

# Sosland Journal

A Collection of Essays

Written for the 2010-2011

Ilus W. Davis Writing Competition

by

Undergraduate Students

at the

University of Missouri – Kansas City

Competition Coordinator and Editor – Kristin Huston



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## Preface & Acknowledgements

*“Writing became such a process of discovery that I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning: I wanted to know what I was going to say.”*

*~Sharon O'Brien*

One of the things that I continually struggle with as a teacher of writing is figuring out how to instill a love of the process in students who perceive writing, and especially academic writing, as nothing short of drudgery. The closest I have found to a solution is the attempt to evoke in students the sort of feeling that O'Brien suggests – a sense of the wonder and discovery in creating something out of a blank page and a keyboard or a pen. When we, as instructors and students, can approach writing as a process of self-discovery, it helps to take away the notion of writing as a sort of innate skill, one that you either have or you don't. Perhaps the most important thing for a writer to remember, no matter how accomplished they are, is that writing is never easy. There is always the blank page and self-doubt. But if we can tap into the desire to see what we are going to say, what we are going to produce, than curiosity can overcome uncertainty.

The writers featured in this year's edition of the *Sosland Journal* have done exactly the sort of thought-provoking, intriguing writing that exemplifies the written word as a discovery. Their work is a refreshing reminder that the essays produced in writing

classrooms across campus are at their best when they can spark debate and cause readers to look at familiar subjects with new eyes. The essays certainly inspire in me a feeling akin to the one O'Brien suggests; for I found that as I was putting together this year's journal, I couldn't wait to get to work in the morning, because I wanted to know what these talented students were going to say!

As always, gratitude goes out to the instructors, who encourage their students and share their own writing process along the way. Also, many thanks go out to the readers, Muffy Walter, Kelly Mathews, and Craig Workman, who spent hours reading the full pool of essays. And to the judges, Dan Mahala, Lindsey Quinn Osman, and Nick Salestrom, who had the unenviable task of choosing among the many excellent entries to decide who would be published and who would win the Ilus. W. Davis Writing Competition. Finally, I would like to extend a huge thank you to our benefactors. The *Sosland Journal* could not be published without the generous philanthropic work of Rheta Sosland-Hurwitt and the Sosland family. It is our hope that the *Sosland Journal* reflects the Sosland family's commitment to excellence in education.

Thank you!  
Kristin Huston, Editor *Sosland Journal*

## A Note from the Judges

Dear Readers,

Judging student writing for publication poses some fundamental questions, not only about what makes writing good in general, but also about why we value writing. When the three of us judges encountered disagreements about some of the pieces published here, we sometimes found it useful to shift our discussion from “quality” in the abstract to the question of what effects we thought this writing might have on a community of readers. We agreed that an excellent writer is one who evokes criticism and conversation -- even dissent -- from the reader. This response is difficult to attain: the writer must carefully craft his or her position, challenging the reader to consider new ideas without pushing so far that rapport is lost.

The essays collected in this volume represent a wide variety of perspectives and challenges to the reader; while we may not agree with all the ideas presented, the judges greatly enjoyed the lively conversations (dare we write, arguments?) these student ideas provoked. Indeed, we regard the cultivation of this sharing, and sometimes this clash, of perspectives as key to the value and

purpose of writing, in school as well as in life. These essays may make you uncomfortable at times, but we are also confident that they will make you think. Hopefully, they will also incite you to want to respond, perhaps even in a piece of writing. We hope you enjoy these pieces and that you find them as provocative as we did.

Sincerely,

Sosland Journal Judges for 2011-12:

Daniel Mahala

Lindsey Quinn

Nick Salestrom



# Introductory Level

Introductory Level Winner

## Wars and Memorials: An Endless Cycle

Alyssa Schwarzenberger

The concrete slabs were like graves. As I entered the labyrinth, they grew taller and more ominous until they towered over me. I wandered through the grid-like maze, lost and disoriented. My friends separated from me; I was alone. I could not tell which way was north, nor did I know which path led me to where I was. Each one would have led to an escape, but once I got to the center, I did not know which one to take. Though it seemed like a simple decision, I did not know how to get out. The blocks engulfed me. From the center, concrete was the only thing I could see. I knew life and vegetation lay on the outskirts of the labyrinth, but they were invisible to me. The 4.8-meter pillars cast shadows on the paths, creating a sense of darkness on that sunny day. In that labyrinth, time stood still, though the rest of the world continued to spin, seemingly unaware of my existence. *This is how the Holocaust victims must have felt*, I told myself.

After an eternity in the center of that five-acre concrete forest, I chose one of the brick trails, hoping it would lead me to a familiar area. When I emerged, no one noticed. Pedestrians

continued on their walks and drivers continued on their way, without so much of a quick glance.

The abstract memorial had become a part of the Berliners' everyday lives, just as architect Peter Eisenman had hoped it would. However, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe was so much a part of their lives that they no longer paid much attention to those cement grave-like blocks in the center of their city.

In designing the memorial, Eisenman intended to “convey the scope of the Holocaust's horrors without stooping to sentimentality - showing how abstraction can be the most powerful tool for conveying the complexities of human emotion”(Ouroussoff). By placing it at the heart of Berlin, Eisenman made it an “unavoidable fixture of the city's life...that allows human beings to accept such evil as part of the normal world”(Ouroussoff). Yet, it seemed as though many of people around me had grown numb to the meaning behind the memorial, as if they had already shared my experience in the labyrinth and then forgotten it. They had already come to terms with their Nazi history and walked past it nonchalantly, as many people do these days when they pass memorials and monuments.

The United States and other nations across the globe have erected hundreds of monuments to honor the victims and heroes

of World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, among others. Though not all of them are as elaborate as the one in Berlin, such sites are meant to commemorate our past and teach us lessons for our future, but they are often forgotten or ignored. And still, tens and hundreds of people are killed throughout the world on a daily basis due to wars and conflicts. Have these memorials lost their meanings? Are we going to create more memorials for victims of our current conflicts, only for them to go unnoticed?

Humans are constantly trying to redeem themselves for the actions of their past. This is evident by the number of monuments dedicated to the Vietnam War, in which over fifty-eight thousand American lives were lost (Leland and Oboroceanu 3). The United States has a Vietnam memorial in nearly every state. From these various sites, it would seem as though our nation had learned from the mistake it made when it entered that war. However, on 20 March 2003, the United States entered into a similar war when it invaded Iraq. Since the invasion of Iraq, over one-hundred thousand Iraqi civilians (“Iraq Body Count”) and over four thousand Americans (Leland and Oboroceanu 9) have been killed. Today we are still fighting this war, and people are still dying.

Though nobody dares to call them by this name, the wars and conflicts we humans face today are a form of genocide. We

Americans like to think that genocide is a thing of the past, left behind in the World War II and Soviet Union sections of our history books. But Hitler and Stalin were not the last instigators of such atrocities. In fact genocide has existed throughout the world for the past several decades and has been especially prominent in African nations. In 1993, over the course of one hundred days, an estimated eight-hundred thousand Rwandans were killed. As of the year 2008, an estimated five million deaths had occurred as a result of the conflict between the Hutus and the Tutsis (“Rwanda: How the Genocide Happened”), and America did not intervene. Nor did America intervene when the genocide in Darfur began, ten years after Rwanda. In Darfur, up to one million people could share the same fate as the Rwandans (Booker and Colgan). Instead of coming to the aid of these people, America created its own genocide on a smaller scale by invading another country. How are these lives to be remembered and honored?

Germany addressed its history of genocide by creating the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. As a visitor to the memorial, it seemed to me that this memorial was intended to demonstrate that humanity can learn from its terrible actions. Yet, after detaching myself from the emotional response it evoked upon my visit like so many other passersby, I am able to see the problem of such memorials.

The problem of erecting memorials for fallen heroes and victims of wars and other conflicts is multifaceted. Though they may serve as educational locations for visitors and tourists, sites such as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe have ephemeral effects in the lives of everyday passersby. Originally meant to pay homage to the heroes and victims of wars and other events, memorials quickly become nothing more than landmarks in our everyday commutes, like other buildings and sculptures. Although these memorials educate us about events of the past, they do not connect the past to our lives today; we are so far removed from those events in history that they no longer seem applicable, and thus, we do not learn from our previous mistakes.

Furthermore, the fault of this problem does not belong to the memorials and monuments; instead, it lies within us. When we create memorials, we pick and choose who to remember and who to forget. We have Vietnam memorials with the names of fallen soldiers, but in the construction of the monuments, we did not acknowledge the innocent Vietnamese civilians who died at the hands of our soldiers. As a result, America is still killing innocent civilians in other countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the majority of the world has turned its back on victims of today's genocide, refusing to actively intervene in countries such as Sudan and Rwanda and forgetting the lives of many world

citizens. Even a nation that has supposedly recognized the flaws of its past stands by as genocide continues throughout the world.

Yet, if we were to create memorials and monuments to recognize the heroes and victims of every conflict in the world, they would probably be as common as buildings that line our streets, making us even more numb to them than we already are. We need to come to terms with our past, but we need to do so in such a way that we can truly learn from it. It is human nature to forget something that does not directly affect us, to shrug off the problems of other people, to have a narrow, one-sided perspective of a conflict, or to walk through a memorial like the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and forget its effect upon departure. We need to remember not only the acts of heroism but also the suffering of the victims. We need to see the names and faces of those lives lost on both sides. We need to walk among the graves, whether they are real or symbolic concrete blocks—to feel even an ounce of what those people felt—so that we may truly understand. Although they serve as a form of repentance for the nations responsible, those memorials will not end the wars. They will not save the lives threatened by genocide. They cannot prevent us from starting more conflicts, nor will they teach us how to avoid them. And if we continue to build them, they will perpetuate the

endless cycle of wars and conflicts, for which we will then create more memorials.



