# Table of Contents

*Editor's Introduction*

**Second Prize, Fall 2016**
Linguistic Persistence ..................................................................................................................................1  
   By Torben Breitkopf, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts  
   Instructor: Dr. Timothy Vincent

**Third Prize, Spring 2017**
The Shadow of Slavery: A Look into How Homegoing Depicts the Structural Oppression Apparent in American and Ghanian Society ..............................................................7  
   By Nathaniel Welhofer, School of Business  
   Instructor: Dr. Erin Speese

**First Prize, Spring 2017**
The Purpose of “Othering” in Julie Otsuka’s When the Emperor Was Divine .....12  
   By Skyler Sunday, McAnulty College of Liberal Arts  
   Instructor: Dr. Maureen Gallagher

**Third Prize, Fall 2016**
Selfless Smiles .................................................................................................................................17  
   By Rebecca Lord, Rangos School of Health Sciences  
   Instructor: Dr. Maureen Gallagher

**Second Prize, Spring 2017**
Citizen: A Dark and Unsafe Place for White Readers.................................................................24  
   By Devon Lyons, Rangos School of Health Sciences  
   Instructor: Dr. Maureen Gallagher

**First Prize, Fall 2016**
A Tale of Two Whales: The Search for a Better Life .................................................................29  
   By Kayleigh Cook, College of Business  
   Instructor: Courtney Druzak

**Honors Program First Prize** .............................................................................................................33  
The Existential Life of the Average Man: Life and Death in George Sprott  
   By Brennan Bizon  
   Instructor: Dr. Erin Speese

**Honors Program Second Prize**
Jay: An Intimate Martyr of Objectivism ..........................................................................................38  
   By Jordan Miller  
   Instructor: Dr. Matthew Ussia
EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION

By Jerry Stinnett

In the following pages you’ll find wonderful examples of many different kinds of writing: argumentative essays, literary and cultural analyses, and studies of problems facing our world today. While their topics and aims differ, they are alike in their excellence. These six essays were produced by students in Duquesne University’s First-Year Writing program and the Honors Program, and they won top honors in our annual competition. Of the many essays submitted to this competition, these were the finest—and they truly are excellent examples of what motivated, talented, hard-working students can produce.

The faculty and graduate students of the English department teach the first-year writing classes (“Thinking and Writing Across the Curriculum” and “Imaginative Literature and Critical Writing”), but the students in the classes come from across the university. This year the prizewinners represent three of the University’s nine undergraduate schools: Business, Health Sciences and Liberal Arts. Our goal for the first-year writing classes is to provide a space where Duquesne’s diverse students come together and have a common intellectual experience. The students here examined everything from what novels like Homegoing and When the Emperor Was Divine have to show us about oppression and resistance, to a plan for freeing killer whales from captivity, to the role of language plays in linking us to our unique heritage, to critical analyses of the philosophy of Objectivism as set forth in Ayn Rand’s fiction. Our students are engaging with the world, with creative texts, and with the conditions of their own lives. They are doing what students in a first-year writing class are supposed to do, and doing it impressively.

Although excellent, these essays are not perfect; I have declined to line-edit them because I want the Duquesne community to see what its first-year writers are actually doing—and to show our incoming freshmen what they can realistically aspire to produce. These essays show minds struggling with complicated issues; they are a snapshot of a process of thinking.

I’d like to thank all of the graduate students and faculty who undertook the task of judging these essays. This year, our judges were David Young, Rebecca May, Emad Mirmotahari, Maureen Gallagher, and Stuart Kurland. Thanks to all of them for their hard work, and particular thanks to Shannon Small and Shawntaye Sledge for their admirable administrative work. As ever, I’d also like to thank the Office of the Provost, whose support keeps this contest and journal going; Michelle Boehm and the staff of the Public Affairs office, who design and produce this journal; and of course all of the magnificent instructors in the First-Year Writing program.
“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.”
-Nelson Mandela

Many people wish they were bilingual in today’s world; thankfully I have had the opportunity to become fluent in both German and English—which is an advantage not only because I have been able to experience two different cultures but because I will be able to put my bilingual abilities to use beyond my university days as well. That being said, I have realized that my German language skills have deteriorated quite a bit over the last six years that I have lived and studied in the U.S.. As I was dining at Atria’s Restaurant with my parents and two of their friends it really sank in that it was not just me who realized it. While talking about being bilingual and the different cultural aspects between Germany and the U.S., my father said something along the lines of: “Both my wife and I have noticed that his German has worsened over the past few years. He's a 20-year-old guy and his German skills are not at the level they should for a kid his age.” A similar situation happened two years prior—when I visited my grandmother in Germany. She bluntly told me: “Your German is shit. Do you never speak it?” Back then I thought that it was only a grandmother jokingly teasing her grandson but over the next few years, every time I spoke German at home, I would be scrambling to find the German word before ultimately giving up and saying the English word. This may not seem like a huge issue to many readers, but seeing your native language skills deteriorate in front of your eyes is scarier than any haunted house could ever be. Our own language is not just a form of communication across countries, it is also a link to the culture and rich history of the specific country. Having this connection fully vanish in front of my eyes would be a metaphorical spit on the grave of my ancestors and the history that is connected to my name and family. Although it is a very easy fix for me by enhancing my German vocabulary and bettering my technical skills, for many individuals around the globe it is a much different situation. Before I continue, I ask you to let me indulge your patience as the background context about language endangerment is vital to understanding the bigger picture of language diversity. There are thousands of languages that are to become extinct over the next few centuries due to the fact that the speakers are slowly dying off and with them their language as well. To understand the severity of language endangerment, one must know the classification system that the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has set in place:

Safe (5): The language is spoken by all generations. There is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language, and the intergenerational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted. Stable yet threatened.

Unsafe (4): Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak the language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home, where children interact with their parents and grandparents).

Definitively endangered (3): The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. The youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation. At this stage,
parents may still speak the language to their children, but their children do not typically respond in the language.

Severely endangered (2): The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children.

Critically endangered (1): The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interactions. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it, since there may not be anyone to speak with.

Extinct (0): There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

In a TEDxUTA talk by Colleen Fitzgerald she said “30 languages including English, Arabic, Hindi, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese include more than 4 billion people speaking the language. So if there’s 7 billion people worldwide, and 4 billion speak 30 languages, that does not leave a lot of speakers left for the remaining 6,970 languages.” This puts into perspective how many languages there are across the globe and really how the number of these languages are on the decline and have been so for the past few decades and century. Of the top 30 thirty languages used in the world, English and Chinese are arguably the most prevalent and widely spoken. In David Masci’s article, “Future of Language,” he says linguists and other experts argue that “the new century will see English supplant many other tongues as the language of everyday discourse” (Masci). This language of everyday discourse is related to the lingua franca. Lingua franca is all about connecting people all around the world with a language that is purely there for communicating and nothing else. The mother tongue is the other side of the argument that will be made throughout this paper. As learning a second language is becoming progressively more important and necessary in today's world, losing grip of the mother tongue is a valid and serious concern. Every person needs to find the middle ground of learning the influential lingua franca while also still speaking his or her mother tongue. Achieving my proposal will not only benefit oneself, but also the success of mankind as knowledge, wisdom, experiences and much more can be shared with ease. If this does not succeed, the majority of those 6000-7000 languages around the globe are in danger of becoming extinct and with them their culture, history and knowledge.

**Lingua Franca vs Mother tongue**

In 1887 Dr. L. L. Zamenhof created a language that was purely there for communication and to allow individuals from different backgrounds to interact with each other without problems. In Nicholas Ostler’s article, “Is It Globalization That Endangers Languages?” he references this language which is called Esperanto. He said “its spread is an asset to globalization, since it puts more people in touch with each other across the world, but it does not thereby replace any other linguistic competence” (Ostler 591). Many linguists see Esperanto as the perfect solution to the global language endangerment crisis currently taking place but, because it does not have a big speaking group, it has never held the title as the world’s lingua franca; this title currently belongs to English. In late 2000, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi published the government goals in place for the new century with one of the most controversial recommendations being “to make English the nation’s official second language” (Masci). The report said “Achieving world-class excellence demands that all Japanese acquire a working knowledge of English.” The English language has slowly taken over the business markets all across the globe and it is cementing its place as the
world's lingua franca with former Japanese Prime Minister Obuchi's statement only supporting this fact. In David Masci's article he further explains: “Even in France, known for its resistance to foreign influence, Prime Minister Lionel Jospin recently uttered what amounted to linguistic heresy by acknowledging that the French must learn English, as it is likely to be the world's language someday” (Masci). He continues to reference the increasing number of English speakers by stating: “This group is likely to grow, as an estimated 1 billion people are currently trying to learn English” and also: “An additional 375 million people use English as a second language in their native countries. While they may speak their nation’s indigenous tongue at home, they turn to English to communicate with their countrymen, often at work.” A graph in which German students were asked in which situations they use English was created by Claus Gnutzmann, Jenny Jakish and Frank Rabe for their article, “English as a lingua franca: A source of identity for young Europeans,” only strengthening Masci’s argument of the growing use and necessity in everyday life—English speaking individuals or not.

**Rise of English as the Lingua Franca**

As English is rising as the business and finance language across the globe, with it rises the social and entertainment aspect. While the U.S. is the center for entertainment—may it be film, music, TV, theatre or writing—it is making English come across as a much needed entity if you wish to succeed in entertainment and life as a whole. Masci uses a quote by John Brough, a professor of philosophy at Georgetown University, in which Brough says: “In the coming century, most people will eventually speak English fluently and use it in their everyday lives. Some people may not entirely give up French or German or whatever their native tongue is, but English will probably be what they use most” (Brough quoted by Masci). In addition Pallavi Nimbalwar said, in her article “Renegotiating Linguistic Identities in the Wake of Globalization,” which was published in the European Scientific Journal, that:

A lingua franca offers its speakers more value and utility by increasing the speakers mobility and by offering more social and economic benefits. Thus happens ‘language replacement’, and much language shift and language loss could be attributed to this. Thus languages that are considered lacking offering its speakers certain benefits like economic progress and social mobility are considered to be void of any ‘instrumental or practical value and albeit some amount of ’sentimental value’ remains attached to the native language or the mother tongue, it is often not enough to lend the language enough vigor for sustenance.

As Nimbalwar stated, many languages across the globe do not offer as many benefits as English does and thus the respective speakers tend to lean more towards speaking English than their mother tongue. In an article by the New Strait Times called “Reasons why globalization is resisted by Governments,” University of Kitakysuhu professor of Asian Studies Yoshihara Kunio stated: “Malaysia, for example has not benefited from globalization because the national language cannot be used to create a large man-power to take advantage of globalization and national culture is not strong enough to bind people together” (New Strait Times). Brough and Nimbalwar’s earlier opinions are valid ones and one can't argue about the effectiveness and simplicity a lingua franca would bring upon, but there is no need for all these knowledgeable and culturally paramount languages to become extinct in the process. There will always be benefits and drawbacks that come up when arguing about a lingua franca, but linguists can come together and have both of their sides heard. In Eric Garland’s article “Can Minority Languages Be Saved” he says: “Without question, there will be a need for common languages... But global prosperity and new technologies may also allow smaller cultures to preserve their niches. It is clear from several modern examples that a dying or dead language can turn around become vibrant again, depending on people’s determination...” (Garland 1). An exemplary situation of this is the creation of the International Mother Language Day which celebrates and recognizes Feb. 21, 1952. In the article “Mother language: celebrating the power of
language and identity” by the University Wire, civil engineering major Syeed Iskander recalls this day by stating that on this day “... students and workers were shot and killed in Bangladesh for demonstrating the right to speak their first language…” (University Wire). The situation in Bangladesh was a very severe one due to the unwillingness of the government to allow any other languages to be spoken besides their national language. Having a lingua franca across the globe does not mean there needs to be simply one language for all of mankind, yet for many individuals who are part of a community that speaks an endangered language, they believe that further globalization and an official lingua franca will only further push their language and culture to extinction. The main force behind keeping a language thriving is a passionate want to do so by the speakers themselves.

Urge and Want to Preserve Languages

There is not much just a few organizations can do to keep languages alive and secure unless the speakers themselves are adamant about it as well. Eric Garland, from The Futurist argues: “It is becoming clear that, when people have strong cultural reason to reverse language shift, they can effectively resist the onslaught of majority languages” (Garland 2). Many languages are deeply imbedded into country’s political and social past. Wars have been fought and countries have been divided purely on the languages the various countries citizens speak showing the connection people feel with their native tongue. Linguistic diversity is essential for our society not to become completely homogenous. In the article by University Wire “Mother language: celebrating the power of language and identity”, the President of the Association for Bangladeshi Students and Scholars Raihan Sharif said: “We believe in multiculturalism, we believe in multilingualism, because in the age of globalization, in the age of multi-migration, people are spreading across the world. We try to carry on our legacy and spread the message of our love, our friendship with other people and other cultures” (University Wire). As speakers of the wide array of languages migrate across the world, the one thing that they try to hold onto is their language even if it is difficult at times for some—myself being one of them. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, an author who has been on forefront of fighting for linguistic diversity and language rights, once quoted an anonymous philosopher: “As long as we have the language, we have the culture. As long as we have the culture, we can hold on to the land.” Through this quote Skutnabb-Kangas proves the significance of languages for people and the need not to lose one’s mother tongue as globalization and migration only further expands.

