponder their own prejudices and how they may surface in ways large and small in their daily lives. Though published almost 90 years ago, “Chapter VIII” of In Our Time still proves to be a thought-provoking, timeless commentary on prejudice.

Works Cited
Spencer Burakowski

A big motivation for me in writing this essay was the struggle I was going on in my life at the time. My mother was in the hospital, I was living alone, my long distance relationship was coming to an end, and most of my friends have moved across the country. I was in a pretty dark place in my mind; this essay helped calm me for let me realize the simple, good things I have in my life. I found most notably, and as silly as it sounds, happiness from my truck that I drove to school in. This was the car I grew up in and learned how to work on with my father. As soothing an experience this was for me to write, I hope others can look for similar methods to calm themselves in dark times in their lives.

Moving on from the composition of my writing to more of myself; I aspire to be a mechanical engineer—following my desire to work on cars and invent mechanical contraptions. I’ve come to West Valley as a way to further my education without outrageous debts, and hope to see myself in a university next year. Following that I imagine myself in a design consultant career where I can come up with clever solutions to client’s problems, for I gain no more pleasure than figuring out answers to Life’s problems.
“Fucking Fuck!”
“What is it, son?”
“Fucking oil, fucking everywhere!”
“What happened?”
“...forgot to open up the air valve on the oil pan…”
“Yeah, well, you gotta just get used to remembering all the little things. Maybe when you start doing projects of your own one day, you’ll be happy you did.”

Even though he never went to college, my father knew far more than me when it came to the world. I’ve always held my father as the kind of person that anyone could find as their role model. The kind of guy who would not only start projects, but make sure to finish them. An engineer of every trade merely from experience and hard thought. One who has dabbled in every hobby imaginable and permanently memorized the skills for each one. A man who never wore a suit but always had a veneer of likability. He was the magician to finding the secrets to happiness. So you can only imagine how hard it was for me to see him go.

Five years later, I now crawl into my old 1999 Dodge Dakota and pop the hood. Despite its old age, the car has held up remarkably
well. The paint hasn’t chipped at all—still a stunning glossy white with the word “SPORT” in a vicious, crimson font under the driver side door handle.

“Come on, Truck-Truck, we’ll get this over with, quick—like a bandage.”

Of course, a truck would have no comprehension of a bandage was so I felt less like a comforting surgeon and more like a socially awkward butcher.

“...just have to replace your steering gearbox, no problem.”

If I was Truck-Truck after hearing that, I would be shaking.

I crawl under the wheels and start getting to work. Looking up, I only see the dirt of every road I’ve ever been on tucked into every nook and cranny of the undercarriage. I have to look hard to see where to begin. I think back to the times where my father would point out the bolt which needed turning and with how much strength, but now I’m on my own. I now see my goal, the gearbox and all its connecting components. Beginning to loosen the bolt connecting the gearbox to the reservoir, I’m greeted with a drop of steering fluid. Literally, it is just a single drop of lubrication that managed to squirrel through the threads in the bolt. But, this is the tear of joy that I have been missing from my father all these years. This is the tear of pain brought by the physical struggle of hands on work that my father always hoped I would pursue. It is a future of happiness derived from simplicity. This simple drop is a cascading foundation of my identity based on all the goodness of my father.

Caught up in the awe of this falling droplet, I forget I’m still loosening the bolt and soon meet the other quart of this drop’s brothers. There was no symbolism in that. It was just a literal geyser of frustration, then humiliation, then stickiness.

I run inside to clean myself off. With a warm, wet towel I wash my face—the especially unfortunate target of this accident. After more layers of soap and hot water, my reflection shows a face cleansed brighter than it looked this morning. I look down to see a blackened towel. I know I still have a job to do.

Two hours later, sixty bolts of thirty different types assort themselves on the ground, a single jack poses like Atlas, two pneumatic drills lie on their sides exhausted, four specialty tools tuck themselves away in their cases, and the gearbox—the infamous gearbox—has been precisely amputated. It lies disconnected, like a parasite without a host. Maybe, I’m not that bad of an automotive surgeon after all, maybe it runs in my blood.

But the other half of the project remains, the most important
part: finishing what I started. The first half takes two hours; the second takes six. Who knew it would be so difficult to muscle all the bolts into place when they were all so neatly arranged before. But it's funny, it's so easy to lose track of time during a project it really feels like equivalent halves. There is a thrill of completion and a sense of pride in my work that can't be satiated any other way. To a rudimentary level, this sense of self-worth and working to see visible progress in something you care about is, in itself, happiness.

"Atta boy," is what my father always said. Score a goal in soccer? There was no hiding from the "ATTA BOOOOYYY" booming from the bleachers. Get an A on a paper? "Atta boy." Finish a hike? "Atta Boy." I've always imagined after every success I would hear my father's voice call out those words. I believe that, if he knew what I was doing right now, I would hear that same voice I've always known.

I move to the driver's seat of the truck, and put my key in the ignition. The lights on the dashboard spark to life; the gauges bounce forward then fall to a rest; I flick on my headlights - I only now realize how dark it is outside. After all this hard work it's time to put it to the test.

The engine roars to life. The exhaust coughs to a late start but eases up. I disengage the brake and gently roll forward. Out of the driveway, I turn right. So good so far. I continue down my road. The radio plays "Fortunate Son" in a hushed tone. I make turn on a city street and prepare to make a U-turn -- the ultimate test. Simultaneously turning and increasing the volume on the radio, Truck-Truck rounds the corner while blaring "I AIN'T NO FORTUNATE ONE" - arguably the fiercest U-turn I've ever pulled off.

I turn the song off. The night air flows into the intake of the car. I sit back and roll down the window, taking in a deep breath. Success. "Atta Boy," whispers in the wind. I crack a smile, exhale, and we breathe.
I’m a “re-entry student,” which is a polite way of saying that I screwed up when I was young and didn’t go to college when I should have. It was my biggest regret but I was fortunate enough to get a do-over. I never imagined when I was young and ashamed of my lack of a degree that I would someday carpool to West Valley with one of my young adult children but it happened. Ironically, he didn’t get his degree and I am about to, but that’s another story. My story is that I was born and raised in the South Bay and took an art class at West Valley decades ago, though writing is my first love. Lots of living and three grown kids later, I’m back. I love WVC and am squeezing every last drop of knowledge and experience I can from my time here.

I chose my topic because I’m passionate about social justice and believe our criminal justice system is broken at every level. I am convinced that the death penalty is both barbaric and unjust, as it is not applied equally across ethnic lines and income brackets. Frequent news stories about innocent people convicted of murder and exonerated years later sparked my initial interest in capital punishment. Given the likelihood that not all the wrongfully convicted have advocates, how many...
innocent people may have been executed for crimes they didn’t commit?
Even one is too many.
Should Capital Punishment Be Abolished?

Capital Punishment, the practice of executing those found guilty of murder or other crimes, dates to before written history. The death penalty in America dates to colonial times and was historically administered for both murder and lesser crimes. Most western European nations have now outlawed the practice, as have eighteen states. Despite its long historical precedent, capital punishment has been and continues to be controversial. It raises many questions such as whether it is ethical to put people to death, what is the goal of executing convicted murderers, and what is the risk of executing an innocent person. A close examination of the practice has led me to conclude that capital punishment is barbaric and is inflicted disproportionately on ethnic minorities and the
poor. It should be abolished. However, proponents of the death penalty maintain that some crimes are so heinous that only execution can provide justice for victims and their families.

One has only to examine some of these notorious cases to understand death penalty proponents’ point of view. Attorney and CQ Researcher author Kenneth Jost recounts the tragic story of the Petit family (967). Dr. William Petit of Cheshire, Connecticut survived a hellish home invasion in 2007. He was tied up, savagely beaten, and left for dead in the basement of his house. The perpetrators, Steve Hayes and an accomplice, then attacked Petit’s wife Jennifer and their two daughters, Michaela, eleven, and Hayley, seventeen. They tortured all three and raped Jennifer and Hayley before killing them. Understandably, Petit expressed relief when Hayes got the death penalty. He said simply, “This is justice” (Jost 965). A juror in the Hayes case stated, after voting for the death penalty, “Here is a case where somebody doesn’t deserve to remain on the face of the earth” (Jost 967).