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# The Irony of Civic Engagement

Kayla Cooper

Society in America has changed drastically over the last forty years. It has gone from knowing the name of your mailman, to rarely saying hello to him; from dinner parties with the neighbors, to an occasional wave while driving by; from game nights with the family, to playing video games alone. Civic engagement, defined as the personal associations individuals make in society which contribute to their personal benefits and to the overall mutual benefit of society, has declined rapidly. America was once a society known for its successful democracy and its “civic qualities”. Today America is viewed as a society that lives too fast, lacks culture, and houses people who are completely self-absorbed. This change in reputation is due to the decline of civic engagement. Not only that, the decline of civic engagement affects America’s economy, crime rate, political state, and schools. This calamitous downward spiral can be attributed to the increase in the use of technology, the current urban layout, and the recently acquired mentality that wealth and social standing is more valuable than personal relationships.

The increase in technology has arguably played the largest role in the decline of civic engagement. Cell phones, televisions, laptops, game systems, smart phones, the list seems to be endless. Technology is not the literal problem, because technological advancements are not negative developments. The problem is the obsession and misuse of technology that has forced the decline in civic engagement. Technology is portable, therefore, there is no escaping it; it is always with you. In any given situation (a date, school, the workplace, etc.) an individual can pull their “handy escape” out of their pocket and find multiple venues of distraction. Through this, social interaction is discouraged. Rather than getting to know your blind date, classmates, co-workers, or even family, one can simply play Tetris or check stocks in one simple click. This phenomenon is not only preventing individuals from interacting with the outside world, but it is also destroying family relations. Philip E. Agre addresses this issue in his article, “Welcome to the Always-On World” and states that, “...family homes break apart into separate media spheres for each individual, everyone with their own television, telephone, and Internet connection” (2). Family relations are pivotal to civic engagement. If there is no interaction with those one lives with, then how is there to be interaction within the community? Americans need to reshape their use of time, because “...technological trends are

radically...‘individualizing’ our use of leisure time and thus disrupting many opportunities for social-capital formation” (Putman 77).

The layout in urban America has also contributed to the rapid decline in civic engagement. The current urban layout discourages developing community relationships. The typical suburban neighborhood consists of wide streets, spread out homes, large lots, and no front porches. This layout “...destroys the spatial relationship between the houses on the street” (Kunstler 5). With so much distance between houses and the lack of a front porch, there is no easy opportunity to socialize with neighbors. An actual relationship with a neighbor is a rarity, no longer a given. To build relationships today, it takes more of an extended effort, actually leaving the environment of your family’s neighborhood to connect. If my family had not been involved in church activities, I strongly believe that growing up I would not have had any friends

Thinking back, I realize I did not make many friends in my suburban neighborhood. Everyone was always inside, because the layout of the neighborhood did not encourage spending time outside. As stated previously, my family was heavily involved in church, providing me with my biggest opportunity to build friendships. However, the majority of the friends that I made at church lived fifteen minutes away, and transportation by a vehicle

was the only way to connect with them outside of church services. This dependency on vehicles, on top of the issue of the current urban layout, discourages civic engagement. The current urban layout separates residential areas from commerce from schools and from the workplace. This vast separation causes the average commuter to “spend seven weeks of the year sitting in his car” (8). Time spent driving, “is time that [one] cannot spend with their children, or going to the library...or doing anything...more spiritually nourishing than sitting alone in a steel compartment”(8). If the urban layout was not so spread out, Americans would not spend so much time driving, and civic engagement would have more opportunity to undoubtedly increase.

Lastly, America’s overall mentality towards life has changed. Individuals used to find value in community involvement, politics, education, and relationships. However, these community values have disintegrated, replaced by acquiring prestige, the amount of wealth accumulated, and one’s social standing. What Americans once found important, holds little value today. It is evident that this mentality has changed the overall involvement in community activities. For example, “the number of Americans who report that...they have ‘attended a public meeting on town or school affairs’ has fallen by more than a third (from 22 percent in 1973 to

13 percent in 1993)” (Putman 73). Growing up, I rarely recall even my own parents attending school meetings; however, they did seem to disagree with a lot of aspects within the school system. It is not that Americans do not notice the problems within society, because they can certainly still complain. However, what has changed is that these complaints rarely lead to action anymore. This belief that “problems will fix themselves” has developed, but this is not what happens. Problems within society require action, the action of a group of people to pursue change. There is a lack of initiative for the gain of mutual benefit in America, today. Instead of caring about politics and education, something that influences everyone, Americans focus solely on personal gain. The beauty of a group of people standing together for one cause is certainly a rare occurrence in America today. Sadly, it is no longer “we the people,” it is now “me, myself, and I”.

This decline in civic engagement worsens every day. Yet, here is the irony in the situation: civic engagement is, in fact, the solution to the decline. It is going to take Americans uniting to reverse this downward spiral. This may not be the exact solution, but I do know Americans must join together if we want to revive the democracy and culture that the United States once was known for. As a people, we must reprioritize our values and find worth in community, in education, and in the mutual benefit of society.

Civic engagement, once a powerful uniting force, no longer brings us together due to the overuse of technology, the current urban layout, and the shift in the mentality that wealth is our number one priority. This decline can be combatted through a return to civic engagement, and if it is, America will once again be a country worth taking pride in.



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# Intermediate Level

Intermediate Level Winner

We Don't Need No Education: College-Level Writing  
and  
Defining America's Future  
Harsh Desai

Syd Barrett, the lyricist and vocalist for the 80s rock band Pink Floyd, declared in the band's hit song "Another Brick in the Wall" that "we don't need no thought control/no dark sarcasm in the classroom." As an inspired college student and Pink Floyd enthusiast, I took Barrett's words to heart, perhaps too much, in deciding the thesis for my synthesis essay: hesitant and anxious upon receiving the instructions, I approached my professor with a sheepish grin and a foolhardy idea for a thesis, only for her to rebuke me with an honest remark that "I am supposed to teach you how to write a college-level paper." Feeling disheartened, I, at that time, internalized Barrett's words in rejecting what I perceived as my professor's "thought control" and deciding to instill my own "dark sarcasm in the classroom" by choosing to write about the meaning of college-level writing, because after all, if she expected me to write a college-level paper, I would have to know what that entailed. However, the tasteless joke fell on me as I realized that

despite having taken four college writing courses and claiming to have a strong writing background, I did not know the criteria for something as simple as a college-level essay, the benchmark for my college education; from my ignorance grew an ambition to answer three distinct questions: firstly, what does college-level writing mean and why does it mean that? Secondly, why should we adhere to or even consider such criteria? And finally, what do such criteria leave out? Through an analysis of the aforementioned questions, the necessity of properly defining the meaning of college-level writing, specifically in the context of a college-level essay in a writing class, becomes apparent, both for the benefit of college students, who can then understand the expectations for their writing and adjust accordingly, and the assurance and furtherance of pedagogical value in post-secondary institutions in the United States.

Justifying the necessity of defining college-level writing involves defining the term in the first place and considering its value; but, before further investigation, we must hearken to the preliminary rationale for developing a definition of college writing: Kim Kautzer, in her article “Students Are Ill-prepared for College-level Writing — In Our Write Minds,” writes that the structural roots of the college writing problem remain lack of preparedness in secondary schools and low standards, and lack of

focus, in post-secondary institutions (Kautzer 1). Specifically, she criticizes college writing courses for their inattentiveness to writing standards and decries high schools for teaching rudimentary English that bears little help for the college level; thus, Kautzer's analysis sheds light on the scope of the problem and the necessity of structural change in order to address it. Fortunately, Patrick Sullivan and his fellow pedagogues, in the interest of reaching a consensus on an incredibly subjective topic, developed an anthology that strives to answer the question of "what is college-level writing?" However, before reaching an answer, Sullivan himself raises the difficulty of the challenge ten-fold by conceding that "major differences related to standards are probably inevitable and result from, at least in part, the indeterminacies of language" (4); thus, a paradox arises in attempting to define the indefinable insofar as Sullivan argues that "assess, we must" (5) for the benefit of professors, students, and institutions alike and yet concedes that subjective criteria will remain to some extent. Nevertheless, such an obstacle does not deter an investigation but rather strengthens the necessity of one as the existence of subjectivity would provoke an inherently inconsistent system, much like the one in the status quo, and the reconciliation of subjective positions remains possible to the extent that it at least mitigates the worst impacts of allowing subjectivity to flourish; therefore, at the very least, the definition of

college-level writing only has the risk of furthering the pedagogical value of post-secondary institutions by establishing a more objective standard and clarifying an important benchmark for college education, as Sullivan proposes. Thus, we delve into Sullivan's definition, which becomes the framework for his colleagues' interpretation and narrows down college-level writing to "the ability to discuss and evaluate abstract ideas" (16). Such a definition maintains three implications: first, it solidifies the university as an institute of critical thought; second, it bases college-level writing not on mechanics or a grasp of grammatical structures but rather on the ideas that the writing presents; third, it presents the college-level paper as a forum for discussion and refutation rather than mere recitation or presentation. All three components suggest an advanced thinking that fosters the development of an educated citizenry, which remains critical for our democracy, and fulfills the purpose of the university as a mechanism of growth and intellectual development. In considering the subjectivity of the definition, Ronald Lunsford, in his article "From Aptitude to Assessment: Assuming the Stance of a College Writer", addresses the issue by embracing subjectivity. His argument observes the process and not the destination: he defines college-level writing as maintaining "the right attitude" (186) and does not seem so concerned about the result as much as

