THE OSWALD Review
A National Journal of Undergraduate Research and Criticism in the Field of English

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To Barchester and Beyond:
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Today's reader needs the novel as much as the Victorian reader did, despite the altered reading habits of the more recent century. The novel offers a unique, permanent place where one can enter a world outside the one he knows. Only in the novel can the reader find a world into which he can enter for a long period of time. Poetry, drama, and short fiction offer only brief chances for immersion in another world, and even then, those forms are more tightly controlled by the author. The novel is a vast landscape that the author cannot completely control, and it contains more than just a few scenes to provide support to a moral position. The novel grows in a way that is strikingly close to real life, and yet retains a formal structure that offers a reader insight into human affairs that real life does not always provide.

Today, as in the nineteenth century, the reader of The Last Chronicle of Barset, by Anthony Trollope, enters the world of Barsetshire with this line: "'I can never bring myself to believe it, John,' said Mary Walker, the pretty daughter of John Walker..." (31). The reader must know his job before he can process this sentence, lest the novel become a difficult reading experience. Perhaps not all readers today know what they are supposed to be doing when they come across a line such as Trollope uses to start his novel. Of course, the reader must realize, or at least intuit, that he is entering into a silent compact with the author. The author is giving the reader information by writing the novel, and the reader must agree to receive the information as the author chooses to reveal it. Trollope gives his audience an "it" to deduce and a character to meet. Much of the trouble in not properly understanding the novel lies in the failure to "accept" this contract.

The unique position of novelist in relation to the reader cannot be found in any other arrangement in society. The novelist may, like Trollope, be dead. Even if living, he will probably never meet the reader in person. Still, the novelist is inviting each reader into his imaginary world by offering the novel. Trollope offers an extended series of novels set in his Barsetshire, so that the reader may join him as he explores the world which his novel reveals in detail. "I may not boast that any beside myself have so realized the place" (861), writes Trollope, who is somewhat of a tour guide into this imagined world. The reader must trust that the guide will take him through the world in an orderly fashion, and that all salient points will be addressed. If the reader doesn't trust the narrator, he will not understand why it is that he learns of "it" on the first page but does not know what it is until later in Chapter One, and why he does not learn what Rev. Josiah Crawley did until much, much later. The narrator presents the information in a way that real life experience cannot, in a fashion designed to pique the curiosity and to best illuminate the psychology of the characters and importance.

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of events. So we learn of "it" first so that the reader understands that "it" is of great importance and, by extension, is greatly anticipating what "it" might be. Real life does not allow for such revelation, but Trollope's narration can, if the reader respects the author's presentation of his world.

So the narrator of The Last Chronicle can tell us that "the letter did not reach Miss Crawley till after the magistrates' meeting on Thursday, but it will be better for our story that it should be given here" (76) and then proceed to show us the letter before the character reads it. And the narrator can also tell us that "what passed between them need not be repeated here word for word" (92) after he has given us the details of a previous interchange. Trollope can also let us know that Archdeacon Grantly's "feeling toward the girl had changed" (599) before Grantly has even started his talk with Grace Crawley—a sort of "giving away" the ending so that the reader may concentrate on and enjoy the novelist's art in building the scene. This annotated narration is foremost among the reasons the novel is a unique form that instructs as it delights.

Once the reader tacitly accepts the narrator's conditions for reading the novel, he can fully enjoy the benefit of the narrator's commentary. In real life, one cannot read a letter before it has been received, nor can he spend more time on an important conversation than on an unimportant one. It is common for one to spend a half-hour trying to order a book from a complete stranger and only ten minutes on the phone with a best friend, though the time used is in inverse proportion to that time's importance in the whole life. In the pages of the novel, the scene's importance rather than its actual duration can determine how many words it gets in the narration. Because of that, the reader can find insight into human conduct in a novel far more readily than it is often found in real life, which omits details and leaves little time for contemplation. The novel is greatly enriched through the act of revelation. The reader, though, must trust the narrator to reveal what is embedded in the story before he can reap the narrative benefits of that revelation.

What common ground exists in the "agreement" between the writer who tries to create human feeling in an imaginary world and the reader who turns to the imaginary world for wisdom and meaning? The answer that readily suggests itself is the ubiquitous "personal experience." By "personal experience," I mean the everyday events and changes that people live through in the course of their lives—the collected information from interaction with other people. Both writer and reader bring this to their exchange of the imaginary, and each uses it as a tool in his own special way. The writer is in some degree bound by what he has lived directly, and cannot create a world that does not bear some resemblance to his own. Yet the writer of fiction cannot simply write autobiography; in order to fashion his world, he must use his experience to
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inform his creative vision. As Nathaniel Hawthorne states in the “Custom House” chapter of *The Scarlet Letter*, his narration is built on a true life that “lies like a dream behind me” (50). There is personal experience that allows Hawthorne great insight into the world of Puritan New England, but that is limited by looking at it as though reflected in a mirror, with the details not being so pronounced that they bind the author’s ability to create characters and places.

There is, of course, more that the writer must bring the narrative, but I shall return to that later. Reading, not writing, the novel is of utmost concern to this essay, so here I consider the reader’s identification with character and his placement of self in the narrative. My sister says she reads novels to be a “voyeur” in the world of the characters. This desire for clandestine involvement in the affairs of other people undoubtedly leads more than one reader to the pages of the novel, while this desire also leaves the reader confused because he can never know what the narrator knows about the novel’s world. In all likelihood, the reader is not really a voyeur. Why read at all if the act of reading is simply the act of observing and not participating in the novel’s world? Surely the novel is not simply a fantastic escape from the real world. Or is it?

I contend that, through reading the novel, the reader becomes a shadow character himself. He is not a voyeur, and if he were, he would not be truly reading the novel. Reading implies that the reader is consciously in receipt of information that he must arrange to make sense of the novel. Whether the narrator addresses the reader as “you” or identifies himself as “I,” like Anthony Trollope, or does neither, that narrator is necessarily in a dialogue with the reader. The reader must become the shadow character by agreeing to a conversation of sorts with the narrator. In this way, the reading is as meaningful an act as talking to a neighbor. Yet the reader as character must understand that his conversation is with a fixed set of words from the narrator. Without the reader’s responses—spoken, written, or simply thought—the conversation does not occur, and neither the narrator/novelist nor the character/reader has accrued any benefit from the experience.

Granted, the reader can also find a role in the novel by living through another character, or by identifying strongly with a character. The tendency to attach love or significance to a particular character must give the novelist happiness, for it is then that the fictional character he created becomes the object of feelings normally directed at human beings. In such a case the reader might engage in a sort of dialogue with a character. The information exchange is not in place, as with the reader and narrator (unless the narration is in the first person), but it is similar: the character’s life in the story is addressed to the reader who in turn addresses feelings of admiration or concern to the character. This can happen when the character and the reader “share” a common experience. An example is
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offered by the Rev. Mr. Crawley in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, with whom I, as a reader, empathize.

Reverend Crawley is accused of stealing a check for twenty pounds, and knows only that he did cash the check. He cannot tell anyone from where he received the check, and the progress of his difficulties—though later resolved—occupies much of Trollope’s novel. Crawley says that: “‘It is because I cannot tell you where [the check] came from that I ought to be—either in Bedlam, as a madman, or in the county gaol as a thief’” (212). While his statement suggests self-pity, it also accents how even Crawley cannot accept the gray area between innocence and guilt that the author has given him. Yet this sort of gray area is encountered all the time in everyday life. I admire Reverend Crawley for enduring so much speculation on his true nature because others cannot be made to see the gray area the novelist and reader can see. Of course the reader may wish, unless he already has done so, to avoid having to see a character’s hardship so sympathetically because of personal history, either the character’s or the reader’s. The novel provides such a reader the room to consider situations without having to live them.

In order to consider the purpose of literature to aid in the individual’s desire to step outside of his own life, the words of Anna Akhmatova are instructive:

> It’s impossible to get here
> By either rowboat or cart.
> The water stands deep

On the rotten snow,
Besieging the estate
On all sides... (250)

These lines serve as a good metaphor for a way of reading the novel in order to learn of those areas of human experience in which the reader has not found himself. How many people have found themselves in the position of Stephen Cox, the writer Margaret Drabble sends to Cambodia in *The Gates of Ivory*? Most readers of this novel likely will never travel to Cambodia, and I doubt any will wish to find themselves dying in the jungle in order to learn that social identity is reliant on being socially identified. But most readers will no doubt find the scene of Stephen Cox’s death enlightening: “It was not very interesting, there would be no revelation, no confrontation, no lights from heaven would flash, neither God nor Pol Pot would speak from the burning bush” (355). Drabble certainly has never died in Cambodia, but her character has, and so she knows intimately the circumstance. She is able to convey to the reader a powerful message about a person’s construction of self and the human desire for personal identification. The interested reader is suited to learn from this instance. Both do not have to go to Cambodia or die to make the parable meaningful.

Stephen’s path coincides with that of the protagonist of Huxley’s *Island*: “Will Farnaby was neither here nor now” (7) upon reaching the supposed elysium of Pala. Both Cox and Farnaby have returned to the wilderness in
offered by the Rev. Mr. Crawley in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, with whom I, as a reader, empathize.

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an attempt to find the essences of their identities, and both find that identity is a concept of civilization's making. In the wild, they "die." The reader can consider better the role of identity in his own life by reading such stories, and the novel provides him the means to make such connections outside his realm of experience. Taking the reader outside his own plausible realm of experience is one of the strongest ways in which a novel can move a reader to a personal catharsis, and is why, for example, dystopian novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* inspired political action against Communist governments in Eastern Europe.

The novel as a literary force makes its own case for its purpose in its endurance. The novel reminds its reader of its continued availability in that it will not leave the reader as long as a copy of it is found on the shelf or even in the reader's memory. Both the reader and the writer accept this as they enter the novel's world. As it is, the very concept of the novel ensures that the novel exists permanently—not permanently in its precise definition, but in a usage relative to recorded history. The novel is not necessarily created with the readers of the next century in mind, and probably should not be. Trollope creates Barsetshire as a city of its time, commenting on contemporary writers (Messrs. Sentiment and Anticant in *The Warden*), religion, and politics. It is not the topical matters the author considers, but rather his exploration of universal human values, that ensures the series continued life. A novel like Trollope's *The Last Chronicle* is permanent physically so long as a copy of it exists, and, more importantly, permanent in its content as well when its author illuminates existence in a way that has enduring relevance. So the reader always can access the wisdom of Trollope's world, because the novel is a written document that presents its author's findings to the world. Whether Trollope thought that anyone in even 1900 would still read his work is irrelevant; the work is a lasting volume that can be read in 2001 as well as 1867 with most of its essence still accessible.

By serving the reader on a continuing basis, the novel provides scenes that can be combed again and again for their perspective on human affairs. No one can stop in the middle of life and examine a scene, but the reader can bookmark page 611 and return to it for clarification. The novel is designed to document the wisdom and imagination of its creator, and thus allows for the agreement between the reader and the novelist to remain in effect years after the novelist dies.

The novel allows the reader to make that agreement as often in the present as he likes. *The Last Chronicle of Barset* concludes:

... to me Barset has been a real county, and its city a real city, and the spires and towers have been before my eyes and the voices of the people are known to my ears, and the pavement of the city ways
an attempt to find the essences of their identities, and both find that identity is a concept of civilization's making. In the wild, they "die." The reader can consider better the role of identity in his own life by reading such stories, and the novel provides him the means to make such connections outside his realm of experience. Taking the reader outside his own plausible realm of experience is one of the strongest ways in which a novel can move a reader to a personal catharsis, and is why, for example, dystopian novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* inspired political action against Communist governments in Eastern Europe.

The novel as a literary force makes its own case for its purpose in its endurance. The novel reminds its reader of its continued availability in that it will not leave the reader as long as a copy of it is found on the shelf or even in the reader's memory. Both the reader and the writer accept this as they enter the novel's world. As it is, the very concept of the novel ensures that the novel exists permanently—not permanently in its precise definition, but in a usage relative to recorded history. The novel is not necessarily created with the readers of the next century in mind, and probably should not be. Trollope creates Barsetshire as a city of its time, commenting on contemporary writers (Messrs. Sentiment and Anticant in *The Warden*), religion, and politics. It is not the topical matters the author considers, but rather his exploration of universal human values, that ensures the series continued life. A novel like Trollope's *The Last Chronicle* is permanent physically so long as a copy of it exists, and, more importantly, permanent in its content as well when its author illuminates existence in a way that has enduring relevance. So the reader always can access the wisdom of Trollope's world, because the novel is a written document that presents its author's findings to the world. Whether Trollope thought that anyone in even 1900 would still read his work is irrelevant; the work is a lasting volume that can be read in 2001 as well as 1867 with most of its essence still accessible.

By serving the reader on a continuing basis, the novel provides scenes that can be combed again and again for their perspective on human affairs. No one can stop in the middle of life and examine a scene, but the reader can bookmark page 611 and return to it for clarification. The novel is designed to document the wisdom and imagination of its creator, and thus allows for the agreement between the reader and the novelist to remain in effect years after the novelist dies.