Some of the survivors of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing expressed similar sentiments when Timothy McVeigh was put to death in 2001. As long as a convict lives, he or she has the ability to inflict additional psychological pain on victims’ families from behind bars. In her book Killing McVeigh: the Death Penalty and the Myth of Closure, Jody Madeira states the following: “Prior to his execution, McVeigh was still a poisonous presence in the lives of most victims’ family members and survivors. He could manipulate or unsettle them at will with
callous media commentary, his stoic demeanor, or his defiance, arrogance, and ‘in-your-face’ visibility” (Madeira 229). Madeira goes on to say that once McVeigh was executed, many of the victims’ family members experienced relief and peace (244). As one man put it, “…after someone is executed you are completely finished with every battle you have to fight in that arena” (qtd. in Madeira 244). In both of these cases, the finality of execution gave survivors peace.

However, finality is also the problem with the death penalty. Once someone has been executed, it is impossible to bring that person back to life should new evidence come to light. In a clear-cut case with incontrovertible proof that the convict is guilty, where the hideous details of the crime indicate a seemingly inhuman perpetrator, it almost seems reasonable to execute that person. One cannot help but sympathize with grieving families calling for justice. However, most cases do not involve ironclad evidence and honest, competent attorneys on both sides. For too many accused, especially those who are non-white or poor, justice can be elusive. Maintaining the death penalty comes at the terrible price, potentially, of mistakenly convicting and executing an innocent person.

According to death penalty opponents, it’s likely that innocent people have been convicted and executed for crimes they did not commit. The Innocence Project is a national litigation and public policy organization dedicated to exonerating wrongfully convicted prisoners and reforming the criminal justice system. This organization and others
maintain that Cameron Todd Willingham was such a person. Willingham was executed in Texas on February 17, 2004 for deliberately setting the fire that killed his three small daughters in 1992 (Jost 978). The fire marshal who investigated at the time concluded the fire was arson, a finding that was subsequently disputed by two separate independent experts.

In a 2005 article about the Willingham case for The New Yorker, journalist David Grann states that, “Texas established a government commission to investigate allegations of error and misconduct by forensic scientists.” Willingham’s and a similar case were the first ones the commission examined. Grann writes that noted fire scientist Craig Beyler, hired by the commission, had nothing but harsh criticism for the local authorities who originally investigated the Willingham case. According to Beyler, “investigators in the Willingham case had no scientific basis for claiming that the fire was arson, ignored evidence that contradicted their theory, had no comprehension of flashover and fire dynamics, relied on discredited folklore, and failed to eliminate potential accidental or alternative causes of the fire” (qtd. in Grann). Another evaluation performed by a respected fire expert while Willingham was still alive came to the same conclusion. Willingham’s attorneys presented the report to the Board of Pardons but the board did not comment on it. They denied Willingham’s petition for clemency and proceeded to execute him.

Willingham was also convicted based on the testimony of jail-
house informant Johnny Webb, though such testimony is notoriously unreliable. Web claimed (in return for leniency, it was later revealed) that Willingham had confessed to him, something the latter vehemently denied. Webb went on to change his story several times. Willingham maintained his innocence to the end and rejected, against his attorney’s advice, a plea bargain that would have given him a life sentence rather than the death penalty. Despite the weight of new evidence presented to it by the Innocence Project, the state of Texas has thus far been unwilling to exonerate Willingham posthumously (Innocence Project). Willingham’s final request of his parents was that they keep fighting to clear his name. When he learned that there would be no stay of execution, he reportedly said, “Don’t be sad, Momma…in fifty-five minutes, I’m a free man. I’m going home to see my kids” (qtd. in Grann).

Even timely exonerations are troubling because they reveal how flawed our criminal justice system is. According to Jost, there have been 139 exonerations of death row inmates since 1973 and many, many times that number in non-capital cases (Jost 970). One death row inmate, Anthony Graves, was set free in 2010 after serving eighteen years. According to District Attorney Bill Parham, a thorough review of the evidence revealed that there was absolutely nothing to connect Graves, who is black, to the crime (970). In a stunning November 2014 case, former Texas prosecutor Ken Anderson pled guilty to deliberately withholding evidence that resulted in an innocent man being convicted of murder and sent to prison. The man, Michael Morton, was wrongfully
convicted of the 1986 murder of his wife. The case is extraordinary because most prosecutors that abuse their power do not suffer any consequences. This was not a capital case but Morton did spend twenty-five years in prison for a crime he didn’t commit. Had it been a capital case, he might not have lived to see justice done. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that Anderson is the only dishonest prosecutor in the U.S. criminal justice system.

Corrupt prosecutors are only part of the problem with the system, however. There is also the issue of incompetent defense attorneys. It is very expensive to hire an attorney to defend oneself in a murder trial. Poor defendants have no choice but to accept a court-appointed attorney, someone who donates part of his or her time to pro bono work. Some of these attorneys are wonderful, hard-working people who represent their indigent clients with the same thoroughness and zeal as they do their paying ones. This is not usually the case, though. Most public defenders are overworked, understaffed, and don’t have the resources to mount a proper defense for their court-appointed clients. Some are simply too young and inexperienced to be effective. Others are apathetic and do the minimum possible, focusing instead on their clients who can pay. Still others are a liability to their clients. They show up inebriated, fall asleep in court or ignore key evidence. The defendant who can’t afford to hire a top-notch attorney is at the mercy of whatever lawyer the court appoints to his or her case. With the death penalty in play, defense attorney errors can be fatal. Thus, a defendant’s income bracket
is a significant factor in the trial’s outcome. Although justice is supposed to be impartial, there is a substantial risk that a poor defendant will not receive a proper defense. In 2000, an Illinois commission performed a study of that state’s death sentences. It found “death sentences imposed disproportionately on the poor and ethnic or racial minorities” (Jost 977).

Along with poverty, race is another key factor in who gets the death penalty. According to the Death Penalty Information Center (“DPIC”), blacks are given death sentences at rates disproportionate to their presence in the population and are far more likely to receive a death sentence where the victim is white. The DPIC is a national non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. It reported on a number of recent university studies on capital punishment and the results are chilling. In Washington state, jurors are three times more likely to recommend a death sentence for a black defendant as for a white one (DPIC). In Louisiana, black defendants are a whopping 97% more likely to receive a death sentence than are whites (DPIC). In California, those who kill whites are three times more likely to be sentenced to death than those who kill blacks or Latinos (DPIC). These statistics send an ugly racist message that white lives are more valuable than non-white lives.

People who are mentally impaired are also more likely to receive death sentences. The case of Teresa Lewis, who was executed in 2010
for the 2002 murder-for-hire of her husband and stepson, is but one example. Her trial counsel didn’t bring up the fact that Lewis, whose IQ was 72, was mentally retarded (Jost 976). Even if her attorney had brought it up, according to the Southern Human Rights Center jurors usually don’t understand what “mildly retarded” actually means (Jost 977). It’s challenging to inform them because the scientific understanding is subject to change, as is the legislative definition (Jost 977). Yet it seems unethical to execute someone who probably didn’t fully understand what she was doing and who could easily have been manipulated by her co-conspirators.

Mentally ill defendants are also more likely to be executed, according to the DPIC, despite the fact that the American Psychiatric Association, American Psychological Association, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the American Bar Association, have endorsed resolutions calling for exemptions for severe mental illness. The DPIC estimates that 10-15% of inmates on death row suffer from some form of mental illness. The Scott Panetti case is just one example. Panetti served in the U.S. Navy and was honorably discharged but began showing symptoms of schizophrenia shortly thereafter (DPIC). For most of his adult life, he was in and out of mental hospitals. According to a psychiatrist who examined him, Panetti is a severely afflicted paranoid schizophrenic and was delusional when he killed his in-laws. Though numerous mental health associations, judges, religious leaders, and the European Union have all urged Texas Governor Rick Perry to commute
Panetti’s sentence because of his severe mental illness, Perry has thus far refused. Panetti is scheduled to be executed on December 3, 2014, which means that by the time this paper is completed, he will probably be dead. [Update: twelve hours before he was due to be executed, the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals granted Panetti a stay of execution due to his extreme schizophrenia.]