the attempt. Unfortunately, his position, however attractive at first glance, becomes devastating for the pursuit of a definition of college-level writing: Lunsford initially surrenders the pursuit of a definition, claiming it impossible, and instead relies on a flimsy standard of “trying hard” that crosses the threshold of subjectivity by failing to provide a single objective mechanism of evaluation; even if one argues that the objectivity lies in the criteria that Lunsford evaluates in the sample papers that he presents, it does not outweigh the blatant subjectivity of the professor’s mercy and sympathy in his students’ attempts. Moreover, by focusing on the methodology rather than the product, Lunsford’s definition threatens the education system as it eliminates assessment of attained standards and instead introduces assessment of attempts, thus promoting inconsistency and confusion. On the other hand, Lynn Bloom, the Chair of Writing at the University of Connecticut, suggests a more concrete framework than Lunsford in her essay “Good Enough Writing: What Is Good Enough Writing Anyways?": firstly, she defines average writing as “B-grade” and secondly, she proposes that average writing extols “a clutch of Academic Virtues” (72), like Rationality, Conformity, and Conventionality, among others. Considering her colleagues’ emphasis on abstract thinking, Bloom’s promotion of such criteria seems at first fairly conservative; nevertheless, upon further

discussion, she asserts that rationality involves the exploration of “diverse views” (73), which suggests the encouragement of abstract thinking to an extent and at the very least touts a dialogue and discussion of arguments within writing. However, her position, although seductive at first because it promotes clear guidelines, ultimately presents problems for that very same characteristic: firstly, her emphasis on conformity and conventionality, while she interprets it as the use of standard English, maintains the connotation of passivity; this does not suggest that one cannot explore abstract ideas through conforming to conventional English, but the connotation lends itself to excessive formality or at least a repression of ideas and certain dialogue. However, more troubling remains her extolling of “academic virtues”, which seem arbitrary at best and tyrannical at worst: she seems to reduce writing to a formal, cookie-cutter event in which students must pass through hoops and display so-called “virtues” to earn a “B” and display average writing – it falls short in allowing flexibility and free thinking, two hallmarks of college education according to her colleagues, and seems to transform writing into a checkmark method. Her definition opens itself to the most criticism from cultural icons like Pink Floyd: her “thought control” reduces students down to collective “bricks in the wall” and turns education into a chore that leaves them screaming “we don’t need



no education.” In fact, Kerri Smith, a speaker for the National Council for Teachers of English, objects to an adherence to structural conventionality in her article “In Defense of the Five Paragraph Essay,” arguing that college professors do not disdain the five-paragraph essay as a method of organization but rebuke students who remain fixated on it (Smith 2); her article suggests that professors place more concern in critical thought, diverse argumentation, and linguistic experimentation than standard forms of organization or coherence, whichever they may include. Ultimately, Bloom’s delving into one extremity, in contrast to Lunsford’s subjectivity at the other extremity, suggests that college-writing remains on a spectrum, with Sullivan’s definition in the middle.

Despite the framework established by Sullivan and his colleagues, the most important and damning criticism to the spectrum of definitions remains the value of its inexistence in the first place: Sullivan defines college writing and conveys its pedagogical value but never refutes the aforementioned criticism. For such an argument, we turn to Jeanne Gunner, who discusses in her article “The Boxing Effect (An Anti-Essay)” the inherent contradictions that lie in defining college-level writing and the necessity of an absence of a concise definition. In fact, she begins her scathing criticism by establishing that “writing is not a

monolithic skill open to simplistic psychometric measurement and behaviorist training techniques” (111) and that defining college writing involves “the commodification of writing, writing students, writing curricula, and writing instructors”(111); while the former remains important insofar as it declares the ludicrousness of defining subjectivity, which Lunsford fails to do in the first place, the latter becomes imperative in launching a scathing cultural critique of college writing that centers on the devaluing effects of America’s capitalist culture. Interestingly, Gunner explains two effects of capitalist commodification of writing: first, she depicts the role of writing in higher institutions as equipping workers with a tool to survive in the market environment, and second, she applies Marx’s criticism of “alienation”, in which a laborer becomes alienated from his product and thus himself due to the capitalist system, to writing insofar as defining college writing detaches the standards from the “social agents who not only produce it, but who might otherwise...have the potential to determine its purpose and values” (112) – that means, from the students. Before considering Gunner’s assertion of capitalist commodification in-depth, one must explore its postmodern roots: postmodernism, specifically in the work of Jacques Derrida, developed in the post-World War II era and used language games and discourses to frame individuals’ roles in society; indeed, Gunner seems to take a leaf out of the

postmodernists' page by criticizing capitalism's effects on language and vice versa. Indeed, Gunner's criticism makes sense on the surface; any fixed definition of college writing would develop dual effects in relation to capitalism: firstly, it would inevitably trigger the creation of hierarchies regarding who can or cannot meet those expectations, and, assuming that one of the many intentions of college remains education for the vocational world, would create classist discrimination, with those who can meet expectations forming an "upper-class" that succeeds in the market environment whereas those who fail becoming part of a "lower-class" that maintains little utility and lives in resentment of the successful. Secondly, it would create oppression insofar as everyone remains subject to a specific definition shaped by the external forces of capitalism that ultimately control their fate both within and outside of college institutions. However, her scathing criticism meets controversy on two fronts: firstly, she does not provide an alternative to the commodification of capitalism, especially considering that, while her criticism applies to the definition of college writing, it does not remain exclusive to that and can signify college writing in general; a criticism without an alternative remains anti-political discourse at best and silence versus supposed tyranny at worst. Moreover, she fails to address the fact that maintaining a strict definition of college writing allows for fixity,

which remains critical to fighting a monolithic system like capitalism insofar as we can locate capitalism's pervasiveness through the fixed definition and consequently work to eliminate it; essentially, the fixity, or standards, unearths the epistemological foundations of an invisible system like capitalism that operates in the structure, or backdrop, of an environment. On the other hand, despite these objections, her consideration of alienation still bears merit: after all, I, disallowed to pursue my thesis of interest, feel alienated to an extent from my writing as I am bound to write eight pages of material and follow specific guidelines to meet satisfactory requirements for this essay; however, even in my situation, following these guidelines remains pragmatic because of the incentive and end reward of a hopefully satisfactory grade. Now, if Gunner had read the aforementioned argument, she would likely respond by saying that such incentives create the disavowal and alienation in the first place in that I am not writing due to passion but only to attain the grade that I desire. Nevertheless, the refutation against alienation still stands because I remain attached and passionate about my writing because of the grade it will help me achieve. However, if one insists on intrinsic value to writing, I could say that I find intrinsic value in the specific dialogue and critical engagement that my writing has prompted, specifically in the context of considering this argument

and its refutations; I, as a debater on the college debate team, intrinsically enjoy such interaction and discourse. The aforementioned also presents the idea that alienation in writing remains subjective: Gunner issues a blanket statement regarding alienation without qualification or qualification, especially since testing whether one remains alienated becomes difficult. For example, in this paragraph, I have both claimed and refuted the idea that I suffer from alienation, meaning that either I have little proper gauge or am easily lying. Thus, while Gunner's criticism remains the most devastating in terms of avoiding a definition of college writing, it comes with its own flaws and does not mitigate the necessity of a definition of college writing in the first place, because pragmatically, it can offer a resistance against capitalism and the same dominant power structures that Gunner criticizes; after all, through fostering a definition and consequently standards for college writing, one can encourage the critical thinking and diversity necessary to incite a resistance against encroaching hegemonic institutions that aim to suppress people's voices.

Having asserted a stable continuum for the definition of college writing and refuted the heaviest criticism for the necessity of one in the first place, we can consider what the definition allows and conversely disallows. Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle, in their analysis titled "Teaching about Writing, Righting

Misconceptions: (Re)Envisioning “First-Year Composition” as “Introduction to Writing Studies”, consider the former and indicate that college writing classes must move from “teaching “how to write in college” to teaching *about writing*—from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced (553); a fixed definition of writing presents the first step toward solidifying their appeal, insofar as the definition would move professors away teaching students vague notions of writing, based on grammar and attaining certain checkmarks, to exploring what writing means and how that impacts the students’ development of writing. Moreover, in specifically observing Sullivan’s definition of writing as abstract thinking, such a definition disincentivizes treating writing as a universal skill in which one must jump through certain hoops to become a better writer and instead focuses on an exclusionary notion in which good writing remains a goal to attain with a self-disciplinary process. The primary criticism against such a consideration involves its obvious exclusion of those who simply do not have the skill nor motivation to reach such levels of abstract thought or academic discourse; however, introducing a definition and teaching “about writing”, as Downs and Wardle suggest, at least opens the door and provides opportunity for struggling students to

meet, and become determined to meet, fixed expectations and a transcendental goal rather than merely stumbling in the dark with vague notions. Thus, the definition most importantly allows for a paradigm shift in education. However, the definition opens itself up to the last breath of criticism that this paper will consider by preaching universality, which Downs and Wardle likewise criticize (553), and supposedly disallowing the flexibility of appealing to different audiences insofar as developing a definition of writing in an English course may contrast with the writing expectations in my physics or philosophy courses. Muriel Harris considers such implications in her essay "What Does the Instructor Want? The View from the Writing Center," indicating that "the variety of audiences out there is not only real in academia (as the literature of writing-across-the-curriculum documents), it is also critically important when writers address the basic prewriting planning questions such as "who am I writing to?" "why?" and "what do they need to know?" (124); the issue of audience remains problematic because a fixed definition of college writing may clash with an appeal to audience and encourage either overtly generic guidelines to account for both the definition and audience or prioritize one criteria over the other. Moreover, Harris's proposition importantly shifts the focus of writing from the writer to the reader; however, in that, it opens itself up to criticism

because her appeal to prioritize audience and purpose seems to further the same capitalist mindset that Gunner criticizes insofar as it creates alienation: in appealing to his audience, the writer becomes detached and alienated from his writing as it becomes not a product of his own imagination but an appeal to his readers' preferences. Essentially, while a consideration of audience remains important for fostering an appropriate academic dialogue, it must not supersede originality of thought and freedom of discourse within writing. However, even if we accept Harris's premise, her criticism does not seem to so much affect Sullivan's conception of writing as it does Lunsford's or Bloom's. Sullivan's argument for abstract thinking and elevated discourse may diminish the writing in a field such as science or mathematics, in which writing remains disciplined and non-abstract, while suiting writing in a philosophy course in which ideas become abstract and complex, but the principle behind the definition suits all audiences insofar as the writing must demonstrate the ability to grasp complex ideas and evaluate concepts critically and analytically. A paper over Boyle's Law in physics or Cantor's theorem in mathematics involves such skill of analysis and elevated thinking. Conversely, Harris's proposal diminishes Lunsford's focus on hard work in the sense that hard work may lend to purpose and audience but not necessarily so. In considering its effect on Bloom's analysis, the



academic virtues that Bloom proposes seem to fall in line with an appeal to audience but her overt specification lends itself to a greater risk of clash between virtues and audience and thus remains slightly unsettling. Nevertheless, one can permute the definition of college writing proposed throughout this paper with Harris's conception of an appeal to audience and purpose; such a permutation may exclude some unmotivated or struggling students, but, as suggested earlier, remains at least better than the vagueness and inconsistency that arises with the lack of a definition.