The novel allows the reader to make that agreement as often in the present as he likes. *The Last Chronicle of Barset* concludes:

> ... to me Barset has been a real county, and its city a real city, and the spires and towers have been before my eyes and the voices of the people are known to my ears, and the pavement of the city ways
are familiar to my footsteps. To them all I now say farewell... this shall be the last chronicle of Barset.

(861-2)

So Trollope closes his history of Barset. But he knows that he can continue to visit Barset in his mind as often as he likes. This is the end of the actively written Barset chronicle, which is only one of six novels on that place that exist. Trollope’s chronicle continues, as does the reader’s reading of the written word. The world is permanent for the figurative reader as long as there is a reader to be found. Each reader may interpret the textual Barsetshire differently, and so the author’s world continues to be modified even after he dies. Trollope is being ironic as regards this being the “last chronicle”—even the reader can, upon finishing the last novel of the series, return to page one of *The Warden* and revisit the world to meet once more a Trollope who has yet to follow his world to its conclusion, a Warden named Reverend Harding, and a living, fiery Mrs. Proudie (whom the reader meets in *Barchester Towers*).

Trollope, the narrator in written word, is permanent, as are his comments and asides. George Eliot similarly plays with the reader at the start of *Adam Bede*: “With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader” (5). So Eliot reaches into the past when the reader reads because she has already finished the story in her mind and on paper, for the book is published. Also, she knows that this promise to her reader can be made as many times as the reader chooses to read *Adam Bede*. Trollope and Eliot realize that the permanence of the novel and its contents might lead both reader and the author to come “back” to the world again.

It is the ready availability of the novel that gives it a large role in modern life. Poetry similarly endures, but does not capture more than glimpses of larger worlds. Whether poetics are graceful or brutal, they constrain the poet, preventing the expression of details that wonderfully coalesce in an eight-hundred-page novel. Only the novel gives the reader an extended world in which to be for more than a few minutes. Humans need to escape to imagination, to study themselves in a context apart from real life. A human being can best be enriched as a person by carefully considering as many experiences and emotions as possible, and the world of the novel is the perfect place for that study. Pages upon pages of words, written down and set in print, offer a solid environment into which a person may enter. The reader need not fret about the laws and ways in which this world is cognitively established—the author has agreed to be tour guide and builder in the novel’s world, so that the reader can enter into pure experience. There are no worries about bills, taxes, yard work, or consequences—because the reader is a quiet player in the world, one who observes so that he may learn more
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about the condition into which he has been born. That only the novel offers this safe place for the study of the human species; only the novel gives it an important role in workaday human life.

Modern readers ought to want to read novels more than they currently do, for each novel is another world of experience to visit, and each novel offers another chance for the reader to grow as a human being. Perhaps the postmodern age is not the easiest time to convince readers that the novel should be read so that the reader may learn more about universal human values. Yet this is a better time than any for the novel to be relevant to life. In an age where the value of human existence is assumed to be relative to one's values and experiences, a novel with as vast a scope as The Last Chronicle of Barset will offer every reader something to illuminate or inform his individual life.

The novel strives to be a legend for readers to check while navigating life. Of all forms of literature only the novel does this. Only in reading the novel can one find an enduring world within the world, a place where human complexities are sorted out in print so as to ease the burden of having to deal with them in the reader's own life. The novel puts the reader in a unique relationship with a writer who can entertain, provoke and illuminate life, both fictional and real, even across centuries. No other form reveals as much about the human condition and that enduring revelatory power is why readers still find the novel worth reading today. Styles and reasons for the reading of novels may vary from reader to reader; each approach to reading is mediated by different circumstances. Essentially, though, each reader can approach the novel on its own terms while creating and discovering connections with the inhabitants of the novel's world. Anthony Burgess writes, "Only through the exploration of language can the personality be coax ed into yielding a few more of its secrets" (156). These connections with the novel reflect an exploration of the reader's self. When made through the pages of a novel, that exploration can yield all the more valuable discoveries to the reader.
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Empowerment of Mortal and Divine Females in the Iliad: A Feminist Study of the Matristic Archetypes in Homer

Javier Betancourt
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The complex individual characters crafted by Homer in the Iliad are well known for their ability to transcend the given narrative situation of the siege of Troy due to a universality of psychology and spirit that creates timeless appeal. Perhaps surprisingly, this is as true of the supporting cast of women who are given secondary roles in the patriarchal epic as of the male protagonists. The purpose of this work is not to explore the dimensions of the Homeric evocation of the patriarchal but to focus on the epic female voice in such a system; it will be assumed that the mythic society evoked by Homer in the Iliad is decisively patriarchal and that this cultural structure introduces rigid existential limitations for the female, be she immortal or human. The specific cultural means, intellectual processes and historical directions of the Iliadic patriarch—even his specific localizations...
Works Cited


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and unfolding movements of his power—are all concerns which will have to be explored in other works.

This paper will present only the shadows of the archaic Greek patriarch insofar as his presence illuminates the search for voice of the epic female in the tense grasp of the Iliadic patriarch. The female characters lack nothing in depth or characterization and are as formally developed as any of the male warriors of the work. At first glance it may appear that the multiformity of Homer's females—from sea nymphs and Olympian goddesses to Trojan princesses and Achaean queens—allows for no connective impulse among them. Yet all the women in the Iliad are allied in their attempts to discover avenues of power where none are naturally or inherently allowed to them.

Thus, while the females in the Iliad have unique and divergent ways of approaching the invisible and sovereign structures of the patriarchal, all are united in attempting to evoke power and achieve voice within a system that inherently denies them both. All are fighting, knowingly or unknowingly, against the same mythico-cultural structures of the patriarchal and its varied manifestations. To these mythic women, then, nothing is a given: everything must be unearthed, seized and reclaimed. Thus the women of the Iliad, psychologically complex in word and action, are all women of necessity and direction, women of production and action. Passivity results in non-being in a patriarchal system that actively seeks to silence the female body. There are no definite options for fulfillment of the female within such a system: on the contrary, very exact and exacting codes of behavior and propriety limit the lives of women to a point of erasure.

To become actors on the Iliadic stage, women must create their own structures, their own roads to completion. Hence, the Homeric female who achieves voice is, by her very nature as speaker, already a transgressor. Yet her insurrection is always creative; passivity constitutes an acceptance of prohibition and absurdity. Thus though each of the women in the Iliad is driven by different needs and desires and though each finds her empowerment in a patriarchal universe by different means, there is a common thread in their rebellious dialogues: all are trying to discover a place for the mother's voice in a patriarchal text.

How successful they are remains to be seen. Two mortal characters—Helen and Andromache—and four goddesses—Hera, Aphrodite, Athena and Thetis—achieve empowerment in the male dominated world of the Iliad and their avenues to ascendency and emotional fulfillment are thematically comparable.

In the movements and reactions of these six mythic women, fundamental reactions to patriarchal authority are observable. With Hera there is a direct attack from a beligerent and dissident female position. With Athena, Helen and Aphrodite there is an acceptance of rigid patriarchal definitions to achieve inauthentic power. Lastly there are
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the essentialist matriarchs, Andromache and Thetis, who stay within the cultural system of the father and yet do not accept his controlling codes and instead revive and reinvigorate the neglected value system of the mother. Thus each of the women of Homer finds her own way to rebel against the shadow of the father; some of these rebellions are more liberating than others. Ultimately, not all avenues to power for the female are equally emancipating. To be able to identify authentic evocations of feminine strength in the Iliad, achieving true empowerment can be theorized as containing three essential elements: it should endow the female with enough power to achieve her desires, it should be rebellious against a construct that does not allow the feminine a real voice, and it should remain constant to the principles of the matriarch without capitulating to the desires or definitions of male hegemony.

Only two females in the Iliad, one mortal and one divine, will eventually achieve an empowerment compatible with all three of these recognized elements. Only Thetis and Andromache, by remaining loyal to their matriarchal values, are able to fulfill a satisfactory position of feminine strength that can remain universally acknowledged as an authentic avenue of power for women past and present. In this exploration of the roles of the Homeric female, we will look first at the rebellious goddesses of Homer, all of whom are shadows of Gaea.

Hera reigns as the queen of the Greek pantheon. At first glance Hera may appear as an irrational being who is moved to hate the citadel of Troy simply because she was deemed less beautiful in the infamous “Judgment of Paris” episode. Her divine motivations are infinitely more complicated, however, than those which fit within the mythical and literary plot of the Trojan saga. Hera, the queen of the Olympian gods and wife of Zeus, is empowered more by her bitter resentment at being reduced to an inferior position than by the unfavorable results of the “Judgment of Paris.” She is the only one of the gods or goddesses who dares to question the supremacy of Zeus, himself the ultimate symbol of patriarchal dominance. Hera wants to destroy the citadel of Troy and will stop at nothing to see the great walls reduced to ashes: a destructive urge that symbolizes her origins in what now appears as a dissident feminine mythology. When Zeus stands in her way, she uses subversive techniques such as seduction and deceit to get her way, as when she borrows the girdle of Aphrodite to lure her overbearing husband from interfering in the battle (Book 14). She is consistently portrayed as a malicious, irrational and subversive deity. Her dilemma, and her demand for a power she does not wield, can be better understood if Hera is seen as the last remaining earth-goddess from an earlier subjugated matriarchal mythos.

It has been a major concern of Jungian psychological feminism to recognize vestiges of the matriarchal deities of earlier societies in the mythologies of patriarchal cultures such as that of the classical Greeks. Zeus is
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the ultimate symbol of patriarchy, but his dominance over the people of Greece came into being only after he had invaded from the north. Zeus was a sky-god conquering the primarily female-centered cults of the early Mediterranean. Homer is not the only writer of Greek antiquity to depict this evolving conflict of the sexes on a cosmic scale. According to Sarah Pomeroy, in her work Goddesses, Whores, Wives, Slaves, such inter-gender divine conflicts are evident in the works of other archaic writers as well as in the works of Homer:

Hesiod details the divine progression from female-dominated generations, characterized by natural, earthy emotional qualities, to the superior and rational monarchy of Olympian Zeus. (2)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze the full dynamics of this cultural invasion, but it is necessary to understand that at one point the Greek mainland worshipped earth-based female deities such as Gaea, Rhea and ultimately Hera. Consequently, Hera is a weak reflection of the earlier generations of earth-goddesses who have been subjected to male dominance. Joan O'Brien in her exhaustive study of the metamorphosis of Hera from a powerful earth divinity to a mere mischievous wife, The Transformation of Hera, asserts: “On one level, then, Homer’s Hera rises out of the ashes of an earlier embodiment of matriarchal chaos” (111). Thus, Hera has intimate mystical connections to the fertility of the ecosphere and the powerful creative aspects of the feminine mythos.

However, Hera’s marriage to Zeus robs her of any real power in the universe. According to radical feminist Mary Daly in her work Gyn/Ecology, the cosmic marriage is a prevalent method for the male to achieve authority: “As patriarchy became the dominant societal structure, a common means of legitimization of this transition from a gynocentric society was forcible marriage of the triple goddess” (76). Zeus is now the ultimate dominant force in the universe and this, not a failure of Paris to affirm her beauty, leads to Hera’s anger at being reduced to a secondary role. Her righteous anger may be legitimate and inspiring as a rebellious feminine statement, but her helplessness against the violence of Zeus is more comic than heroic:

Crucially, this Hera has no power to smite. However artfully she and Sleep tame Zeus, her machinations never presage cosmic ruin. They amuse, not frighten. Zeus may be outmaneuvered, but he has the power to smite as once before he subdued Typhon and her. This nurse of monsters has lost her bite (O’Brien 110-111).

Hera’s apparent inability to achieve any real control over the affairs of the divine household combine with her overt subjugation by the patriarchal forces to make her an unimpressive figure. She has become a shadow of a primordial matriarchal goddess with only vague memories of that
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deity's cosmic dominance.

However, Hera is not the only goddess endowed with cosmic feminine aspects. Other goddesses of the *Iliad* display powers of the earlier, primal "Great Mother" deities, though like Hera they do so on a diluted scale. It is possible that, in the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal mythologies, the power of the older female deities was diminished not only by marriage to the conquering gods but also by the division of an earlier goddess into new separate goddesses in order to dilute their original power.

According to feminist psychologist Jean Shinoda Bolen in her work, *Goddesses in Everywoman*:

The Great Mother goddess became fragmented into many lesser goddesses, each receiving attributes that had once belonged to her. (21)

Aphrodite and Athena are examples of this division. Significantly, neither of these goddesses taken singly provides a satisfactory model for the woman that is both constant to the feminine psyche and rebellious against male domination.

