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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

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The keys to a good life were a medicine once universally prescribed. In the days of the enlightenment, a time in Europe before the two world wars that saw the blossoming of science and reason, there were sets of universal values whose purity was perceived as being independent of human opinion. Justice, love, righteousness—among others, these are examples of the essences that were believed to have existed apart from bias, and what every human being should strive towards if they wished to live a genuine, fulfilling life.

Two world wars soon put a strain in those “universal” values that once seemed so obvious. The beginnings of that familiar ambiguity we know today was soon cast over the enlightenment’s declarations of certainty. Dictators, war criminals, and other vicious men hijacked these universal values to justify acts of genocide and attacks toward civilians, and endless violence soon voiced a question in response: are these values so ultimate if they butchered millions and led young soldiers six feet into the ground before they had the chance to live?

No longer were we living in a storybook modernist society, where all one had to do was defeat Saturday morning evil by sticking to widely prescribed values and that which was ultimately good. There was no ultimate good anymore. And statements like those are what postmodernism based itself off of. How could we know what values are truly genuine if what’s being preached to us as to how we should live was nothing more than a narrative for another entity’s benefit? Were there even such things as universal values, or is meaning just a matter of perception? These questions are a monumental counter to enlightenment era thinking. And they still have trouble being answered to this day.

How can we live genuinely if we don’t know what’s true and what isn’t? Living genuinely is as difficult as ever in a whirlwind of declarations, conflicting opinions, and an entire spectrum of truth. It’s a search that occurs within us all, and is represented in the essays that you are about to read.

From fox farms in Ontario, to the urban metropolis of Chicago, to futuristic vistas a century ahead of us, the subject of these essays is whether it’s possible to be true to one’s self, amidst the obstacles that attempt to compromise that goal.

The real struggle is a postmodern one; who or what are the enemies of self-identification? Are they structural? Are they certain people or ideologies? Or are they simply the flaws in the stories we’ve told ourselves?

By engaging with these essays that paint many iterations of the journey to live genuinely, we hope that readers will be able to sympathize, and perhaps find that little bit of wisdom to help maintain their own.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Alexa Glassman Different Wounds, Shared Scars	1
Sacha Jordan My Experience	8
Caitlyn Schork Prince Hal The Genius	15
Corinne Vergari Reimagining R&J: A Review of Two River Theater's Romeo & Juliet	19
Natalie Villalpando Remembrance and Appreciation	23
Karolina Vlckova Are We Hardwired to Improve? Themes of Reincarnation, Karma, Morality and Ethics in Cloud Atlas and The Good Place	29
Scott Pendell The New Counterculture	36
Special Thanks To Sandra Cisneros Marcia Krefetz-Levine	42
Jahnia Boone Building Identity in the Face of Hardship: An Analysis of The House on Mango Street	44
Amber Conrad Home in Our Hearts	47
Rose Johnson Mango and Mortar	55
Bibliographies	62



ALEXA GLASSMAN

DIFFERENT WOUNDS, SHARED SCARS

Living with trauma is a silent killer, a constant looming threat and disease that affects every aspect of your life every day. What's worse than a silent killer is slowly being consumed by your trauma until it kills you. In the three stories, "Tooth and Claw" by T.C. Boyle, "ID" by Joyce Carol Oates, and "The Man in the Black Suit" by Stephen King, the authors create riveting stories with a very important theme. These three stories share a repeated and important theme, shown through the setting and symbols, that being in denial towards traumatic experiences will compound its effects, making it worse and causing devastating results. The authors write intricate and in-depth pieces describing the truth behind trauma. Each author creates a different reaction to the traumatic events the characters experience and allows the reader to see the depth of long-term effects of unresolved trauma.