The definition of college writing proposed throughout this essay in no way means to solve all of the problems in regards to college writing and does not close itself off completely from criticism; after all, the evaluation of what constitutes as abstract ideas remains incredibly subjective as well, dependent on both student and professor. However, even in conceding its subjectivity, a definition presents the first step toward better college writing: it offers a framework for promoting academic discourse and soothing students and professors on the expectations that their task demands. It offers a goal to achieve, a benchmark to strive for, and a light at the end of the tunnel to work toward, and in that, its power lies in promoting a specific process in college writing that allows for contribution to the collegiate atmosphere and prevents

students from becoming “another brick in the wall.” For an aspiring student and writer like me, it offers recognition of the achievements thus met and the hurdles yet to overcome in my writing career.

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## Emotional Portrayal of Circumstances within

### *Persepolis* and *Persepolis II*

Devon Russell

Marjane Satrapi wrote the autobiographical graphic novels, *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*, in order to convey to the reader an emotional experience of the climate in Iran from a civilians perspective. In an interview with Leonard Malton on “Secret’s Out”, Satrapi explains that she wrote the *Persepolis* through the graphic novel medium in order to “give another version of the story” that was not heavily emphasizing the historical or political value, but rather a personal experience (*Secrets Out*). In another interview with Steve Colbert, Satrapi discusses her intentional way of making the Iranian civilian more human to the readers by emphasizing characters emotions throughout the graphic novels (*Colbert Report*). Satrapi presents many themes through narration as well as illustrations within *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* which support this intention of allowing the reader to emotionally relate to the characters.

In *Persepolis*, Marjane is a vivacious, outspoken, confident child. Before the revolution, she has hopeful dreams for her future and holds the belief that she would be the last prophet (*Persepolis*

6). Marjane holds no fear and is illustrated in such a way that freedom and confidence exude from her demeanor throughout the first few pages of the novel. As Marjane grows a few years older, she still holds high expectations for her future as demonstrated by her distress when the universities were ordered to shut down. Satrapi narrates that she "wanted to study chemistry [...], to be an educated, liberated woman" and images of Marjane in tears convey her emotional distress (*Persepolis* 73).

As Marjane continues her intermediate education in Iran, the children are forced to partake in rituals honoring martyrs of the revolution as part of their education. Satrapi conveys the true nature of the children in her class, describing how [a]fter a little while, no one took the torture sessions seriously anymore [...]. As for [Marjane, she] immediately started making fun of them" (*Persepolis* 97). Images of students laughing, joking, and rebelling against their teacher lead the reader to a deeper understanding of the mindset of the youth in Iran.

The reader connects even more deeply with the youth in Iran in the chapter of *Persepolis*, "Kim Wilde." When Marjane's parents ask her what they can bring her back from Turkey, Marjane asks for "a denim jacket, chocolate, [... and] two posters" (*Persepolis* 126). Upon her parents return, Marjane walks around in her Americana, only to be reprimanded by "guardians of the

revolution, the women's branch. This group had been added in 1892, to arrest women who were improperly veiled" (*Persepolis* 132). Satrapi's illustrations portray the guardians disgust and aggressive rebuke of Marjane's wardrobe. As Marjane lies about her circumstances to the guardian, Satrapi's illustrations display a steep escalation of Marjane's emotions into an uncontrolled wailing which she hides from her mother after arriving back home (*Persepolis* 134). The reader comes to an understanding of the necessity of Marjane's outburst, and celebrates in her rebellion as she dances to the chorus of "Kids in America" to calm down.

The final chapter of *Persepolis* is a very personal account of the days leading up to Marjane's departure from Iran to continue her education in Austria. Satrapi illustrates her own sad acceptance of her parents decision as she cries herself to sleep and gives her prized possessions to friends in Iran (*Persepolis* 149). The reader understands the love and companionship Marjane has experienced throughout her childhood in Iran through illustrations of farewell embraces, Marjane's last night with her grandmother, and the lamenting expression of Marjane's father as he carries his wife away after she faints from the distress of saying goodbye to their daughter (*Persepolis* 149-153).

*Persepolis 2* tells the story of Marjane's adolescents away from Iran, and her experience as she returns home as a young woman.

Marjane's struggle to find a sense of belonging and acceptance is a constant theme throughout this graphic novel. The second chapter, "Tyrol," illustrates Marjane's annoyances with her roommate, "to then return to a school where [she] had no friends" (*Persepolis 2* 10). It is also in this chapter that the reader connects with Marjane's first instance of feeling loved away from home when she travels to Tyrol with her roommate narrates that she "had a new set of parents" (*Persepolis 2* 18).

When Marjane's mother comes to visit her in Vienna, the reader sees how Marjane finally has her primary support and acceptance united with her again. After spending time together, Satrapi narrates that "she left [Marjane] with a bag of affection that sustained [her] for several months" (*Persepolis 2* 52). The time they had together filled Marjane with a sense of belonging as she was reminded of her life back home and true identity.

Marjane returns to Iran after experiencing deep heartache and an episode of depression and is again reunited with her mother as well as father after four years in Europe. Family and friends of Marjane's family came to see her, yet Satrapi portrays a sense of reluctance to the reader as she dealt with her own disappointments and failures (*Persepolis 2* 104). Marjane's experience away from Iran exposed her to situations and paradigm shifts that her Iranian friends and family would not know how to process. Even as she



spoke with some of her friends about night life in Vienna, Marjane disappoints them by not having much to talk about (*Persepolis 2* 105). The reader can empathize with Marjane's insecurity in being back home, feeling reluctant to speak of her time in Europe.

The reader is invited into Marjane's deep sorrow when she makes the decision to kill herself. After taking enough pills to knock her unconscious for three days, Marjane awakens with a new realization of her meaning and purpose in being alive (*Persepolis 2* 119). The reader experiences Marjane's transformation first hand as she enters into a way of living with confident presence, intellect, and beauty, giving her a platform to gaining new friendships and opportunities in Iran. Marjane continues to experience challenges including a divorce from her husband after three years (*Persepolis 2* 184). After that decision, Marjane's is France bound and the reader experiences her take advantage of moments with her family up till her departure at the airport (*Persepolis 2* 186).

Satrapi's inclusion of such internal processing and intimate relationships in *Persepolis 2* allows the reader to emotionally relate to her young self. The theme of nonacceptance and belonging within the second graphic novel emphasizes Marjane's humanity and need for love and peace of mind in which all readers can understand and empathize with. Satrapi's portrayal of personal

experiences through narration and illustration in both *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2* support her intention to allow the reader to emotionally relate to the characters.

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# The Basis of Strong Anti-Western Sentiment

in *Persepolis II*

Amit Roy

Most countries tend to forget their darker periods of history. In *Persepolis II: The Story of a Return*, Marjane Satrapi presents her own experiences as an Iranian woman in the graphic novel format. The novel traces Satrapi's life as she lives and matures in Vienna without the presence and care of her parents. After failed relationships, extensive drug use, and a series of other events, Satrapi finds herself homeless, and eventually chooses to return to Iran. Upon returning to Iran, Iranian law requires that Satrapi wear a veil, and thus, she loses the liberties she enjoyed in the West. Back in her home of Iran, Satrapi details the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq war, the severity of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic rule, and the troubles of a failed marriage. Throughout *Persepolis II*, Satrapi poignantly portrays her struggles in her coming-of-age in a foreign country as well as the brutality of living in Iran during this time. However, one cannot help but notice that Satrapi's writing and portrayal of the Iranian people contains many anti-Western elements. On many occasions, Satrapi seemingly blames the West for wars, economic or political upheaval, and other turbulent

periods in Iranian history (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 168-173). In fact, in a comic written shortly after the publication of *Persepolis II*, Satrapi herself acknowledges that *Persepolis II* was “an attack on America” (Satrapi, “Persepolis II”). After thorough research, it becomes apparent that the historic involvement of the United States in Iranian affairs, the tendency for Iranians to scapegoat, and Satrapi’s experiences with racism abroad contribute to the pervasive anti-Western sentiment found in *Persepolis II*.

It is important to examine the early communication and formation of U.S. foreign policy in Iran to comprehend the increasingly complex U.S.-Iran relationship. Leading up to World War II, U.S.-Iran relations were strong because unlike the threatening “imperialist[ic]” British and Russian regimes, the American government had little influence in Iran and did not otherwise impede Iranian sovereignty (Sheehan 2). The U.S. assisted the Iranians greatly despite strong opposition from other powerful countries. American missionaries and other individuals traveled to Iran, creating schools, hospitals, and broad economic reform that revitalized an economy that was on the verge of ruin (Sheehan 1-5). During World War II, Britain and Soviet Russia invaded Iran because they sought a shorter route for transporting supplies to Russia (Sheehan 6). The U.S. government sent military missions to Iran to help support the transport routes of their two

allies. During this period, the Iranians had positive interactions with U.S. military personnel while British and Russian troops displayed conceit and instilled fear. This only caused further aversion to Britain and Russia, while bolstering the U.S. rapport with Iran (Sheehan 8-12). Following the end of World War II, U.S. military and economic aid to Iran increased, and the U.S. worked strongly to dispel Russia from Iran during the Azerbaijan crisis (Sheehan 28-32). As a result of this continued assistance, Iran naively began to view the U.S. as, “the protector and guardian of Iran’s independence and territorial integrity” (Sheehan 39). While ties between Iran and the U.S following World War II remained excellent, they began to decline following the revelation of true American intentions.