To begin with, Aphrodite is simply a temptress or a prostitute on a grand scale. Still, Aphrodite, like Helen on the mortal level, uses her sexuality and the value given the female body by the male libido to get what she wants. In a perverse way, this is empowering. Aphrodite's body, the hyper-idealized female body, is thoroughly objectified:

it is a visually subservient body used to satisfy the scopophilia and voyeurism of a society controlled by men.¹

In the *Iliad*, Aphrodite works primarily through other characters such as Helen and even Hera. We can observe the Aphrodite principle at work when Helen's beauty keeps her safe from reproach in Troy. The elders of the city are mesmerized by her physical aspects, and cannot find a way to chastise Paris for his judgment in bringing the fateful female within their citadel (3.165). Similarly, as mentioned above, in Book 14, Aphrodite helps the queen of the gods as to seduce her husband, by allowing her to use a magical girdle filled with deceptive sexual power. Aphrodite has found a way to compete in the patriarchal universe but only by prostituting her own body, or the bodies of other females, to the desires of the

¹Aphrodite holds all of the sexual power that was originally a part of the earth-divinity but was balanced by other powers. It is fitting that Homer chose to portray Aphrodite as the child of Dione and Zeus and not of Uranus. This is the genealogy of "Aphrodite Pandemos," mentioned in the *Symposium* of Plato as the goddess of profane physical passion and the protectress of prostitutes. She is juxtaposed to "Aphrodite Urania," who transcends vulgar lust and represents an intellectual, nonphysical union. The Aphrodite depicted by Homer, though deceptively portrayed as good-natured and innocent, is undoubtedly the former.
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Aphrodite and Athena are examples of this division. Significantly, neither of these goddesses taken singly provides a satisfactory model for the woman that is both constant to the feminine psyche and rebellious against male domination.

To begin with, Aphrodite is simply a temptress or a prostitute on a grand scale. Still, Aphrodite, like Helen on the mortal level, uses her sexuality and the value given the female body by the male libido to get what she wants. In a perverse way, this is empowering. Aphrodite’s body, the hyper-idealized female body, is thoroughly objectified: it is a visually subservient body used to satisfy the scopophilia and voyeurism of a society controlled by men.¹

In the *Iliad*, Aphrodite works primarily through other characters such as Helen and even Hera. We can observe the Aphrodite principle at work when Helen’s beauty keeps her safe from reproach in Troy. The elders of the city are mesmerized by her physical aspects, and cannot find a way to chastise Paris for his judgment in bringing the fateful female within their citadel (3.165).

Similarly, as mentioned above, in Book 14, Aphrodite helps the queen of the gods as to seduce her husband, by allowing her to use a magical girdle filled with deceptive sexual power. Aphrodite has found a way to compete in the patriarchal universe but only by prostituting her own body, or the bodies of other females, to the desires of the

¹Aphrodite holds all of the sexual power that was originally a part of the earth-divinity but was balanced by other powers. It is fitting that Homer chose to portray Aphrodite as the child of Dione and Zeus and not of Uranus. This is the genealogy of “Aphrodite Pandemos,” mentioned in the *Symposium* of Plato as the goddess of profane physical passion and the protectress of prostitutes. She is juxtaposed to “Aphrodite Urania,” who transcends vulgar lust and represents an intellectual, nonphysical union. The Aphrodite depicted by Homer, though deceptively portrayed as good-natured and innocent, is undoubtedly the former.
Athena, goddess of wisdom and strategy, also finds a way of competing within the patriarchal system. Her approach at first seems to work quite admirably. She is the greatest war divinity in the *Iliad*, second only to Zeus in prowess, and her stratagems place her far above her half-brother Ares, who represents the bestial side of war. While Aphrodite may have originally been a matriarchal warrior goddess, these female origins have been erased and she is now intimately connected to Zeus—who birthed her from his head—and thus her strength is derived from the patriarchy itself and not from her femininity. She has become masculine in her characteristics as a warlike goddess driven towards excellence by reason and intellect. Somewhere along the way, Athena lost her femininity by trading it for masculine strength. She has betrayed her feminine roots by forgetting her origin as a maternal being.

So far—with Hera, Aphrodite and Athena—we have observed a variety of very realistic reactions of women to male domination, none of which has been a complementary or satisfactory approach for a universally liberated female. These are the same reactions of post-modern women in the contemporary environment that remains predominantly controlled by males. Sarah Pomeroy speaks of the parallel: “The fact that modern women are frustrated by being forced to choose between being an Athena—an intellectual, asexual career woman—or an Aphrodite—a frivolous sex object—or a respectable wife-mother like Hera shows that the Greek goddesses continue to be archetypes of human existence” (9). If these were the only options for women, mortal or divine, the situation would be grim indeed for the women of the *Iliad*. There is, however, one other goddess outside of the Olympian pantheon, who has found a different way of approaching the dilemma of being female in a patriarchal cosmos.

Thetis, the caring, nurturing and divine mother of Achilles is the best option for liberal feminist women to admire in the *Iliad*. Thetis is a symbol of virtuous motherhood that suffers for the life principle and the preservation of the child. She has neither capitulated into the lascivious desires of a male godhead—her husband is aloof and does not appear in the work—nor has she given up her strictly feminine attributes of compassion and motherhood. Yet she enjoys an independence and freedom of action that the other women, mortal and immortal, seem to lack. She has gained her solitude and has not had to subjugate her body nor reject her own desires as a female being. With her femininity and self-respect intact, she is still able to deal with Zeus, the enduring symbol of paternal hegemony, and ensure favors from him, not by prostituting her body like Aphrodite or becoming masculine like Athena, but by utilizing her specifically feminine powers for her own benefit.

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dominant men.

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Thetis ensures the favor of Zeus for her son, the warrior Achilles, by reminding Zeus that she came to his
aid when the other gods and goddesses rebelled against him (1. 533). Similarly, when her son needs new armor, Thetis turns to the lame smith god Hephaestus and he is obliged to help her because she once saved him when he was hurled from Olympus by his father, Zeus (18. 433). Thetis uses a system of reciprocal kindness, a cleverly feminine system that functions harmoniously and effectively within the patriarchal world. She has found a way to remain female and wield power without losing her feminine dignity or capitulating to the rigid demands of patriarchal culture.

The methodology of feminist liberation of the goddesses is repeated on the mortal plane. These reflections of the Olympian macrocosm can be seen in the two most important mortal women in the Iliad: Helen and Andromache. One is the cause of the war. Helen, who is the Greek queen, has followed her Trojan prince, Paris, away from her matronly duties in Sparta, thus setting the states of the two men against each other. The other is the wife of Hector, Andromache, who is a living symbol of the hearth and the “home” principle: a stark contrast to the brutal warfare occurring outside the city gates. Thus the value systems of Helen and Andromache, namely “passion” and “domesticity,” are in specific opposition to each other as they embody eroticism and devotion to the hearth.

Helen, the mortal counterpart to Aphrodite, contains most of the same negative feminine aspects of extreme sexual objectification observed in Aphrodite. Thus, Helen is no more of a positive female archetype than the frivolous goddess she emulates. However, Helen’s actions may be interpreted as somewhat more liberated, if not more radical, because of her rejection of the matronly duties of a compliant and submissive Greek mother. The patriarchal system has turned motherhood away from the natural ideal of Thetis and the mother-goddess, and institutionalized it to the point that it has lost its mystical connotations. Males of high class in classical antiquity used concubines and female slaves for sexual fulfillment and noble women only for necessary procreation. Any love or passion in this system seemed left to chance. Helen actively rebels against this sterile system by willingly eloping with Paris, a charismatic and exotic prince who provides an opportunity for erotic adventure and escape from domestic routine. Some would say that Helen was forced to go against her will by the goddess Aphrodite, but as in many cases in the Iliad, the goddess here is more of a psychological projection of the internal potentialities of Helen than an actual being. The goddess is simply her libido anthropomorphized.

Helen has done what few women can do. She has chosen a mate and left behind the duty to husband and child. Paris may not be much of a choice, but on some level, Helen can be admired for her power to beguile men and for her rejection of contemporary values. What is perhaps even more amazing about this classical evocation of a “radical feminist” is that she gets away with it as well.
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as she does. Menelaus, her husband, must go after her, but in the end, he cannot harm her because: “Since Menelaus was king by virtue of his position as Helen’s husband, he might lose the throne if he lost her” (Pomeroy 21). This type of matrilocal inherited kingship ironically traps Menelaus in a paradox where he must chase after his rebellious wife but he must not punish her with death as the law commands. Perhaps Helen is not an ideal feminist heroine, but she at least finds some release from the exacting confines of the prevailing patriarchal system.

At the other extreme, Andromache, the gentle and compassionate wife of Hector, is the human parallel to the underlying “Great Mother” mythos. Andromache is most fully portrayed in two scenes—a meeting with her husband in Troy and later a speech of lamentation upon his death—which Homer fills with the pathos of human existence, making the Trojan noble woman a tragic figure in the work. Andromache confronts her husband in an emotional scene when he enters the citadel for a moment and is about to return to the carnage of war. She meets her husband and brings their child Astyanax with her as she attempts to persuade him to take a defensive stance, and thus save their family:

Possessed is what you are, Hector.
Your courage is going to kill you,
And you have no feeling left
For your little boy or me, the luckless woman

Who will soon be your widow. (6. 426-30)

Though Andromache is pleading with her husband, Homer makes a point of portraying her with honor and dignity, presenting her relationship with her husband as one of equality. This scene is made more poignant as a foreshadowing of what will happen to this noble family after the war has run its course. In the Iliad, Hector is killed by Achilles and his funeral ends the epic. His body is brought back to Troy, which leads to the second important scene for Andromache. As she cradles the head of her dead husband she laments the grim future she knows awaits her when the Achaeans finally take Troy. She will be sold into slavery to some Greek chieftain, and her son Astyanax will be hurled from the ramparts to a grisly death. Thus, the family unit is sacrificed to the brutality of battles waged by men in a society where war is an integral part of the patriarchal universe.

In her appearances, so filled with the tragedy of the feminine everyday, Andromache speaks the language of the earth-goddess that acts as preserver of life in contrast to the savage, heroic code that dominates the Iliad. Andromache is the greatest objector to the idea that men must become murderers as they display their bravery on the battlefield. Hector, defender of the Trojan people, lives and dies by the heroic code that demands such brutal conduct in war. The need for violence and destruction as a means to redemption is an inherent part of the patriarchal organization and has been recognized as an unconsciously
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motivated compensation for the lack of the feminine ability to give life: “The male sense of barrenness, then, breeds hierarchical structures of violence, epitomized in war” (Daly 361). Andromache is a symbolic juxtaposition of the female life principle and matristic ethics as opposed to the destructive aspect of the patriarchy. Homer, a fundamentally polyphonic author, gives her a strong voice of dissent, and her questions about why men must slaughter each other remain largely unanswered or unanswerable within the patriarchal text of Homer’s *Iliad*. Like Thetis, Andromache is a strong female character in the *Iliad* who still holds the essential life-preserving values of the matriarchy intact while using compassion and intellect to retain power and equality within the patriarchal universe.

Ultimately, each of the women of the *Iliad* approaches the problem of patriarchy in a specific and deliberate way. It is this extraordinary ability to capture multiple consciousnesses and psychological realities within a single work that render Homer a remarkably multiphonic writer who achieves a depiction of his culture which is epic in its inclusiveness. Yet even as Homer honestly depicts the feminine principle within a predominantly patriarchal text, there is still a sense that these women can never completely escape the controlling system of patriarchy. For the women of the *Iliad*, there is no ideal, external position from which to wage war against the father’s jurisdiction: all are woven into the fabric of their culture, inseparable from the dominant males who deny them easy assertions of power. Accordingly, in the *Iliad*, their rebellions must exist within the invisible, all-encompassing body of the father. For all their dynamic action it is apparent that the cosmos will remain primarily male-oriented. No matter in which direction these women seek spiritual and ethical refuge, there is still a central pull of imperceptible and omnipresent patriarchal domination that exerts itself in every conceivable instance.

Finally, it is precisely because of this indefatigable presence of the male that the females who are most effective at achieving empowerment within patriarchy are those who recognize its multifarious, inescapable reality and develop more intricate ways of circumventing its ontological stipulations. Undoubtedly, Thetis on the divine level and Andromache on the mortal are the two females in the *Iliad* who are best able to achieve power within the system of the father. Neither can escape the patriarchy directly, yet both can escape institutionalized notions of sickly motherhood as a regimented and dissected enterprise and recover their own matronal language as mothers, achieving a personal effectiveness from within. Consequently, while still under the constraints of the male, they naturally subvert and challenge the dominant patriarchal structures of violence and subjugation by speaking directly from the ethical codes of reciprocity and compassion belonging to the female. Thus, Andromache and Thetis are the only women who achieve all of the criteria stipulated at the beginning of this essay: they acquire power; they are
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fundamentally rebellious; and yet they remain true to their female nature.

Homer wrote the *Iliad* in a time period removed from ours by a span of nearly three millennia, but the basic attributes of gender and the male/female interrelationships of the book remain as strikingly relevant today as they were in the time of Homer. The voices of these epic women, these rebellious and hysteric goddesses and mortals who challenge patriarchal dominance, are, in their radically searching actions, as comparable to the post-millennial women of the present day as to the women of the Achaean epoch of petty kingdoms. Marginalized by the conquering sky-god, the mother-goddess within these women finds empowerment through the unique power of the female. Their return to the essential nature of matrismic and biolithic womanhood subverts repressive male authority and, one likes to think, may someday right the distorted patriarchal world-view of violent individualism and savage war.