Dying Speaker’s Own Experience

In an article by the New York Times called “Who speaks Wukchumni?” Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee follows and creates and Op-Doc about the story of Marie Wilcox, the last speaker of the Wukchumni language. For several years Wilcox has worked together with the Advocates for Indigenous California Language Survival to create a dictionary that will preserve the Wukchumni language long after Mrs. Wilcox passes away. The Wukchumni tribe, which is part of the Yokuts tribal group, is not acknowledged by the federal government and thus makes it even more difficult for Mrs. Wilcox to try to spread the language. In the short documentary profile about the Wukchumni language, Wilcox says: “See, I’m uncertain about my language and who wants to keep it around. Just a few. Its sad. It just seems weird that I am the last one. I don’t know, it’ll just be gone one of these days” ( Vaughan-Lee). As the last fluent speaker of the Wukchumni language, she carries the weight of preserving the language and with it the vast reservoirs of knowledge and memories. She is the last chance there is to keep this language alive and without her dedication to do so, it would die off like so many of native languages before hers. Although her actions are good first steps to achieving the ultimate goal of keeping the language alive, not one person can do it alone. There needs to be a communal want and urge to help these endangered languages not become extinct, which is starting to grow within the Wukchumni community, yet Emmanuel Vaughan-Lee adds:
“Few seem able to dedicate the time needed to learn Wukchumni and become fluent speakers. Without additional resources and interest, I fear the language, in any meaningful form, may soon exist only in Ms. Wilcox’s dictionary” (Vaughan-Lee). Language revitalization and persistence is not simply something that can be achieved by a few individuals or groups, it is a worldwide phenomenon that needs to be in the pushed within each society.

Conclusion

As many of the previous quotes display, the importance of native tongue or mother tongue to migrants is a major factor in many of them being bilingual and having a comprehensive knowledge of both languages. As my family and I moved to the United States, my mother put a big emphasis on purely speaking German in the home because she knew my brother and I would spend the majority of our time in school or doing extracurricular activities in our younger years as well as our teenage years and thus our German proficiency would decline exponentially after a few years. Little did I know that her fear was a grave concern that ended up coming into fruition. As stated at the beginning of my paper, my German skills have deteriorated significantly. If this is the end result in my case, in which my mother put great emphasis on keeping the connection to our fatherland through language, what will the case be for individuals who just simply conform to the official language of the country they have migrated to or of their own country that has a different official language than their own? In the book Intercultural Communication: An Ecological Approach by Amardo Rodriguez and Devika Chawla, an article by Norimitsu Onishi called “For English studies, Koreans say Goodbye to Dad” is used in which a Korean family had recently immigrated to New Zealand. The parents signed their sons up for school and were quite proud of their successes in such short time at a foreign school. Onishi said that after a few weeks “the parents were pleased that their sons had integrated well into the neighborhood and school, and were now even speaking English to each other. But Ms. Kim was worried that her younger son ... might not form a solid Korean identity” (Chawla 73). This is not just an issue that is affecting myself; it is one that affects many immigrants to new countries who don’t know how to balance the two or more languages in their life equally. Losing your first language or mother tongue takes a big chunk out of your personality and identity.

In the article “Languages in Danger of Death - And their Relation with Globalization, Business and Economy” Muhammad Tariq Khan argues: “that spoken language is the most intimate expression of the identity and personality of the people. Language is also the clearest expression of knowledge, wisdom, freedom and culture of the peoples and of their creative spirit.” (Khan). He/she also uses one of Lawrence Berlin’s articles by saying: “Berlin (2000) reported that people speaking a language among the many feel that there is an integral link between their language and culture and believe that their culture is expressed through their own language and cannot be adequately represented by any other language.” (Khan quoting Berlin )

Do not get me wrong, having a lingua franca is much needed, yet it should not come at the expense of languages that are rich of history, culture and knowledge. By having parents or educators not teach children the importance of bilingualism, the fear of having a homogenous society is a nightmare that just might become reality. The need to, from an early age, have bilingualism be one of the center points of education is becoming more clear now than ever and as globalization continues this will only further increase. In his article Masci quotes Cecilia Munoz, vice president for policy at the National Council of La Raza, who says: “...bilingualism should be encouraged since having knowledge of more than one language is very helpful in today's increasingly global economy” (Masci). Having this mindset not only benefits these children later in life, but it will also save hundreds and hundreds of languages over the next few decades. To conclude, I want to leave you with two more quotes—one by Eric Garland and one by Pallavi Nimbalwar. Garland concludes his article by saying: “The pressures of globalization on minority languages are undeniable, and many will likely disappear. However, extinction is not a certainty. The
trend toward the homogeneity of global culture has stimulated many people to search for their native roots and hold tighter to their cultural identity” (Garland). Nimbalwar, somewhat along the lines, says:

There is no glorification in homogenization if it comes at the cost of multiculturalism and multilingualism. True that the death of certain languages is inevitable, yet we must preserve and save as many as we can, if only to maintain diversity. The threat to languages not only threatens cultural diversity, it leads to the extinction of a community’s identity. A language never dies alone, along dies the vast reservoirs of knowledge, and each last speaker of a particular tongue carries to his grave thousands of years of shared knowledge.

As I leave with these two quotes that stress the importance of linguistic diversity I want you think of a world where there is only one language. It might be easier to communicate, but is not learning new cultures and gaining new knowledge from them one of the things that we strive for as humans? We were not meant to stay within one community but rather experience other cultures and widen our horizons holistically. Conveying these mindsets to the younger minds in our communities will produce open minded, bi or multilingual, successful, and culturally diverse and culturally tolerant humans. Something that is much needed; especially in days like these.

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Back to the Future of Endangered Languages. TEDXUTA, 17 Apr. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=DERu2aAqqWM.


“The Shadow of Slavery: A Look into How Homegoing Depicts the Structural Oppression Apparent in American and Ghanian Society”

By Nathaniel Welbofer, School of Business

Having been born in Ghana and emigrated to the United States at the age of nine, Yaa Gyasi understands the life of Africans and African-Americans – more importantly the connection they have with each other. In her novel, Homegoing, she demonstrates the oppression wrought on by colonialism, imperialism, and slavery by following a family’s lineage dating back to the seventeenth century. These issues remain in memory for white culture, yet their effects are still being felt to this day in the black community. Even after Brown v. Board of Education, there still remains much housing segregation that leaves the poor neighborhoods with failing schools – thus creating a cycle of poverty. Gyasi illustrates the struggles of each generation in the family, which further paints the cycle of oppression that exists. She also shows that institutions put in place by white culture have historically failed African-Americans and Africans alike. I argue that Homegoing shows the implications of colonialism imperialism, and slavery, which displays the connections they have to the struggles in the black community today. Ultimately, Gyasi suggests that the oppression that black people face today is largely systematic, as they were forced to live in a culture and society that favors white people.

Gyasi’s Homegoing uses characters that have been subjected to such oppression. Sadly, these stories are all too familiar with those among the black community. Their oppressors, western culture, subjugated the native African people to benefit their own gain through use of institutions like education, religion, law-enforcement and slavery. Michael Omolewa explains in his article “Educating the ‘Native,’” that the English colonizers had pushed Euro-centered ideals and culture that were “ill-suited and irrelevant” to African people (Omowela 269). Furthermore, Africans had grumbled as they noticed new values like “intolerance, hatred, ‘cutthroat competition,’ disharmony, pride, arrogance, and even cheating” (Omowela 269). Beyond the physical exploitation of black people throughout slavery, Melissa Harris Perry explains the stereotypes that stemmed from it that persist to this day in her book, Sister Citizen. She claims the origin of the Jezebel stereotype as an excuse for white slave owners to sexually exploit their black slaves (Perry 56). By labeling black women as “hyper-sexual,” they were painted as the perpetrator in sexual encounters as opposed to the white male. In today’s world this has evolved to lessen the word value of black women in regards to rape allegations. This is just another sinister example of the continuity of slavery following its legal death. Backlash against these institutions from the black community have been met with much resistance, sometimes resulting in violent, deathly outcomes from those same institutions – mainly the law enforcement. Not even the United States Constitution is free of blame, as Devon Carbado explains in his article, “From Stopping Black People to Killing Black People,” the Fourth Amendment has been interpreted to legalize racial profiling (Carbado 125). This leads to the racial discrimination we see in arrests nationwide – thus spinning the cycle of oppression and poverty. All protagonists in Homegoing are disillusioned to these institutions and white culture, which mirrors the feelings of many in African-American communities today. Slavery was just the beginning of the exploitation and oppression that African-Americans would have to face for centuries.

By comparing the horrors of slavery to Hell, Gyasi demonizes the slaving industry and those involved. Ness, born a slave, is the primary channel through which Gyasi illustrates the life of a slave. Gyasi describes Ness’s life at the first plantation as, “In Hell, the sun scorched cotton so hot it almost burned the palms of your hands to
touch it. Holding those small white puffs almost felt like holding fire, but God forbid you let one drop. The Devil was always watching,” (Gyasi 74). The metaphor of Hell emphasizes the brutal conditions and treatment that Africans were subjected to. The imagery furthers this metaphor, as Gyasi is trying to demonstrate that slave work was a literal Hell on Earth. By referring to the plantation owner as the Devil, she illustrates the fear that the slave masters instilled into them. Ironically, whites pushed Christianity onto Africans and their slaves, yet instead of setting an example of what a good Christian should be, they mirrored the Devil and exacted their own Hell onto their slaves. The relationship between the slaves and slave master is furthered by the Ness’s fear, as “the Devil shows no mercy…[Ness] is beaten until the whip snaps off her back like pulled taffy…some nights, they feared that the Devil is watching them as they lie,” (Gyasi 81). The gruesome diction displays the savagery that white people inflicted to their slaves – something that has not been forgotten in the black community. Ness was driven to paranoia by these beatings, which creates a distrust and fear of her white oppressors. These feelings do not go away easily, and although slavery is long gone the distrust and fear of authoritative whites still lingers.

Gyasi displays this mistreatment of police through the violent details in the chapter following H’s life through his time in prison and freedom. H lived as a freedman following the Civil War, yet the people sworn to “serve and protect” ridded him of this liberty not so long after – for something as insignificant as looking at a white woman (Gyasi 158). She depicts his handling following arrest as, “ten men who had been chained to him on the train ride there…he saw a boy no older than twelve…he looked like he would melt down into a puddle of wet…he’d probably never seen a whip like the one the boss pit had…only heard about them in nightmarish stories his parents told him,” (Gyasi 160). The chain and the whip are synonymous with the torturous aspects of slavery. Through this imagery, Gyasi alludes to the fact that even though slavery was banished, the criminal justice system still permitted the same oppression in practice. The fearful diction also demonstrates the traumatized feelings of the African-American community as a whole, due to the “nightmarish stories” his parents lived through. While serving his sentence, H was whipped and scarred; which after an exchange with a white man calling him out for them, he knew “he couldn’t go back to the free world, marked as he was” (Gyasi 167-168). These scars would be common on slaves as well, illustrating further the continuity of slavery following its legal death. The disillusioned tone also indicates the knowledge that had become common for many blacks at the time – that freedom was not yet truly here.

The educational gap between whites and blacks in Homegoing displays the advantages given to white people that are not given to blacks. This discrepancy was largely due to the segregation that was prevalent and legal in America. Karen Benjamin in his article, “Suburbanizing Jim Crow,” explains that this discrepancy in schooling was done intentionally by lawmakers, particularly in Raleigh, North Carolina (Benjamin p. 226). The local governance had “protected” elite white neighborhoods by placing restrictions on where African-Americans could move to, then equipped the white neighborhoods with newer, better schools (Benjamin 226). This is a blatant act of discriminatory action towards African-Americans, one that demonstrates the malevolent systematic oppression that white culture has induced on the black community. Gyasi displays these discrepancies when Sonny is visiting a white school as,

Sonny looked at the pristine building, clean and shiny, with smartly dressed white children entering and exiting as calmly as can be, he’d thought his own schools, the ones in Harlem that had the ceiling falling in and smelled of some unnamable funk, and he was surprised that both things could even be called ‘schools’…Sonny said he didn’t mind his schools because he never went, and Willie said the fact that he never went was what was wrong with them. (Gyasi 249)

The juxtaposition between the “clean and shiny” white school with the black one that had “ceilings falling in” and an “unnamable funk” display the unmistakable inconsistencies in who our education system benefits – rich white kids. Sonny’s surprised reaction furthers this juxtaposition as he would not even put
the two in the same category. His school failed to even give him reason to attend, which sets him up for little hope of economic mobility. This story is not an isolated one, as many African Americans are caught in this cycle of poverty brought on behind the shadows of intentional segregation that remain prevalent in residency.

Christianity is portrayed as yet another instrument of structurally oppressing the African people by Gyasi. The distrust of Christianity by the Ghanaians is displayed by Yaw as he,

Wasn’t certain he believed in forgiveness. He heard the word most on the few days he went to the white man’s church...and so it had begun to seem to him like a word the white men brought with them when they first came to Africa. A trick their Christians and earned and spoke loudly and freely about to the people of the Gold Coast. Forgiveness, they shouted, all the while committing their wrongs...forgiveness was an act done after the fact, a piece of the bad deeds future. And if you point the people’s eye to the future, they might not see what is being done to hurt them in the present. (Gyasi 237-238)

This enlightened point of view displays the true intentions of the British in spreading Christianity – control. The repetition of the word “forgiveness” demonstrates the shallowness in its meaning, also originating from white institutions. The concluding sentence indicates that the British used Christianity to blind the Ghanaian people and understate the oppression they have and continue to face. The spread of Christianity was represented as a positive thing for Africa by the white, Christian community, yet they took little note or care of the opinions of those it was being pressed onto. While once again rooted in their own self-interests, the English pushed another white institution, Christianity, on the African people.

The emptiness of Christian forgiveness is furthered by the missionary’s murder of Akua’s mother, Abena. In a violent scene, the missionary drowned her in an attempt of baptism, “I took her to the water to be baptized. She didn’t want to go – but I forced her. She thrashed as I carried her through the forest to the river. She thrashed as I lowered her down into the water. She thrashed and thrashed and thrashed, and then she was still. I only wanted her to repent,” (Gyasi 189). This gruesome detail displays the evil qualities of the missionary – forcing his own religion on her against her will. Ironically, he breaks a tenant of his own religion “Thou shall not kill,” while performing a sacrament of Christianity (Exodus 20:13). This indicates the contradictions the missionaries had in their teachings and actions, which further leads to the emptiness of the white man’s word. It also demonstrates that the true reason for spreading Christianity was not to offer salvation to the Africans, but to use it as a way to control their lives. Following her drowning, the missionary burned her corpse and her belongings, while pleading for his God to forgive him (Gyasi 189). This directly coincides with what Yaw was alluding to in his summation of Christian forgiveness. The white people were using this term as a way to rid themselves of the guilt and Hell in the afterlife – even though they had imposed a real life version of Hell onto the Africans. This incident is a microcosm of the abusive relationship between Christianity and Africans – it was forced onto them whether they embraced it or not. This displays that Christianity was a way for the British to try to better control the mind and spirit of the African people, which makes them easier to exploit.