The European Union’s interest in the Panetti case is not surprising because most European countries, as well as many nations outside Europe, have banned the death penalty by law or by practice (DPIC). The consensus among these countries is that capital punishment is barbaric and is inextricably linked to civil rights abuses. Consequently, they have replaced it in their criminal justice systems with life imprisonment. There has been a significant side effect of this in the United States. The major drug manufacturers happen to be located in Europe. As a result of the EU’s stance against capital punishment, these companies have stopped selling lethal injection drugs to U.S. prisons. Because they can no longer purchase the drugs from major manufacturers, prisons have resorted to buying them from unauthorized sources. According to an article by Josh Sanburn for Time Magazine, some states are literally experimenting with new combinations of drugs and buying them from developing nations where oversight is lax (Sanburn 42). Per Sanburn, “the result has been high-profile mishaps that have called into question the future of what was once thought to be the most humane way to kill” (42).
This raises another troubling aspect of capital punishment—botched executions. While those who want revenge may argue that convicted killers deserve any pain and suffering they receive, most people take issue with the state causing undue pain and suffering when executing a convict. Abolitionists argue that botched executions violate the Eighth Amendment ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Botched executions are on the rise both because it is difficult to procure lethal injection drugs and because the American Medical Association prohibits physicians from assisting with executions for ethical reasons. Lethal injection, unlike other methods, is a medical procedure. Since doctors cannot be present, the injections are currently performed by prison system personnel, often with disturbing results. On April 29 of this year, the state of Oklahoma executed Clayton Lockett. Lockett was convicted in 2000 of murdering a 19-year-old woman by first shooting her then burying her alive. It was a horrible crime, and his execution was horrible, as well. The state used a mix of midazolam, vecuronium bromide, and potassium chloride from “an undisclosed source” (Sanburn 42). After the initial injection, Lockett appeared to pass out but then opened his eyes and started mumbling. He proceeded to thrash against the gurney. The warden sought to have the execution stayed at that point, but forty-three minutes after it began, Lockett died of a heart attack following the rupture of the vein into which the drugs were injected. The incident prompted Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin to suspend all executions pending a review of the state’s lethal injection protocol (Sanburn 42).
The Lockett case was one of three botched executions this year.

Botched executions are nothing new, but it is surprising to most people to learn that there have been more botched lethal injections than any other execution technology used in the twentieth century (Inskeep). Amherst professor Austin Sarat has studied over a century of American executions. He was interviewed earlier this year by Steve Inskeep of National Public Radio about executions in the U.S. in general and the botched execution of Joseph Wood in Arizona this year in particular (it took Wood nearly two hours to die). According to Sarat, America has been on an elusive quest to find an execution method it finds acceptable (Inskeep). He states quite emphatically that there is no safe, effective, reliable, humane method of execution, and that botched executions are a sign that the death penalty is waning in America (Inskeep).

Disturbing though executions gone awry may be, death penalty supporters argue that capital punishment has value because execution acts as a deterrent. However, there is no evidence that this is true. States that don’t have the death penalty actually have lower murder rates than states that do. The EU, without any death penalty, has far fewer murders than the U.S. Multiple studies have demonstrated there is no statistical evidence that the death penalty deters people from committing capital offenses (DPIC).

Another practical reason for eliminating capital punishment is cost. Only about one percent of murder cases result in the death penalty, but it costs four times as much to try and put a convict to death as it
does for a life sentence. The actual cost varies from state to state but the 
bottom line is that it would save taxpayers millions of dollars if the death 
penalty were abolished. The cumbersome appeals process is designed 
to ensure that innocent people are not executed, and adds greatly to the 
expense (which as we have seen is not free from error anyway). The 
process could be streamlined if life imprisonment were the only choice. 
The savings could then be spent on crime prevention and help for vic-
tims’ families.

Though it’s a polarizing issue, death penalty proponents and 
abolitionists have something in common. They agree that convicted 
murderers should be removed from society so they cannot harm anyone 
else. Where the two sides differ is that abolitionists believe life sentenc-
es are sufficient punishment, while proponents want retribution. At the 
crux of the matter is whether the government should go on having the 
power to execute convicts when there is a risk of making an irrevocable 
mistake. It is impossible to reconcile the two sides of this issue com-
pletely. However, it is understood that imprisoned murderers can cause 
pain to their victims’ families when they speak to the media from behind 
bars, as Timothy McVeigh did. One possible way to reduce survivors’ 
pain would be to reform the system with laws that silence such convicts 
by making it illegal for them to speak to the media. As it is, families of 
victims are traumatized during trials by the media circus that surrounds 
them, especially high profile, capital cases. Were the death penalty elim-
inated, some of that furor would die down because the media wouldn’t
be able to jump on every step of the appeals process.

There are logical, practical reasons why the death penalty should be abolished. However, there are absolutely no logical, practical reasons for executing convicted murderers. It doesn’t deter future murders. It doesn’t bring victims back. It may temporarily give victims’ families peace but it can’t heal their pain. The only reason for executing people is to exact revenge. Do we want a government that metes out revenge? Life imprisonment without the possibility of parole is just as effective at removing dangerous criminals from society and doesn’t carry with it the unacceptable risk of executing an innocent person. Even people serving life sentences sometimes repent of their crimes and make something positive of their lives behind bars. The death penalty is costly and unethical. It is disproportionately applied to ethnic minorities, the poor, and the mentally ill. Its moral price—the possibility of executing an innocent person—is much too high. It is time to abolish it.
Works Cited


My essay was on the challenges faced by workers who have hands on experience in a career field competing against people whom have gotten a degree in the field but have no practical experience. I implemented parts of Mike Rose’s “Blue Collar Brilliance” to draw a contrast between some perceived successes on the part of blue collar workers, and the impending problems that they will face in the current work force. My interest in the topic stems from the challenges I faced following my separation from the military and subsequent job search. During my job search I was repeatedly looked over for jobs, and when I did acquire a position in my career field I was paid much less than workers whom had a degree with no practical experience despite my years of experience.

I am a 28 year old Florida native who served eight years in the U.S. Air Force. I am an avid video gamer and e-sports enthusiast. I am currently pursuing my AA in Communications, with the plan to either transfer to SJSU or Stanford to complete my BA. My career goals are to attain a Juris Doctorate from Stanford and be at the forefront of the legal field of digital property rights.
Blue Collar Blues

The blue collar worker, the average Joe, the proletarian, whatever you want to call them, it will always equate to the guy or girl who is breaking their back for their paycheck. Day in and day out, blue collar workers turn the gears of our society, but they are taken advantage of at every turn. They work in factories and flightlines, in diners and the DMV, but they face enormous bias in attempting to move up in an increasingly corporate world, where their skills are overlooked, undervalued, marginalized or ignored. With ten years experience toiling away in blue collar jobs, I have found that there is a very unique set of challenges and unreasonable demands that are levied towards workers who have not attained their degrees.
Most blue collar workers pursue their line of work out of passion for that field and end up in a position that gives them a very defined skill set that will allow them to become subject matter experts in their very narrow field. They may gain experience that will put them at the front of their respective career field, but time and time again, this experience will be overlooked by hiring managers or supervisors because the next level in their career requires a degree - not a specific degree that will give valuable insight or job knowledge that could not be gained elsewhere, just a degree. I have worked in aircraft maintenance for six years, but upon searching for employment outside of the military, I was repeatedly overlooked in favor of the individual that has a degree but no experience. I wonder what the reasoning is for choosing someone who has no practical experience in a field over someone who has tons of experience but is lacking a piece of paper. There seems to be a misconception that a degree represents a certain level of intelligence. Employers need to come to the understanding that there is a "broad range of intellectual capacity" (Rose 314). But it seems that employers would rather have a group of book smart employees with no relevant experience than hire someone who has years of experience without a degree.

One of the stranger facts that blue collar workers face is that, if they do manage to get the job, they will be paid significantly less than a coworker fresh out of college. With three years experience in a specialized field, I found myself being paid $10,000 less than my college-educated co workers. I understand that with higher
education comes a broader world view, but in a field that specialized in processing paperwork and efficient time management, I found that my specialized training in time management and experience did land me the job, but at the cost of a significant salary cut. There seems to be the standard practice that higher education equals higher pay. The problem with that model is that a mechanic with a PhD in underwater basket weaving is no better than a mechanic with basic certification, and should not be paid more just because of a degree. The model of higher pay for higher education levels results in numerous pointless degrees that were acquired for no other reason than to check off a task on an application or provide a reason to request a raise. Employers should realize that practical experience is of the same, if not of more value than a formal education and that a wage disparity will cause the employer to not only lose out on quality workers, but will promote the mandatory higher education trends that seem to be flourishing. Job seekers should not get a degree in a field that they have no interest in just to fill a requirement for a position that shouldn’t have the requirement in the first place.

Even if blue collar workers are not looked over for the position they will face terrible trouble in the long run. To move up through a business it will eventually mean stepping in to a management role. Most blue collar workers, while having a range of practical experience and a good working knowledge of the operations inside a company, will not be able to make the jump from worker into upper management. Rose recounts the story of his uncle Joe and his rise to become a foreman
This seems very encouraging until you think about what happens afterwards. Joe may be a foreman now, but will he even be able to move to the next position? In my experience, most jobs have an imaginary ceiling that they are willing to allow non-degree holders and that ceiling is way below the six figure earnings of the upper management. But why is that? Are workers who originated from manual labor unfit for critical thinking? Most companies seem to think so. Most large companies have specific recruiters who will go out and hand pick upper management without so much as a thought towards finding the positions internally. The person who once built the car, then supervised the teams, will never be the person who makes the decisions on a company wide scale. There are some exceptions, like the CEO of Chiquita who started off as a storage room assistant, but stories like that are few and far between.