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In the fiction of Toni Morrison, the African American woman emerges as a strong, central figure despite circumstance. Whether she is well-loved or not, happy or not, she retains tremendous strength. The dynamics of the family, including family obligations, family heritages, brothers, sisters, mothers, and so on, take center stage in Morrison’s work. Mothers are very important. It is interesting, then, to note how motherhood affects or determines their behavior as women, as wives, and as social individuals. Two of Morrison’s novels in particular, *Song of Solomon*, set in twentieth-century Chicago, and *Beloved*, set in nineteenth-century Lorraine, Ohio, reveal patterns and similarities in these resonant maternal figures.

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control, some seek love, some seek freedom and sisterhood, and some seek redemption. In all cases, the importance of patriarchy fades into the background as everything these women do revolves somehow around their daughterhood and its impact on their motherhood.

*Song of Solomon,* less blatantly concerned with motherhood than is *Beloved,* best reveals its coherence when one understands the motivations of the mothers and the way the mothers figure in the story's structure. In *Song of Solomon,* there are two main mothers, Ruth Foster Dead and Pilate Dead. Pilate Dead also represents, by extension, her daughter Reba and her granddaughter Hagar. Ruth Foster Dead is the unloved wife of a well-to-do landlord; before she was his wife, she was a wealthy doctor's daughter. Ruth never had an attachment with her mother, and she had devoted all of her affection, however excessive, to her father. Though she has three children, two daughters and a son, understanding her relationship with her son Milkman is the key to understanding Ruth. She uses pregnancy and motherhood as a means of exercising control in a world where she otherwise has none.

Pilate Dead, Ruth's sister-in-law and an extremely unconventional woman, has borne and raised her daughter without a husband. Pilate, though perhaps not the strongest woman in *Song of Solomon,* is certainly one of the strongest women in the book. Her weaknesses become apparent only when Pilate is understood both as a mother and as a child. Like Ruth, Pilate did not know her mother. Unlike Ruth, she lost her father very early. Haunted by her past, she attempts to find some emotional stability in the matriarchal household she establishes with Reba and Hagar.

Another woman haunted by her past is Sethe, the main character in Morrison's *Beloved.* Sethe is different from Ruth and Pilate because of her drastically different position in history and social situation. Sethe, like Ruth and Pilate, suffered the lack of a mother in her own childhood, having only fragmentary memories of her “Ma'am.” As an adult, she suffers the theft of her milk by her white oppressors. Most famously, she is a runaway slave who kills her next-to-youngest child, a daughter, to protect her from slave catchers. The ghost of this child returns to be with Sethe.

*Song of Solomon* is a book rich with relationships, particularly mother-child relationships. Ruth Foster Dead is an important character to understand both as a child herself and as mother to the main character, Milkman. Likewise, the three-generational family of Pilate, Reba, and Hagar must be understood in terms of its mother-child bonds. One finds, as the text develops, that these women are not fully functional. Their families are unstable configurations, and these women are the sources of the instabilities.

Ruth Foster Dead is herself emotionally unstable. This instability may be the result of her strong bonds with her father rather than with her mother. According to Gary
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Ruth Foster Dead is herself emotionally unstable. This instability may be the result of her strong bonds with her father rather than with her mother. According to Gary
Storhoff, Ruth obediently “conforms to the stereotypical image of a devout housewife” and describes herself as “pressed small” in her marriage (8). On the surface, Ruth’s passive behavior may seem to be nothing out of the ordinary.

When the reader understands that Ruth has a simultaneous desire for control and for victimization, then her relationship with her father assumes paramount importance. Ruth says to Milkman of her relationship with her father: “I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package... but I didn’t think I’d ever need a friend because I had him” (124). Storhoff characterizes the relationship as “a family legacy of enmeshment” (8); since Ruth was so enmeshed with her father, even at his death, she became a mother who sought the same type of enmeshment with her own son. Ruth even “understands... that she cannot use her ‘smallness’ as a mask to disguise her own efforts for control” (Storhoff 8).

Ruth, who had never imagined her life without her father, “attempts to deny [her father] the relief of death,” and she “ostensibly perpetuates her victimhood by prostrating herself before him” (9). The reader is unsure whether there was a literal act of incest between Ruth and the wealthy Dr. Foster, but it is clear that Ruth had an unhealthy sense of belonging to her father. She even “prostrates herself” before him after he is dead by lying on his grave. When she marries Macon, she “continues her role of self-abasement for her father’s sake” (9).

As a husband and as a father, Macon leaves much to be desired. He is presented as:

solid, rumbling, likely to erupt without prior notice. Macon kept each member of his family awkward with fear. His hatred of his wife glittered and sparked in every word he spoke to her. (10)

Ruth is an abused wife who, in Morrison’s words, “began her days stunned into stillness by her husband’s contempt and ended them animated by it” (11). As a daughter, Ruth abased herself out of love for her father. As a wife, she abases herself out of fear. Nonetheless, she tries to continue the “affectionate elegance” (12) of her childhood by continuing to arrange centerpieces, regardless of Macon’s contempt for them. By continuing the “elegance” of her childhood, she is honoring her father’s memory by keeping the house as he preferred it—continuing to abase herself as she honors his memory. At the same time, she spurns her husband’s exercise of domestic power.

Though abused, then, Ruth is also a wife in control. Her ultimate act of control is her son, Milkman. Ruth and Macon’s sister Pilate scheme together to orchestrate Ruth’s pregnancy, so that Ruth can have something to bring to her marriage that will “hold them together” (131). Ruth knows that her husband will be enraged when he finds out that she is pregnant. This is strongly related to her desire to always be a victim. By being the victim, she thinks that

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she has ultimate control because her victimhood is some­how necessary to her husband. Ruth sees Milkman's birth as her one "aggressive act brought to royal completion" (133). Milkman provides Ruth with another man to serve, to take the place of her father (Storhoff 10). She is possessive of him, then, not only as her child, but as the manifesta­tion of her control and the embodiment of her master. She dotes on him more than she does on her daugh­ters, Lena and First Corinthians who, as females, do not embody the same legacy as a male child.

Ruth's son earned his embarrassing nickname, after all, because she was known to have breastfed him long after he was too old, as a way of prolonging his depen­dance on her and of asserting her control over the satis­faction of his needs. When Hagar, Milkman's former lover and first cousin, is attempting to kill Milkman, it is Ruth who approaches her and threatens to cut her throat if she succeeds. Ruth's explanation for doing so is that she be­lieves she is Milkman's only "home" in this world. Obvi­ously, Milkman does not agree, since he spends a substan­tial portion of the book seeking his true home elsewhere. Ruth even acknowledges to herself that "her son had never been a person to her, a separate real person. He had al­ways been a passion" (131).

Ruth sees her child as an extension of herself, as an extension of feelings inside of her. She may possess secret desires to be with and serve her father again or even to be a lover to her husband. Since she cannot fulfill either one of these desires, she may see Milkman as the embodi­ment of a part of her own flesh, of her own desires. Ruth is a mother who uses pregnancy as a tool—a weapon, a means of having someone to control and worship simulta­neously. The fact that her own mother had little to do with her life leads the reader to believe that Ruth may be acting to compensate the affection she never felt from her own mother. Or, conversely, if Ruth sees Milkman as a "vic­tory over her husband" (Storhoff 11), then perhaps she is trying to obtain some sort of symbolic control over her dead father through her child.

The household of Pilate, Reba, and Hagar Dead consists solely of mothers and daughters. Like Ruth, how­ever, Pilate carries the weight of her dead father with her. Pilate has lived almost her entire life literally carrying around a bag of dead man's bones from a cave where she once hid as a child. She had seen her father killed and she knew little of her mother, not even her name. She believes that the ghost of her father told her to keep the bones of a man she had seen killed in the cave so long ago, to carry around the remembrance and its physical anchor for her entire life. She never settled down and married; many of her lovers were repulsed by her lack of a navel, an anat­omical anomaly that suggests that she in fact literally had no mother.

Pilate is a self-supporting woman who lives on her own and earns her money by making and selling wine. She seems very different from her sister-in-law, Ruth, but,
she has ultimate control because her victimhood is somehow necessary to her husband. Ruth sees Milkman’s birth as her one “aggressive act brought to royal completion” (133). Milkman provides Ruth with another man to serve, to take the place of her father (Storhoff 10). She is possessive of him, then, not only as her child, but as the manifestation of her control and the embodiment of her master. She dotes on him more than she does on her daughters, Lena and First Corinthians who, as females, do not embody the same legacy as a male child.

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in actuality, they may be similar in the way in which they view their children as a means of correcting the deficiencies of their own lives. "Morrison does not privilege Pilate's unconventional, matriarchal, marginalized family unit over Macon and Ruth's conventional, patriarchal, bourgeois nuclear family" (Storhoff 2). In fact, Pilate may even be "seeking to fuse" with her children in order "to satisfy [her] own emotional cravings" (2). If this is the case, then perhaps Pilate is lonely and hurt by the idea that she has no companion and that her brother will not even speak to her. As Morrison's text dodges back and forth in time, the reader learns that on the occasion of her pregnancy with Reba, Pilate would not marry Reba's father because she "wouldn't be able to hide her stomach from her husband forever... once he saw that uninterrupted flesh, he would respond the same way everyone else had" (147).

When Reba was born, Pilate looked first to see if her daughter had a navel, and she was relieved that she did. Perhaps, to Pilate, the navel is symbolic of a chance at life and family that she did not feel that she had. Also, with the birth of her own child, Pilate may have felt a special connection to a mother she never knew. Directly after Reba was born, Pilate says that her father came to her again, and, very clearly, said "Sing, Sing" (147). At the time, Pilate thought that her father was literally telling her to sing. At the end of the book, however, the reader learns that Sing was in fact Pilate's mother's name. Living to see her daughter and living so closely with her, Pilate may be living out a personal emotional craving, as Gary Storhoff calls it, through her daughter and later through her granddaughter. This craving for brother, mother, and husband may find some satisfaction and ease in a matriarchal household.

The truth, however, is that Pilate does not understand what her dead father is trying to say to her for most of the book. Only at the end, when Milkman reveals the truth to her, does she realize what her father was saying about the bag of bones. This confusion about the past molds Pilate's identity as a woman and as a mother. Because she lost her home, she has taught Reba to care nothing for property or possessions; because she lost her own family, she is very involved in the lives of Reba and Hagar in order to compensate. Pilate also projects an image of independence:

when she realized what her situation in the world was and would probably always be she threw away every assumption she had learned and began at ground zero.

(Morrison 149)

Almost predictably, Pilate imposes no sense of patriarchy upon Reba and Hagar. As a result, Reba thinks nothing of sharing herself and any material possessions she may have with any man. Gary Storhoff asserts that Reba "magnifies the destructive aspect inherent in Pilate's self-denial by allowing herself to be exploited by nameless lovers" (7).
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She constantly gives away gifts, money, and herself to men. Hagar, the beloved granddaughter, has always had to deal with two mother figures in Pilate and Reba. When she is rejected by Milkman, she falls into a deep and violent depression, eventually dying from her madness. Most would blame Milkman for Hagar’s actions; however, Pilate and Reba may be just as responsible for making Hagar suffer. Pilate and Reba have always spoiled Hagar, wanting to give her anything she asks. Most importantly, they have given her their sense of independence. “Her feeling of entitlement is a result of Pilate and Reba’s enmeshment” (Storhoff 7). Hagar feels that she is indeed entitled to Milkman, which is why she tries to kill him when she realizes that she cannot have him. Hagar never becomes a mother herself, but her behavior is certainly directly influenced by that of her mother and grandmother, who have unwittingly cast her in the enduring role of the pampered child.

Pilate, like Ruth, lives out her desires through her child. With Ruth, being a mother serves as a sexual means of power and control, of totally enmeshing herself with another. Pilate does not deliberately plan to have children as Ruth does, but having a child changes her nonetheless. The child becomes so important to her that she actually begins her life again, starts over, lives alone, and pours her life into pleasing her child. Pilate’s household is not really an ideal one; if it were, the reader is inclined to believe, then Hagar would not have succumbed so easily to madness. Hagar, like Ruth, becomes the sufferer, but there is nothing devious or intentional about her suffering. Her household simply harbors it.

The matriarchs, Ruth and Pilate, both seem to be affected by a lack of contact with their own mothers. Ruth has become obsessed with her father; she was isolated in the house because of their wealth, and he was her only “friend.” Pilate’s mother died while she was being born, and Pilate pushed her own way into the world. Pilate never enjoyed the lengthy company of mother or father. To some extent this leaves her more free than Ruth as she carves out her own lifestyle and centers her world around her family of women. At the same time, she is more ignorant of parental relationships. Where Ruth has some knowledge of the uses of control, however unfortunate, Pilate has none. Both households suffer as a result.