Another way the English oppressed the Ghanaians is through their use of their own language, Gyasi illustrates the class associations and discomfort with speaking English. The English ran schools had required Africans to speak and write in intelligible and meaningful English (Omowela 275). However, only the top tier of African students were ever allowed to study English. Gyasi expresses the discomfort speaking English by Africans,

It was like he had opened a gate, her body began to slip into an easy stance, and Yaw realized that it was not his scar that had terrified her, but rather the problem of language, marker of her education, her class, compared with his. She had been terrified that for the teacher of the white book, she would have to speak the white tongue. Now, released from English Esther smiled more
brightly than Yaw had seen anyone smile in ages. (Gyasi 230)

The eased diction demonstrates how anxious and uncomfortable Esther was to speak her spotty English because she was ashamed it would reveal her low education and economic levels. This also illustrates the longing that Africans have to live in their native culture. The “white book” and “white tongue” display the connection that the school curriculum has with English; and language is a physical embodiment of a culture. This reveals the agenda the British had when creating these schools – to culturally suppress the Africans. Yaw’s fascination with Esther’s smile indicates that he does not see this from his students – meaning that they are not interested or engaged. This is still a pressing issue in Ghanaian society, as Charles Owo Ewie explains in his article, “The Language Policy of Education in Ghana,” Ghana made English the official language of learning in May 2002, which infringes on their linguistic human rights (Owu-Ewie 79). This adoption of English demonstrates legacy of the continuity of the systematic oppression – further pushing them into the white man’s world.

The English exploitation of the African people continued to America, where institutions were set up to benefit white society and disregard the black community. In Homegoing Gyasi displays the sole purpose for Africans in America – forced labor. With this in mind, it indicates that the Africans had been forced into the white, American society – which naturally benefited white Americans rather than African-Americans. Through Sonny, Gyasi points out that the education system has failed African-Americans while the white children get to attend the good schools and set themselves up well financially. This leads to the cycle of poverty that strikes so many black neighborhoods nationwide. In today’s America, education is the path to economic stability, and without adequate educational institutions African-Americans are systematically blocked from this path. The exchange between Yaw and Esther show the implications of the British forcing English down the African’s throat. The staple of every culture is its language, and the British had pushed the Ghanaians to learn English in exchange for education. Since the English had set their white system of economic stability through education, this was their only hope of escaping poverty. This allowed the British curriculum to teach British values and Euro-Centered history – having little to no importance to the African children. Gyasi portrays missionary work as evil and non-consensual, which juxtaposes many white people’s ideas of missionary work. The English pushed Christianity upon the Africans in order to blind them from the exploiting relationship they had been a part of. Yaw explains that they used the concept of forgiveness to rid themselves of their guilt of the Hell they had inflicted on the Africans and to ease relations with the Africans – so they could control them easier. Ultimately, Homegoing illustrates the institutions that white culture has set up were meant to exploit Africans and African-Americans alike. Through colonialism, imperialism, and slavery, Africans were forced into a world shaped by white people for white people. A serious discussion needs to take place regarding how we can make our institutions more beneficial to the needs of African-Americans and other minorities, not just their white creators. Affirmative Action and Brown v. Board of Education are a good starting point, yet they are a means to lessen the effects of the systemic oppression – they do not address the root cause. African-Americans feel helpless after hundreds of years of this oppression, as Gyasi points out throughout Homegoing. If we are to create a fairer and accepting society, then we must seriously consider reform to the institutions that push this oppression and look at the origins of why our society was built the way it was.

1In Homegoing this refers to the British and American societies
2These tests divided the students into four groups: Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, and Group 4. Group 1 was permitted to learn English, as they had the highest scores. Group 2 learned subjects like history, religion, Latin, and Yoruba. Group 3 was taught algebra, chemistry, botany and biology. While Group 4 was left with low-intellectual training in drawing, bookkeeping, shorthand, and art.
3Professor of Education at Ohio University


Everyone knew that kid in elementary school who never really fit in, was kind of nerdy, always sat alone at lunch, and any time they were made fun of the teacher always stepped in to stop the teasing. But what if instead of stopping the teasing, the teacher joined in? This rather basic scenario of an elementary school kid can be an analogy for the Japanese American experience during World War II. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, anyone in America of Japanese descent became the kid who never really fit in. The government ordered all Japanese Americans to be placed into internment camps because they were considered dangerous and potential threats to the safety of the nation. There was an anti-Japanese sentiment of xenophobia that spread across the American population thus alienating them from society. There is a plethora of written work about how the American government justified the internment. However, Julie Otsuka’s novel *When the Emperor was Divine* offers a different perspective of the internment from the traditional textbook description. Otsuka argues that the American government created the Japanese American as the “Other” through the description of the internment camp setting, the interaction between a soldier and an internee child during relocation, geographical symbolism, and the namelessness of the characters in order to demonstrate how the American government’s forced relocation, mass incarceration, and relocation of Japanese Americans during WWII hinges on the tendency of authority figures to erect social constructs to control marginalized minority groups.

In order to understand why the Japanese Americans are portrayed as the “Other”, one must first understand how these social constructs are created. In modern day, it is common for people to refer to social constructs as societal norms and traditions alone, such as a high school prom or getting a driver’s license at sixteen. However, this is a misconception because social constructs, while they are generally accepted by society and can be driven by societal norms, also begin with mental and cultural discourse. Thus, social constructs are a result of an interplay between mental and cultural discourse as well as societal norms. According to Schwarz, Norbert and Bless mental constructs “require a representation of the target (i.e the object of judgment), as well as a representation of some standard against which the target is evaluated” (120). In other words, they are formed through a comparison between a person, trait, or custom that is familiar and one that is foreign or un-relatable to the traditional regularities of a society. This recognition of a something that is unfamiliar is the initial spark that ignites quick judgements that show the target as “different.” Schwarz, Norbert and Bless go on to say that “people rarely retrieve all information that may be relevant to a judgement but truncate the search process as soon as ‘enough’ information has come to mind forming a judgement…” (120). Ultimately, when people realize that they are interacting with someone or something that possesses different qualities than themselves, snap judgements are made before properly getting to know the person and gaining a well-rounded understanding. This pattern, when repeated over and over among many people, eventually causes mental constructs to evolve into social constructs that are believed and followed by the majority of a population.

Through the process of truncated judgement, there is an impulse of the majority to construct the dehumanized “Other”. This phenomenon of the “Other” can be traced in many cultures throughout...
history. In my argument I will draw on concepts from Edward Said's Orientalism to show that the American government constructed the Japanese American as the “Other”. Said refers to the “Orient” as the “Other” and states “the Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be ‘Oriental’... but also because it could be- that is, submitted to being- made Oriental” (6). In other words, Said is saying that the Orientalist “Other” of the East, is constructed and made foreign through social constructs that are erected from the judgments of the presumably superior West. In the case of *When the Emperor was Divine* the WWII Japanese American is constructed as the “Other” by the supposed superior majority- the American Government. The Japanese American is the minority in WWII America that possesses many foreign qualities from the majority (i.e. skin color, heritage, language, traditions, values). According to Said Westerners consider people from Asia to be “ripe for reform and re-education” (291). In an American context, the white majority as well as the government seeks to remove these foreign qualities from the minority to satisfy their social constructs, and encourage or even compel assimilation into contemporary society to ensure that life remains familiar and similar to current culture so the majority do not feel threatened. This forced assimilation in turn causes diverse minorities to often be dehumanized and lumped into a similar category of being different, which allows the majority thinker to create the construct of the “Other” and do harm to them without necessarily feeling much emotion. This can then become the basis for racial slurs, or hate crimes and is further exemplified through literature.

This phenomenon of the “Other” or “Othering” someone can lead to systematic institutional discrimination as seen through the forced internment of Japanese Americans in *When the Emperor was Divine*. Literature often reflects the views, values, and traditions of a culture. Thus, a society's racial views are often reflected in written expression leading literary critics to identify the “Other” within literary texts. Ethnic literary studies seeks to explore the concept of the “Other” and what that means for the time and society that the piece is written in. Ethnic studies involve “the view that racism is not an aberration but inherent to the guiding narratives of national progress” (Mays 1990). Further, ethnic studies examine the role of the “Other” in literature to determine how the role functions as a means to comment on society in that time period. Critics now “emphasize the hybridity of all cultures... and intermixture of cultures... may be read as enriching literature and art...” (Mays 1991). The “Other” is now read not only as a method of understanding how society is run during that time period, but also what the authors commentary about society is. Ethnic studies and the role of the “Other” is important in *When the Emperor was Divine* because it scrutinizes White America's role in alienating Japanese Americans during WWII and offers extensive commentary about societal constructs and boundaries that are erected for the sake of protection for the majority.

Otsuka dedicates the third section of *When the Emperor was Divine* to the family's experience in the internment camp to highlight its function as a means of alienation and “Othering” by the American government. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the government issued an order for all Japanese Americans to leave their homes and travel to internment camps where they would live because they appeared to be untrustworthy, being of Japanese descent. Despite being Americans and living peacefully for many years within American society they “found themselves at this cusp between domestic and wartime policy... friend or foe” (Park 139). Because they looked different from the white majority, and descended from a Japanese heritage, they too were labeled as enemies who attacked Pearl Harbor and imprisoned.

In the novel, Otsuka sets the scene at the internment camp by showing a high level of government control and surveillance. The internment camp demonstrates that the people inside do not belong in society; they are not “American” enough to function in society without supervision. This ideology of the “Other” is fueled by the internment camp because the camp only supports the fear of the Japanese
Americans. The camp is a physical construct that was erected by the American government to show other Americans that people of Japanese descent are not loyal and therefore should be placed under heavy watch. Otsuka states that “there was a guard in each tower, and he carried a machine gun and binoculars and at night he manned the searchlight” (51). The heavy scrutiny by government officials shows that they are being treated as if they are prisoners of war or have committed a capital crime, they are essentially being reduced to the enemy. The heavy surveillance is further exemplified by all the rules they must follow while in the camps. Otsuka describes the “rules about food: No second helpings...And books: No books in Japanese... about religion: No Emperor worshipping Shintos allowed” (61). These rules are surveillance which ensures a stripping of their identity. Because they cannot live freely and are corralled by a strict set of rules, Otsuka is showing how the Japanese American is reduced to the enemy. The American government, by purposefully removing them from their homes and the rest of society solely because of their heritage are blatantly “Othering” them without a concrete cause. Thus, the internment camp functions as a direct vessel for contributing to the “Othering” of the Japanese Americans because it isolates them from the outside world and society.

Not only are Japanese Americans placed under heavy surveillance in the camps by the government, but also are subjected to despicable living conditions on their journey to the camp and also while living in the camp. Before going to the internment camp Otsuka states that “all summer long they had lived in the old horse stalls in the stables behind the racetrack” (30). By being forced to live in the stables, they are essentially being reduced to animals. The government is dehumanizing them completely by requiring them to live as a barn animal would. Thus, stripping them of their dignity and their humanity. In the camp the family is forced to live in a dehumanized state as well, with “three irons cots and a potbellied stove... a single bare bulb that hung down from the ceiling... a table made out of crate wood... there was no running water and the toilets were half a block away” (Otsuka 51). This scene epitomizes the dehumanization of the Japanese Americans during WWII. Because Otsuka describes their living conditions in such detail, she is demonstrating the extent to which they were stripped of their identity. They were stripped not only of their Japanese identity, but also of their American identity and given the label of simply the enemy. The primitive and dehumanizing conditions of the camp also demonstrate that if the Japanese Americans do not cooperate with the government by completely stripping themselves of their heritage and completely assimilating into modern American ways, then they will be severely punished. Ultimately, the “Othering” of the Japanese American is what led them to be imprisoned in the camps, but the camp is what solidified their identity as the “Other” because it removed them from society altogether and forced them to live in poor conditions under constant surveillance.

Furthermore, the interaction between the soldier and the girl during the forced relocation to the camp, demonstrates society’s collective view that the Japanese American “Other” is not only the enemy but also inferior to other Americans. While on the train to the internment camp, a soldier is walking around instructing everyone to pull down the shades over the windows. When he tells the girl to pull hers down she does so and thinks “he did not smile but she knew that he would if he could” (Otsuka 27). This interaction is skewed by the unreliable narration of the little girl. She sees him simply as an instructor telling her to pull the shade down and believes his lack of a smile to be something that he simply was not allowed to do. However, knowing that the Japanese Americans are intentionally being “Othered” by the government it becomes clear that his character was not as the little girl described it. The soldier walks around repeatedly telling everyone to pull the shade down so that they will not be seen at the next train station, because they are the enemy. Should they be seen, other Americans may feel threatened and act in violence. The soldier embodies the governments military authority by giving direct orders to lower the shades while on the train. Because the Japanese Americans have been alienated by the government,
the soldier does not have any emotion or connection to the passengers on the train, thus accounting for his lack of a smile when talking to the little girl. The alienation has made them inferior and incapable of being treated like regular people. Otsuka shows readers that the alienation has reduced them to inferior beings that are not worth connecting with because they are the enemy. This ideology that has been manifested by the government is reflective of Otsuka's commentary that these social constructs are manifested simply to encourage conformity and rejection of things that are different. The scene on the train specifically highlights interaction between the accused “Other” and one who is accepted in society. This interaction shows just how influential institutions of authority can be because they completely dehumanize and deem inferior those who do not perfectly fit in and thus provide positions of power and authority to those who are assimilated into society.