"Tooth and Claw" by T.C. Boyle is a heartfelt story about a man named James Turner, Jr., who is lost in his life and ignorant to his cycle of alcoholism, just like his father. Boyle allows the reader to see how impactful and consequential alcoholism becomes when it is ignored. Junior is extremely impulsive, irrational, and lost in his life. Junior makes unstable

choices like making a bet in a bar and walking out with a pet he can't care for. Junior continues to ignore the traumatic impact of his alcoholism and how it creates traumatic consequences. "Here I was hanging out in an old-man's bar that smelled of death and vomit and felt as closed in as a submarine, . . . outside the door were all the exotic, sunstruck glories of California." Junior could be in the bright sun, or a college bar, but here he is in an old man's bar that smells like death and vomit. Junior is letting his alcoholism control his life, and in doing so he keeps adding trauma to his life.

Boyle uses the wild cat Junior wins as a symbol of his alcoholism and the traumatic impact of his denial. The author utilizes this wild cat as a representation of Junior's erratic and neglectful attitude toward his alcoholism. "I'd have to get to know it eventually, have to name it and tame it, maybe even walk it on a leash. I had a brief vision of myself sauntering down the sidewalk." Boyle uses walking the cat to describe Junior's addiction to alcohol and the importance of taking control before it's too late. As Junior neglects the cat he is inherently neglecting his issues and how it is creating trauma in his life. The wild cat ends up destroying Junior's room further symbolizing the destruction and traumatic impact of his alcoholism. If Junior continues to ignore his alcoholism it will compound his lack of self-identity, impulsive choices, and end up getting him killed just like his father.

Boyle creates a disheartening and impactful setting for this story, using the setting of a bar with a bunch of middle-aged men and college students, to further push the fact that Junior is completely in denial of the issues in front of him. Junior consistently finds himself at Dagget's bar where he drinks heavily. "Daggett's was the only place I felt comfortable. . . it was filled with old men drinking themselves into oblivion. It made me think of home. Or feel at home, anyway." Junior moves to town

to meet college kids his own age, yet Junior consistently finds himself at a bar full of old men drinking themselves into oblivion. Junior chooses to go to this bar and ignore his alcoholism. Junior is creating trauma in his life by refusing to take control. Junior ignoring his issues will lead him down the same path as his father, a dead drunk.

Boyle ends the story with Junior walking into his apartment where the wild cat could be lurking and lets the door shut behind him. The ending was representative of the impulsivity and continued ignorance within Junior. "It was gone. Sure it was. I steeled myself, pulled open the door, and slipped inside. And then—and I don't know why—I pulled the door shut behind me." If the wild cat remains in his apartment, it will destroy Junior just like his alcoholism will destroy him. Junior is also choosing to shut the door behind him, making a choice to remain ignorant to the trauma caused by his alcoholism. He makes a choice to continue to let alcohol control his life until he ends up dead. Junior's traumatic addiction to alcohol will haunt and affect his life until it kills him.

Another author who creates a very telling story about not facing trauma and experiencing a devastating consequence is Joyce Carol Oates in "I.D." This is a creatively layered story focusing on a girl who has had traumatic experiences that are unresolved and affecting her life. At a young age, Lisette was being physically abused by her father. The abuse was so bad it left her with a permanent eye injury. This eye injury is pivotal to the story and theme as Lisette was so blind to the things happening around her. Not only is she physically affected by her trauma but also mentally and emotionally, just like how Junior's alcohol addiction affected him in "Tooth and Claw." "Her left eye, the eye socket that had been shattered and repaired, and the frozen look of that part of her face because some of the nerve muscles were dead." The injury is truly symbolic to how Lisette's

shattered eye is just like her shattered “truths”. Lisette is utterly in denial of the abuse from her father and the effects it still has on her ability to see clearly, both physically and metaphorically.

Oates uses the eye injury to symbolize the clouded vision and denial Lisette struggles with throughout the story. Lisette never sees the truth to what’s in front of her, whether it is the whiteboard, her father’s abuse, or her mother’s body in the morgue. Oates utilizes the extensive damage to Lisette’s eye to create the damaged and traumatized lens she sees through. “And when the doctor at the E.R. had asked Lisette how her face had got so bruised, her nose and eye socket broken, she’d said that it was an accident on the stairs. . .” Lisette did not fall down the stairs and break her eye socket. Lisette was brutally beaten by her father and insists her father didn’t mean to hurt her and loves her, even though he clearly has no regard for his daughter’s well-being. Lisette is completely unaware that she struggles with seeing things clearly. As long as she remains in denial about her trauma, she will continue not to be able to see those differences. Eventually, Lisette’s mind will be completely cracked trying to process reality and the traumatic things she has experienced.