Following World War II and the dissolution of the Allied Powers, relations between the U.S. and Soviet Russia deteriorated rapidly, resulting in the lengthy Cold War. Iran became of increasing importance to the U.S. because of its geographic proximity to Russia (“Background”). The U.S. viewed Iran as a “testing ground” for dealing with Soviet expansionism in the Middle East during this time (Sheehan 23). Acting Secretary of State Edward Stettinius discussed the basis of American foreign policy in Iran as a, “desire to strengthen that country so that it may maintain internal security to avoid dissensions and weaknesses,

which breed foreign intervention and aggression” (Sheehan 24). This explains the reasons for extensive military and economic aid to Iran. While Iran saw American activity in Iran as an indicator that the U.S. was their “protector”, the U.S. did not necessarily reciprocate this sentiment (Sheehan 39). American activity in Iran was merely aimed at preventing “foreign intervention and aggression” from neighboring Russia (Sheehan 24). Scholar Michael Sheehan affirms this point: “U.S. policy in Iran now became only a part of a much larger policy, the containment of Communism in not just Iran but in many other parts of the world” (Sheehan 37). This policy did not become explicit until 1950, when the U.S. refused to provide aid to Iran because of rampant corruption in the Iranian government (Sheehan 47). Up to this point, U.S involvement in Iran was believed to be merely supportive in nature. But this abrupt discontinuation perplexed the Iranian people. Iranians could not understand why their American advocate would stop funneling aid, and they felt betrayed. Sheehan reports the fallout following this incident: “In one stroke all the good feeling that America had built up for herself over decades was wiped out” (Sheehan 47). Before this incident, Iranians were not able to see the reality of the situation. They naively believed that U.S. activity meant that Americans desired to protect and help them. But U.S. involvement in Iran was realistically aimed at

limiting Soviet influence, *not* providing altruistic support to Iran. The U.S. sought to protect their own interests first, not those of the Iranian people. When Iran finally arrived at this realization, anti-Western beliefs began to proliferate.

A great deal of the discussion surrounding the U.S. influence in Iran involves the American role in the 1953 Coup D'état. In conversing about the dreary economic state of Iran, Satrapi writes: "If Mossadegh had been able to see out his project of reform, Iran wouldn't be finding itself in this situation today'... It's the English and the Americans' fault. They're the ones who deposed him by organizing the coup d'état" (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 173). After comprehensive historical research, Satrapi's contention holds almost entirely true. After the aforementioned falling out between Iran and the U.S., the Shah lost favor and Mohammed Mossadegh rose to power (Sheehan 48). Mossadegh was a, "proponent of democratic liberal institutions and the symbol of his people's quest for national independence and dignity" (Goode, "The United States and Iran" 108). Mossadegh aspired to nationalize Iranian oil to rid foreign influence from Iran entirely and allow Iran to collect profits from their oil production. Both Britain and the U.S. were strongly opposed to nationalization for multiple reasons. Generally speaking, the nationalization of Iranian oil meant less oil and concessions for the West. Britain



previously owned the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and thus stood to lose a plethora of oil and wealth. The U.S. was in the midst of the Korean War, and nationalization would jeopardize the oil supply needed to fight the war. After discussion between Britain and the U.S., the American Central Intelligence Agency orchestrated a successful coup d'état to overthrow Mossadegh and reinstate the Shah (Sheehan 52-55). Some question the necessity of the coup d'état in ousting Mossadegh, but Goode asserts that its, "role was crucial...without it Mossadegh could have maintained himself indefinitely." (Goode, "The United States and Iran" 123). The coup d'état itself understandably aggravated the Iranian people. The U.S. infringed upon Iranian sovereignty and disrupted the Iranian way of life to bolster their economic and political interests. This selfish and careless nature is reprehensible. If a foreign country orchestrated a coup d'état to remove President Obama from office, Americans would surely develop a similar revulsion towards that country as well. In fact, Iranian anti-Western sentiments do not differ greatly from the anti-Arab racism that swept the U.S. after the terror of 9/11 (Salaita 251). Ultimately, the detrimental consequences of the coup in the following years played a larger role in the spread of animosity towards the West.

The subsequent rise of the Shah crippled Iran greatly. The U.S. State Department reports that under his rule, “democratic reform and civil liberties deteriorated. The Shah’s autocratic method of rule and the abusive practices of SAVAK (his internal security and intelligence service) alienated large sectors of the population” (“Background”). In *Persepolis*, Satrapi presents this brutality by illustrating an instance where the Shah orders 400 Iranians to be burnt alive, a calamity reminiscent of Nazi Germany during the Holocaust (Satrapi, *Persepolis* 14-15). In 1954, under the Shah’s new rule, a company known as the Consortium was formed to resolve the oil crisis that former Iranian leader Mossadegh sought to fix through nationalization. This new company gave the U.S. and Britain each 40% of the shares, leaving Iran with a mere 20% stake (Ramazani 22). This continued usurpation of Iranian oil profits by England and the U.S. likely contributed to the widespread poverty noted in *Persepolis II* (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 173). It is clear that Iran suffered greatly under the Shah’s ruthless directive. Iranians lost civil and political liberties, suffered economically, and were subject to unjust violence and brutality. Remnants of these policies are also highlighted in *Perspolis II*. On many occasions, Satrapi and her boyfriend Reza are forced to stay inside because only married couples can be seen together (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 134-136). The Iranian government

even punishes Satrapi for wearing red socks (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 148). The U.S. effectively put the Shah in power, and continued to support the Shah throughout his reign, therefore Satrapi and her fellow Iranians feel strong resentment towards the West (Sheehan 81). Yet some may argue that Iran would have reached a similar state of ruin under Mossadegh, essentially voiding the U.S. of any culpability. Scholar James Goode disagrees with this contention:

There is convincing evidence that Mossadegh never planned to create one-man rule such as developed in the 1960s and 1970s under the Shah. He relied on the army, did not create a secret police like the shah's SAVAK nor a paramilitary organization similar to the *pasdaran* of the Islamic Republic. He did not violate the constitution, as did the Shah repeatedly in later years; he never put himself beyond control of parliament and to the end allowed the press to speak its mind. (Goode, "The United States and Iran" 124)

Goode illustrates that the fate of Iran would have been different and significantly better for the Iranian people under Mossadegh. In addition, as previously mentioned, Mossadegh sought to nationalize the oil industry. If the U.S. had left Iran undisturbed, perhaps Mossadegh could have achieved this goal, and achieved financial stability for Iran once and for all. After illustrating the

discrepancy between the Shah's rule and the conceivable future under Mossadegh, the damaging impact of the U.S. on Iran following their participation in the 1953 Coup D'État is apparent.

Another springboard for Western hostility stems from U.S. involvement in the Iran-Iraq War. Satrapi contends: "This entire war was just a big setup [by the West] to destroy both the Iranian and the Iraqi armies...the West sold weapons to both camps and we, we were stupid enough to enter" (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 99).

Scholar Mansour Farhang partially supports Satrapi's assertion, arguing that the West behaved in a, "shortsighted and manipulative fashion that has only prolonged and exacerbated the war and reinforced the less pragmatic tendencies of both leaders" (Farhang 667). He continues to describe U.S. diplomatic actions:

During the first two years of the war, when Iraq was occupying Iranian territory, most of the super-power aid went to Iran...But since 1982, when Iran gained the upper hand in the war...Washington has discouraged even indirect arms sales to Iran, and has instead given more and more support to Iraq. (Farhang 671)

The U.S. initially supported Iran, but changed midway to support Iraq, preventing either side from winning. This parallels post World War II diplomatic relations in that the U.S. initially supported Iran, but eventually betrayed Iran to pursue their global

agenda. While economic greed and the desire to increase the U.S. military presence in the region both contributed to this course of diplomacy, the main goal was to ensure that, “both [countries] should lose” (Farhang 671). Irrespective of American political and economic desires, their blatant disregard for those living and fighting in both Iran and the greater Middle East is appalling. Merely five years into the war there were 350,000 deaths, 600,000 wounded, 100,000 POW, 2 million homeless, \$700 billion of material destruction, and widespread use of chemical weapons (Farhang 663). Satrapi writes of her own post-war experience as well. She discusses her emotions after noticing that street names were named after martyrs of the war: “It was very unsettling. I felt as though I were walking through a cemetery” (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 97). She later illustrates a young, crippled war veteran who must live the rest of life in a wheelchair (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 108-112). With these examples, Satrapi provides a human perspective on the impact of the war that is far more moving than statistics. She illustrates her own fear and disconcertion as well as the life-long hardship that the veteran must endure. Her goal in doing so is not only to reveal the impact of the war, but also allude to the consequences of Western intervention in the Iran-Iraq war. The role of the U.S. in setting up this level of destruction is undeniable, therefore the anti-American feelings shared by Satrapi and the

Iranian people are justifiable. However, it is important to note that Iran and Iraq are to responsible for the initial *outbreak* of war, not the U.S. or their Western counterparts (Farhang 659).