The geographical symbolism throughout the novel reflects the “Other's” inability to achieve ultimate freedom. On page 58, the girl is describing what it's like beyond the fence that captivates her and her brother. She describes a dry riverbed that was once a salt-lake during the ice age. She says that during the ice age “there were no fences...no names... no Utah... no Nevada... just lots and lots of water” (Otsuka). This description of the land where they are currently living is in its purest state. Humans had not touched that land, it was boundless. But now the lake is dried up, it has become desert and there are now fences all around. It’s as if all opportunity that the land once offered is now gone with the water. The water offered abundant life and freedom to those who encountered it. The boundary of the fence was created by humans to encage others and prevent them from having freedom. But it was not the land that chose these boundaries, the American government erected these physical constructs to demonstrate ownership of an area. Thus, the conversation between the girl and her brother highlight Otsuka's negative commentary that constructs are created to control and encourage conformity. Much like the water that disappeared years and years ago, so has the freedom of Japanese Americans as they are now imprisoned in an internment camp as the “Other”, because they supposedly cannot be trusted. This conversation between the girl and the boy leads to the boy having a dream about water. In his dream, he “saw the ancient salt-lake floating above the floor of the desert... drifting down through the reeds and fish were swimming through his fingers...” (Otsuka 59). The boy dreams of swimming and essentially being free. The water offers an image of freedom for him amidst the internment that they are experiencing because it is natural and pure, contrary to the fences and boundaries that surround them. Thus, Otsuka shows through the focus on water and landscape in these two instances that the boundaries and lines the American government created are artificial and contrary to the natural freedom and purity of nature itself. These social constructs manifest ideologies that pit people against each other because of race, class, etc. Ultimately, conveying that people tend to generalize and stereotype against things they don't understand further erecting artificial boundaries thus preventing the purity and freedom of people to live.

The novel's main characters remain nameless throughout the story, making their experience a universal human experience rather than a strictly Japanese experience so that readers can connect to the situation. By choosing to not provide readers with names of the main characters, Otsuka is essentially critiquing the concept of “Othering”. In an analysis of the novel, Tina Chen argues that the purpose of the namelessness is to “encourage... readers to concentrate on the universal dimension of the family's experience” (167). In other words, by referring to the main characters as simply “the girl”, “the boy”, “the woman”, the ability to easily “Other” them is greatly reduced because they are identified by merely their gender and age. These terms pertain to all people, in all cultures making it much easier to relate the struggle this family endures. By universalizing their identification, Otsuka removes the ability of the reader to say “Well that's not me, they're Japanese and I'm not so this has nothing to do with me”. It becomes clear that readers “are supposed to align [themselves] with the outcast family, experiencing
discrimination and marginalization from a subject position as close as possible to that of a Japanese American...” (Dunbar 32). Ultimately, the namelessness of the characters provides an interesting commentary by Otsuka about the effects of “Othering”. It becomes clear that Otsuka is defying the social constructs of cultural bias by universalizing the struggle of the family. If she had given them traditional Japanese names, it would be easy for readers to disconnect themselves from the story and discredit the struggle Japanese Americans faced through the internment. However, by universalizing the characters the struggle and pain in the story becomes more personal to all readers. This ultimately highlights the negative effects of social constructs because if the characters were not universalized it would be easy to immediately write them off and argue they should just assimilate fully into American culture to avoid problems. But when read from an unbiased perspective, the ability to “Other” the story is removed and thus can be understood from a personal standpoint with regards to internal morals and values.

Otsuka’s novel explores the concept of the “Other” through a perspective that highlights the negativity and wrongdoings of the American governments internment and forced assimilation of Japanese Americans during WWII. Otsuka does not explicitly state that social constructs have negative effects, nor does she explicitly blame the American government for the internment. However, she exposes the negative effects of social constructs because she demonstrates how they create division between groups of people by casting the marginalized group out of society and alienating them as the enemy. By pitting people against each other through alienation, it becomes easier to manipulate groups of people into forced assimilation. During WWII, the American government created the Japanese American as the “Other” to be feared, thus allowing for the rest of the nation to view them as the enemy. This then led to their forced assimilation or complete alienation from American society altogether.

Works Cited


“... 8! 9!! 10!!!” As everyone in the ring counted in excitement, I couldn’t contain my pride as an eight-year old boy that I had worked with for the past year, smiling ear to ear, held his gaze upwards long enough for his mother to take the first picture of her son looking at the camera. A snapshot of the joy that filled the arena that day was made possible through his participation in therapeutic riding and hippotherapy. A highly specialized treatment, hippotherapy can be defined as “(...) physical, occupational, or speech therapy that uses the movement of the horse as a treatment tool (...). The goal of hippotherapy is for professional treatment to improve neurological functioning in cognition, body, movement, organization, and attention levels.” (Apel).

I distinctly remember this moment, among countless others, as a demonstration of the direct impact equine therapy can have on its participants and families. Unfortunately, only a very small percentage of the disabled population across the nation has access to this extremely influential therapy, which benefits the participants both physically and emotionally. Nationally, thousands of families are put on waiting lists for hippotherapy and therapeutic riding programs year after year. Only a small number of therapeutic centers exist near Pittsburgh, yet the need is continually increasing. As of 2014, more than 10% of the Pittsburgh population under 65 is recorded as having a disability (“With a Disability”). The U.S. Census Bureau defines a person as having a disability if they have “difficulty performing a specific set of functional and participatory activities” (“Nearly 1 in 5”). My personal experience as an equine therapy volunteer suggests that this large population would benefit highly from either therapeutic riding or hippotherapy.

While Duquesne does have some volunteer and fieldwork options to work with the handicapped, there is currently no integrative equine therapy program. Implementation of a program would simultaneously accomplish three goals: Serve the disabled on campus and in the city of Pittsburgh, provide opportunities to students both in the health science school and those in need of volunteer hours, and fulfill Duquesne’s core mission as a university that “serves God by serving students through (...) service to the church, the community, the nation, and the world” (Duquesne University). By instituting a hippotherapy program through the Rangos School of Health Sciences and with the collaboration with the Dean of Health Sciences, Dr. Turocy, the disabled populations on campus and in the city of Pittsburgh would have access to a unique, customized approach to therapy improving their social and motor skills. Through the utilization of Duquesne volunteers, the program would simultaneously support the University’s mission statement, provide meaningful opportunities for volunteers, and create important research and fieldwork positions for Rangos students in this low-density, high-demand therapeutic field.

Hippotherapy can benefit participants physically, mentally, and emotionally. Participants are exposed to a situation that many in the general population are unable to access, not only increasing their pride but also their confidence. As one proud mother of a hippotherapy rider claimed, “Nothing has reached him and brought him out of his world of autism like his interaction and relationship with the horses and the volunteers” (Apel). This form of therapy creates an alternative environment that fosters openness.
within the participant. Participants often claim that when interacting with the horse, they feel as though the horse does not judge them, and instead there is a feeling of acceptance present that is lacking in human society (Peters, Email Interview). A nonjudgmental attitude allows the participants to be themselves, creating an interactive and comfortable setting for therapy to take place. In general, animal assisted therapy advances socialization in the participant, increases responsiveness and mental alertness (Heimlich). Personally, in my time volunteering at a New York state therapeutic riding facility named Pegasus, I have observed a positivity that emanates from the staff and volunteers to the participants and ultimately their caregivers, as each party benefits from the facilitation of equine therapy. This positive attitude is essential in fostering growth for the participant both physically and mentally. All of the behaviors learned in this environment can become routine and incorporated in the every day lives of the participants. Countless physical benefits can be attributed to the movement to the horse. According to Pegasus volunteer coordinator and PATH certified instructor, Lynn Peters, “Because the movement of a horse closely resembles the gait of a human, riding can elicit changes in the rider helping to improve muscle strength, core strength and balance. It can also benefit individuals with sensory integration issues in establishing rhythm, organizing and responding to sensory input, and increased body awareness. Individuals with cognitive impairments can benefit from an increase in concentration, patience, and team building with their horse and volunteer team” (Peters, Email Interview). For some who are physically unable to walk independently, this is their chance to walk again. They are able to “walk” across a large area of space without the use of machines. Also, since the rider is on top of a horse, he or she is elevated to a higher level, increasing self-confidence and enforcing the idea of independence to the rider. All of these benefits would directly affect the Pittsburgh and Duquesne campus community, spreading not only a “can do” attitude across the participants and students, but also increasing the quality of life of these individuals.

The facilitation of volunteers in therapeutic riding and hippotherapy programs is essential to the success of the riders. Volunteers for these sorts of programs need no prior experience with horses or with the riders; all they need is a positive attitude and a determination to focus on and help the participant. Volunteers, known as side walkers, provide stability for the rider when needed, as well as interact and bond with the participant over the course of the program. According to PATH certified instructor, Lynn Peters, “Riding in a group promotes interaction and bonding between participants and their volunteer team, instructor and other participants. It encourages communication, builds listening skills and provides an opportunity for support and encouragement among participants in accomplishing lesson skills” (Peters Email Interview). These interactions create social and emotional growth for the participants that can be applied to their lives outside of the barn. Volunteers also benefit from creating a visible difference in the participant’s life. Volunteering in such a positive environment not only increases their world-view of acceptance and the disabled, but it also provides focus and the feeling of self-importance to the volunteer, a highly beneficial perspective essential to a student’s success.

Volunteering in an environment where a direct, visible impact is available can be extremely influential in the volunteer’s attitudes towards their own lives. A director of special education at a charter school, Erin Grimm, spoke to this effect. Discussing a young man with a terminal illness at risk not only academically but also emotionally, she examined the impact that volunteering at a therapeutic riding program had on him. “He realized that he wanted to give back to the children and young adults participating in the program. As he participated each week, he began to regain a strong sense of self-confidence and pride that inspired him to not only attend school each day, but to live each day to the fullest despite the outcome” (Grimm). Volunteers hear and see the impact of the “can do” attitude on the participants, and are continually inspired by the rider’s determination and relentless desire to succeed.
Unfortunately, volunteer opportunities on many college campuses, including Duquesne University, are often much less tangible and temporary; in some cases, they are more a mechanism to fulfill a time requirement for specific clubs and activities than any meaningful pursuit. According to researcher Dwight Giles, “Attending college removes students from the web of activities and organizations that have tied them to their communities (...) this uprooting contributes to the dramatic decline in volunteer service that has been noted between high school and college” (Giles). This gap not only contributes to the sense of not belonging experienced by many freshmen, but the decline of their mental health as well. By volunteering in a program that requires commitment and focus, Duquesne students are given more opportunities to experience structural and emotional ties to their community. By working with the disabled population, the volunteers are able change their mindsets towards the handicapped, generating an openness and acceptance not only in the program, but also in the volunteers’ daily environments. By allowing Duquesne students to participate in the program proposed, they would have access to more meaningful and life-altering experiences that could foster a dedication to service within students and across campus.

The lack of equine therapy availability is unfortunately due to a number of factors, including a dearth of positive clinical evidence, safety considerations and concerns about the ethics of using animals for such programs. Hippotherapy and therapeutic riding is a fairly recent approach to therapy in the U.S., having been introduced here in the 1970s. Although previously established successfully in many European countries, some in America remain skeptical of equine-based therapy, calling it too experimental and dangerous. As a researcher for the Journal of Rehabilitation, Kathryn Heimlich, states, “Full acceptance into the therapeutic mainstream has been blocked by the lack of quantitative data assessing its effectiveness” (Heimlich). A lack of concrete evidence illustrating positive cognitive effects in participants is a valid counterargument against hippotherapy. Due to its relatively recent incorporation in the U.S., the study of participants over a long period of time has been difficult to achieve due to the fast-growing development of technology and the wide variability inherent in disparate programs found across the nation. However, as time goes on and the therapeutic approach coalesces around a standard of practice, more studies will be done to prove the beneficial effects of equine therapy over a longer period of time across various populations.

The ethics and safety of equine therapy must be taken into consideration when addressing the lack of programs across America. Horses chosen for these programs must be “screened to make sure they have the appropriate temperament for this job” (Apel). Participants vary in their behaviors, aggression, and temperament, and it is not uncommon for riders to make loud noises, kick, and perform other dangerous behaviors around or on the horse. In such instances, the safety of both the horse and the participant are at risk. Horses must be highly trained in order to acclimate to the spontaneous reactions that can arise from the participants. Moreover, safety guidelines must be in place to provide a quick and efficient dismount of the participants if need be. The ethics of using animals in animal-assisted therapy is also a question, considering the unpredictable demeanors of participants. However, as animal activist and author of Ethics and the Beast: A Specified Argument for Animal Liberation, Tzachi Zamir, concludes, “Hippotherapy...is not a form of human-animal connection that appears detrimental to the horse. The utilitarian benefits for such horses – they get to exist, lead safe and relatively comfortable lives, are not abused or exploited – outweigh the price they pay.” (Zamir). Established protocols and training also play a role in minimizing program risk. Disruptive and dangerous behaviors displayed by a participant, at any time, that involve the well-being of the horse must be immediately stopped through discussion or, if necessary, a dismount and further consultation with the caregiver. Certain policies must be in place to protect all members of the program: the horse, the participant, the volunteers, and the instructor.
These requirements address valid and necessary concerns that must be addressed when structuring and implementing an equine therapy program at Duquesne, as they are necessary to ensure not only the best results with the riders, but also the happiness and peace of mind of the volunteers, caregivers and organizations, such as Duquesne, that are involved.