The dynamics of the mother-child relationship are also the key to understanding the events in Morrison’s Beloved. In this book, there is one central family and one very central mother, Sethe. Sethe is a slave who has managed to run away to freedom and has given birth along the way. She lives contentedly with her four children at her mother-in-law’s house until, one day, she knows that slave catchers are approaching the house, looking for her. In an act of desperation, madness, and, it seems probable, love, Sethe flees with her children to a shed where she attempts to kill them before the slave catchers can arrive and take them back into slavery. She manages to kill only one, the
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toddler Beloved. The book begins around eighteen years later, and the reader learns that Beloved has been haunting the house ever since her throat was cut.

Sethe, “like all slave mothers, cannot claim her children” (Hansen 65). In this case, Sethe is both victim and property, though not by her own choice. Trying to kill her own children may even be viewed as an assertion of power, because by doing so Sethe is “usurping the slave master’s rights” (65). Unlike Ruth, who seeks her own victimization through her child, Sethe is a mother who, when she finds herself and her children becoming victims, reacts by bringing immediate death to her child. In both cases, the women’s actions are about exercising power. Sethe’s case revolves around escape; she is consumed by the need to save herself and of her children, all of whom escaped slavery once. She faces a completely different situation than Ruth, who, never having to escape from anything, uses her pregnancy and her child to preserve the survival of herself, of her marriage, and of her own personal desires.

Ruth is, arguably, a selfish mother, as is Pilate. Sethe’s situation could be argued either way; she is selfish because she wants control over whether her own children live or die, and she is also selfless because she is actually capable of killing her own child in order to secure that child’s safety from slavery. The slave-holding society which Sethe has fled dictates that Sethe cannot claim her children. Sethe is strong because she claims her motherhood. Doing so, she claims the strength to act in her child’s behalf.

According to Marianne Hirsch, most Americans see African American families as “matriarchies in which mothers rather than fathers have power and presence” (95). She also states that Morrison’s Beloved “tests the notion of matriarchal power and its effect on children” (95). The strong sense of matriarchy permeates Beloved. Back at Sweet Home, where Sethe was a slave, she was concerned as a child only with knowing which one of the workers was her mother. She was happy to know that she was the only child that her mother had kept through the years. When her mother took her outside and showed Sethe the mark that could always distinguish her as Sethe’s mother, Sethe pleaded to have one to match it. She wanted a sense of identity at Sweet Home, and she wanted to identify herself with her mother. This same longing for identity and for identification with one’s mother brings back the ghost of baby Beloved.

Beloved cannot bear to be separated from her mother, even in death, so she returns to enjoy her as much as possible, meanwhile driving out Paul D, the last of the Sweet Home men and Sethe’s lover, who has driven the earlier manifestations of the baby ghost from the house where he now lives with Sethe. Now Beloved seeks to oust Paul D. First of all, Paul D is not Beloved’s father; secondly, Paul D represents fatherhood in general, an institution that is not seen by any woman in the book as an
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ultimate power. Beloved is jealous of Paul D's attention to Sethe, and she proceeds to drive him away from her mother by forcing him to sleep with her. Sethe willingly forsakes the company of Paul D in order to enjoy the company of her two girls.

Sethe's attitude about motherhood, fatherhood, and Paul D is evident when he asks her to have a baby with him:

Unless carefree, motherlove was a killer. What did he want her pregnant for? To hold onto her? Have a sign that he passed this way? He probably had children everywhere anyway... No, he resented the children she had, that's what...that is what he resented. Sharing her with the girls. Hearing the three of them laughing at something he wasn't in on... They were a family somehow and he was not the head of it.

(Morrison 132)

Motherhood, then, is indeed the most powerful bond in the book. To Sethe, a woman having children is of greater value because of the hard labor and time involved. This is clearly implied in the above passage of text when she says that Paul D probably had "dropped" children everywhere. She knows that the children do not mean the same thing to fathers as to mothers, and she draws a kind of pride and power from this belief. The pride shows through in her last statement: "they were a family somehow, and he was not the head of it" (132). Sethe's attitude about her newly reunited family may stem from what Hirsch refers to as "maternal fantasies of reparation and recovery" (97), the desire to triumph over the man who has cast her in the role of mother.

Pregnancy and birth, with all their painful associations, also symbolize a condition or act of bonding with other women, a sisterhood that is not shared with men. This special type of bonding is evident in the scene where Sethe gives birth to Denver on her way to freedom. Pregnant and trying to escape alone to get to her other children, Sethe finds herself in the woods suffering labor pains. A white girl, Amy Denver, discovers Sethe in the woods and helps her deliver her baby while comforting her and keeping her company. Sethe and Amy are briefly "united by their gender, their poverty, their subordinate social status, and by their stories of cruel masters, absent mothers, unknown fathers" (Hirsch 100). Denver, while acting as a midwife, almost takes the place of a father figure in the situation; after all, the baby is named after her (100).

The story of Denver's birth is crucial to the development of Denver herself. It is the only story of Sethe's that Denver enjoys hearing, and only because it is about her. Sethe tells Denver small segments of the tale at a time, about her swollen feet and about Amy, about Denver's birth truly being a miracle. The full story develops when
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Denver and Beloved are playing in the attic, and Beloved asks to hear Denver’s story. It is then that the reader is completely filled in with the details of the birth. It is a particularly significant birth for Sethe, symbolic of her new freedom. For Denver, the story of her birth is a means of finding herself: According to Hirsch, “Morrison allows the daughters to find themselves in the mother’s story so that Denver might develop into the mature, self-reliant, caring, and community-oriented woman she becomes at the end of the novel” (101). Denver finds her place in life from her mother, not from her hometown or her father, but from the story of her birth. The strength of the women is threading down through the matriarchal line.

Sethe, who saw her own mother killed and knew her only by her mark, likewise finds strength in the matriarchy of the family. Her strength comes from Baby Suggs, who is Sethe’s mother-in-law. Baby Suggs had been bought by her own son, Sethe’s Sweet Home husband, so that she could live in freedom. It is to her house that Sethe and her children flee when they escape. “Baby Suggs, the freed mother who lost all of her own children, can offer Sethe an alternate to the maternal care she could have had from her own mother” (Hirsch 102).

Sethe, the reader discovers, repeats the actions of a mother she never really knew when she kills Beloved; her mother, as mentioned earlier, killed many of her children that were fathered by men she did not care for. In Baby Suggs’ house, Sethe is nurtured and cared for as she had never been before; upon Sethe’s arrival, Baby Suggs cleans her from the birth and washes her all over. This scene is similar to the one in Song of Solomon where Pilate cares for Ruth after Macon attempts to abort their child. One could say, then, that just as Baby Suggs is a surrogate mother to Sethe, Pilate is a surrogate mother to her sister-in-law. The women find strength and purpose in one another, if not in their children, and mother each other as well as their own offspring.

All of the women suffer terrible losses. Sethe can never forget Beloved, who vanishes once again at the end of the book. Pilate can never forget her father and does not find closure until she properly buries his bones. Ruth probably never finds a sense of closure; after all, she has lost her son, both literally and figuratively. Baby Suggs, who lost all of her children during slavery, finds comfort in caring for her daughter-in-law. Denver, who is not a mother and who has been denied anything like a normal childhood, must rely on the story of her birth and her matriarchal lineage as a touchstone from which she can begin her life. Hagar, by contrast, cannot find a touchstone, and she drifts away, regardless of the efforts of her family. Because these women are without mothers—Ruth, Pilate, Sethe—the reader cannot help but notice that maternal absence shapes the way they behave. They may try to relive a part of their life that is missing through intentional pregnancies, as Ruth does, by claiming motherhood as an exercise of power. Alternatively they may pour themselves
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into their motherhood; although because they lack so much in their own pasts, like Pilate and like Sethe, they never pour exactly enough. Sethe even repeats the behavior of her mother, though for somewhat different reasons. Some, like Baby Suggs, find purpose in surrogacy. Others, like Beloved, find some purpose in reconciling themselves with the children they lose, and some never find purpose at all. Nonetheless, Morrison makes known the power of motherhood as a system in and of itself, separate and independent from patriarchy, feeding its members with an ever-renewing strength.

Works Cited


Storhoff, Gary. “‘Anaconda Love’: Parental Enmeshment in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*.” *Style* 31.2 290+.
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Women's roles in American society have changed drastically since the establishment of the early colonies. On the frontier, women were expected to care for their homes and families and to work in the fields as well. In the event of a husband's absence, the wife would also assume his responsibilities governing the work of servants and ensuring that crops were harvested and sold in a timely fashion. At harvest time, most women worked in the fields alongside the men. These same women also had to maintain their roles as mothers and homemakers, taking on the tasks of sewing, cooking, cleaning, and caring for the ill.

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The development of early capitalism enforced existing gender roles. Because of the painstaking drudgery that accompanied early industrialization, it was assumed that men would enter the work force as physical laborers.
Consequently, a woman’s “place” became the home, while men became the wage earners for their families. Additionally, external forces such as family relations, loss of a husband, racism, sexism, and mainstream notions of what constitutes “ideal femininity” have continued to affect women’s lives throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Stephen Crane, in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, tells the story of Maggie Johnson, a young girl living in the tenement houses of New York City during the late nineteenth century. Maggie confronts violence both in her home and on the streets. She witnesses constant brutality between her parents and she is physically abused by her mother and by her brother Jimmy. After her father’s death, Jimmy advises Maggie to either “go to hell or go to work” (Crane 49). Although Maggie promptly finds work sewing collars in a shirt factory, an infatuation with her brother’s friend Pete evokes the romantic inside of Maggie:

As thoughts of Pete came into Maggie’s mind, she began to have an intense dislike for all of her dresses.... She began to note, with more interest, the well-dressed women she met on the avenues. She envied elegance and soft palms. She craved those adornments of person which she saw every day on the street, conceiving them to be allies of vast importance to women. (Crane 49)

The dialogue between Jimmy and Pete depicts the two young men as rowdy and mean. They take great pride in exchanging stories of street fights and barroom brawls. Because of her constant exposure to violence and hostility, Maggie perceives this type of behavior as not only acceptable, but admirable:

Here was one who had contempt for brass-clothed power; one whose knuckles could defiantly ring against the granite of law.... To her the earth was composed of hardships and insults. She felt instant admiration for a man who openly defied it. (Crane 53)

Maggie’s naivete gives life to idealistic visions about Pete’s job as a bartender and to a deepening discontent with her job at the shirt factory:

She reflected upon the collar and cuff factory. It began to appear to her mind as a dreary place of endless grinding. Pete’s elegant occupation brought him, no doubt, into contact with people who had money and manners. (Crane 53)

Maggie realizes that her factory wages will never provide her with the expensive clothes or jewelry that Pete finds enticing. Moreover, she begins to fear that she will become as useless and miserable as she perceives her fellow workers to be. “She speculated how long her youth would endure. She began to see the bloom upon her cheeks
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as valuable” (Crane 59). Maggie ultimately discovers what many women throughout history have discovered before her: an attractive face and body can be a useful asset. As Pete and Maggie spend more and more time together, her brother and mother become increasingly resentful. When Jimmy learns that Maggie has been “ruined,” the situation erupts in one final violent outburst of emotions. She leaves the Johnson home and finds temporary sanctuary with Pete. However, he soon rejects her in favor of a more elegant sort, “a woman of brilliance and audacity” (Crane 78). Having nowhere to turn, Maggie tries to reconcile with her estranged family. But they too are not interested in the broken spirit of the young woman and rather than trying to save her, they take great pleasure in humiliating her and turning her away. Maggie’s story finally concludes with her unfortunate yet inevitable demise.

In a related narrative, Fanny Fern’s story “Ruth Hall” elucidates the problems of a young woman whose husband has passed away, leaving her with the responsibility of providing for her two young daughters. Ruth’s situation is further complicated by her unwillingness to conform to the idealized notion of “true womanhood,” which defines a woman as:

gentle and submissive...selfless and self-effacing...respectful of and deferential toward her male relatives...never lacking in female delicacy...[and having] religious piety and respect for religion. (Fern xx)

The death of Ruth’s mother and her subsequent placement in boarding school by her father, cause her to fall short of these ideals. Aside from her roommates at school, Ruth has no female role models to learn from. These girls are more interested in teasing Ruth for her naivety than helping her acquire the traits of a “true” woman.

Ruth has also suffered an unhappy childhood. During a retrospective moment she recalls that her mother “always looked uneasy about the time her father was expected home; and when his step was heard in the hall, she would say in a whisper... ‘Hush! hush! you father is coming...’” (Fern 14). Ruth’s brother Hyacinth is also cruel, constantly remarking that she is “very plain” and “awkward” (Fern 13). As a child she spends most of her time alone. However, as she matures Ruth is shocked to find that she is developing into an attractive young woman. Not surprisingly, Ruth believes if she is beautiful she will finally find the love she has never received from her father and brother:

... she was “plain, awkward Ruth” no longer. Eureka! She had arrived in the first epoch of a young girl’s life,—she had found out her power! Her manners became assured and self-possessed. She, Ruth, could inspire love! Life became dear to her. There was something worth striving for...she should some day make somebody’s heart glad.... (Fern 16)
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Ruth’s concern involves her aesthetic qualities and her education as well. This is another example of her unconventional mentality:

Ruth’s schoolmates wondered why she took so much pains to bother her head with those stupid books, when she was every day growing prettier, and all the world knew that it was quite unnecessary for a pretty woman to be clever. (Fern 16)

The death of her husband, the maltreatment inflicted upon Ruth by her in-laws, and her own family’s indifference towards her, ultimately cause Ruth to realize the true value of her intellect. She begins writing and eventually her talents save Ruth and her daughters from absolute poverty.