The American government now acknowledges the damaging impact of U.S. intervention in Iran. In 2000, the Los Angeles Times paraphrased an address from the acting Secretary of State Madeline Albright: “She acknowledged that the coup was ‘clearly a setback’ for Iran's political development...Albright also expressed regret for U.S. support of Baghdad during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s” (Wright). In this address, Albright essentially apologized for American actions during the 1953 Coup D’état and the Iran-Iraq War. The fact that the American government concedes an admission of guilt further illustrates the deplorable result of U.S. involvement on Iran over the last century.

In addition to U.S. diplomacy, a skewed Iranian mindset has also contributed to the anti-Western sentiment in Iran. As Sheehan explains:

Iranians, rather than admit their own failures and attempt to do something about them, tend to explain them away by accusing some other country of meddling. The country most likely to be blamed for the difficulty would be the one that has the closest relationship with Iran at the time. As a result, the

United States, ever since 1954, has been blamed for almost everything that has gone wrong in Iran.

(Sheehan xii-xiii)

One cannot ignore the far-reaching impact of U.S. relations with Iran. The U.S. has undoubtedly altered the course of events in Iran and brought about havoc, directly and indirectly. Yet, Sheehan demonstrates that Iranians have the tendency to place blame for the internal affairs of Iran on others, including the U.S. While the U.S. must share some responsibility, Sheehan contends that Iranians are also partially accountable for their troubled plight. Satrapi exemplifies this externalization of blame in the aforementioned passage surrounding the 1953 Coup D'état, essentially blaming the U.S. and Britain for the bulk of Iran's problems without assessing the possibility of an Iranian contribution as well (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 173). In her discussion of the Iran-Iraq War, she reduces the basis of the war to the West (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 99). As mentioned above, while the U.S. "prolonged and exacerbated" the war, Iranian aggression was largely responsible for starting the war (Farhang 667). Unfortunately, amidst decades of turmoil, Iranians have lost the ability to examine the consequences of their own actions and more readily pass off the basis of their condition to the U.S. This

analytical defect surely contributes to the hostility towards the West in *Persepolis II*.

Satrapi's experience living in Vienna serves as the final contributing factor to her anti-Western outlook. Satrapi experiences racism and stereotyping many times during her adolescence in Vienna, as portrayed in *Persepolis II*. In one section, a nun reprimands Satrapi for eating dinner while watching television, stating: "It's true what they say about Iranians. They have no education" (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 23). Later on, while on the metro, an elderly man yells at her: "Dirty foreigner, get out!" (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 66). Finally, in one instance, her boyfriend's mother refers to Satrapi as a "witch", claiming that Satrapi seeks to use him to get a passport (Satrapi, *Persepolis II* 66). These interactions all highlight extreme ignorance and racism in Austria. These few events surely affected Satrapi greatly seeing as Satrapi was an adolescent living in a foreign country without any parental or emotional support. These factors made Satrapi extremely malleable, allowing these racist experiences to shape her opinion of the West. Thus, she developed a strong resentment towards the West that manifests itself throughout *Persepolis II*.

Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis II* is an autobiographical graphic novel that unearths her experiences as an adolescent in Vienna as well as her return to a devastated Iran. While the novel is effective



in conveying the reality of her struggles, the conspicuous anti-Western viewpoint of *Persepolis II* demands further investigation. Thorough research reveals that longstanding U.S. involvement in Iran, the Iranian tendency to scapegoat, and Satrapi's own experiences with Western racism and ignorance explain the anti-Western stance in *Persepolis II*. Unfortunately, the Middle East continues to be one of the most volatile regions in the world. The entire world would benefit from the establishment of friendly relationships and peace in the Middle East. While the U.S. must move towards establishing stronger diplomatic relations with the countries in this region, it cannot simply forget history. It is of the utmost importance to consciously examine the errors made in Iran to ensure that similarly egregious foreign policy decisions do not mar the future.

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# Advanced Level

Advanced Level Winner

## Poverty: Empty Pockets, Empty Dreams?

Ashwini Poola

Gazing out over the murky, cold waters of the Hudson River, one can easily view the centuries-old oxidized copper structure that has long since become an international beacon of hope and freedom—the American Dream beaming from the embers of The Statue of Liberty. The American Dream: an idealistic viewpoint shared uniformly by many that the secret to success is a dash of luck and a bucketful of hard work. In *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich examines the livelihood of the working class, revealing the perpetuating and limiting factors of poverty. Her introspective journey evoked memories of the urbanized areas in which I spent most of my childhood, silently observing the wearing effects of the sociology of poverty on my peers. To be poor, for many, often translates into an economic deficit, watered down to not having money. However, the negative state of poverty far outreaches the physical limitations of *money* to include irreversible damages to the psyche of those “affected,” hitting children particularly hard (Danziger). From a very young age, children of poverty are handicapped by their subpar home environments and public

education, leading to inevitable and indispensable obstacles in attaining the glorified American Dream. One can quickly tabulate money, adding and subtracting its influence on life, but the mental backlashes of poverty are not so quickly negated.

*Her name was Tara Fahkry. She was one hundred percent Egyptian with an untamed mane of tight black curls and a smart mouth, home to a silver tongue. Although we had attended the same red brick elementary school and sat within four rows of each other for almost six years, fate waited until middle school for us to fall into each others lives. We were instantaneous friends, sharing fundamental qualities of girls our age: curiosity, intelligence, and a penchant for boys. At that age, my eyes were blind to concepts such as socioeconomic status. Thus, her small yellow house with the wire fencing and the concrete walls covered in chipped paint seemed at most untidy in comparison to my comfortable split-level three bedroom suburban norm.*

The unsavory living conditions of the poor are by no means a hushed surprise and are often subject of heated conversation, whether it is the substandard state of housing projects in inner cities or the hordes of people forced into trailer parks littering the forgotten corners of rural America. Outside of the obvious lack of stability and security provided from physically unsound houses, the social reverberations that a neighborhood of said dilapidated

structures have on individuals are of importance. Timothy Haney of the University of Oregon examines the effects of *perceived neighborhood disorder* on an individual's self esteem. His research supports previous claims that "blighted and decaying urban neighborhoods are read as disinvestments both by residents and by city governments" and thus, "these images [negativities] are internalized and incorporated into residents' psychological makeup" (Haney). If an unstable environment does little to incite personal growth for the average person, imagine this same influence on the ever-changing, eager minds of children. Children have little or no voice in the matter of what house becomes their home and what neighborhood becomes their background, but are equally as privy to the effects of these *disinvestments* from society.

In times of economic turmoil in America, communities, particularly those that are urbanized, dramatically restructure to reflect the severely macerated job market of the working class in (Stewart). According to Wilson, these "neighborhood structural changes" lead to a "concentration of the most spatially concentrated and racially segregated disadvantaged populations, characterized by acute poverty, joblessness, and a sense of alienation from mainstream society" (Stewart). This *racial isolation* profoundly influences adolescents and children, heavily concentrating their lives and memories with a sense of loss and

hopelessness and allowing for the propagation of negative cultural influences. In his research, Wilson states that “adolescents from disadvantaged neighborhoods are likely to be exposed to a number of risk factors that can derail positive adolescent development and thereby lead to an oppositional culture that tolerates deviant values and behaviors” (Stewart). Although environments are not single causative agents of childhood achievement, they certainly have a profound influence on a child’s psychosocial development, whether it is growing up in a stable and secure home or being exposed to positive influences in their neighborhood.

*Seventh grade was a pivotal academic moment for us; it was the year where the “smart” were weeded from the “average” students. This was the time when we, as students, were granted the opportunity to choose our tracks: did we want honors courses or academic courses? Making this decision would unequivocally influence the rest of our coursework from then until high school. If one took honors level classes in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, one would then go onto take honors level courses in ninth and tenth grade, and then go onto advanced placement classes, which everyone knew meant a sturdy leg up into college. This was a big deal! When the day came that our courses were announced for the next year, I sprinted down the hallway between bells to find Sarah at her locker, beaming at me. Smiling to myself, I thought this for sure means we would have identical eighth grade schedules, filled with Honors*

*English, Algebra, Geometry, and Biology. So I could not hide the shock on my face, when she uttered the words, "I never requested those classes, why would I?" It turned out this became a turning point in our friendship as well; when the differences in our lives became glaringly obvious and unavoidable.*

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Thomas Jefferson proposed that education be under government control to President Jimmy Carter's Department of Education Organization Act of 1976 to The No Child Left Behind Act by our very own George W., providing equitable public education for the American youth has been on the forefront of our nation's agenda. As years have passed, public schools, despite state and government funding, have very often come to reflect the poverty level of the children attending them. Large disparities exist in the quality of public education between children living in mild to extreme affluence and those living below the poverty line:

The school children of Belmar reflect the variations in the population. Many arise on school mornings on their own initiative. They must provide themselves with a meager breakfast, if any, decide upon grooming procedures, if any, and depart on time, if at all. They must select their clothing for the day from a small collection of soiled, unpressed, and worn clothes. Their



parents have already left for work, have never returned from the night before, do not arise that early or are awake but just never participate in this preparation process... These children often arrive at school with their hair uncombed and with remnants of bedding in their heads. They are unwashed and not groomed. Their clothing is often in disarray. The neglect of such children seems thorough to the mainstream eye. They are malnourished and unmotivated in scholastic goals. In peer-group interaction, they are constantly abused. They are 'sounded' upon and 'ripped' often until they are forced to respond with violence. They are objects of disdain for the school's staff, faculty, and administration. There are other households in Belmar where the parents rise with the children or before to ensure that the children get an appropriate early start. They supervise their children's selection or prepared clothing and monitor their grooming procedures. They prepare their breakfast and give them a final check before they depart for school. Other households here have eager parents who not only participate in all these participations for school but also provide them with school supplies, the fad containers to carry such

supplies, and their personal protection to and from the school building. These parents are acquainted with the personnel and are familiar faces at all school affairs (Williams).