For many blue collar workers the barrier holding them back from being able to truly reach their potential lies in getting higher education. Unfortunately, for most that is a hurdle that will they will probably not be able to jump. Many workers have full time jobs or a family that they must commit to in order to get by. They would be unable to handle the course load necessary to acquire their education in a timely enough manner to matter. When I worked aircraft maintenance, I was expected to put in twelve hour days on the flightline, then go home take care of my personal life, and still find time to take college courses. I found that the only thing I had time for was attempting to CLEP a class, which is a 2 hour test that would give me college credit, for which I wouldn’t have
enough time to study so I would end up failing the test. I attempted to take online classes, but the only time I ever had to do my class work was over the weekend, and with three mandatory check-ins a week, I quickly fell behind. Until there is an option that makes it possible to pay bills and make a living while attending school, I do not see where a blue collar worker will have the chance for advancement.

So this is the situation in which many blue collar workers find themselves, toiling away at jobs that serve only to keep them from reaching their potential. Workers are exploited, time-constrained, and underpaid, with no real chance to escape a cyclical pattern that employers maintain. I fear that the rise of post-secondary education will force most blue collar workers into education that will provide no gain other than qualifying for a job for which they are already qualified for. The job market is flooded with pointless AAs and BAs that provide no real skill, but will cause less qualified people to gain jobs for which they have no working knowledge. The only chance of true change is for employers stop believing that “everyday work is mindless”.(Rose, 314)
Work Cited

Daniel Duarte

For this assignment we were given the choice to select any poem within Sharon Olds collection, The Dead and the Living. I specifically chose this poem because I found Olds captures a very intimate scene of a man prior to sexual union and unusually compares him to a slug. This comparison puzzled me initially, but after rereading more critically I found it quite beautiful. Prior to this poetry explication, I never would have imagined feeling such appreciation for males being compared to slugs.

I am in the process of completing the pre-chiropractic courses necessary to transfer to Life Chiropractic College West. For two semesters I have been President of West Valley College’s Alpha Gamma Sigma Honor
Society. I enjoy simple things in life like cooking and eating wholesome meals, practicing yoga, reading, writing poetry, enjoying nature, good company, conscious music and learning anything of value that cultivates a sense of healthy optimism. I am fascinated by human potential and the connections between science and spirituality that are emerging in various fields. If we are courageous enough to change our thinking and our relationships with one another and our Earth, we have the potential to restore balance to our planet.
Beneath the Surface: Explication of “Connoisseuse of Slugs”

A slug has no shell for protection. It secretes a slimy liquid to retain body moisture which is vital to its survival. When conditions aren’t in alignment with their needs, they find cover to protect themselves. The cover they create provides them with the protection they need to survive. In the poem “Connoisseuse of Slugs,” written by Sharon Olds, we’re told the story of a woman’s deep infatuation for slugs. We come to learn this poem isn’t merely a tale of slugs. As the reader, one views the story as a fly on the wall, a silent observer to the speaker’s experience. The poem is an indirect address to males who struggle to open themselves up to women from an honest place of love. The slimy exterior of
the slug, its need to take cover for survival, represents the disguise that men in our culture use to protect themselves from pain. The poem begins describing a woman’s infatuation for slugs, which we then learn is an analogy used to describe her love for the vulnerability of a man in the moments leading to sexual intercourse.

As the poem begins, the speaker introduces herself as a “connoisseur of slugs” (ll, 1). Use of the word “connoisseur” provides the reader with an understanding of the speaker’s background. This isn’t her first experience with a slug. It is implied that she has done her fair share of observation of this particular species. We learn that the speaker has a unique set of interests that fall beyond those of ordinary women. Moving forward she describes her experience with the creature, “I would part the ivy leaves, and look for the / naked jelly of those gold bodies” (ll, 2-3). The first line breaks with the speaker still looking for something. We see her uncover the slug in search of what is beneath the surface. The reader is left with the impression that the speaker knows what she wants to find, the “naked jelly of those gold bodies” (ll, 3). Beginning with the word “naked” emphasizes the desire she has to see the slug vulnerable. Ordinarily the idea of an uncovered slug might not fancy your everyday woman. Yet, the speaker uses beautiful imagery to paint a picture of the slug as a majestic creature. The color gold has a connotation of perfection. “I’ve struck gold!” is the commonly used phrase people use when they find what they’re looking for. By removing the leaf covering the slug and discovering the naked gold body, she has
found something of value.

At this point the speaker provides us with a vivid description of what this life form means to her, “translucent strangers glistening” (ll 4). By placing the word “translucent” before “stranger,” we get the idea that this stranger isn’t a huge mystery to her. The pairing of these two words together tells us that there is a mystery to this slug that fascinates the speaker. Use of the word “translucent” suggests that her search beyond the majestic form of this creature may already be complete. Here a beautiful image is painted of the shining mystery behind this slug. In the next lines we experience the joy brought to this connoisseur of slugs, “…their gelatinous bodies / at my mercy” (ll, 5-6). The line breaks and the second sentence begins with the line, “at my mercy.” This emphasizes the significance of what it means for her to be in a position of power over the slug. We learn the speaker enjoys experiencing the presence of this organism while it lies in a vulnerable place. She feels a deep sense of contentment standing over the naked, elongated body of the creature. However, through the writer’s use of language we can understand that the slug, being at her mercy, is not meant to illustrate her longing for power, “…they would shrivel / to nothing if they were sprinkled with salt, / but I was not interested in that” (ll, 6-8). It is not control over the creature that the speaker yearns for. Her desires are deeper than a sense of empowerment over this slug. She sees beyond its naked and vulnerable state of being. In all its glory, she possesses the knowledge it would take to make this creature wither away. However, she portrays a sense
of integrity when she doesn’t find satisfaction in this petty power trip.

The speaker moves on to vividly describe her honest intentions, to “stand there in silence / until the slug forgot I was there” (ll, 10-11). Now we begin to see her honest desires slowly uncover. This accentuates the idea that the action she sought to experience requires to slug to feel trusted. For her to have this experience she needed to remain still, allowing the slug to find a trusting place within itself. She was waiting to observe the moment where it, “…sent it’s antennae up out of its head” (ll, 12). In this moment the slug is comfortable enough to open itself up to its environment. A slug’s antennae are used to feel its surroundings. By not exposing its antennae while being watched we learn that the slug has a fear of being in a vulnerable position. The speaker understands the rarity of this moment. Captivated by its magnificence she watches intently, “…until finally the / sensitive knobs would pop out the ends, / delicate and intimate” (ll, 14-16). The slug allows itself to bring its feelings into the present moment and experience its honest state of being. The sensitive knobs at the tip of the slug’s antennae shine light to the reality of emotions. No longer protected by its cover, the slug has exposed itself, fully reaching its most vulnerable state.

In the next line the speaker takes us several years into the future, “Years later, / when I first saw a naked man, / I gasped with pleasure to see that quiet mystery reenacted” (ll, 16-18). We have now moved several years past her original encounter with the slug suggesting that the speaker has potentially developed new interests. The experience of
witnessing the slug opening itself to a world of trust is now connected to her first experience with a man. We take ourselves back to the vivid descriptions of this beautiful, majestic creature, and the rarity of the moment as a whole. She characterizes this man by connecting him to her idea of the slug. The speaker gasps for air telling us that this moment has left her in awe. She compiles two seemingly distant moments and connects them through her emotional experience.

What begins as an infatuation with a slug has now transformed into a love for the male body, “…the slow / elegant being coming out of hiding” (ll, 19-20). The language used here magnifies the love she feels viewing this male as he undresses himself. One moment he is an ordinary man; in the next he is an “elegant being coming out of hiding” (ll, 20). In her eyes the removal of clothes allowed this man to transcend his ordinary state of being embodied just a moment ago. In the final lines the speaker describes the energy he radiates when coming out of hiding, “gleaming in the dark air, eager” (ll, 21). Here we are given an image of this man lighting up a room as he uncovers himself for this woman. The speaker longs for the moments where she can experience the man let himself go and open his heart to her with trust. We feel her emotions as she describes this man opening up, “…so trusting you could weep” (ll, 22). She describes the emotion as a bittersweet moment, an experience of joy that can bring a tear to your eye. As he opens himself up to her potentially for the first time, we are taken back to the moment where the speaker expresses her love for the slugs golden body being at her “mer-
cy.” We now come to understand the truth behind the interest of this connoisseuse.