Taking these counterarguments into consideration, Duquesne University could feasibly start an equine program through the Rangos School of Health Sciences. In fact, one university has already successfully implemented a hippotherapy program through their Speech Language Pathology department. Ithaca College runs an eight-week program named Strides to assist children with autism learn to communicate in both social and educational environments. Led by Dr. Caswell, and using iPads to facilitate the learning process and the incorporation of riding, “the Strides program puts children on horseback and gives each family iPads equipped with speech generating applications. Caswell and her team of Ithaca College graduate students provide intensive, highly customized training and ongoing support. The unique therapeutic approach has helped children reach significant breakthroughs in communication, both verbally and through effective use of the device” (Israel). Through the use of students in the graduate year of the speech language pathology program, participants are not only benefitting from their knowledge, but the students are also gaining valuable fieldwork experience in a different and unique setting. Through the careful examination of Ithaca’s program, Duquesne can benefit from their experience and incorporate many of their ideas regarding logistics into a hippotherapy program through Rangos.

The Strides program is owned and copyrighted by Southern Tier Alternative Therapies Inc. (STAT), an organization that paired with Ithaca College in order to provide funding through grants and scholarships, as well as provide insight into the organization and needs of a therapeutic riding and hippotherapy program. STAT actually moved from New York to Ligonier, PA in order to be closer to the Pittsburgh Children’s Hospital and allow the founder, Catherine Markosky, to gain access to treatment for her disabled son, who suffers from a condition called Costello Syndrome (Markosky). Interested in giving their child the benefits of hippotherapy, Markosky and her family were shocked by the extensive waiting lists and low availability of equine therapy in Pittsburgh. So, instead of waiting, they founded STAT to provide the opportunity of hippotherapy and therapeutic riding to children who may not be able to afford it otherwise, as well as those placed on extremely long waiting lists (Markosky). STAT’s policy was based on the idea “to build a center for our entire community - for the disabled and the able-bodied - a place to heal - a place to come together and bear witness to miracles” (Markosky). STAT’s success story with Ithaca College would be an invaluable model for instituting a therapeutic riding program at Duquesne. If partnered with the Rangos School of Health Sciences, STAT could provide guidance, experience, facilities and organization to the program, and potentially sponsor or source donations needed for the program. Rangos, in turn, would support and incorporate the therapies into relevant academic programs (i.e. Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Language Pathology), allowing for a multidisciplinary approach in which students across programs could work together to provide the most individualized therapy for participants. A multifaceted design of Duquesne’s potential hippotherapy program would provide an outstanding opportunity for fieldwork and the application of a student’s chosen profession in a different and new setting. Rangos students could work to ensure the participants receive the kind of therapy they need, while Duquesne volunteers of any discipline could provide assistance and support for the participants. Providing a great sense of community to Duquesne, the program proposed would provide a extraordinary opportunity for students to meet others in various career fields, and work towards the improvement of the Pittsburgh community in general and its disabled population in particular.

Duquesne University already has many of the necessary components needed to implement an equine
therapy program. The Duquesne Equestrian Team is aligned with Fox Hollow Stables in Wampum, PA, providing many options for a hippotherapy program. If possible, the equine program could take place there, or at a barn nearby recommended and supported by the Equestrian team here on campus. The Equestrian team runs purely for personal benefit and often struggles to meet the demanding expenses of a competitive show team. By linking an equine therapy program with the Equestrian team, both sides could benefit. In alliance with STAT, the equine therapy program could take place at Fox Hollow Stables with the facilitation of properly screened horses, and could also benefit through a representation of the program through the Equestrian team. The Equestrian team could grow as well, gaining valuable service-oriented exposure on campus, and potentially gaining membership, donations and raising awareness for both the equine therapy and the team.

A large number of students on campus are continually looking to give back to their community. By providing a meaningful and lasting program, Duquesne volunteers could interact with other students on campus while accomplishing this goal. According to Pegasus’ Peters, requirements to start such a program are minimal: “The needs are horses suitable for the job, a place to provide lesson sessions, instructors, [and] volunteers as necessary. The program can be very small, in which case needs would be basic, and would grow if the center chooses to grow. The horses are carefully chosen for their temperament, ability to handle specific tasks relative to the type of therapeutic job they may have (mounted, unmounted) and are trained for their specific job” (Peters Email Interview). Fox Hollow Stables and the Equestrian team could potentially provide a place, while personnel for the program could be provided through the highly trained STAT instructors, and the stable would be compensated for the use of their location. By working with STAT and the university, capital support could be provided or sourced. If started as a very small program, the only funds necessary would be to pay Fox Hollow Stables for the use and training of one of their horses and their location. To start the program, only one horse is needed. The best choice for the program at its starting phase would be to lease and train the horse, costing around $400 per month. Boarding at Fox Hollow Stables would cost around $225 per month and the annual upkeep (food, trim, and veterinary care) would cost around $320 per month. In order to use the riding arena for the therapeutic riding program five times a week and pay compensation for the instructor, the cost would be around $800 a month. In total, starting a small, basic therapeutic riding program could cost as little $20,940 per year. With an operating budget of $288 million (Duquesne University) and potential partnerships with STAT and other organizations, the initial cost of this program is achievable with careful planning and budgeting. As the program grows, more funding would be needed and could be provided through the use of grants and scholarships through STAT, the city of Pittsburgh, and various organizations such as the Pittsburgh Penguins. In fact, the Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation and the Citrone Fund have given $30,000 two years in a row to STAT to facilitate the growth of their equine therapy programs.

Participants and perhaps some volunteers could also be provided through a program called Best Buddies here on the Duquesne campus. Best Buddies hosts numerous events, which pair college students with individuals with intellectual and development disabilities, which is abbreviated as IDD. At Duquesne, there are 111 participants with IDD and 200 volunteers (Best Buddies Executive Board, Email Interview). Not only could Best Buddies have some events at the equine therapy program, but also Best Buddy participants and their families could be recommended to the equine therapy program based on their needs. If affiliated, volunteers from Best Buddies could transition to the equine therapy program based on their schedules and availability, as well as providing some change and options in their volunteering. Creating a connection with Best Buddies, as well as reaching out to those in the city of Pittsburgh, would provide no shortage of participants for the program.
Transportation is also feasible, leveraging volunteers who own cars to create a carpooling service. There are also service vans provided for volunteers through Duquesne University. According to current nursing student and volunteer at a nursing home, Ashley Pifferetti, “Duquesne University provides volunteers with a volunteer rental car that students can drive to and from volunteering. It’s completely free and in order to access it, students just have to submit an application to get it approved” (Pifferetti, Personal Interview). With all of the underlying elements already present, Duquesne University could realistically start a hippotherapy program, not only wholly supporting the University’s mission statement and serving the needs of an underserved local population, but also creating a sense of community with the disabled population in Pittsburgh and among the students here at Duquesne.

With an extremely high need for alternative therapies to address the disabled populations in Pittsburgh, implementation of an equine therapy program at Duquesne University could provide the benefits of therapeutic riding and hippotherapy to participants. Giving more opportunities to volunteers across campus to provide a meaningful impact in a person’s life, this program could also provide present students, enrolled in the various academic tracks offered by the Rangos School, an opportunity for valuable experience and unique applications of their coursework in the field. Participants, meanwhile, benefit physically and socially by interacting not only with the horses, but the volunteers as well. The program could even be linked with existing programs such as Best Buddies to provide participants and even some volunteers. Finally, such a program would lend a special and valuable element to Duquesne University, providing more attraction to prospective students and faculty and underscoring Duquesne’s commitment to its mission and its community. A program feasible through affiliations with STAT and the Equestrian team, equine therapy could be a unique and extremely altruistic aspect of Duquesne’s students and the university itself. After all, who wouldn’t want to be the one getting a child to smile while speaking for the very first time, or concentrating long enough for their family to take a picture, and touching and being touched by the countless experiences that take place during these equine therapy sessions? And which university would not want to be affiliated with such miracles?

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Citizen: A Dark and Unsafe Place for White Readers

By Devon Lyons, Rangos School of Health Sciences
Instructor: Dr. Maureen Gallagher

In 2014, Claudia Rankine published her latest novel, Citizen: An American Lyric, and it quickly gained national attention for its recounting of unsettling racist moments that occur in everyday life. Jonathan Farmer, a writer for The Slate Book Review, writes, “It is one of the best books I’ve ever wanted not to read” and that is how many white reader will feel while reading this book. (Farmer). Many white readers try to avoid the topic of racism at all costs because it makes them uncomfortable. Many others believe that racism does not occur today solely because it they do not see or recognize it occurring right in front of them. Citizen is attempting to change this thinking and bring these seemingly invisible moments of racism to light. The book is a collection of poems that addresses rising racial aggressions in various encounters in twenty-first-century daily life and in the media. These encounters range from seemingly innocent slips of the tongue to intentional offenses on the bus or in the supermarket to blatant offenses against professional athletes that attracted worldwide media attention. While these poems are written in unique forms and describe different situations, they all share the same essential message: racism is more alive today than ever and there is no way for African Americans to avoid being affected by it. Rankine utilizes tenants of critical race theory, the pronoun “you,” the visibility of the black race, and the media’s portrayal of race to argue to her white audience that safe spaces do not exist for African Americans.

To understand this argument, safe spaces must first be defined. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a safe space is “a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm” (“Safe space”). Safe spaces have been a popular argumentative idea as of late. Many supporters of these safe spaces believe these types of places are beneficial to specifically students’ mental health as it allows them to have access to a place where they can avoid or recuperate from something that causes them distress (Shulevitz). In an article published in The New York Times, Judith Shulevitz argues against the existence of safe spaces saying, “kindness alone won’t allow us to gain more insight into the truth” (Shulevitz). The fact of the matter is that safe spaces exist for some people, but not for others. James Arnt Aune, who teaches senior-level Religious Communications at Texas A&M University, is very against safe spaces, especially in the classroom saying, “Rather than conceptualize themselves as victims in need of protection, students must learn to accept their education by actively engaging in the course material, even if it is offensive, because there is always some knowledge to be gained” (Stob 558). The only way people, particularly students, will be prepared for the so called “real world” is if they understand that awful things occur that will make them uncomfortable, but they have to learn how to deal and learn from those situations. The many encounters written about and experienced by the readers in Citizen show that African Americans do not have the same access to a place that will shield them from discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm. Many face racism every single day in the classroom, supermarket, or sports field and for them it has become normal, the status quo.

The idea that racism is ordinary, and not aberrational is one of the central ideas of critical race theory. Richard Delgado, who teaches civil rights and critical race theory at University of Alabama School of
Law, defines critical race theory as “a theoretical and interpretive mode that examines the appearance of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of expression” (Delgado and Stefancic 3). Rankine is considered a part of the critical race theory movement because she, along with a collection of activists and scholars, is “interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado and Stefancic 2). In Citizen, Rankine attempts this transformation in describing everyday, ordinary incidents of racism to bring to the attention of her white readers, who might not even realize it is occurring. In one example, presumably a person of color is at the cash register and “the man at the cash register wants to know if you think your card will work” (Rankine 54). A friend “says nothing” because “she is not you” (Rankine 54). This is the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country and most people just stand by and continually watch this happen without saying anything. By writing about encounters like this, Rankine wants to show the readers who have been this bystander before how their silence contributes to racism because it can have greater damage than outright and blatant acts of racism. In another example, Rankine writes, “When the waitress hands your friend the card she took from you, you laugh and ask what else her privilege gets her?” (Rankine 148). The waitress just assumes that you, the person of color, is not capable of paying for the meal by giving the credit card back to your white friend. Seemingly innocent slips like this occur so often to people of color that it becomes comical. In both encounters, Rankine is not only trying to understand our current social situation, but attempting to change it by pushing her audience, specifically her white audience, out of their safe spaces to get them thinking about the racist situations they do not want to talk about or even realizing are occurring.

One method Rankine uses to demonstrate to push her white audience out of their safe spaces is by putting them into the shoes of a person of color by continually using the pronoun “you” throughout her writing. The first sentence of this novel is, “When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows” (Rankine 5). The reader is thrown into the story right from the second word of the novel; there is no easing into it. Vahni Capildeo, a writer for the *PN Review*, states, “Citizen’s pronouns are not objects of excavation so much as mini-gorgons. They can turn the reader to stone” (Capildeo 9). Each use of “you” forces the reader to not just read what Rankine is writing, but to feel and experience each moment as well. Each moment makes each reader freeze, as if a cold bucket of water has been thrown on them. White readers are suddenly in the middle of moments and thoughts they have long tried to avoid and pretend do not exist. Rankine is famous for placing her audience in each moment as she used a similar technique in another one of her books, *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*. In a critical review of that novel, Tana Welch describes Rankine’s use of “you” by stating, “Active versus passive spectating directly relates to Rankine’s engagement with trans-corporeal ethics: the passive spectator, much like the liberal humanist subject, believes she is separate from what she is witnessing, but an active, or critical, spectator understands that she is entangled in the spectacle” (Welch 129). Rankine wants her readers to actively read her novel rather than passively consume it. She wants each reader to experience a life where there are no safe safes to keep them safe. Rankine wants each reader to think and feel about each uncomfortable encounter she places her or him in. The effect of this is that if the audience attempts to pull away from the “you” in just one story, they are forced to register their choice to stand apart and accept their refusal of Rankine’s experiences. In that moment of realizing, the audience is forced to accept the idea that maybe they are or have been that friend who said nothing in line at the cash register or in the restaurant. The reason why the word “you” orders such immediate force and leaves behind such intimate unease is, according to Jonathan Farmer, is the “addressability at the heart of *Citizen*” (Farmer). Addressability is the reason why “for white people” this book feels so problematic. In saying, even implicitly, who we’re speaking to, we say who we’re willing to exclude. Such
talk imagines a culture based on the absence of some people, and in doing so, it addresses those people, too (Farmer).

Rankine tries to make the feeling of being invisible, tangible to a white audience that has put people of color in the dark for so long. Rankine writes, “Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen” (Rankine 9). Rankine makes each invisible body hypervisible to her readers through, according to Mary Pinkoski who wrote a critical review for the *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education*, a “rupture an endemic system of categorization and dismissal that privileges certain bodies in citizenship over others (Pinkoski 75). Rankine’s disruption is so powerful that the reader is not able to dismiss or hide from the racism and unsafe conditions that many people of color experience regularly. This manipulation of visibility is most evident in Rankine’s essay on Serena Williams. She writes,

Serena’s frustrations, her disappointments, exist within a system you understand not to try to understand in any fair-minded way because to do so is to understand the erasure of the self as systemic, as ordinary. For Serena, the daily diminishment is a low flame, a constant drip. Every look, every comment, every bad call blossoms out of history, through her, onto you. To understand is to see Serena as hemmed in as any other black body thrown against our American background (Rankine 32).