The notion of inequalities in the treatment of children within the classroom by teachers, supervisors, and peers is not new. However, it is not difficult to understand who or to see how stunting of the normal learning process may occur. There is disastrous recurrent loop of low self-worth perpetuated by a lack of positive encouragement by teachers and school officials, leading to bleak outcomes scholastically. Studies have shown that by first grade, students in low socioeconomic status schools were 0.3 grade levels behind those of high socioeconomic status, growing to a gap of 3.5 grade levels by the end of sixth grade (Greenwood). Similar research has linked academic retardation most commonly to environmental factors such as deprivation and non-stimulatory environments, such as many institutions located in the poorest neighborhoods of our country (Greenwood). Although there are numerous folk who fight the war for working towards equitable education standards for children in poverty and wealth, there are numerous battles yet to be won on this front and in the meantime, it's these lost children that remain casualties.

*Swathed in our green caps and gowns, embellished with gold tassels—our precious school colors—our eyes met through a gap in the rows of jittery, smiling excited seniors. The extinguished hope in her eyes is an image burned into my memory. Since freshman year of high school until that moment, three years had gone and in that time a friendship had absolved into nothing more than courteous remarks and gestures. Quickly after the summer of eighth grade, she had fallen into the wily claws of peer pressure and was lost in “the wrong crowd.” Through the grapevine, there were whispers of how she had slipped into the vast majority of population that had made more than casual practice of drugs, alcohol, and sex. Her questionable choices had gotten her very near to expulsion more than once and the academic prowess she once possessed had long since disappeared. Matriculating into the local community college, she joined the ranks of dozens who were marching forward with very little future aims. I heard many years later that she has dropped out.*

Children. They are seen as society’s voice and actions of tomorrow—investments in the future of our world. It is almost instinctual to protect these innocent packages of limitless potential. Yet, in 2008, an estimated 20.7% of the nation’s children under the age of eighteen were living below the poverty line (U.S.). Children of poverty, such as my good friend Sarah, are “less likely to enter school ready to learn, more likely to have

health and behavior problems, and more likely to drop out of school and become teen parents” (Danziger). This continually proven fact is best described as having a multi-factorial cause; no single truth justified as a single agent of destruction. However, an irrefutable and particularly damning obstacle faced by impoverished children is the lack of a fostering environment, both in the unsafe neighborhood they must live in and the hostile public schools they must attend. The inability to secure these hinders their personal “pursuit of happiness” and indubitably , gives them less of a fighting chance to attain their own personal *American Dreams* (Declaration). These are not impossible, just more difficult to ascertain. In this country, where the bricks of our society lay upon the foundational pillars of equality and justice, it is difficult to overlook these wide gaping cracks through which you see the weight of poverty stifling our nation’s youth, denying them these innate rights. How, then, can we teach our children of the beauty of equality when the socioeconomic gap widens everyday and the effects ripple down into their homes? How can we teach them to continue to dream when society’s “indiscriminate” eye has already reached a verdict on their futures?



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## True Womanhood in Pauline Hopkins' *Contending Forces*

Jacquelyn E. Hoermann

*Would you blame the world if it should press  
On him a civic crown;  
And see me struggling in the depth  
Then harshly press me down?*

*Crime has no sex and yet to-day  
I wear the brand of shame;  
Whilst he amid the gay and proud  
Still bears an honored name.*

*-Frances E. W. Harper, "A Double Standard"*

"Aren't I a woman?," Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech at the Woman's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio challenged white antebellum standards of true womanhood, which excluded black women, free and enslaved. Based on their racial features and preconceived notions about black women's sexuality, blackness and true womanhood were, according to white ideology, mutually exclusive. Intertwined with this assertion is the oft-referred to "woman question," which asks how an African-American woman can best establish her virtue in a society predominated by white values. Earlier black women writers exacerbated black women's prudery and portrayed them as more worthy of true womanhood

than most white women. Others re-defined true womanhood on their own terms, still begging Truth's question, "Aren't I a woman?" or "How do I define my womanhood?" Pauline Hopkins takes up "the woman question" in her novel *Contending Forces*, and for the most part takes a comfortable middleground. By refusing to stray from true womanhood ideals Hopkins appeals to an audience of true white women, but also redefines the oppressive and impractical standards of true womanhood and uses character development to demonstrate its complexity for the black woman who is judged by white critics.

### **The Cult of True Womanhood**

Barbara Welter partially defines the nineteenth-century true woman as one who practices the "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity," (152). Yet the other, more or less unspoken requisites for admission to the cult of true womanhood were pure Caucasian descent and conformity to white, middle- to upper-class expectations of womanly behavior. Scholars have referred to black women at the turn of the nineteenth century as "atypical American[s]" because they were excluded from the idea of true (white) womanhood (Gates xiii, Carby 269-270). White critics determined standards of true womanhood, assuming that black women were "generally incapable of comprehending, much less embodying, the high



moral propriety and sexual restraint that typified the white bourgeois feminine ideal" (Yarborough xxxii). True womanhood was built on a white foundation, and so the negative counterpart to virtue was naturally blackness.

The black-skinned antithesis to true womanhood goes deeper than skin color. The brutal legacy of slavery had previously established negative stereotypes of black women. Such stigmas were by-products of physical and sexual abuse black women incurred under the wrath of white, male slave owners, not to mention the physical abuse and social disapproval inflicted by white mistresses. In turn, these women "were stereotyped... as promiscuous and overtly sexual in nature [and] suffering from moral corruption" (Zafar and Ahmed 2). Likewise, Phillip A. Bruce was one of many white supremacists who aggravated contemporary thought in regards to black women, by arguing that "black women did not have to live up to the standard of morality or adhere to the cult of true womanhood because no such values existed... within the black community" (Kaiser 100). Bruce's argument captures a commonly-used argument that dismisses black women and disregards their capability, and in some cases, desire for true womanhood.

In response to these almost incontrovertible allegations, some black women fought back, albeit in remarkably different

ways. In some cases, black women writers catered to white constructions of womanhood and attempted to prove their ability to conform it, often through Christian rhetoric (virtue of piety) with the hope of re-vamping the soiled image of black women (Putzi). While some labored to take up true womanhood, others reworked the social construction to fit with their status quo (Kaiser). To use the words of Carby, black women “adopted, adapted, and transformed” pre-existing standards of womanhood, “to effectively represent the material conditions of black women” (*Reconstructing Womanhood* 6). Like Kaiser, Carby also mentions the reclaiming of true womanhood as a social weapon to redefine roles and lift disenfranchising stigmas (268-269). Either by working within or re-working the true woman construction, black women, especially black women writers, were determined to remove stigmas and gain equality, with or without true womanhood.

### **The Black Woman’s Era**

At the end of the nineteenth century, black women writers, such as Hopkins, began to “[dominate] the last decade of the nineteenth century,” also known as the Black Woman's Era, circa 1890-1910 (Gates xii). These writers felt it necessary “to confront the dominant domestic ideologies,” through their own, non-exclusive “literary conventions of womanhood” (Carby 6). During

this era, one black male writer, Charles Chestnutt, claimed that fiction could be used for “the express purpose of effecting social change,” and in a similar manner, these women wrote with the intention of lifting stereotypes and double-standards (23). They also knew that writing contradicted true woman virtues; according to Jacqueline Jones Royster, “their space was... not the written page—nothing that would draw attention to them in a ‘public’ way,” because “public women were not ‘good’ women” (20). One woman whose writing was geared toward promoting the new woman, not the true woman, was Ida B. Wells. In this era, she “emerged as one of the most well-known,” black women writers and, “like other professional women, she was challenged to adhere to nineteenth-century standards of “ladyhood” (22). In an informal, but well-remembered debate with Temperance Movement activist, Frances Willard, “Wells concluded that Willard apparently was ‘no better or worse than the great bulk of white Americans on the Negro questions’” (Royster 38). In doing so, she publicly burned bridges with the dominant ideas about womanhood and uncovered her allegiance to the uncompromising side of the black woman’s cause. Another new woman—Anna Julia Cooper—spoke and wrote openly about the dignity of true black womanhood as different from the dignity of true white womanhood, a dignity she called “undisputed” that works on non-

violent terms (Cooper as qtd. in Wilson 191). Cooper did not abandon, but rather re-shaped true womanhood with new ideas that merited equitable treatment from both white and black men (Wilson 191).

Hopkins' representations of true womanhood in *Contending Forces* are far more complex than either Wells or Cooper. One of the earliest representations comes in chapter two with the description of Grace Montfort, "a dream of beauty even among beautiful women" (Hopkins 40). Grace's characterization is imbued with all the cardinal virtues of true womanhood. Early on, two white men in the community suspect her of having "too much cream color," or having black ancestry, and this suspicion balloons into unfounded accusations within the community that later justify her rape by her accusers (Hopkins 41). Her alleged blackness categorizes her as a public body worthy of sexual mistreatment and rape, regardless of her true woman status (Putzi). Grace's true womanhood was symbolically tarnished, but Hopkins never clarifies her racial constitution, suggesting that in instances of sexual violation, race is not a pertinent consideration (Carby 131). Readers' sympathy for this tragic character is enhanced by Grace's adherence to true-woman standards, which should have shielded her from sexual outrage. By invoking sympathy for this woman of

ambiguous race, Hopkins appeals to the sentiments of black and white audiences. To an extent, she is catering to white audiences, showing that she values the tenets of true womanhood. She invites proponents of true womanhood to cease neglecting true black women, and most importantly, she conveys through Grace Montfort—a superlative example of true womanhood—that it is equally unjust to rape a true woman, be she white or black.

As the novel progresses, so do the representations of true black women. Hopkins introduces Sappho Clark and Dora Smith, as a set of foils. Sappho's characterization resembles Grace Montfort. To the reader, both Grace and Sappho are portrayed as true women. Excepting the mulatta tint to her skin and a shameful secret, Sappho's beauty and good virtue indicate that she is a plausible candidate for the cult of true womanhood as Grace Montfort was a century earlier. Although Sappho believes that she does not qualify as a true woman, the sewing circle discussion makes her think otherwise:

“Did I understand you to say that the Negro woman in her native state is truly a virtuous woman?  
Asked Sappho, who had been silent during the bustle attending the opening of the meeting.