We began this piece with the belief that we are hearing the story of a woman’s deep fascination with slugs. However, we come to learn the slug is a symbolic reference to men. Her love is not for the creature itself, but for the moments it opens itself to an honest state of vulnerability. She longs for the moments where the man opens himself to her, trusting her in the experience of raw, uncut emotion. The slug is a representation of the man who doesn’t display emotions in fear of making himself vulnerable. This is the man who creates an idea of self, a protective cover, based around his deep insecurities. The connoisseuse represents the woman who provides a man with the trust necessary to fill the vacancy in his heart, allowing himself to break down his protective barriers and experience honest affection. What starts as a woman’s outlandish passion for slugs, evolves into an insightful perspective on receiving a man’s love.
The subject of my second essay, on Hemingway’s Francis Ma-comber, started forming as I was reading the piece. The more I read, the sorrier I felt for poor Francis, but at the same time, his state of affairs became more and more comical.

My writing process is difficult, even tortuous, and all-consuming for me; I labor obsessively over every part of the process. Had I ever entertained thoughts of making a living as a writer, English 1A and 1B have given me cause to reconsider.

Almost all of my life has been spent in the Santa Cruz area, the last 32 years among the redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains. I have a deep affinity for green growing things and a passion for gardening. Reading and learning—anything and everything—are also an essential part of my life. I was raised in an environment that quite literally for-bade my having an education when I was young. Now that I am no longer working, I am granting myself that right and exploring new fields of interest, letting them lead me where they may.
**Distraction by Materialism**

Imagine you are a member of a hunter-gatherer tribe somewhere in Africa, twenty or thirty or fifty thousand years ago, long before the agricultural revolution, the industrial revolution, mass production, capitalism, consumerism and stuff. Your tribe is a particularly fortunate one, living in an area with plenty of resources to supply the food and clothing you need. It's evening, stars are twinkling overhead, there's a crackling fire keeping you warm and the predators at bay. You're falling asleep with your stomach full, surrounded by your family, gazing at the unspoiled celestial view. You have everything you need. Can you imagine the peace and happiness you would feel? You can't? Neither can I. There were no psychologists passing out surveys to assess human hap-
piness then, and not one of those happy-go-lucky tribesmen thought to write his or her memoir for us. But our physical needs are nearly identical today to those of our ancient relatives, so I think it’s safe to say that without a planet full of material things to yearn for, we would at least have been content.

The progress made since our little tribe roamed the savannas of Africa has made indelible changes to the lives of the human species. We will never know a life uncluttered with stuff and the constant presence of messages telling us that the acquisition of more stuff is the way to happiness. In his essay, Two Cheers for Materialism, James Twitchell has a lot to say in defense of our Western consumer culture and its spread to the rest of the world. Some of his defenses are valid. More than a few are not, however, and although he includes a few disclaimers at the end, namely that “the globalization of capitalism will result in banalities” and that “getting and spending as the most imaginative endeavor of modern life is dreary and depressing to some,” he lets our rampant materialism off too easily and misses the biggest problem it has created for us modern humans—the distraction from our inner selves (Twitchell 51).

Twitchell’s best defense of materialism is that “Commercialism has lessened pain,” and certainly few people would argue against that statement (46). To the extent that mass production and commercialization have made accessible the goods required to alleviate hunger and pain, treat and cure illnesses, and protect ourselves from the elements and other dangers, most of us are far better off than our forebears of a
hundred or so years ago. He goes on to say that “most of us have more 
pleasure…in our lives than most of the people most of the time in all of 
history.” (Twitchell 46). Also true, mostly, but at what price? Do the 
kinds of pleasure afforded by material things provide fulfillment and 
make us truly happy? Let’s take a look at what, how and why we con-
sume, our relationship to material goods, and what materialism has done 
for us in terms of our personal development.

The main explanation for our excessive consumption, Twitchell 
explains, is that “human beings love things,” and that we do so because 
things have meanings, but in short order, he reveals that these mean-
ings are only emotions and memories associated with certain items by 
their owners (44). Citing a study done by a psychology professor at the 
University of Chicago, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, that asked 82 Chicago 
families about their most cherished possessions, he tells us that “happy 
family members often described, for example, the times they spent on a 
favorite couch.” (Twitchell 50) He uses Csikszentmihalyi’s reasoning to 
argue that spending the time together on the couch is part of consump-
tion. This is a very odd assertion. If it were true, couldn’t every act of 
our lives be construed as consumption if it occurs in the presence of a 
manufactured item? His conclusion, that “families derived great mean-
ing from the consumption and interchange of manufactured things” 
(Twitchell 50) is almost in direct contradiction to the example cited. 
The happy families mentioned obviously derived meaning from the time 
spent together. The couch was only incidental, its consumption phase
having no doubt long been forgotten.

The sorts of things that have happy meanings for us are not the type we need to purchase. They are mementos of experiences that had deep emotional significance for us. This is not to say that consumer goods don’t have meaning; they do, but not the type Twitchell credits them with. Most of our consumption is done with the best of our conscious intentions, to provide food, clothing and shelter for ourselves and our families. We also buy things that we hope will enrich our lives. But if we look closely, we may find that many of our product choices are driven by unconscious meanings attached them. One the most powerful of these drivers is a need to project an image of ourselves, to create an identity that makes us feel that we belong to a certain group and tells others we who we are. And how do we know what products will communicate the correct message about who we are? Advertising, of course.

Commercial interests have honed to perfection the exploitation of our needs and desires for financial profit. Advertising has gone far beyond telling us what products will make us look cool, or like successful, upper-class folk. It is targeted to every age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. For example, in Naomi Klein’s book No Logo, she speaks of the way that commercial interests have co-opted her generation’s protests over the lack of representation in the media of certain social groups and turned them to their advantage by marketing directly to them, enlightening each group as to what they need to have in order to belong, to identify themselves as part of the group. She quotes music
writer Ann Powers as saying of the Girl Power movement, “girls are encouraged to purchase whatever identity fits them off the rack,” and writer and critic Daniel Mendelsohn as saying that “gay identity has dwindled into “basically, a set of product choices” (Klein 166). Advertising assures us we can be whoever we want to be, as long as we buy the right product, or even better, a whole suite of products. In other words, things mean what the commercials say they mean. Worse, by playing along, we give credence to these manufactured, calculated meanings.

Further confusing the meanings of material things, Twitchell goes on to tell us that the “penalty of intractable, transgenerational destitution…is the absence of meaning, the exclusion from participating in the essential socializing events of modern life,” by which events he means, apparently, buying the right things and wearing logos (47). He asserts that the reason “ghetto kids” kill each other for branded items of clothing is that the “poor are after…what we all want: association, affiliation, inclusion, magical purpose” (Twitchell 47). He almost gets it right here by including the desire for association and inclusion. But what “we all” really want is community, real community, not the imagined kind you get by buying and wearing the same things that other people wear in the group that you aspire to be a part of. We long for the type of community where we can relate to each other on a much deeper level. The trouble is that we seldom recognize this longing, because of the constant bombardment with materialist messages that keep our focus externalized.

Twitchell’s weakest and most absurd defense of consumerism is
his attempt to define two of our Western world's most treasured ideals, freedom and democracy, as the right and ability to consume, backing this up by saying “any group of teenagers” will tell you this (46). While I’m not sure “any group of teenagers” would be a reliable source for this kind of information, I myself have known many teenagers who were not nearly so shallow. After connecting the events in Eastern Europe in 1989 to capitalism (accurately), and the Revolutionary War to the “right to consume freely” (semi-accurately), he takes his argument too far when he reduces the Civil Rights Movement to the mere desire for the “right to be served in a restaurant” (Twitchell 46). These latter two struggles involved far more important issues; the civil rights movement, especially, was about respect and recognition as equals—deeply human needs—and not the “freedom to shop” (46).