The setting Oates uses to portray Lisette’s denial towards her trauma, and clouded vision is the morgue. Lisette is not only in denial but also avoidant to the traumatic events unfolding in her life. Oates utilizes the setting to foreshadow Lisette ending up there one day if she continues to deny what is right in front of her. “The air was cooler and smelled of something like chemicals. There were no visitors . . . very few hospital staff people. A female attendant in white pants, a white shirt, and a cardigan sweater told them that the assistant coroner would be with them soon.” This is obviously no place for a 13-year-old yet it was a perfect setting to convey an important message. If Lisette cannot confront her trauma and accept it, the consequences will be devastating and deadly.

Oates creates a telling ending in which Lisette needs to

identify her mother’s body. Lisette then insists on returning to school regardless of what she has just seen. “There was Keisha, looking concerned, calling, ‘Lisette, hey—what was it? You O.K.?’ and Lisette said, laughing into the bright buzzing blur, ‘Sure I’m O.K. Hell, why not?’” Lisette is repeatedly denying the trauma she experiences. Lisette witnesses a woman’s dead body on a slab with proof the body is her mother’s, yet she returns saying everything is fine. Lisette has never resolved or accepted any of her trauma which hinders her ability to see the truth. Oates is again saying if Lisette never confronts what has happened, she will end up just like her mother. This concurs with Oates’ theme in the story: unresolved trauma and denial will always become detrimental to your life and future.

Just like Boyle and Oates, Stephen King wrote an intense story following the devastating results of unresolved trauma. “The Man in The Black Suit” is a tale of a boy named Gary who loses his brother, causing him to lose his faith. One day while fishing, a man in a black suit appears taunting Gary about his brother’s sudden death, and the loss of faith Gary is experiencing. It’s a deep and beautifully written story describing how Gary is traumatized over what has happened, and his battle with what he believes is the devil. King creates a theme that trauma is long-lasting and leaving it unresolved only creates devastating consequences. “A man in his eighties should be well past the terrors of childhood, but as my infirmities slowly creep on me. . . that terrible face grows clearer and clearer. . .” Gary never confronting his traumatic experiences shatters his ability to ever reconnect with his faith. This is a brutal consequence that comes with denying trauma.

King uses the man in the black suit as a symbol of Gary’s fear and his battle with his faith. Gary believes without a doubt that the man in the black suit is the devil. In the story, the devil hunts Gary down and makes derogatory and spine-chilling

comments making him lose his beliefs even more. The devil's comments targeted sensitive topics within Gary. The topics were horrific and traumatizing ranging from his brother's death to his father using Gary for pleasure, and more. When confronted with the devil, Gary pondered even more if God was real. If he was real, why would he let the devil torment him? "I feel more and more strongly that escaping him was my luck—just luck, and not the intercession of the God I have worshipped and sung hymns to all my life." This traumatizing encounter with the devil further pushes him away from his faith. Gary never comes to find closure with either traumatic event despite attempting to move on. However, trauma lasts a lifetime and losing faith creates even more loss. Without resolving or addressing what has happened, Gary will continue to be affected and haunted by the ghosts of his past.

King uses an eerie and lonely setting to convey to the reader that Gary feels physically and metaphorically isolated. Gary encounters the devil for the first time in a part of the woods where he and his brother used to fish. King creates a scary and isolated setting where Gary is surrounded only by the woods, snakes, and bog. "Most of Motton was woods and bog, dark long places full of moose and mosquitoes, snakes and secrets. In those days there were ghosts everywhere." King also utilizes the setting to make an already fearful experience even more haunted and daunting. Gary is slowly losing his faith and the devil takes advantage of the setting to continue to set off Gary while pushing him further away from his faith. King's use of the setting supports his message that trauma will continue to affect Gary until he confronts it with damning consequences.