Finally, the story of Helga Crane in Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* explicates the turmoil of a young mulatto woman who cannot find happiness. Helga is trapped in a downward spiral triggered by self-loathing and contemptuous jealousy of the world that her black skin forbids her to share with her white step-brothers and step-sisters:

Of that white world, so distant, so near, she asked only indifference. No, not at all did she crave, from those pale and powerful people, awareness. Sinister folk, she considered them, who had stolen her birthright. Their past contribution to her life...had been but shame and grief. . . . (Larsen 45)

Helga spends every day fighting a violent inner-conflict regarding her mixed ethnic background. She moves from place to place in search of a happiness that she cannot find within herself. Although each new home brings initial joy and peace, Helga’s feelings of jubilation quickly disappear. For example, when she first arrives in Harlem:

In the actuality of the pleasant present and the delightful vision of an agreeable future she was contented and happy...she knew it sprang from a sense of freedom, a release from the feeling of smallness which had hedged her in, first during her sorry unchildlike childhood among hostile white folk in Chicago, and later during her uncomfortable sojourn among snobbish black folk in Naxos. (Larsen 46)

However, once the novelty of her new surroundings recedes, Helga begins to draw away from those contacts which had so delighted her. More and more she made lonely excursions to places outside of Harlem. A sensation of estrangement and isolation encompassed her...Not only did the crowds of nameless folk on the street annoy her, she began also actually to dislike her friends. (Larsen 47-8)

This pattern of emotional highs and lows continues throughout the story. When Helga decides that she is
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This pattern of emotional highs and lows continues throughout the story. When Helga decides that she is
going to live with her white aunt in Denmark, she describes the city as a place devoid of racial injustices and prejudice, a place where she can truly be happy. But after two years in Copenhagen, Helga longs to return to Harlem:

These were her people...strange that she had never truly valued this kinship until distance had shown her its worth. How absurd she had been to think that another country, other people could liberate her from the ties which bound her forever to these mysterious, these terrible, these fascinating, these lovable, dark hordes.

(Larsen 95)

Helga’s struggle with her racial identity, her desperate need to belong, and her unending yearning for happiness ultimately force her to make a decision that she will forever regret. This final move is not to some new city or the faraway shores of another country, but into the arms of a man she will later grow to despise.

In the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green Helga finds both “God and man” (Larsen 117). Her felicity is soon interrupted, however, when she realizes the roles of mother and caretaker are repugnant to her. Helga does not possess the physical nor the emotional endurance to keep up with her husband and three children:

Always she felt extraordinarily and annoyingly ill, having forever to be sinking into chairs. Or, if she was out, to be pausing by the roadside, clinging desperately to some convenient fence or tree, waiting for the horrible nausea and hateful faintness to pass. (Larsen 123)

The final blow to Helga’s health comes with the death of her fourth child and her own subsequent illness, from which she needs considerable time to recover. As she regains her strength, Helga develops a true loathing for life with the Rev. Mr. Pleasant Green and for religion as well. She is determined to leave him, to abandon him in search of her lost happiness. But Helga soon realizes that her husband has no intentions of letting her go, “...hardly had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain...when she began to have her fifth child” (Larsen 135). It is at this moment that Helga’s search for happiness, whether successful or not, is finally over.

The stories of Maggie Johnson, Ruth Hall, and Helga Crane illustrate only a few of the problems that women have endured for generations under the patriarchal guidelines of mainstream western culture. Maggie suffered the disadvantages of being born into poverty and she never acquired an education. Although Ruth had the benefit of an education, she violated the conventional notions of “true womanhood.” Furthermore, while Ruth became financially independent through her talents as a writer, it is important to remember that the harsh scrutiny given to women authors during
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The stories of these women represent only a fraction of the obstacles that many women encounter in everyday life. Their stories are to be remembered because they are in the eyes and hearts of every woman we pass on the street. Regardless of race, socioeconomic status, education, or gender, no person is ever fully protected in a world that devalues those who are not “ideal” and creates an image of the “marginalized other.”

Works Cited


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The following story, related by Howard M. Miller in his article "Teaching and Learning about Cultural Diversity," illustrates a difficulty in the teaching of multicultural literature. Ruth Sherman, a third-grade teacher, read aloud one of her favorite multicultural children's books in her classroom one day. All the students present on that occasion seemed to like the story, but when word reached their parents, there was a very different reaction. The parents stormed the school and Ms. Sherman, upset as any good-intentioned teacher would be, resigned her position and found work elsewhere (Miller 1). Is this really how teachers and parents should respond when children, often identified as the future of our country, are learning other cultures? There are many points...
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of view about the inclusion of multicultural literature in the curriculum. With each different viewpoint comes yet another question. What determines good literature? How much of that should be multicultural? Of that, what should we be teaching in schools? How should we be teaching this other literature in the classroom? Should we just leave the canon as it is? The list of questions goes on. These are some of the major issues we are facing today.

For a full semester, the authors of this article (female first-year students) examined these questions in a class called "Alternative Voices in American Literature." Although we all come from different high schools, we have all come across issues involved in the quest for diversity in the literary curriculum. Some of us have had more experience with multicultural literature than others. While some schools stick to traditional literature, one of our group members had the opportunity for a more diverse experience, which we will discuss later in this article.

The "Alternative Voices" class was structured to provide a strong foundation in multicultural literature in America. For one class project, we evaluated a high school in Berks County, Pennsylvania for its literature content. For many reasons, we are in disagreement with the high school's literature curriculum. This high school tends to stick to the traditional canon of literature and shy away from the addition of multicultural literature. Our research indicates that the school is not moving to a more well rounded curriculum.

Background Research

First, we need to clarify why we think multicultural literature is important. Lara Hillard writes that multicultural literature is a way of accepting, acknowledging, and affirming human differences and similarities related to gender, class, handicap, race, and other ideas (Hillard 2). She goes on to say that it "emphasizes respect for the different historical perspectives and cultures in human society"(Hillard 2). What she means is that without multicultural literature, different cultures may not be understanding of each other. We cannot truly understand each other if we do not know what everyone is all about. For example, we can try to imagine what different religions mean to their followers, but without reading about them, or participating in services, how can we know for sure?

Why, then, should schools include multicultural literature? One response is that the inclusion of multicultural texts will enable children to understand the cultural diversity around them. Kids gain respect for others, and learn not to subscribe to prejudiced views around them. Jim Barta, in "Exploring Bias Using Multicultural Literature for Children," adds to this insight by saying that children also learn to understand the way people speak, act, celebrate, and mourn as well as learning to acknowledge the contributions of minorities (2). Generally, people who study texts outside of the traditional canon will gain a better understanding of lives that are not their own.
of view about the inclusion of multicultural literature in the curriculum. With each different viewpoint comes yet another question. What determines good literature? How much of that should be multicultural? Of that, what should we be teaching in schools? How should we be teaching this other literature in the classroom? Should we just leave the canon as it is? The list of questions goes on. These are some of the major issues we are facing today.

For a full semester, the authors of this article (female first-year students) examined these questions in a class called "Alternative Voices in American Literature." Although we all come from different high schools, we have all come across issues involved in the quest for diversity in the literary curriculum. Some of us have had more experience with multicultural literature than others. While some schools stick to traditional literature, one of our group members had the opportunity for a more diverse experience, which we will discuss later in this article.

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For many people that is the primary reason to study multicultural literature; for others, the rationale of including such texts is to appeal to minorities in the classroom. Soon, however, the term “minority” will be of no use since, according to Yvonne Siu-Runyan, it has been estimated that by the year 2010, those currently designated minorities will constitute 46% of the school population (3). She also mentions that teachers include works by minority writers in order to give a sense of self-worth to members of a less-represented culture. This is a good idea, although it has drawbacks. Howard M. Miller, for example, asserts that “we cannot allow multiculturalism to be turned into a game of blame, shame, and guilt” (667). To expand on his ideas, we have decided that with the wrong rationale, our society may be trying to use multicultural literature to make the dominant cultures guilt-free. Thus, a very important reason for including multicultural literature in the canon, to create awareness and understanding of others by the dominant cultures and ethnic groups, may be subverted. Multicultural literature should be taught for the purpose of enlightening people about the world, and may, at the same time, entertain them with rich stories.

The inclusion of multicultural literature is a difficult decision for a school to make, but if the issues are understood, it is also the right decision to make. We, as a whole society, have to put aside our prejudices; we must learn to work together to create balance in what our schools offer their students. If we are all human, if we all feel the same emotions and see the same things, then why should the things some people write be classified as being worth reading and the things others write be classified as not being worth reading? We agree with Miller, who states, “all of us together have a story to tell. It is a story with many chapters and verses, told in many different voices in many different points of view- the magnificent, awe-inspiring story of humanity” (667).

Taking a Position

In order to complete the assignment, we had to decide on our position regarding multiculturalism. After debating and hearing various views, we decided that multicultural literature should definitely be included in the high school curriculum. The issue really has become how much of it to include.

We feel that a school should not include multicultural texts just because they have been written by a minority author or by a woman. We agree that these texts should be put in the curriculum if the work deserves to be taught because of its content or message and its artistic merit, but not just to fill a quota. We also support the retention of traditional, canonical works. The cultural and artistic merit of traditional classics is great. Certainly they do deserve to be taught, but they are not the only works to deserve this treatment. The value of multicultural literature is great as well, since it provides a cultural learning experience and also has artistic merit.
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There is room in the curriculum to add more works by minorities and women. From the articles we have read and the research we have gathered from the high school, we have concluded that the main problem with adding multicultural texts to the curriculum is that some teachers don’t know how to teach them and may not want to learn a new method of teaching. Rather than challenge themselves and their students, these teachers stick to the traditional works that are taught every year over and over again.

It should be mentioned that in some schools there are courses that students can take to study multicultural literature, but then they miss out on the classics taught in the regular English classes. We feel that students should have access to a classroom that teaches both classic and multicultural literature.

The Study

For “Alternative Voices in American Literature” our group did a study of the curriculum of one Berks County high school. We brought our understanding of the issues related to multicultural literature to this study in order to evaluate the type of literature that is being studied in this high school. Our research methods included surveys and interviews with some teachers and a few students. It should be noted that the student population is mostly Caucasian. In the long run, this should have nothing to do with the inclusion of different works, but we think that some bias may have occurred anyway. Our reasoning is that the curriculum, which includes no works outside of the standard, European-white-male-focused canon, reflects the fact that the school is deeply rooted in tradition. Unless something changes, the curriculum will not be touched in any significant way by multicultural literature.

After deciding how we wanted to obtain our data, we sent out surveys to all of the teachers in the English department. After about two weeks, we received back 13 of the 20 surveys we had distributed, all with helpful information. The teachers who took the time to fill out these surveys really helped us to understand why certain literature was taught in this school. This survey was to be the basis for our research. We also interviewed ten students in a wide range of classes to get a sense of how they felt about the literature they were currently reading in their classes. Among the teachers, the students, and one member of our group who had some experience with the same high school, we had a strong understanding of the curriculum. We believe that this provided a good base of information, because it put us on a more personal level than if we had just looked up everything in a database.

The high school curriculum is designed by the members of the English department and approved by the department head and the Director of Secondary Education. The English teachers are given a set list of works that must be taught for the year. After these are taught, there is some space for an instructor to add appropriate
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works of his or her choice. The curriculum is reviewed and revised every four to five years. Currently, canonical works of literature such as *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (Harper Lee), *Julius Caesar* and *The Taming of the Shrew* (William Shakespeare), *A Separate Peace* (John Knowles), *The Good Earth* (Pearl Buck), *Les Misérables* (Victor Hugo) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Victor Hugo) are studied in tenth grade. In eleventh grade, works of a slightly higher degree of difficulty are taught: *The Crucible* (Arthur Miller), *The Great Gatsby* (F. Scott Fitzgerald), *The Old Man and The Sea* (Ernest Hemingway), *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (Anne Tyler), *The Catcher in The Rye* (J.D. Salinger), and *Of Mice and Men* (John Steinbeck). Finally, the senior year focuses on *Macbeth* (William Shakespeare), *Gulliver’s Travels* (Jonathan Swift), *Beowulf* (anonymous), *Canterbury Tales* (Geoffrey Chaucer), *Frankenstein* (Mary Shelley), *The Fountainhead* (Ayn Rand), and *The Iliad* (Homer).

The English department teaches these works in this sequence because the teachers feel that these works provide a good basis for the development of reading skills and literary analysis. Additionally, these works present the literature that the creators of the canon feel is some of the best and most important literature for students to experience. Our argument is that students will become more well-rounded if they read about other cultures, and will still develop the appropriate reading and analytical skills.