So all this consumerism isn’t really about freedom, democracy, our true selves, and the meaning of life, but we still pursue it feverishly. We start driving our children down the road to this distraction by materialism before they ever see their first commercial—before they are even born, in fact. Parents stock their nurseries for baby-to-be with designer cribs and pajamas with licensed characters and the latest high-tech, scientifically-proven-to-make-your-baby-smarter mobiles and a myriad of other items. After collecting things by proxy in infancy, children compel their parents to buy them even more stuff, and parents (usually) happily comply. (If only I had a nickel for every prospective parent I knew who said, “I’m not going to be one of those parents whose house is filled with
“kid stuff,” only to have to move a couple of years later to a bigger house to hold it all.) When we become adolescents and adults with purchasing power, we begin consuming for ourselves in earnest. There is no shortage of electronic gadgets, clothing, vehicles, soft drinks, furniture, and on and on, to spend our money on. Oniomania, or as it is popularly known, shopaholism, is a real addiction that is only recently being studied. While few of us are truly addicted to shopping, the fact that such a problem even exists tells us a lot about how our consumerist culture has affected our lives.

The real reason we are so easily led down the road to excessive consumption, which Twitchell fails to recognize, is that it is such a convenient distraction from our internal lives. It works because we allow it to, because to a large extent, we want to be distracted. It is easier to buy the car or clothing or whatever else we think will announce to the world and ourselves who we are than it is to examine our inner lives, improve our thinking abilities, develop our talents and characters and relationships to others, and integrate ourselves into the larger community. This kind of work is hard and sometimes even uncomfortable. It takes personal honesty and moral stamina and diligence and a lifetime of effort. It is really easy to let ourselves be distracted so we don’t have to think about these things. But this is also materialism’s greatest fault. It can, if we let it, steal our most precious resources, our time and mental energy, away from the development of our true, inner selves. It keeps us busy and distracts us with bright, shiny toys. And if we fall for it, we risk
abdicating the power and responsibility to define and develop ourselves
to those with only financial profit on their minds.

Yes, our consumer culture does have some advantages, but I just
can’t let it off the hook as easily as Twitchell has. We’ve become depen-
dent on it, surely, and will never be able to completely eliminate it from
our lives, but we need to be mindful of its powers, resist its pull, and
focus inward, if we want to live real, full lives.
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The Joke’s On You, Francis!
Lois Vanderville

What makes us laugh? If we have a good sense of humor, we laugh at our own foibles or misfortunes, or at least those of others we can relate to. Humor has evolved continually through time and what is funny to one generation isn’t necessarily so for the next, so when Ernest Hemingway’s short story “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” was first published, his audience may or may not have seen the humor in it. Nevertheless, in this story of a wealthy, high-society American couple on safari in East Africa, Hemingway uses a crafty, slightly disingenuous narrator, two over-the-top stereotypical characters, and one very human one to tell a long, macabre joke.

An American couple, Francis Macomber and his wife, Margaret,
have undertaken a safari, purportedly to liven up and inject some romance into their 11-year marriage. Robert Wilson, an Englishman, is their safari guide. When Francis is frightened during a lion hunt and runs away in terror, and Wilson saves the day by killing the lion, Margaret quickly becomes infatuated with Wilson, repeatedly humiliating her husband in front of him, going so far as to kiss and sleep with Wilson. Of course, later, while hunting buffalo, Francis finds his courage within, as in all good coming-of-age stories. The kicker, however, is that he is killed almost immediately afterward by his wife. Was the killing intentional or accidental? This question is left unanswered, sort of.

There are many themes to be found in this story, not the least of which are masculinity and courage, and certainly Hemingway was using the story to convey his opinions on these and other subjects. But what first tips us off to his humorous intent are the characters of Margaret and Wilson. The personalities of these two are portrayed to be so extreme as to make them seem like caricatures or mere props.

Wilson is presented as a man’s man, masculine in the extreme. He is rugged, tough, outdoorsy. Seen through Margaret’s eyes, he is the physical opposite of her husband, stocky, mustachioed, tanned, ruddy-faced, clothed in worn safari pants, dirty boots and, of all things, a Stetson hat, a distinct symbol of American cowboy-style ruggedness (Hemingway 2). While admiring him after the lion incident, she notes the “four big cartridges held in loops where the left breast pocket should have been,” deadly weapons in the place where her businessman husband would have carried pens (Hemingway 2).
Wilson’s attitudes are just as incredibly masculine as his looks. Although he surmises from the lion’s roar that it is quite old, he calls it a “hell of a fine lion” after seeing the fight it put up after having been shot, cluing us in to his estimation of courage as the quality to be most highly prized (Hemingway 12). Naturally, he considers Francis a coward for running from the lion and despises him for it. He disdains the unmanly expression of personal feelings; when Francis speaks frankly about his failure in the lion hunt and later gushes exuberantly at discovering his courage while shooting buffalo, Wilson is repelled by the outpouring of emotion and tries to quiet him (Hemingway 3, 4, 19-20).

The most extreme aspect of his personality, though, is his attitude toward women, especially American women. There is no ambiguity here, no subtlety or nuance. He is not a little uncomfortable with them. He despises them, believing them to be “cruel” and declaring he’s “seen enough of their damn terrorism” (Hemingway 5). He claims to have had his “education” in them and now arrogantly professes to know them, assuming all of them to be the same (Hemingway 4). When Margaret goes off to cry over the lion incident, he tells Macomber in an off-hand way, “Women upset. Amounts to nothing. Strain on the nerves and one thing’n another,” displaying his condescension toward them (Hemingway 3). Their only value to him lies in their willingness to share his cot with him; he refers to these occasions as “windfalls,” further demeaning and objectifying women (Hemingway 16). All in all, Wilson strikes the modern reader as the macho sort of man you might find in a Monty Python sketch.

Margaret’s character is equally two-dimensional and, like Wilson’s, is just too outrageous to be taken seriously. We are told in our introduction to her that she had accepted five thousand dollars for “endorsing, with photographs, a beauty product which she had never used,” so right away, we are made to view her as opportunistic
and lacking in integrity (Hemingway 1). She has been and continues to be unfaithful
to Francis, uncaring and downright flippant toward the pain she causes him. And she
is the quintessential harpy, mercilessly humiliating and emasculating her husband at
every opportunity with her razor-tongued sarcasm and criticism.

Playing opposite these two cardboard characters is Francis, an all-too-flesh-
and-blood human, with real weaknesses and emotions. His experience thus far has
been in the world of business and the more genteel sports of “court games” and “big
game fishing” instead of killing dangerous animals, so a little trepidation is under-
standable, which should not be confused with cowardice (Hemingway 2). In fact, just
leaving that world to come to Africa and hunt dangerous game had to require some
courage. He is a little socially clumsy, blurring his feelings out awkwardly, and rather
insecure as well, leading him to tolerate the mistreatment he receives from his wife.
He is a not altogether unlikeable person stuck in an unenviable situation. Francis is
the one character in this story we can relate to because we’ve all felt awkward and
insecure and had to endure abuse at some point. He is the only one we can really care
about. He is believable.

Meanwhile, the narrator does his level best to lead us to believe that Francis is
a coward in need of reform so that we might see this as the main point. He even states
it in his introduction to him: “[Francis] had just shown himself, very publicly, to be a
coward” (Hemingway 2). That he has access to the truth of the matter is evident; he is
so omniscient as to know the thoughts of every character in the story, including those
of the lion. He even knows what they don’t know; he casually, almost inconspicuously
drops in a Somali proverb which, if Francis were aware of it, would exonerate him
from the accusation of cowardice: “a brave man is always frightened three times by a
lion” (Hemingway 6). It is as if he is deliberately keeping this knowledge from Francis
to force him to go through the motions of finding his own courage and manhood, because without this development, there would be no setup for the punchline of the joke.

He has established Wilson as a sort of authority on the subject, so when he quotes his thoughts, “How should a woman act when she discovers her husband is a bloody coward,” he is using him to reinforce the misconception (Hemingway 5).

Then, during the buffalo hunt, just as Francis realizes he is no coward, just as he is overcome with the elation that accompanies his freedom from shame, his shining moment is ended suddenly with a bullet in the back of his head. Here again, the narrator is cagey. He tells us outright that Margaret was shooting at the buffalo, but then quotes Wilson as saying to her “That was a pretty thing to do,” and “Why didn't you poison him? That's what they do in England” (Hemingway 22). He is again using the influential words of Wilson to confuse us and to generate doubt as to her motives. Regardless, Francis is just as dead.

Poor hapless, miserable, downtrodden Francis Macomber. A born loser.