“Travelers tell us that the native African woman is impregnable in her virtue,” replied Mrs. Willis. (149-149)

Mrs. Willis stands in as the instructor of virtue for young women in her community and the reader. She exemplifies true woman qualities with “many a subtle business man had been worsted by her apparent womanly weakness and charming simplicity” (Hopkins 144). In this dialogue, Sappho is the student of virtue, questioning and critically thinking about true womanhood as it applies to “the Negro woman.” Mrs. Willis instructs her otherwise, using deductive reasoning to arrive at a favorable conclusion: Because the “native African woman is impregnable in her virtue,” her descendants must be worthy of virtue to a certain degree. The conversation continues:

“So we have sacrificed that attribute in order to acquire civilization,” chimed in Dora.

“No, not ‘sacrificed,’ but pushed one side by the force of circumstances. Let us thank God that it is an essential attribute peculiar to us—a racial characteristic which is slumbering but not lost,” replied Mrs. Willis. “But let us not forget the definition of virtue—  
“Strength to do the right thing under all temptations.’  
(149).

Dora's misconception of compromised virtue is corrected; Mrs. Willis elaborates on the true black woman as one who must work within ideas of true womanhood that allow no exception for women whose virtue has been stolen. In spite of what Mrs. Willis refers to as "the force of circumstance," black women can still be true women. "The force of circumstance," is the brutal history of slavery, physical and sexual mistreatment, and racial miscegenation and discrimination of the past that has altered definitions of true womanhood for black women. For the most part, Mrs. Willis supports true womanhood ideals because she has full faith in the virtue of her race, but she does take up issue with true womanhood on the matter of stolen virtue. Her final sentence is a definition, or better yet a re-definition of virtue: "Strength to do the right thing under all temptations." This re-definition recognizes "the force of circumstances" as sometimes overwhelmingly unwelcoming, but unavoidable. In cases of sexual assault, the virtue of a true black woman was compromised and she cannot be held accountable. At the same time, when presented with the opportunity to resist and salvage her virtuous standing in society, she must preserve her purity.

The sewing circle conversation on true womanhood foreshadows Sappho's secret of stolen virtue. The dramatic irony of Sappho's questioning and her prolonged silence thicken the plot

and illuminate for black and white readers alike the inner struggle of a woman whose virtue was forcibly and incestuously taken. At fifteen, Sappho was raped by her uncle, and as a result of her stolen virtue was impregnated by the perpetrator. When asked why he destroyed the virtue of his niece, the rapist replies, “What does a woman of mixed blood, or any Negress, for that matter, know of virtue?” (Hopkins 261). His response resembles Bruce’s dismissal of black women as unworthy of true womanhood, both of which capture popular misrepresentations of black women’s sexuality.

The fruit of Sappho’s unfavorable union, Alphonse, was born out of wedlock, adding more shame to Sappho’s already heavy load. Once only her race stood in her way, now having lost her purity and birthed a bastard child, Sappho could never satisfy the requirements of true womanhood. The Catholic sisters at a New Orleans convent take her in and attempt to re-invent her as a woman with a second chance at true womanhood. Still, her past catches up with her and she was forced to return to the same convent, with Alphonse to re-invent herself, again. This time, however, she re-defines true womanhood on new terms. Mrs. Willis’ discussion of true womanhood assures her she can regain virtue, despite her previous rape. Then, she chooses to accept her child and her role as an unwedded mother, which can be read as a



“reclaiming of the previously colonized’ female body” (Andrews 442). Sappho returns to the same convent that re-invented her once and her true womanhood is restored again. Her suitor, Will Smith, witnesses the restoration of her true womanhood in a dream: “Presently upon the altar before him appeared a vision of the Virgin and Child, but the face of the mother was Sappho’s, the child by her side was the little Alphonse” (Hopkins 386-387). Although her sexual purity can never be restored, Sappho’s purity is spiritually restored by returning to the convent where she is cleansed of impurity. She is likened to the Virgin Mary, the exemplary true woman, who was also an unwedded mother. She no longer defines herself by the restrictions of true white womanhood, but rather, re-defines true womanhood, “in which motherhood [is] not contingent upon wifhood” (Carby *Reconstructing Womanhood* 144). Additionally, Will Smith’s dream symbolizes her spiritual restoration, and his commitment to her authorizes her as a true woman, defying traditional views about raped women as unmarriageable (Carby book 144). Sappho’s virtuous re-definition gives hope to the hundreds of black women contemporaries of Hopkins who were sexually victimized and who were not afforded the same respect as true women. Sappho's characterization appeals to new women and true women alike by redefining true womanhood.

Continuously working within a variety of parameters, Hopkins' characterization of Dora is Sappho's foil. She maintains each cardinal virtue of true womanhood, and at the end of the novel, her virtue is rewarded when she marries Dr. Arthur Lewis.

If ever a doubt of Dora's happiness had troubled Will's thoughts, it was dispelled now that he saw her a contented young matron, her own individuality swallowed up in love for her husband and child. She had apparently forgotten that any other love had ever disturbed the peaceful current of her life. (389-390)

Hopkins describes Dora as, literally, consumed by wifedom and the promise of true womanhood. Her maintenance of virtue and her entry into wifedom and motherhood suggests that black women are worthy of true womanhood, Dora being a shining example of success. As a married true woman, "she like the real life wives of Booker T. Washington, sacrifices any identity outside of marriage" (Cassidy 390). This condition of true womanhood conflicts with the new woman's conditions. Yet Hopkins' motivation for presenting true woman figures alongside Sappho, the transformed true woman, and arguably, new woman figure, is astute. To a certain degree, she is catering to white standards and evoking sympathy from true white women, but she also appeals to the sexual-moral double-consciousness of her black female

contemporaries. Black women at the end of the century would have been equally conflicted between the true woman and the new woman because, according to Cassidy, they had a black and a white audience to consider (661). For those who possessed the virtues of true womanhood, they could stave off white criticism by accepting standards of true (white) womanhood, but for many more, new womanhood offered a realistic alternative to true womanhood, hence why Hopkins writes for both. One facet of her characterizations is her appeal to true and new women alike with various characters; yet another pertinent facet is how each character promotes new and traditional standards of womanhood within communities of black women. With her characterizations as her means of promoting social change, she lets white readers and proponents of true (white) womanhood see why black women should not be unfairly stereotyped.

Writers of the Black Woman's Era gradually phased out character representations of the cult of true womanhood and graciously welcomed the new woman, one who worked on freer sexual terms and disregarded stigmatization by white critics. Though many black women writers embraced the new woman, others, like Hopkins', reverted to the true woman. The true woman characterization used to portray Grace Montfort, Mrs. Willis, and now Dora Smith thwarted continued stigmatization by

true (white) womanhood and was especially potent in conveying the virtue of black women to a white readership that had not accepted new woman ideals. Dora and Mrs. Willis exemplify true women and are proof that black women can adopt true womanhood. Grace Montfort also represents the true woman, but her status is an adaptation, signifying what happens when the true woman's virtue is stolen. Likewise, Sappho also represents the true woman, but she redefines or transforms it to fit with the reality of many violated black women. Toward the end of this era, comes the total rejection of true womanhood ideals by writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen (Kaiser). Still, Hopkins' complications of true and new womanhood through female characters demonstrate the complexity of this social justice question for women at the turn of the century. Her characterizations do not alienate or privilege one kind of woman over the other. Instead she authorizes the black woman's ability to adopt, adapt, and transform the true woman as she pleases, and in doing so, Hopkins' advocates the black woman's morality to those who question her moral character. On the other hand, her characterizations speak to the women of her race and their sexual-moral double consciousness, urging them to embrace high standards of morality while also realizing that skin color and sexual

violation do not disqualify them as true woman, but rather transformed women.

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## Contributors

Kayla Cooper is a freshman at UMKC from Lee's Summit, Missouri. She is pursuing Music Therapy currently and plans on remaining at UMKC for the next four years. She is heavily involved in music, but has always loved writing for leisure and for her classes.

Jacquelyn E. Hoermann graduated from UMKC in May 2011 with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and two minor concentrations in Communication Studies and Political Science. She enjoys reading non-fiction literature, journalistic writing, and spending time with her three Yorkies. In the fall, she will attend graduate school at Iowa State University to pursue a Master of Arts degree in Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication.

Ashwini Poola is one of those students in limbo between finishing her undergraduate degree and obtaining her medical degree, otherwise known as the Accelerated Medical Program. Ashwini supposes you could say her official title as of now read "Ashwini Poola, Medical Student IV going on V." After graduation, in two and a half years, she will likely join the ranks of overworked residents, continuing the desperate pursuit of medicine! One day in the distant future, after debts have been repaid, Ashwini hopes to work abroad, ideally in one of the numerous impoverished communities of our world to play her part in working towards global health equity.

Amit Roy is a first year medical student in the six-year medical program. In his free time, Amit enjoys cooking, playing the piano, and volunteering through Alpha Phi Omega and the Sojourner Health Clinic.



Devon Russell is approaching her senior year at UMKC and is studying Music Therapy through the Conservatory of Music and Dance. She has spent the majority of her college career gaining skills in using music as a therapeutic tool toward the achievement of non-musical related goals and the well-being of individuals. Devon has always enjoyed writing creatively as well as academically and plans to integrate expressive writing techniques into her future music therapy endeavors.

Alyssa Schwarzenberger is a German Education student entering her fourth year at UMKC. She began as a Music Education student in the Conservatory and switched to German Education at the beginning of her third year. In addition to her studies, Alyssa teaches horseback riding lessons and enjoys sewing, salsa dancing, boxing, and playing music. She grew up in Overland Park, Kansas and recently moved to Kansas City.

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