Making Williams’s experience visible, Rankine is able to show the continuing narrative of how people of color are being treated negatively. Historically, they always are on the losing side, just like Williams in this situation. By making what happened to Williams visible to an audience that has made her and many others invisible, Rankine changes the game. Rankine employs a similar tactic when discussing Hurricane Katrina. She writes, “he said, I don’t know what the water wanted. It wanted to show you no one would come” (Rankin 85). Rankine draws attention to the lack of emergency aid to the poorest areas of New Orleans inhabited by many black families in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. She brings attention to the geographic borders between the visible and invisible, the white and the black. Rankine not only demonstrates that the so called invisible population do not get the same treatment as everyone else, but in doing so she forces the reader to go where no one wanted to go. According to Pinkoski, “[Rankine] importantly agitates and demands that the reader call into question the insidious privilege (or lack of) in their own citizenship and reorder or re-categorize to account for (rather than dismiss) the violent experiences of those who do not experience the same positionality in society as themselves” (Pinkoski 75). Rankine is able to call to attention what is normally seen and what is normally unseen in daily social behavior and challenges her audience to respond to that. Now that Rankine has made these previously unseen bodies and society’s treatment of them visible, the white readers can no longer avoid these issues in their so called “safe space.” Rankine wants her readers of all races to know that no American citizen is ever ignore or is free of race and racism because it is so embedded in American history.

One of the reasons why race and racism is so embedded in each person is in part due to the media’s portrayal of it. Rankine writes, “My brothers are notorious. They have not been to prison. They have been imprisoned. The prison is not a place you enter. It is no place” (Rankine 89). The media plays an essential role not only in shaping the way we see the world, but how we perceive race as well. In the United States, the media portrays whites as the superior race, with people of color being the minorities. People of color are torn apart by the media and made out to be perceived as dangerous, a threat, or even notorious for their supposed bad qualities. The media has imprisoned people of color into this stereotype, despite most of them being good people. While there are people of color who are dangerous and have committed awful crimes, a similar amount of white people has committed similar crimes, but the media portrays them and only them completely differently. Rankine writes of the white male who murdered James Craig Anderson
saying, “The announcer patronizes the pickup truck, no hoodlums, ‘just teens,’ no gang, ‘just a teen,’ ‘with straggly blond hair,’ ‘a slight blond man.’ The pickup is human in this predictable way” (Rankine 94). Not only is the murderer humanized, the pickup truck is pictured as being at fault for this awful event. The media treated Anderson as the object of this encounter, rather than the victim.

Both stories depict how black men, specifically, are treated as the same object by the media. They are all deindividualized and assumed to all act the same as a dangerous criminal. From the day they are born, black people are continually told who they are by the media. Angela Hume wrote a literary criticism on *Citizen* and she states, one of the book’s main critiques “concerns the difficulty of relating to or identifying with one’s environment when one has been othered by the dominant white society and, consequently, forced to live with greater amounts of environmental risk” (Hume 80). People of color never can have a safe space because of the white race’s perceptions of them. For decades, this perception has been engraved into the minds of white Americans, who try to avoid people of color who might cause them harm. Rankine writes, “I left my client’s house knowing I would be pulled over. I knew. I just knew” (Rankine 105). The media’s dangerous stereotype of black people, especially black men, has led to an increase of racial profiling by police officers. This black man has been trained to believe that even though he is an innocent man who has done nothing wrong, he will be pulled over solely for being black. Rankine continues to say, “And you are not the guy and still you fit the description because there is only one guy who is always the guy fitting the description” (Rankine 105). This confusing and contradictory statement reaffirms this stereotype. He will always fit the description of a black man because is only one stereotype for black men, dangerous. Not only are the police at fault for racial profiling, the general public is at fault as well. In another incident, Rankine writes of a woman who “would rather stand all the way all the way to Union Station” than sit next to a man of color (Rankine 131). This forces the white audience to think of all the times they were that woman, where they passed by the open seat next to a person of color due to their preconceived perceptions of him or her. Rankine wants her audience to recognize the error in the media and continuously through her novel challenges the readers to fill that empty seat on the bus.

Rankine wants her audience, specifically her white audience, to finally acknowledge that there has never been a safe space for black people. Rankine successfully accomplishes this by utilizing various techniques within her writing. She uses the main beliefs of critical race theory to not only write about racism, but portray how this affects black people. She places each reader into many uncomfortable experiences by using the pronoun “you” in most her poems. She makes visible the struggles of an invisible black race by sharing the stories of Serena Williams and the forgotten people in Hurricane Katrina. Lastly, she calls to attention how the media’s portrayal of race contributes to this situation by describing the media coverage of James Craig Anderson's death, which leads to events like the police pulling over a man for being black or a woman choosing to stand rather than sit next to a black man. In this novel, Rankine is trying to show the world, specifically her white audience, that racism and discrimination are still alive today despite the apparent progress made on the surface over the last hundred year. While legally people of color have the same rights as every other person in this country, they are far from being treated like it. The work for equality does not stop once some laws are passed. We each must work to end racism in day to day encounters and work to ensure that each person, regardless of race, can have access to a space in which they feel safe from discrimination, criticism, harassment, or any other emotional or physical harm. A former student of Aune’s says, “the point of his classes was the way in which he designed them to help you—if you chose it—to become a better person as you saw competing visions of yourself, of who you thought you were and who you thought you could be” (Stob 562). By stepping out of safe spaces, we not only become more aware about the world and how others live, we learn more about ourselves and how we can become better people.
works cited


Imagine your life as it right now. Think of all the things that you enjoy. Now imagine that when you were young you got taken from your family, brought to a new country where no one spoke your language and then were forced to live in a space the size of a bath tub. But this hell gets worse: you will be made to perform in front of large crowds, your captives will rob you of the ability to hunt, and will only feed you dead fish when you do their silly tricks. The stress will consume you forcing you to harm yourself and others. This is the plight of the captive killer whale. There are currently 57 captive killer whale in the world. That means there are currently 57 highly intelligent animals living in the worst imaginable hell. Action must be taken to reverse this egregious crime. I propose a 5-step plan to help free these incarcerated whales. First, we must understand the life of a wild and free killer whale. Then we will explore the differences between the lives of the captive whales versus the lives of the wild killer whales. The next thing we must determine is that the whales are in harm’s way living in captivity. After gaining this crucial understanding of such a complex creature I will explain my plan to better their lives. This proposal will detail a plan of action that would compromise with the marine parks that possess the captive killer whales and yet also enables the whales to live the best life possible given their circumstances.

The life of wild killer whale is much different from the life of a captive killer whale. In the wild these majestic creatures swim hundreds of miles a week across the open ocean. They are very tightly connected to their families. They are born into a pod where they remain for the rest of their lives. In these pods, they travel the oceans, hunt together, and each play an important role in life in the pod. Female whales can have calves up until their 40s and after that they’re role changes to helping the males hunt for the other females and calves (Smith 13). Significantly, it is incredibly rare for these whales to leave their pod and join a new one. It is also believed that different pods communicate differently so changing pods would essentially be impossible (Riesch par. 20-22). Killer whales in the wild live the same life span as a human. This means that a wild killer whale can live to be 100 years old. Wild Orcas also are expert hunters. Orca’s from different regions hunt and eat differently. Some killer whales eat salmon while other hunt things like seals and otters. They have skilled hunting techniques that they implore to catch their prey (Harden 1). They are an apex predator and dominate the ocean.

The problem with keeping these killer whales in captivity is that it is a horrible injustice. To take a wild highly intelligent creature and make it perform for our own amusement is wrong. We are robbing these animals of the life they could have had. The life span of captive killer whales is very bleak, as their life span is significantly shorter than that of whales in the wild. They typically only live to be 20 to 30 years old. There is also a high rate of mortality in young orcas that were born into captivity. One reason SeaWorld often uses as an excuse to keep these apex predators captive is that captive subjects provide round breaking research on orcas. However, “Advances in technology, from satellite tagging to biopsy darts, have made it much easier to get detailed data on wild marine mammals” (Raja 10). Captive killer whales have also been known to engage in highly aggressive behavior. In 2010 a tragedy rocked SeaWorld Orlando when they’re prized male killer whale viciously killed trainer Dawn Brancheau. It was later
uncovered that Tilikum, the killer whale responsible, was also the cause of two other human deaths yet trainers were still allowed in the water with him. There are hundreds of killer whale aggression reports from SeaWorld alone but most went unheard of for many years.

Additionally, captive whales can turn their aggression upon one another and even themselves, causing injury and sickness. The small tank size creates a somewhat powder keg with no means of escape. They’re have been many incidents of killer whales actively engaging in raking each other. This is the process of scratching each other with their teeth, which cause open flesh wounds and blood in the water. A very common issue is that the whales often bite the bars of the separation gates which causes their teeth to break. As a result of this whales must have a very similar procedure to a root canal done every day to avoid infection. As you can imagine this is a very painful procedure. “Reports have shown a high incidence of death due to bacterial infections, particularly upper respiratory infections. Whilst such infections are not exclusive to captives, it may be inferred that they are aggravated, if not caused by, the highly artificial conditions of confinement” (Tierney par. 13). Captive killer whales are put through many uncomfortable procedures to maintain their health to ensure their ability to perform. A huge issue that arises in captive marine animals is health problems related to eating the paint on the sides of their tanks. These health issues haven't been known to ever plague wild killer whales.

How can we expect to be better as a nation if we discriminate against other living creatures? Mahatma Gandhi once said, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated” (Gandhi n.p.). Currently there aren't that many laws or regulations for the captivity of killer whales. They have increased in current times because of the increased awareness of marine animal rights but they are still not nearly where they should be. For example, “The most significant legislation for the protection of whales is the Marine Mammal Protection Act enacted October 21, 1972.” This law states that mammals cannot be taken from the wild because orca captures were particularly violent and often resulted in a few deaths of whales in the pods (Tierney par.18). However, it still permits marine parks such as SeaWorld to own these killer whales and breed them. The Animal Welfare Act has regulations on how big the Orca’s pools must be. It states that, “The issue of adequate space for large cetaceans like the orca, involves four main factors: the minimum horizontal dimension (MHD), the depth of the pool, the volume of water in the pool, and the surface area (SA) of the pool. The MHD, or length, of the pool must be at least twice the length of the orca and the pool must be at least half the length of the orca deep. Thus, a 24-foot-long orca whale must be housed in a tank at least 48 feet long and 12 feet deep. If multiple orca whales are housed in the same pool, then the size standards must go off the largest orca in that pool” (Tierney par. 26). This is considered to be the size of a bath tub to a killer whale who in the wild could swim up to 100 miles a day. Considering that killer whales often share a tank with 2 to 3 whales it simply is not humane conditions. There is also a law that applies to dolphins and orcas that states that they must be placed with a companion (Tierney par. 28). This means that an Orca or a dolphin cannot be isolated in a tank by themselves. It also allows for a killer whale and a dolphin to share a tank as companions.

SeaWorld has taken multiple steps to save the company and regain the type of revenue they were bringing in before controversies of animal mistreatment rocked the company. CEO Joel Manby announced, “Its signature Shamu shows would be phased out and replaced by less circus-like “encounters,” in which trainers explain how whales behave in the wild in a “natural-looking setting” (Fry 166). They have also stopped the breeding of killer whales in the United States. But with the many of their killer whales being so young and with the ocean caught orcas, which typically tend to live longer lives in captivity, it is likely SeaWorld could have these orcas for 40 more years. SeaWorld is undergoing a massive overhaul to get people back into their parks. The CEO also admits that, “Months earlier he had
mobilized a task force of four board members—code-named the Q Committee—to research possible paths on the orca issue. Its nine-month study returned a compelling finding: Average Americans—not just animal-rights activists—thought that keeping large creatures in small spaces was wrong. The writing was on the wall. SeaWorld needed to change” (Fry 166). Now that the parks have a more progressive thinking CEO, it is the perfect time for SeaWorld to change while still providing visitors with its well-known excitement; this excitement, however, would just be generated in a different way, as the whales themselves would need to be treated differently. SeaWorld certainly still has value in today’s world because it targets interest especially among children in marine animals and encourages them to care about them and our oceans.

I propose a plan that would suit all parties involved. Unfortunately, the solution isn’t as easy as freeing the whales. We’ve already learned from that mistake when Keiko the whale from Free Willy was released. It demonstrated that killer whales who have spent most their lives in captivity can’t easily assimilate back into the ocean. From the Free Willy trial, it was found that a whale such as “Keiko never managed to integrate with Icelandic orca pods and didn’t seem to do much diving or fishing. He spent two several-week-long stretches on his own at sea, but ultimately chose to return to human care. He died of pneumonia in 2003, inside an open-access pen in a Norwegian inlet” (Kessler par. 2). So, what are the options for these animals? Right now, SeaWorld holds the monopoly on killer whales in captivity. Even with their plummeting stocks they are still making millions off these whales. It seems highly unlikely that they will ever give up this power. They have agreed to stop the breeding of Orcas in California which is a great first step but they still have tanks full of whales, dolphins, and other marine life to attend to. Currently, they have 3 operating parks in Orlando, San Antonio, and San Diego. These locations have relative proximity to the ocean. SeaWorld could move they’re animals into blocked off portions of the ocean called sea pens. This would enable the whales to feel the ocean currents and would allow them to have a more natural life. It could also be more cost efficient because you would erase the cost of up keeping tanks and the health issues marine mammals because of living in such artificial environments. With all their animals moved to ocean pens they could open this up to the public to sustain a stream of revenue and profit. One very crucial part of the Keiko experiment was when he was introduced into a sea pen, “Keiko quickly proved the doubters wrong about his ability to recover his health. Within the first two months, his food intake doubled, his weight rose dramatically, and he shed the skin lesions from the papilloma virus infection that everyone had noticed in Free Willy” (Neiwert 214). This means that SeaWorld’s whales would likely demonstrate the same progress. An enclosed sea pen could be up to triple the size of the space the Orcas and dolphins currently live in. Sea pens are usually and enclosed peninsula or inlet, which would mean it would be surrounded by land to view the animals from a distance. Underwater viewing areas could also be put in place to see the animals in a more up close light. It would also show the public how these animals behave in a more natural setting. If SeaWorld were to adopt this method, they would still be able to show how highly intelligent these creatures are without making them do foolish performances.