Everything happens to him. According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, a joke is “something said or done to provoke laughter; especially : a brief oral narrative with a climactic humorous twist” (“joke”). “The Short Happy Life” fits this definition almost perfectly. Francis is led down the garden path, tricked into seeking redemption in his own eyes and those of his wife and Wilson. Just when he achieves it, when he recognizes his courage, his manhood, his worth, at the happiest moment of his life, he goes out with a bang. Now that’s humor!
Works Cited


You Don’t Know What You Don’t Know

Sarah Hines

A student sits with her arms crossed in an uncomfortable chair next to her full-sleeve prison tattooed, Harley Davidson t-shirt wearing, high school dropout, Mexican father. A school counselor is berating them both from across a large, intimidating desk, obviously judging the father for raising such a disobedient child. “There is no room for a student with such low grades, and poor attendance in our school; we have standards to keep.” The counselor is repeating variations of this phrase in loud, exaggerated inflections as if the father was a non-English speaking immigrant. The father pleaded with the counselor over and over.
He informed her that his daughter just moved in with him. His daughter’s mother was just sentenced to two years in prison. Her half brother was taken to foster care, and as the fates would have it, her sister was just in a DUI car accident and was in an ICU with a 10% chance of living. He asked why he had never been contacted prior to her impending expulsion, where they were supposed to go from there, and if there were any other choices they had. He begged for the counselor to help him to no avail. Just then, the principal came in and asked to speak alone with the father and student. She let them know of a Vocational Training Program in Cosmetology. She gave them all the necessary paperwork and enrolled his daughter in a continuation high school that would accept her. The principal went on to explain that they only give a student who is “helpless” this opportunity. Gratefully the daughter accepted and never forgot the kindness the principal showed her on that day, the first day of the rest of her life. I am that daughter.

I am now thirty-three years old. I rent my station in a prestigious Aveda salon in Los Gatos. I charge the highest prices in the salon, and I am an educator in the art of hair coloring. Now that I am supporting myself and discovering who I want to be in life, I am able to attend college and proudly admit this is the first essay I have ever written. While cosmetology school was a last resort and not a true choice that I made, I am grateful. I have no idea
where I would be today had I not been given that opportunity. There
are millions of other students who have had the same troubling experi-
ences. Most of these people will become products of their environments,
ending up on drugs, in prison, or if they are lucky, menial entry-level
jobs. The education system in America is constantly being changed and
re-worked into a new system. No matter how it is revamped, it always
seems to fail. The problem is that one system will never work for all
students. There needs to be multiple education systems for the diverse
society in which we live. Parents, as well as students need to be well
informed so that they can choose their path before is too late. Choice is
a great freedom Americans pride themselves on, and yet we give little to
no choice to students in regards to their education.

“You don’t know what you don’t know” is a phrase that has
impacted me greatly. If we are not informed of our choices, we do not
know that we even have a choice, and may feel stuck or backed up
against a wall with no way out. As humans, we tend to thrive in areas
we succeed. The student failing in academia may thrive working with
their hands. Never giving these students the opportunity to realize their
potential is what I consider truly a child left behind.

There are some schools across the United States that are implementing
vocational education, which is now being called the “career technical”
approach. Camden County High School (CCHS) located in Georgia
is one such school. CCHS offers their students a choice between Gov-
ernment and Public Services, Engineering and Industrial Technology,
Health and Environmental Sciences, Business and Marketing, and Fine
Arts.

Students complete freshman year and then must choose one of the five options available to them. While students still attend the required academic courses “they also get extensive and seemingly very-well-equipped training in the reality of the jobs they might hold” (Fallows). While I love that CCHS is implementing the workforce into their curriculum, I question whether this is ideal for all students. The student who is academically driven may perform poorly in such an environment. Though they might perform well in the course, it could be time that should have otherwise been spent in AP courses or graduating early. I believe it would be ideal to implement student preferences. This is a question that needs answering from statistical evidence, so that every student receives the best education possible. CCHS is one of the first schools to provide alternative education for their students. Hopefully other schools will begin implementing similar structures with vast arrays of non-mandated options into their curriculum, so that data can be gathered and analyzed.

While CCHS is focusing on “career technical” training, other schools are preparing elementary grade students for managerial positions. It is no surprise that one of these schools is located in an impoverished, minority community, in Columbus, Ohio. Students are taught from a young age how to fill out applications, and are interviewed prior to receiving a position. All of the job titles are menial, and yet related to management. Posters of major retail stores were posted in a kindergarten class which were “JCPenney, Wal-Mart, Kmart, Sears, and
a few others. It’s like working in a store, a classroom aid explained” (Kozol 332). This is another example of providing choice and vocational education while pigeonholing students. Though there are definite positive incentives in teaching impoverished children how not to become a product of their environment, this is setting the bar quite low in terms of potential. Some argue that this is the one true answer, for example a Chicago school principal “was criticized by some for emphasizing rote instruction, which his critics said was churning his students into “robots” found no reason to dispute the charge” (Kozol 337). This teacher defended whole-heartedly that these “robots” would become productive tax paying citizens. I am not disputing his case for a more productive society, I simply note that there might very well be an astronaut or physicist among these bright young children that will never be realized. I am attending college and writing this essay because I choose to. I did not choose cosmetology school, I was given an opportunity, and there is a difference. I did not know that I did not know about vocational training until it was offered to me. This is a serious issue with schools. Awareness of opportunity and choice needs to be disclosed before there is a problem present. Just because a student is receiving high grades does not mean that they do not wish to attend vocational training. Likewise, just because a student is receiving low grades does not mean that they will not thrive in academia under the right curriculum, incentive program, or later in life. Putting students into boxes, even if there are multiple boxes to choose from, is keeping them and us from discovering our societies true potential.
Works Cited


Freedom in Death

Sarah Hines

My mother was always ill due to being born with only one functioning kidney, her illness worsened upon developing Type-2 Diabetes, and contracting the Hepatitis C virus that eventually made her liver go into Cirrhosis. Shortly after she became terminally ill, so I was not surprised when my little brother called to say, “Mom is in the hospital again.” I figured it was just another round of antibiotics for a kidney infection or a transfusion due to her continuously vomiting blood. As soon as I walked into her hospital room and saw her sunken face, I knew this was her last visit to the hospital; I knew she was dying.
She opened her eyes with a smile as I sat beside her and held her hand in mine. I asked her what the doctors said, and she confirmed, “I am dying.” She said this in such a brave, matter-of-fact and serene way that I immediately accepted it. Tears were streaming down my face as I handed her a Glow-Worm toy she had given me when I was little and afraid of the dark. When you push on the belly of a Glow-Worm its face illuminates; she gently pressed it and said, “Oh- Thank you; this will help light my way!” A few moments later she lifted my tear soaked face and quoted Peter Pan, “You know, it will be an awfully great adventure.” I was so proud of my mother’s newfound bravery. “Too afraid to live and too scared to die,” was a phrase she used to use to describe herself. Facing death, she found within herself what she never thought she had. Her gracious courage in turn made me fearless; I knew I would be strong and able to be by her side through to the end. We let the doctors know that she wanted to take herself off of all life-prolonging medicine and devices. She had told us all, “I am ready to go, and I want to go now!” If only that wish of hers could have been granted. If only she could have died with her family by her side, in good smiling spirits, and with the bravery she attained in the face of her worst fear. This did not, and could not happen since the state of California only allows for hospice and palliative care. So my mother went to hospice. Since she only had Medi-Cal and Medicare, it was not
a dedicated hospice; it was a government funded retirement home. This retirement home was tucked away in the side streets out of site from the young able-living. It was run down and smelled of weeks worth of soiled laundry. They put my mom in a room with one other woman. This woman was nearly deaf and had her T.V. on full blast twenty-four hours a day. When I asked her or the nurses to turn down the volume, she would scream at the top of her lungs, “That bitch is dying anyway, I am not dying! Hurry up and die!” This woman would throw things at me when I entered the room, and the only thing that separated us from her was a thin sheet. My mom was in constant pain that went from worst to unimaginable. The nurses were under strict orders when it came to how much pain medication they were allowed to give my mother. I fought day and night trying to get them to up her medications. My mom had asked me numerous times to go to her house and get all her pain meds so she could take them; she begged me to do something, anything, to take away her pain. The nurses explained to me that they were not allowed to give more than the prescribed pain medication due to families suing over ruining the natural death process. It took me nearly three weeks of going up the chain of command and many arguments to finally sign the paperwork needed to get her more medication and get her in a room by herself. My mom was no longer able to communicate, but when we wheeled her into her new room, she was making guttural noises that were beyond screams of pain. That evening the nurses gave her a slightly larger dose of pain medication and her brows unfurrowed. She was finally in a peaceful place, and I felt I could go home to sleep. My moth-
er passed away alone that evening.