Basing our conclusions on the information we had gathered, we deduced that this curriculum is very traditional, focused mostly on works by European white males, of which only the “greats” are being taught. However, there is a bit of a multicultural twist here. There is not enough change for us to consider the curriculum truly multicultural, but there is some indication that teachers are waking up to the presence of women writers. For instance, Mary Shelley is being taught in some 12th grade classrooms. *To Kill a Mockingbird* (written by a woman, Harper Lee) is an interesting selection also. Though it is a traditional novel, within the story is a battle against prejudiced views of African Americans. Perhaps this will help people understand other cultures as well. These texts are not enough, but perhaps their inclusion will begin to bring about change. Because these texts are authored by women, and because one of them confronts racial prejudice, they do not fit what students think of as “the mold.”

One question on the survey we used asked if the English department members at the high school were aware of the movement calling for the inclusion of more multicultural literature in the high school curriculum. The responses came back with a resounding yes. One English/humanities instructor responded by saying, “I am open to just about anything if the material will help our students learn and genuinely reflects the culture.” However, this does not address the issue of whether multicultural literature is appropriate with regard to the ethnicity of students
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As far as the question of female writers goes, teachers are much more aware. One educator remarked that he or she would love to include works by Maya Angelou, a respected African American writer and poet. The remainder of the responding teachers simply answered “yes” for that question on the survey.

Though not widely taught throughout the school, when literature by a minority or a woman is introduced to a class, it is taught in the same manner as any other piece of literature. One survey response indicated that the teacher always taught the cultural background of any text. Another instructor wrote that the elements remain the same as in any other piece of literature, so the same method is applied to all the literature taught. This is the general consensus among the department personnel.

The final survey question asked about debates and disagreements that have arisen as a result of the issue of multicultural literature. These debates and disagreements could have been with the school board or the school’s external community. Some teachers went into detail about debates by mentioning relevance, approach, necessity, and the fact that teachers want to hold onto the “classics.” One individual wrote that multicultural literature is “very difficult to teach in our relatively homogenous class.” Perhaps the best way to sum up the issue of multiculturalism and the debates that go along with it can be found in the word of the humanities instructor who wrote on the survey sheet:

> Education is organic. Multicultural studies are in response to a variety of influences both past and present. In short, they certainly have a great deal of value and will make the world a better place. However, if we wipe out the icons of Western culture simply because they were created by dead white males, our educational landscape will suffer.

After discovering this information about the high school, we concluded that its English curriculum does not fit our idea of a sound multicultural curriculum. We noted that some teachers are willing to add some non-canonical literature or that they really would like to incorporate some multicultural texts, but that is not sufficient. One or two novels is not going to change the entire curriculum, and even then, not all students will get to read the “multicultural novel” if it is offered only in certain classes. We think that
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schools need to include multicultural literature in all levels of the curriculum, though it need not dominate the curriculum.

Additionally, we feel that there is some difficulty with the manner in which the works are selected for use in English classes. According to the information we received, it seems that the head of the department and perhaps the school board must approve all texts to be used in classes. In itself, this is fine. The problem is that the people who design the curriculum seem to be very set in their ways and only want to include "classic" literature. As mentioned before, some teachers want to include more multicultural literature, but they are not able to get these inclusions approved.

The literature of women and minorities is not being taught effectively. Only one or two works by women are being taught in the school under discussion, and no works by minorities. In this, the school is well below the norm of most schools whose anthologies are apt to include works by Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Brooks, and Frederick Douglass, among others. Perhaps things will change once the curriculum has been reviewed, but for now, it is unacceptable. Unfortunately, a student may graduate from this school without a sound understanding of the rest of the literary world. On a positive note, however, some teachers seem eager to learn about more about multicultural literature in the hope of forming a well-rounded curriculum.

Conclusion: Hope for a Diverse Future

As a point of contrast, our group took a look at another high school nearby to show a different view on multicultural literature in the classroom. Not too far from Berks County, there is a school that incorporates multicultural literature into its regular English curriculum. In the regular levels of Freshman and Sophomore English, students in this high school study several texts by minorities and women. The section is emphasized effectively due to the new content. Days are spent introducing each text to be studied. Two books among many read by the students are Kaffir Boy and Cry the Beloved Country, both by male Afrikaners. The concern with teaching minority and women writers and poets is very high. The school's English department is very aware of the need for multicultural texts and shows this by including them in the regular curriculum.

Not only can a student attending this school study multicultural texts in regular English classes, but he/she can also enroll in an optional class that teaches only multicultural literature. This is a very popular option even though this school's student body is also predominantly white. If all schools employed such a curriculum, students would have a broader range of knowledge by the time they graduate. Having the choice of a class involving multicultural literature in conjunction with regular literature classes will help students understand minorities and women far better than they could without expo-
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exposure to such works.

Up to this point, the Berks County high school we evaluated seems to have been lacking in sound multicultural education. Though students may excel in the literature they are taught, they have not been introduced to new ideas present in other literatures. Perhaps the school should exchange a few of its more traditional texts for some multicultural ones. Since this is the year of curriculum review and revision for the school, a later analysis might indicate a more positive situation.

Because this paper was a project for the entire class, other groups enrolled in “Alternative Voices in American English” reported their findings about many other schools within the county and the way those schools treat multicultural literature. Most of the findings were very similar to ours in that the schools are stuck in the rut of traditional literature. We hope that school boards nationwide will take a second look at their current curriculums and make the necessary changes.

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Western conceptions of freedom are based primarily on individualism and personal rights. For Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, however, the foundation of human existence and true freedom is an inner quality, “morality steeped in spirituality” (Patterson 373). While Solzhenitsyn values freedom, he recognizes that freedom, especially external freedom, by which he means freedom from externally imposed constraints, is “quite inadequate to save us” and is valuable only as a means to a higher goal (Solzhenitsyn, “As Breathing” 18). Through his writing, Solzhenitsyn interprets human experience, and “it is always within [the] context of the Christian view of the human drama that he does his interpreting” (Ericson 25). For Solzhenitsyn, “the task of the writer is to select more universal, eternal questions [such as] the secrets of the human heart, the triumph over spiritual sorrow, the laws of the history of mankind that were born in
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the depths of time immemorial and that will cease to exist only when the sun ceases to shine” (qtd. in Barker 35). Through *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn interprets, through his Christian view, the universal and eternal question of freedom, revealing its true nature as the moral duty of sacrifice and self-restraint rather than individual license.

Solzhenitsyn himself experienced extreme external bondage in Russia’s labor camps. While a Russian soldier in 1945, at age 26, Solzhenitsyn was arrested for writing “disrespectful remarks about Stalin” (Solzhenitsyn, Solzenitsyn 20) in letters to a school friend. Without a trial, and in his absence, Solzhenitsyn was convicted by a “procedure” and “sentenced to eight years in a labor camp” (Solzhenitsyn, Solzhenitsyn 20).

Solzhenitsyn was to spend the last few years of his sentence in a “special camp for political prisoners” (Solzhenitsyn, Solzenitsyn 31) similar to the one described in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. After eight years and an additional month of imprisonment, Solzhenitsyn was released from the camps but sent into “perpetual exile” in southern Kazakhstan (Solzhenitsyn, Solzhenitsyn 31). During the few years he spent in the forced labor camp, where “he became a number” (Rothberg 6), Solzhenitsyn “conceived the idea of writing *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*” (Rothberg 6).

Solzhenitsyn’s imprisonment in the forced labor camps was “the crucial experience” in his life (Clement 86) during his imprisonment, he experienced prisons into which human beings are crammed to the point of suffocation, the labour camps of the North where the common laws reign supreme, and where inhuman regulations and starvation rations leave a man almost without defence against the rigours of the climate. (Clement 13)

Out of this experience he created the short novel *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, through which he illuminates the universal theme of freedom. In “As Breathing and Consciousness Return,” Solzhenitsyn describes the nature of freedom:

> We are creatures born with inner freedom of will, freedom of choice—the most important part of freedom is a gift to us at birth. External, or social, freedom is very desirable for the sake of undistorted growth, but it is no more than a condition, a medium, and to regard it as the object of our existence is nonsense. We can firmly assert our freedom even in external conditions of unfreedom. (21-2)

Solzhenitsyn’s own experience in “external conditions of unfreedom” gives credence to his assertion that true freedom is possible even in the most restrictive human situations. Solzhenitsyn believes that to assert one’s “freedom
the depths of time immemorial and that will cease to exist only when the sun ceases to shine” (qtd. in Barker 35).

Through *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Solzhenitsyn interprets, through his Christian view, the universal and eternal question of freedom, revealing its true nature as the moral duty of sacrifice and self-restraint rather than individual license.

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even in unfreedom” (Solzhenitsyn, “As Breathing” 22) implies a persistence of inner freedom which denies the significance of the external condition and affirms the identity and value of the individual. The exertion of individual choice in renunciation of external conditions stands as an act of freedom which is a necessary step toward the ultimate freedom of moral responsibility.

While imprisoned, Solzhenitsyn expressed his inner freedom and individuality by continuing to write. He did not have the freedom to write prose, so he began to “compose verse by heart” (Solzhenitsyn, Solzhenitsyn 38). By his own admission, Solzhenitsyn “could not make moral compromises” (qtd. in Rothberg 6) even in prison. He refused to cooperate with the secret police, and he was subsequently transferred from comfortable prison conditions to the forced-labor camp where he would finish his sentence (Rothberg 6). Solzhenitsyn asserted his identity and refused to surrender to the surrounding lies.

Not surprisingly, Solzhenitsyn depicts the characters in One Day as individuals who, in the midst of external unfreedom, maintain their individuality. “To look at them, the gang was all the same—the same black overcoats and numbers—but underneath they were all different” (One Day 16). The title character, also known as Shukhov, demonstrates a sense of personal freedom in his individuality as he always removes his hat to eat (16, 169) and refuses to eat the eyes of the fish “when they’d come off and were floating around in the bowl on their own . . . . The others laughed at him for this” (17). Prisoners, they are externally stripped of individuality and worth as they are clothed in black coats, pants, and hats with painted numbers for identification. Each has a different past, however, and a particular story surrounding his conviction.

The characters retain the stories that make them who they are. The prisoners share these stories with each other in an affirmation of their humanity and individuality. Remembering his past, Shukhov resists the lie communicated by the prison structure and the painted identification number. His inner freedom expresses itself as he jokes with his fellow prisoners:

Never been out in the cold in Siberia before? Come and warm up under the moon like the wolves. The “wolves’ sun,” that’s what they sometimes called the moon where Shukhov came from. (One Day 190)

Shukhov refuses to relinquish his particular story, his past, and his individuality.

For Solzhenitsyn, resistance to inaccurate and deceptive assertions of the external condition is fundamental to true freedom. In “As Breathing and Consciousness Return,” he writes,

Our present system [the USSR in 1973] is unique in world history, because over and above its physical and economic constraints, it demands of us total surrender
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of our souls, continuous and active participation in the general, conscious lie. To this putrefaction of the soul, this spiritual enslavement, human beings who wish to be human cannot consent.” (24-5)

Solzhenitsyn refused to participate in “the general conscious lie” (25) by his refusal to compromise his morality and by his refusal to sign his deportation papers after his release from the forced-labor camp. Abraham Rothberg reports his explanation:

“Later on I was summoned to appear before the local committee of the security police where I was asked to sign a document confirming my permanent deportation. It was formulated exactly in this way—permanent deportation, not deportation for life. I refused to sign.” (qtd. in Rothberg 7).

Solzhenitsyn continued to refuse participation in the lie as he protested the seizure and censorship of his writings and condemned the Writers' Union for his expulsion (Rothberg xv-xvii). Solzhenitsyn held on to his inner freedom, in part by refusing to make his writing acceptable to those in authority. In One Day, K-123, an otherwise nameless prisoner working in the office with Shukhov's gangmember Caesar, expresses the same revulsion towards those who participate in the lie so rigorously repudiated by Solzhenitsyn. Speaking in a voice very similar to Solzhenitsyn's, he claims, “A genius doesn't adapt his treatment to the taste of tyrants!” (One Day 94).

Many of the characters in One Day demonstrate self control and find a degree of freedom in spurning the lie of the camp, which insists that they are subhuman and must abandon their dignity and morality if they are to survive. Recognizing that both refusal to surrender and maintenance of self-control mean survival, the prisoners take the words of a former gang boss seriously:

“It's the law of the jungle in here, fellows. But even in here you can live. The first to go is the guy who licks out bowls, puts his faith in the infirmary, or squeals . . .” (One Day 2)

The prisoners' refusal to yield, their refusal to lick bowls or spit bones on the floor, which “was thought bad manners,” sustains their inner freedom (One Day 15).

Shukhov also refuses to participate in the lies, the untruthful assertions of the environment, surrounding him. In a culture where dishonesty and bribery prevail, Shukhov has “never given or taken a bribe from anybody, and he hadn't learned that trick in the camp either” (48). While the narrator's assertion that “even after eight years of hard labor he was still no scavenger and the more time went on, the more he stuck to his guns” (178) may seem to lack credibility in light of Shukhov's actions, Shukhov has not become subhuman in his scavenging (178). Even his name, likely derived from “shukhovat” meaning “to pick up secretly small advantages for oneself” (Rutter 106), reveals
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to the reader that Shukhov is resourceful, not bestial, in his scavenging.