Right now, SeaWorld is tanking and they need a good solution to stay afloat. If they switch their motto from entertainment to rehabilitation and education, which they already claim to be then they might be able to make it out of this scandal alive. This would also allow them to keep more animals. If they used their facilities for rehabilitation and release, then it would allow people to come and see real wild animals while they’re receiving care. This system is already being used by smaller marine parks such the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. They rescue animals, rehabilitate them, and then ultimately release them back into ocean. If SeaWorld implemented this system after all they’re captive born animals die out it could continue to survive as a marine park. SeaWorld already dabbles in animal rescue and
releases. However, they typically stick to smaller mammals such as sea turtles and manatees. They aim to rehabilitate and release if the animal is still able to survive on its own and if not they create a permanent home for it at ones of its parks. SeaWorld would need to expand this part of their franchise if they would survive as a sea pen sanctuary. With SeaWorld’s reputation and resources, it is certainly possible for them to rebrand themselves as an animal advocacy marine park. Most importantly, it would continue to enrich youth to care about our oceans and marine life.

I grew up going to SeaWorld Ohio every weekend in the summertime. It was my favorite place in the world. I like many other children was in awe of Shamu. I wanted nothing more to be one of those trainers who got to swim with the dolphins and killer whales. It created a sense of wonder and respect for these animals that remains to this day. I think the best thing SeaWorld gave to me was a way to see these animals up close and form a bond with them. It is because of this bond that I feel so strongly about them today. So, I don't think we should do away with SeaWorld and condemn it as a horrible mistake. Times have changed and so has the information we know about these animals. It is time to change the way we house these animals and give them the respect and humane treatment they deserve. My proposal will ensure that SeaWorld and other marine parks like it would stay in business. This would allow other children in future generations the same glimmer of passion I got many years ago, from these truly breath taking creatures.

Works Cited

THE EXISTENTIAL LIFE OF THE AVERAGE MAN: LIFE AND DEATH IN GEORGE SPROTT

By Brennan Bizon
Instructor: Dr. Erin Speese

The Existential Life of the Average Man: Life and Death in George Sprott

George Sprott, a graphic novel authored by Gregory Gallant under the pen name “Seth”, is a collection of intertwining cartoons about a larger-than-life retired radio show celebrity. The novel takes readers on a journey, from Sprott’s birth until the day he dies, via an omniscient third person narrator, several first person accounts of other characters, and first person accounts from George Sprott himself. Through parallel narratives, different aspects are revealed about George’s generally mundane life; we learn of his expeditions and triumphs, losses and failures, and overall human condition. Thematically, George Sprott embodies a number of themes that pit youth against old age, fruitfulness against stagnation, and ultimately, life against death. The author’s portrayal of Sprott’s life thus plays directly into the fundamental characteristics of life, ranging from its physical features and aspects to its metaphysical and existential implications. Furthermore, Seth uses the theme of life and death to explore other thematic qualities, such as the duality of George’s public and personal lives, and the cohesion between the successes and failures the protagonist faces. Through the use of these themes, the author helps his audience discover inherent messages about what it means to be born, to die, and to exist within the borders of these two states of being. I argue that George Sprott is an exploration of the veil between life and death, portrayed through the use of unorderly sequence and structure, playful imagery that embodies memory, and collective memory from before and after George’s death. Ultimately, the author illustrates the continuity between life and death, and the fragility of the veil that separates us from other states of being.

When interpreting the graphic novel George Sprott, it is evident that Gallant utilizes a variety of literary tools to reveal underlying messages about life and death. The presentation of life and death in Gallant’s work largely reflects the ideology of varying states of being presented by writers such as James Damske. In his book, Being, Man, & Death: A Key to Heidegger, Damske writes that language is a “collective understanding of the world... and thus the way being appears to them” (122). Thus, the narrative style of graphic novels such as George Sprott and the diction that such literary works utilize is what defines life, death, and states of being. Furthermore, Damske remarks that “Death is the preeminent mode of being’s coming-to-presence and fading-into-withdrawal, the high point of the mysterious coupling of these two moments, positive and negative” (4). It is from the framework of these philosophical ideas that the depiction of death in George Sprott is derived; it is George’s high point in coming to a new state of being as well as fading to a state of unknowingness and withdrawal. Perhaps the most important understanding to have while analyzing George Sprott, however, is a comprehension of how graphic narratives as literary works are interpreted by readers. In a study by Joseph Magliano, three experiments were conducted to evaluate how visuospatial and linguistic systems develop unique inferences in readers’ memories. Ultimately, the study demonstrated that visual narratives, when evaluated as having a beginning-state and an end-state, can be more acutely interpreted with more detailed inferences in the presence of a...
bridging event. That is, the reader’s perceptual process that interprets and makes inferences about both imagery and the context is more accurate when a bridging event is presented in the narrative (Magliano 207). In the scope of George Sprott, which is largely separated into a sequence of birth, bridging events, and death, this study demonstrates that the bridging events the reader perceives have a large influence in the inferences we make about George’s death, or end-state. The visuospatial imagery in the graphic novel, including flashbacks, seemingly random objects, and collective memory from varying characters, ultimately aids in the process of reading comprehension and interpretation, and is relevant to understanding how George is perceived. In George Sprott, collective memory is the definitive tool used to express and illustrate both nostalgic memories and subjective views of the protagonist via other characters. By using collective memory, a colorful array of information is revealed about George that further allows the reader to make inferences about George’s life, death, and the veil between these states of existence.

In George Sprott, Gallant structures the plot in a disorderly way to portray the transitional continuity between life and death in the protagonist’s existence. In an article by Hilary Dickinson, nostalgia was examined as a literary tool used to construct autobiographies and visual narratives. Dickinson’s analysis notions that, in the past, nostalgia was often utilized for “linear rather than cyclical time”. Furthermore, Dickinson asserts that the “complexity of time frames highlights the important way in which a nostalgic contemplation is almost by definition a memory placed in linear time” (227). In George Sprott, the author almost mechanically includes flashbacks from George’s life in between the larger dominant narrative. These flashbacks can be clearly identified by a monochromatic tint that mimics old newspapers, and the sections are titled by their dates in a successive fashion. These sections, seemingly random in the overall sequence of the story, are vessels of nostalgia that are utilized in demonstrating the differance between life and death. This function is largely apparent towards the end of the novel in sections such as “April 5 1963”. In particular, this flashback is relevant because it immediately follows the section “And So, Here We Are”, in which George dies. “April 5 1963” is a behind the scenes look at a discussion between George and Stanley pertaining to the death of other characters such as “Lucy” and “Henry”. The insertion of a discussion about death immediately after George’s death is an intentional move by Gallant to emphasize the bridge between life and death through the use of a comic underlined by nostalgia. Although George Sprott is not compiled in a purely linear sequence, Hilary Dickinson’s notion of nostalgia is not invalidated or defeated. While the organization of events from the past to the future is intertwined in the graphic novel, nostalgia is not diluted or decomposed as a literary aspect. Much rather, this organization of events points to a tightly knit continuity between life and death, made available only through the use of nostalgia. As literary elements, life and death (the beginning and end states) are closely compacted by the author. Ultimately, the use of nostalgia within bridging-events demonstrates that life and death are merely steps away, and that memory highlights the veil between these two states.

Nostalgic imagery and illustration of objects from the past employed in George Sprott embodies either life or death and ultimately demonstrates the fragility of these states of being. In a 2005 research project by professor Elizabeth Wood, experiments were conducted utilizing different nostalgic objects in an attempt to define major qualities of nostalgia and how it acts through tangible materials. Wood’s studies brought light to how experience and meanings can be reflected in objects, and ultimately identified four trends of nostalgic objects (123). Wood declared that objects contain identity, embody timelessness, preserve character from death, and often personify other aspects of life in a “real” way (III). In the untitled section immediately following “April 5 1963” in George Sprott, readers are presented with a conglomeration of objects and people depicted through simplistic imagery, accompanied by
short phrases such as “deep in the night”. Varying coloration of the pictures indicate different periods of time. These images and objects, such as a ball, a bird, a spider, a man driving a truck, and different women, comprise a larger collective memory that ultimately points to the end-state of George’s being. The repetition of “wake” and “wake him” throughout the section parallels the very condition George endured during the bridge of his life and nostalgically insinuates that George’s “bridge” was a very fragile state and a precursor to his end-state. In other words, by repeating images and phrases associated with George’s elderly life, the novel emphasizes that these elements were a precursor to death and cessation for George as a character. In the scope of Elizabeth Wood’s study, objects in George Sprott act very much in the nostalgic fashion which one might expect. A quality of Wood’s findings that is evident in the visual narrative by Gregory Gallant is the timelessness of objects, in which objects exist in a realm unrelated to the dominant linear narrative. For example, the young child with the coat portrayed in the collective memory closely parallels previous imagery from the novel; this child is both illustrated by George for his talk show, and also closely reflects the child from “Iqaluit” whom George is the father of. Images such as this child that embody the timelessness of an individual narrative are purposefully implemented to underline how nostalgia can act through an object and represent an entirely unique narrative. Furthermore, images like these shown at the end-state of George’s being demonstrate that the protagonist’s death is a fragile state, and can be existentially resurrected through the use of nostalgic objects. That is, although George’s character is physically deceased, the essence of his being is captured via the collective memory of images at the end of the novel.

In addition to the utilization of nostalgia in George Sprott, Gallant portrays aspects of the protagonist such as success and failure as well as the duality of George’s public and private lives in order to further encapsulate George’s state of being. Much in the way that life and death are united in the novel, success and failure are bonded, and publicity and privacy are partnered. In a study by social psychologist Tilemachos Iatridis, a metric of achievement (success vs. failure) was weighed against socioeconomic variables in order to examine how success or failure is perceived under differing conditions. Iatridis’ study ultimately determined that the perception of success in a high status character, such as George, views success as the result of abilities, a stable cause largely unaffected by what a person does or not do. On the other hand, high class failure is perceived as being on the other end of the spectrum as an unstable cause, defined as a lack of effort (415). In the same way that success and failure are unique yet on the same spectrum, George has both a public and private side that exist individually within the same family. His public life is extremely evident in his talk show as well as in sections such as “A Few Words from The Man Himself”. George’s addressment of subjects including youth, sex, food, women, money, memory, and the future in this section, at a fundamental level, is a representation of George’s success and his public life. It is evident in statements such as “I have tried hard to live a life undisturbed by the past” by George that a connection exists between George’s public life and his very state of being. On the other side of the spectrum, George’s private life is revealed in sections like “November 27 1951”. The account of George’s affair with a woman named Janet reveals a very selfish and emotionally frustrated side of George. This selfishness is emphasized by scandalous imagery of George sitting with a naked woman smoking in a dark room. The bond between these two contrasting sides of George – public and private – is important because it mirrors the theme of life and death in George’s life. They are uniquely different sides of George’s state of being, distinguishable in almost every aspect, yet they still exist on the same spectrum. If success and failure in the protagonist’s life is the subject of study, then the duality of George’s life – his public and private lives – is the magnifying glass used to view the subject.

Upon analyzing the continuum between life and death, the fragility of the two, and how they are
portrayed using different techniques, it is important to evaluate each state singularly. Life, as the beginning-state in George’s continuum of being, can be dissected further into birth and the bridging-events of George’s life. Mary Lindemann, an expert on 18th century literature, dissects the portrayal of birth and life in her writing, (Re)Productive Thinking. In her analysis, Lindemann follows Lisa Cody’s notion that birth is central to the “understanding of human identities, social institutions, cultures, and the natural world”. Furthermore, Lindemann notes that the framework of much of modern work hinges on birth as a literary construct (423). In the scope of George Sprott, this euphemism for life is relevant because George’s birth, or beginning-state, is essential to understanding how George exists both physically and existentially. In the opening section of the graphic novel, “George is Born”, simple imagery is paired with contextual background about George’s birth. This section’s importance is that it speaks about the spectrum of life as a whole, and not just on George’s birth. Thus, it gives identity to the full spectrum of George’s being and not just his beginning-state. Images of George that fluctuate between a baby and elderly man are closely positioned in order to emphasize the thin veil between life and death, or the “two voids separated by a brief spurt of time” that is declared. Moreover, strips that inquisitively ask “These boxes in a row—perhaps they’re not just a sequence. Perhaps the action in the middle box... Isn’t merely determined by the action in the box before it” allude to a complete continuity between George’s birth (“the box before it”) and the bridging-events (“the action in the middle box”). The implication of the text in “George is Born”, in reference to the work by Mary Lindemann, is that while George’s birth is a defining quality of his existential being and his physical life, the “action in the middle box” is not purely dependent on birth. Birth is the literary tool used to achieve a starting-point for George’s state of being. Therefore, it is evident that while birth (the beginning-state) and life (the bridging-events) are undeniably continuous and connected, they also exist independently of one another and constitute individual states of being unto their own.