Death is a huge part of our lives yet it is something we rarely talk about. We celebrate births and make sure they are as peaceful and memorable as possible while we hide our dying and speak in hushed whispers about their deaths. The beliefs and fears associated with death have given the dying no room for choice. Death is personal, and just like with birth plans, the terminally ill individual should be able to choose which death is best for them. California Senate Bill 128 End of Life Option Act (SB 128) will make this choice possible. SB 128 would “allow a mentally competent, terminally ill adult in California in the final stages of his or her disease to request medication from a physician to bring about a peaceful death” (Wolk). My mother was not able to die in the way she wanted; she did not have this option. I want to live in a state where there is freedom in death, not fear-based bureaucracy.

There are five states in the U.S. that have passed the Death with Dignity Act. Oregon was the first state to legalize aid in dying for the terminally ill on “October 27, 1997” (Oregon.gov). Montana, New Mexico, Vermont, and Washington have also followed suit. Though these are all lovely states, California is my home; I was born here, and I want to die here. While I am young and hopeful that SB 128 will pass before I do, others do not have the luxury of time nor can they afford the high cost of moving out of state.

One brave individual that did have the support and financial means to move from California to Oregon was Brittany Maynard. Her story has touched so many people and is the white light that fueled SB
128 into California’s legislation. Brittany was a twenty-nine-year-old newlywed who was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer and given six months to live. With her families help she moved from California to Oregon. Her mother Debbie Ziegler said it was “difficult, expensive and time-consuming” (Maynard). Brittany not only had to uproot herself and her family, she also had to leave all of her friends, and “establish a new team of doctors” (Maynard). Brittany did all of this because if she did not move to Oregon she “would have suffered a horrifically painful death” (Maynard). Brittany’s brain tumor caused her the “inability to sleep for days at a time,” seizures that would make her forget her husband’s name and “leave her unable to speak”(Maynard). Brittany was asked if she had explored palliative care and medical sedation; both of which involved “nutrition and fluids” being withheld and doctors “drugging the patient into a comma” (Maynard). Brittany knew that within the confines of these options her young body, though very ill, might take weeks or months to die from “disease or dehydration” (Maynard). Brittany was terrified of dying in such a way that left her in unnecessary pain, and her and her family incapable of helping her in her suffering. She knew “prolonging and intensifying suffering” is very different from “extending life” (Maynard). Brittany wanted to live; she “was full of love and zest” (Maynard). She was gifted with the means and wherewithal to move to a state where she would be given a choice; when so many others are not.

Similar to Brittany Maynard, there is a populace of terminally ill patients in California that want to live; they are not suicidal. The term
“assisted suicide” is derogatory towards SB 128 (Compassion). Due to its negative connotation, this vocabulary needs to be stricken from any conversation and documentation regarding this bill. Framing people’s minds with such vocabulary not only predisposes them to incorrect ideas but also influences the wrongful interpretation of SB 128. Suicide is a word that the Webster Dictionary defines as “the act of killing yourself because you do not want to continue living” (Suicide). The terminally ill patients that would benefit from SB 128 want to live; however they do not want to prolong the dying process. Being able to have this option allows the patient immense relief and the ability to continue living fully until, and if, they choose to die by the prescribed medication. Some patients choose to not ingest the death-bringing medication prescribed to them and die of natural causes. Our medical advancements have not only made us live longer lives; they have also made the terminally ill aware of their imminent death. The knowledge of being terminally ill, the inevitable decline in health, and impending pain that comes with that diagnosis can be terrorism; it can also give great relief if we allow for it. There can be supreme freedom in knowing you are going to die and having the option of enduring that death or choosing to finish it before it becomes unbearable. Some people believe that holding on and fighting till the end is the right choice, while others believe that there is bravery in being able to let go. Since Oregon has legalized Aid in Dying “1,200 prescriptions” were prescribed by doctors, and only “752 patients” have died from taking the medication (Death). Just by having the medication in their hands, patients feel a sense of freedom from having a choice and
sense of control in their life and death. Terms such as “mercy killing, or homicide” also need be withdrawn when it comes to doctors prescribing death-bringing medication (Compassion). The patients who would choose this course of action are neither being murdered nor are they ending their life. These people are simply ending their dying process.

There have been rigorous efforts to make sure that Aid in Dying is not misused and not one “incident of abuse” has been filed in Oregon since it was legalized in 1997 (Oregon). The fear that children and mentally disabled will be persuaded into taking the medication due to being a burden to their family or state funding are null and void. SB 128 was built off of Oregon’s Aid in Dying Act and states that only a “mentally competent adult” is allowed this right under the law. (Compassion) The other fear-based opposition, which entails the elderly being victimized, is legitimately worrisome but also irrelevant under SB 128. When an elderly terminally ill person is facing death, insurance and government-aided funding will not grant costly prescribed medication to help prolong their life. SB 128 will only provide a choice as to whether or not they will want to end their dying process, and only that individual will be able to choose if that is the right path for them. There are “felony penalties” to any person coercing a patient into “requesting the medication,” and physicians are required to “discuss feasible alternatives or additional treatment opportunities, including but not limited to comfort care, hospice care, palliative care, and pain control” (Wolk). There are no legitimate cases where these fears could or would be a means to oppose SB 128.
With fear out of the argument, SB 128's last line of offense in becoming legal comes down to spiritual and religious beliefs. Please note that Webster dictionary defines belief as “an acceptance that a statement is true or that something exists” (Belief). There are religions that believe ending your life unnaturally is an abomination, while there are others that do not. Respecting all religions, SB 128 is by no means ending a life; it is bringing about a peaceful dying process. Given the United States Constitution stating, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion” this argument also becomes null and void (First). Until SB 128 becomes the constituent’s decision; religion should not effect our Government’s votes. When this does come into the hands of California voters, I would like to make a plea directly to those that may oppose SB 128 due to their beliefs. We are all individuals with bias conviction. The beliefs and constructs of our opinion, faith, spirituality and religion hold true to us just as solidly as the reality of the sky being blue. I would never try to trick or persuade someone into viewing the sky as a different color. I would only ask that people watch the sunset on any given night and see how its colors change. Through conversation comes progress from new insights; we allow ourselves the room to see things in a new light. In 1870 people in the United Kingdom rioted over the first crematorium being built due to the belief that cremation was wrong and sinful, so “99.8 percent of the population” was buried (Ted.com). Today, due to loss of land and growing population, new conversations are had, and ideals have begun to change. When we share meaningfully, and openly with each other, and come from a place of under-
standing and empathy, people are open to new ideas “when they’re given the chance to talk about them” (Ted.com).

The only conversations that most young people have, surrounding the topic of death, are when a beloved pet dies. My experience was with my ten-year-old Rottweiler Kali. When we found out that Kali had an inoperable tumor, we were told her health would decline quickly. Our veterinarian also said if we chose to, we could bring her back in once her quality of life diminished, and her suffering became too intense. I sadly had to bring Kali back only a week later. Her breathing was severely labored, and she could barely walk. As I sat with Kali in the veterinarian’s office, it broke my heart to see her in such debilitating pain. The term “put to sleep” is perfect terminology; after a single shot she began to relax and passed away effortlessly. She truly fell asleep for the last time. It brings tears to my eyes knowing it was sincerely the most humane thing I could have done for her. Giving her the gift of peace and an end to her pain while I held her in my arms was the definition of beauty. I wish that I could have done this for my mom. It pains me that my mother’s death held more suffering and lasted so much longer than Kali’s. I do not understand why we treat our pets more humanely than humans. It grieves me that neither the doctors nor I were allowed to take away my moms suffering, even when she had the ability to verbalize this wish. Kali’s death left me with a false sense of what death would be like for one of the people I love the most. I was not prepared for the heart-wrenching ache that came with watching my mother slowly die and being incapable of helping her. SB-128 allows for new conversations
to be had regarding the way we perceive our dying, and the space for a terminally ill patient to create a meaningful life until their chosen time of departure.

When I think back on my mother’s passing and how much of her life leading up to that point she based on her fear of death, it saddens me. I wonder if she had the option of SB 128 if she would have been able to be at peace with her death and lived her last days to the fullest. Ever since her diagnoses of liver failure my mother’s whole aura changed. She no longer bore her vivid Cheshire smile and heartfelt laugh that came with it. She lived in constant fear and being a witness to her death, I can honestly say that terror was justified. There is no way to turn back time and give my mother the passing she wished for and deserved. There are hopes that California’s terminally ill patients will be given the choice she did not have, and SB 128 will make those dreams a reality. My mother’s childlike awe and wonderment towards living and loving are something I embody every day. It not only helps keep her memory alive, it allows me to bring about unspoken conversations such as this. I will know the way in which my mother had to die was not in vain when my actions have helped change the dying process for Californian’s terminally ill. Only then will I be able to view the way she passed away as meaningful.
Works Cited