Fetyukov, a prisoner in Shukhov’s gang whose name probably means “poor fool” (Rutter 106), is unable to retain his dignity, however. His scavenging makes his imprisonment more encompassing as he is reduced to the level of an animal. Unlike some others, Fetyukov has not maintained an inner freedom. After he’d “gotten beat up again for trying to scrounge somebody’s bowl” (One Day 181), the narrator concludes that “he’d never live out his time in the camp. He just didn’t know how to do things right” (One Day 181). Fetyukov has succumbed to the lie of the prison camp that tells him he is an animal and has forfeited his dignity and true freedom found in self-restraint.

In contrast to Fetyukov’s lack of dignity, Y-81 epitomizes the survival of the human will. After countless years in the camp and a day of working outside at the hardest site, Y-81 maintains his dignity, sitting ramrod straight, undisturbed by the commotion of the mess hall. He didn’t bend down low over the bowl like all the others did, but brought the spoon up to his mouth. . . . His face was all worn-out but not like a “goner’s.” . . . And you could tell from his big rough hands with the dirt worked in them he hadn’t spent many of his long years doing any of the soft jobs. You could see his mind was set on one thing—never to give in. He didn’t put his eight ounces in all the filth on the table like everybody else but laid it on a clean little piece of rag that’d been washed over and over again. (171-2, italics added)

Y-81’s determination to maintain his individuality and his dignity in prison enables him to maintain an inner freedom; he is still human. “The most important part of our freedom, inner freedom, is always subject to our will. If we surrender it to corruption, we do not deserve to be called human” (“As Breathing” 25). Persistence of the will in the midst of extreme suffering maintains the freedom of the spirit. The spirit cannot be imprisoned, so it is possible to achieve freedom even in the camps (Rothberg 45). Solzhenitsyn contends, however, that it is not in spite of deep suffering, but because of it that people achieve intense spiritual development (“A World” 12).

Spiritual development, in Solzhenitsyn’s view, is also fostered through work.

For Solzhenitsyn work (which he divorces neither from the humble tasks of every day nor from the most sublime artistic creation) requires and promotes a movement of self-transcendence in which spiritual awareness is established. (Clement 49)

In One Day, Shukhov experiences freedom in work. For Shukhov, work is a form of freedom; “not being let out to work—that was real punishment” (One Day 7). He takes pride in his bricklaying (72), caring more for
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For Shukhov, work is a form of freedom; "not being let out to work—that was real punishment" (One Day 7). He takes pride in his bricklaying (72), caring more for
his work than about his safety. After finishing for the day, "Shukhov—the guards could set the dogs on him for all he cared now—ran back to have a last look" (125) at the wall he had been building. Shukhov almost regrets that he had to stop working "just when they'd gotten into stride" (119). From the top of the wall, Shukhov no longer saw the view with the glare of sun on the snow. And he didn't see the prisoners leaving their shelters either and fanning out over the compound. . . . All he saw now was the wall in front of him. (106)

Because Shukhov almost forgets his imprisonment, the time flies when he is working (73). Work even combats the cold:

Shukhov and the other bricklayers didn’t feel the cold any more. They were now going all out and they were hot—the way you are at the start of a job like this when you get soaking wet under your coat and jacket and both shirts. . . . The main thing was they didn’t get the cold in their feet. Nothing else mattered. (11)

Work not only assails the cold, but it also has the ability to cure Shukhov’s pain (10). After arriving back at camp in the evening, Shukhov remembers how he had tried to get on the sick list. “Funny he’d forgot all about it at work” (142). He then realizes that after working all day, “the pain was pretty much gone” (142). Through work, Shukhov transcends himself and his situation. “Creative joy is born, not in spite of hardship and fatigue, nor by suppressing them, but through them” as Shukhov and the other prisoners empty and transcend themselves to find freedom (Clement 52, italics added). Freedom is only worth finding if it is moral. Freedom is moral, according to Solzhenitsyn, “only if it keeps within certain bounds, beyond which it degenerates into complacency and licentiousness” (qtd. in Ericson 240). The freedom of self-restraint—of not simply looking out for oneself but considering others, and thereby restraining the self’s impulse to preserve its own comfort first—is the moral responsibility of each person. For “the truth that liberates is the truth of moral responsibility of each for all in the light of a relation to One who is above all” (Patterson 377). True freedom is not license to look out for oneself but “moral responsibility of each for all.” Solzhenitsyn illustrates this true freedom of self-restraint and moral responsibility through the characters in his novel.

The narrator describes camp life as “every man for himself” (One Day 83), but this perception is renounced through the actions of the individuals in Gang 104. For the gang is much more than every man for himself; it is a prisoner’s family (96-7). Gang 104’s members are responsible for each other and even sacrifice for each other. They trust the boss of their work gang to do what is best for them.
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Your boss only had to say the word, even if it was the meal break, and you worked. Because it was the boss who fed you. And he wouldn't make you work if you didn't have to. (103)

The narrator continues: “There’s nothing you wouldn’t do for your boss” (104). This sacrificial attitude is reciprocated as Tyurin, the gang’s boss, takes the blame on himself for the gang’s tardiness (127) and continually protects them.

While Tyurin protects the gang, the gang also stands behind him. “Shukhov wasn’t a bit worried about himself” when Der, a prisoner acting as the building foreman, arrived threatening Tyurin about the discovered roofing felt; Shukhov knew that Tyurin “wouldn’t give him away — but he was scared for Tyurin.” Pavlo, the assistant gang boss, stood with Tyurin, however, “looking murder at Der,” and “Senka, deaf as he was, . . . came out with his hands on his hips. He was strong as an ox.” They supported Tyurin as he threatened Der into retreat (115-6). The gang looks out for each other.

The freedom in responsibility to one another is further revealed in the relationship of the camp’s two Estonian prisoners, who “stuck together as though they couldn’t breathe without each other” (55). They recognize the responsibility they had to one another as “they always shared and shared alike and wouldn’t use a single shred of tobacco without the other knowing” (99). This care and camaraderie between individuals is not limited to the Estonians. Senka, a prisoner in Shukhov’s gang, waits for Shukhov when they are both late because Senka “wasn’t the kind to leave you in the lurch. If you were in trouble, he was always there to take the rap with you” (126).

Another example of this sort occurs when, at lunch, Pavlo gives the extra bowl of mush to the Captain, who had only been a prisoner in the labor camp a short time, and “to Shukhov’s way of thinking, it was only right. . . . The time would come when he’d learn the ropes, but as it was he didn’t know his way around yet” (91). At the end of the day, Shukhov, as Pavlo had with the Captain, recognizes Caesar’s need and sacrifices himself to help him. While Shukhov has not completely renounced the lie of the prison world, which claims that acts of assistance require payment, he does, at the end of the novel, act in opposition to that lie. Caesar runs out of time to take his package “to the store room before night check,” leaving himself susceptible to theft (188-9). Shukhov offers to help not “to get something out of Caesar again but [because] he was just sorry for him” (188). The moral responsibility that the prisoners show, their willingness to compromise their own safety for the benefit of their fellows, constitutes a freedom from the external restraints of life in the camp.

“Freedom,” [Solzhenitsyn] declares, “is self-restriction! Restriction of the self for the sake of others! Once understood and
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“Freedom,” [Solzhenitsyn] declares, “is self-restriction! Restriction of the self for the sake of others! Once understood and
adopted, this principle diverts us—as individuals, in all forms of human association, societies and nations—from outward to inward development, thereby giving us greater spiritual depth.” This shift from outward to inward comes about in a shift away from the self. The moral path to freedom, then, leads the self away from a stance of I-for-myself to the position of I-for-the-other. (Patterson 377)

No character exemplifies this more fully than Alyoshka, the Baptist. He epitomizes the freedom that arises from the “I-for-the-other” position. Alyoshka is a good worker who is able to satisfy the demand when the Captain requests “a man” (One Day 112) to work with instead of Fetyukov. He is not noted solely for his strength as a worker, but for his willingness. “Alyoshka was a quiet fellow and he took orders from anybody who felt like giving them” (112). He “would never say no. He always did whatever you asked” (120).

Shukhov found this quality inspiring: “If only everybody in the world was like that, Shukhov would be that way too. If someone asked you, why not help him out? They were right on that, these people” (120). The narrator concludes that “a meek fellow like that is a real godsend in any gang” (112). Alyoshka has attained what Solzhenitsyn describes as a restraint of self in order to benefit others. It is a quality that illuminates Alyoshka’s true freedom.

Duty is a crucial component of freedom. According to Solzhenitsyn, “duty is one’s capacity to ‘lay down one’s life for one’s friends’” (Clement 46). Alyoshka fulfills this duty willingly. A.B., a contributor to From Under the Rubble, believes that “mysterious inner freedom, once achieved, will give us a sense of community with everybody and responsibility for all” (qtd. in Patterson 377). Alyoshka is not free because he acts on his “sense of community;” rather, he acts on his “sense of community” because he has attained inner freedom.

The extent of Alyoshka’s inner freedom is revealed throughout One Day. He has maintained his individuality and has not surrendered to the lies surrounding him. He continues to pray and read “his notebook in which he had half the Gospels copied down” (One Day 26). Alyoshka is not ashamed of his faith. He even reads the Gospels aloud in the morning. He reads, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” His pride at suffering for Christ is not the result of reckless stupidity or naiveté, however. His reading aloud the Gospels is juxtaposed with a commentary on his practical skill: “One great thing about Alyoshka was he was so clever at hiding this book in a hole in the wall that it hadn’t been found on any of the searches” (28).

The inner freedom of many of the characters enables them to live and not to submit to the lie; Alyoshka’s
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The inner freedom of many of the characters enables them to live and not to submit to the lie; Alyoshka’s
inner freedom is so great that he even rejoices in the midst of his imprisonment.

Alyoshka, at Shukhov’s side, looked at the sun and rejoiced. A smile came to his lips. His cheeks were sunken, he lived only on his ration and didn’t earn anything extra. What was he so pleased about? On Sundays he spent all the time whispering with the other Baptists. The camp didn’t worry them—it was like water off a duck’s back.

While Shukhov has developed a degree of inner freedom, he cannot understand the extent of Alyoshka’s. Shukhov’s conception of freedom is linked with health, extra rations, and free time. There is a difference in Alyoshka’s freedom, and Shukhov recognizes this. There is something attractive to Shukhov about Alyoshka. He sees a light in Alyoshka’s eyes that makes them “like two candles” (195). Alyoshka possesses the truth. After considering Alyoshka’s admonition to rejoice in his imprisonment, Shukhov realizes that “Alyoshka was talking the truth” (199). And Shukhov respects Alyoshka’s sincerity, as his words are proved by his life: “you could tell by his voice and his eyes he was glad to be in prison” (199).

Not only does Alyoshka rejoice while in prison, he rejoices because he is in prison. Alyoshka rejoices in his imprisonment because he is there for Christ, and perhaps because in prison he experiences the greatest religious freedom. For Alyoshka, as for Solzhenitsyn, the ontological impossibility that became possible in a movement inward is the discovery of freedom in prison. Indeed, when the State is totalitarian, prison may be the only place where the inner freedom of the soul can be discovered, since it may happen that only in prison is participation in a lie no longer required. (Patterson 375)

Alyoshka has true freedom. Like many of the other prisoners, he has not surrendered to the lie, he has maintained his individuality and his faith, and he works at least as hard as Shukhov, although there is no indication that he finds his freedom in this. Unlike the other prisoners, however, Alyoshka has fully attained the highest freedom, which is the moral freedom/duty of laying down one’s life for another. He has laid down his life for God and lays it down continually for his fellow prisoners. Freedom is not an end in itself for either Alyoshka or Solzhenitsyn. Rather, for them, “freedom . . . is part and parcel of the image of God which we human beings bear” (Ericson 160).

Solzhenitsyn’s depiction of the hard life of the forced-labor camps legitimately horrifies the reader who has never experienced such “external conditions of unfreedom.” While Solzhenitsyn’s belief that “a hard life improves the vision” is evidenced by One Day (Rothberg 1), a hard life is certainly not required to attain the true freedom of “morality steeped in spirituality.” In Solzhenitsyn’s view, it is the renunciation of the pervasive lie of external and individualistic freedom that changes...
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Works Cited


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Three copies of each manuscript and a computer disk containing the finished version of the submission in Microsoft Word or WordPerfect for IBM.

All copy should be provided in current MLA format, justified left only.

Two title pages:
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one to contain author’s name; address (both local and permanent); phone number & email address; name and address of college or university; name and department of endorsing professor.

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Send inquiries and submissions to:

Tom Mack, Ph.D. or Phebe Davidson, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of South Carolina Aiken
471 University Parkway
Aiken, SC 29801

Email to: tomm@aiken.sc.edu or phebed@aiken.sc.edu (inquiries only)
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