George’s death is ultimately the resolution of the graphic novel, and the way that death and loss are presented and memorialized demonstrates that there are unique physical and existential implications to George’s death. Wojciech Drąg, an English professor at the University of Wroclaw, wrote in his 2014 book Revisiting Loss: Memory, Trauma and Nostalgia in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro about death as a literary theme and loss as an intangible aspect of these works. Drąg asserts that “loss constitutes the core experience which determines the narrators’ sense of identity and the shape of their subsequent lives” (1). Drąg argues the narrator in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro is preoccupied with loss (much as is the narrator in George Sprott). Drąg concludes the dichotomy between the state of loss and its predecessor is the driving force in narration (2). Thus, loss molds the identity of the narrator in George Sprott and consequently reveals an inherent message about death in the process. The section in which George dies after a lengthy narrative in George Sprott, “And So, Here We Are”, is spoken from the perspective of the 3rd person narrator who presents death in a regretful way. At this point in the novel it is evident that George has reached his physical end-state, although not entirely in his existential state. It is evident through the quote “And at 9:01 P.M. of Oct. 9, 1975. George Sprott passes from this life” that George has ceased physically, but that a collective memory of nostalgia and other characters will keep George’s existential being in a transitional state of life and death. The narrator’s tone, objective and somewhat mocking through statements such as “Oh, what a disheartening parade”, is underlined by the loss of George’s physical being and defines what George’s death implies about the larger continuum of being. Thin black boxes inserted into the scene that “spare you (readers) this scene as well” reinforce the idea of a thin veil between living and dying. Furthermore, the fragility of life and all states of being is emphasized by clever similes like “struggling like a turtle stuck on its back”. The dominant theme, that living and dying are individual states of being, yet continuous in their very nature, is asserted as the narrator sadly declares ‘She’ll be gone 10 minutes, but a lot can happen in 10 minutes”. In the scope of Wojciech Drąg’s writing, it is clear that the narration in George Sprott is largely defined by the death of the protagonist much in the same way in the novels by Kazuo Ishiguro. Loss is undoubtedly the defining feature of the narrator’s identity in George Sprott; the narrator is preoccupied with the eventual death of the protagonist, and otherwise
lacks significant function in the graphic novel. This is additionally evident through the lack of imagery of the narrator. Although the dominant narrative is almost entirely dictated by the omniscient narrator, the actual character is pictured but a few times. The presentation the narrator offers the audience, paired with nostalgic imagery of the event, ultimately indicates the physical end-state of George, but existential continuation of his life. These states are irrevocably individual in nature, yet exist on the same spectrum of states of being.

Looking conclusively at the way life and death are presented in the graphic novel George Sprott, it is quite easy to question what the existential implications of George are ultimately attempting to portray about life. One way to shed light on this question is to use the scope of an article by Joseph Sirgy and Jiyun Wu, titled The Pleasant Life, the Engaged Life, and the Meaningful Life: What about the Balanced Life? In the article, a discussion is presented for developing a theoretical metric for weighing the meaningfulness and balance of life. Sirgy and Wu provide an empirical postulate for the balance of life, suggesting a meaningful balance is attained via the synthesis of pleasure, engagement, and achievement of virtue (184). Much in the way George’s life is comprised of a beginning, bridge, and end-state, the “balance” of life can be viewed as a compilation or spectrum of highly individual states, interconnected nonetheless. They are fragile states, separated by a few mere steps, yet they are inherently different and individual. We understand that George is a fairly average character; while it is hard to determine whether his life is meaningful or pleasant, it is simple to see that it is a life underlined by a wholesome balance. George’s beginning, bridge, and end-states are defined by unique characteristics, but comprise one coherent equation of being. And although he is average, George’s existence carries with it fascinating existential implications that colorfully illustrate the human condition.

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“At the dawn of our lives, we seek a noble vision of man’s nature and of life’s potential” (“Introduction”). According to Ayn Rand, Russian-American novelist and philosopher, Objectivism is that vision. This credo rests in the foundation that reality exists and one must discover its nature with an audacious approach of self-serving ambition. Although it has received a fair amount of following, praise, and success, Rand’s philosophy has also sourced the demise of many individuals through broken promises and mental pandemonium. The life and mental state of Jay, a broken man from the novel Intimacy by Hanif Kureishi, serves to thoroughly exemplify the philosophy’s imperfections and the reasoning behind one’s downfall on the path of Objectivism. Throughout the novel, his character development, or lack thereof, constitutes as the paradigm for an Objectivist breakdown. Jay’s thought process, intimately shared through a perspective that ostensibly caters to Rand’s ideology, leaves him in a hopeless abyss of indifference and monotonous strife towards the known unknown; he lives with the unsettling, subconscious belief that his purpose has expired. Jay is the epitome of the failures of Rand’s philosophy, a martyr of Objectivism.

Objectivist essentials most rudimentarily consist of reality and self-interest which ultimately derive reason. Rand explains, “If one recognizes the supremacy of reason and applies it consistently, all the rest follows.” Furthermore, the key goal of Rand’s philosophy is to embrace reason as an absolute. Objectivism, in Rand’s eyes, promotes the idea that recognition of reality and approach with selfish ambition is a sure-fire way to embrace this absolute. One must: “choose to face the facts at all times, in all areas, whether at work or at home, in business or in love . . . no matter what conclusion logically ensues, whether pleasant or unpleasant” (“Introduction”). Rand’s philosophy emphasizes that “reality is not to be rewritten or escaped, but, solemnly and proudly, faced” (“Introduction”) and further encourages that this reality be faced with refined and rational selfishness.

With the esteemed value of selfish motivation, Objectivism seemingly appears as an unorthodox approach to life. However, according to Rand’s Virtue of Selfishness:

The Objectivist ethics holds that the actor must always be the beneficiary of his action and that man must act for his own rational self-interest. But his right to do so is derived from his nature as man and from the function of moral values in human life — and, therefore, is applicable only in the context of a rational, objectively demonstrated and validated code of moral principles which define and determine his actual self-interest. It is not a license “to do as he pleases” and it is not applicable to the altruists’ image of a “selfish” brute nor to any man motivated by irrational emotions, feelings, urges, wishes or whims.

Selfishness, according to Rand’s re-established definition, is rooted in reason, opposed to self-centered whims. It is exemplified through hard work for a purposeful and productive life that aims to earn genuine self-esteem. Optimal success and human fulfillment is only reached with a foundation of reason and selfish ambition (in its noblest and most respected form). Ergo, therein Objectivism lies the key to unlocking the highest morality and satisfaction of existence.

Objectivism, through its suggested elevated reasoning, provides answers to various questions faced by
humanity. Stated on Aynrand.org:

Is the pursuit of profit a noble enterprise or the root of all evil? Is sexual passion an exalted spiritual virtue or a dirty, animalistic vice? Is reason an absolute or is faith an alternative source of truth? Is self-esteem possible or are we consigned to a life of self-doubt and guilt? In what kind of society can an individual prosper, and in what kind of society is he doomed to the opposite fate?

Objectivism promises answers to these questions with the simplicity of selfishness: self-profit, self-pleasure, self-reasoning, self-esteem. The self is the Objectivist’s answer; the answer Jay is looking for. Many, alike Jay, view Rand’s philosophy as a hopeful approach to life, believing that it has the potential to “[give] philosophic and esthetic expression to the uniquely American spirit of individualism, of self-reliance, of entrepreneurship, of free markets” (Brook). However, although Objectivism has been accredited with success stories of motivating rebirth and lifestyle realignment, it remains a topic of controversial debate. “With adoring fans, rabid critics and very few in between, why does Atlas Shrugged [among countless other Objectivist works] evoke such impassioned responses? Because it grapples with the fundamental problems of human existence — and presents radically new answers” (“Introduction”).

Unfortunately, with radical change, just as the result of radical success, comes radical consequences. Jay, as previously mentioned, embodies the consequences of the promises broken by Objectivism. His life represents the potential downfall of following this movement, as Rand’s perspective is not always able to amount to the fulfilling and perfected outcome it claims to guarantee. Jay’s ultimate goals include finding purpose and living productively. He desires genuine self-esteem and true happiness, the kind that enables complete satisfaction. According to Objectivism, strife towards these goals follows a simple path of recognizing reality and approaching it with selfish intent. This philosophy argues, “man is an end in himself”, and that is exactly the course Jay took.

As previously discussed, the first step of Objectivism is to embrace reality. Approaching life with reason is halfway to the ideal way of life. Jay does this by always analyzing his life with truth, or at least his perceived truth. This is the source of one of the main issues. Everyone has their own perspective, and therefore everyone has a different perception of truth or, in other words, a biased reality. No one holds the complete concept of reality for no one is without their own perspective. It is impossible for humans to remove themselves in a way that objectively observes the world in completeness. Yes, objectively viewing specific aspects can be achieved, however objective observation of the world in its entirety is inconceivable. Therefore, the Objectivist claim that reason is fully conceived cannot be true, thus furthermore there lies a major problem in the philosophy from which downfall can conspire.

Jay values reason as an absolute, however the Objectivist’s failure to recognize the qualities of human perception leave Jay (anyone on such a path) is in a state of mind that believes his own perspective is reality. This perspective enables lies to prosper as other’s perspectives are shut out and ignored, ultimately resulting in loneliness. Failure to make compromises and learn from other’s viewpoints is ultimately failure to live in reality; the Objectivist fails to abide by its ultimate value of reason. In summary, reality is recognizing that your perspective is not the only one observing the world and reason is realizing your perspective is not always reality. By extension, Objectivist’s reason is not perfected reality. Jay puts too much value in what he can offer himself and not enough in what others can help him see, and therefore experiences isolation rather than the promise of fulfillment. Not one human being can truly be fulfilled alone. As Jay approaches life disconnected from others, he soon discovers his Objectivist viewpoint leaves him at a loss, his own essence cannot fulfill his existence.

In addition to reality and reason, the second step of ideally living by Objectivism is to embrace selfishness. The problem of Rand’s selfishness lies in her idiosyncratic usage of the term. According to Rob Bass, “Selfishness does not mean “concern for oneself or what one wants or how one feels”. Nor does it mean, as Rand defined it, “concern with one’s own interests.” The problem with these “definitions” is that they leave out an essential element that selfishness always involves “excessive concern with one’s own interests or concern with one’s
own interests to the exclusion or disregard of the interests of others”. Due to the confusing definitions tied
to selfishness and the failure to recognize the link between selfishness and exclusion, many people approach
Objectivism's value of self-interest in the same way they approach reality: with ignorance towards others.

As self-interest promises to produce happiness, Jay embraces his selfish nature in search of satisfaction. This
thought process is expressed though Jay's Objectivist perspective found in an internally formulated response to a
question asked by his friend:

Don’t you believe in anything? Or is virtue only a last resort for you? I might say: I believe in
individualism, in sensualism, and in creative idleness. I like the human imagination: its delicacy, its brutal
aggressive energy, its profundity, its power to transform the material world into art. I like what men and
women make. I prefer this to everything else on earth, apart from love and women's bodies, which are at
the centre of everything worth living for.

Rand's previously explained ideology of self-interest and selfishness takes form in Jay's beliefs; everything
important to him relates solely to himself, and by doing this he shuts everyone else out. Every value pursues
his own selfish ends. Although Rand claims to have re-defined selfishness, its roots still revolve around the self,
therefore, as previously noted, there is potential source for failure. Relying on selfishness to determine one’s
actions and thoughts only separates a person further from others, thus further from reality, hence Objectivism
(complete reliance on oneself) fails again.

To further diagnose self-interest's downfall, Jay's specific Objectivist values can be scrutinized. According to
Jay's wife, Susan, we live in an age of selfishness. Jay states, “She talks of a Thatcherism of the soul that imagines
that people are not dependent on one another. In love, these days, it is a free market; browse and buy, pick and
choose, rent and reject, as you like. There's no sexual and social security; everyone has to take care of themselves,
or not. Fulfillment, self-expression, and “creativity” are the only values” (Intimacy). However, as he soon discovers,
these values cannot complete the foundation for one's life, just as selfishness fails to create a fulfilling life.
Objectivist Jay complies to the agenda of the Thatcherite soul.

Fulfillment, in Jay's instance, involves love and women's bodies. The Objectivist would say that, to a rational
individual, love involves tremendous personal, selfish gain and sex is an expression of self-esteem and celebrated
existence. However, as Jay experiences both sex and supposed love, he is left emptier than he began. He states,
“I know love is dark work; you have to get your hands dirty. If you hold back, nothing interesting happens. At
the same time, you have to find the right distance between people. Too close, and they overwhelm you; too far
and they abandon you. How to hold them in the right relation?” (Intimacy). This dissatisfaction can easily be
attributed to the Objectivist's approach of self-interest. Love and sex involve two people, opposed to one. As
previously stated, Jay picks and chooses love as he pleases with self-induced desire and therefore fails to truly
experience his relationships. Objectivists see these relations as a “trade” that benefits both parties whereas these
relations should be viewed through the lens of a shared experience. Jay is unable to experience fulfillment because
he individualizes the experiences of love and sex.

Additionally, independent thinking and self-expression are also important Objectivist virtues that further
isolate the objectivist from reality. Although both are positive ideals, sole reliance on independence leaves one
feeling incomplete. As previously described, Thatcherite souls place no value on the dependence of others. Jay
places so much value in his independent thoughts that he comes to a point where he is living in his head. His
inability to share experience, emotion, and discovery with others plays a huge role in his demise. It is impossible
to feel true fulfillment without sharing creativity with others and learning from other's creativity. Often, in Jay's
case especially, the Objectivist believes they will feel empowered through individualism and sensualism. However,
creativity, when idle, is a source of isolation.

“Man must choose his actions, values and goals,” she summarizes, “by the standard of that which is proper to
man — in order to achieve, maintain, fulfill and enjoy that ultimate value, that end in itself; which is his own life.”
Jay’s belief in objectivist values drives him to act in selfish ways, hoping they will leave him with a life of purpose, success, and fulfillment. Sadly, Objectivism’s theory of self and oneself as the means to all ends has proven faulty, leaving its followers with inaccurate guidelines and broken promises. Jay’s life exemplifies the downfall of reliance on self and proves the falsity in living by values connected solely to the self.

“A philosophy for living on earth,” Ayn Rand called Objectivism, or rather a philosophy that creates an inner world of isolation. Jay exemplifies all the martyrs for the cause of Objectivism.