The story ends with Gary telling the story 80 years later on his deathbed, still traumatized over what has happened. Gary continues to talk about his encounter with the devil and his fears about the afterlife. These traumatic situations affect Gary

even later in life, never finding his faith, and in turn losing a piece of himself forever, just like Lisette in "ID" who will grow up with unresolved trauma affecting her life. "Yet of all the memories, the one of the man in the black suit is the strongest, and glows with its own spectral, haunted light." Gary never finding his faith again is a big reason he is so terrified of the afterlife. He remains unsure if he lived a good enough life to get into heaven or if he was just doomed to hell to see the devil once again. His trauma left him haunted for the rest of his life, filled with questions, uncertainty, and a void where his faith used to comfort him. The author formed an inquisitive, beautifully written story portraying the lasting effects and isolation from never resolving your trauma.

All three stories are filled with emotional depth and portray how trauma affects people's lives as long as it remains unresolved. Each author shines a unique light on a specific character and their reactions to what they have experienced. The authors created an important theme because not only is trauma commonly ignored, but unresolved trauma can affect people's lives in the hardest of ways. The authors use of symbolism and the setting gave each story depth. Every author created a different symbol and setting allowing each reader to see completely different stories, but the same concept. Each story told the same theme, but different aspects to the effects of unresolved trauma. Every person should read these stories because it gives a deeper understanding to trauma, and its true impact on people. Remaining in denial about traumatic experiences will only compound the damage and power over somebody's life; acknowledging trauma could be the difference between life and death.

Remaining in denial about traumatic experiences will only compound the damage and power over somebody's life; acknowledging trauma could be the difference between life and death.



SACHA JORDAN

MY EXPERIENCE

Female adolescence is a delicate time in a young girl's life, and in terms of an outcome, the possibilities are endless and unique to each girl. During female adolescence, young women come of age and struggle to find a true sense of self. "Boys and Girls," by Alice Munro, is a beautiful coming-of-age tale in an outdoor setting, where the narrator is on the cusp of young womanhood with all the confusion and pain that it entails. With the story of "Lust," by Susan Minot, the reader is given a window into the life of a 15-year-old girl in boarding school who lusts after love and acceptance. In the most extreme example, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates, a 15-year-old girl struggles with the real dangers of adolescence and the loss of herself. In these three stories, Minot, Munro, and Oates use a symbol and their setting to uniquely portray adolescence as a challenging time in a young girl's life where expectations imposed on them can result in loss of autonomy and self and in extreme cases, loss of life.

"Boys and Girls," by Alice Munro, is the tale of a young nameless female narrator facing gender expectations imposed on her, while living in Ontario, Canada, on her parent's fox farm.

Her parents and younger brother Laird are introduced early on in the story. She is often responsible for Laird while doing her chores, and her parents expect her to do traditionally female chores. The reader sees this young girl growing up around foxes in various forms of the tanning process, from the kill to skinning the pelts. The reader sees her love being in nature and reveling in its beauty: "Against a background of cold blue sky and black pine forests and treacherous northern rivers, plumed adventures planted the flags of England or of France . . ." She loves being outside, which the reader can see in how Munro vividly paints her in the outdoors. She becomes aware of male and female roles after she sees her father and his hand Henry put a horse down.

The horses symbolize freedom, and the young narrator desperately wants to be free from the expectations of gender roles. The unnamed female protagonist loved to watch the horses running free, especially Flora: "It was exciting to see her running, whinnying, going up on her hind legs, prancing and threatening like a horse in a Western movie." When she sees the horses running free, she feels a sense of liberation from the traditional female role of staying inside and doing housework. She wants to be outside with her father and the foxes, doing traditionally male work. When she opens the gate and liberates Flora, it's a way of freeing herself from the gender role imposed on her.

The outdoors is a setting of freedom, as opposed to in the house where women are confined. When she is outside with the animals and her father, she is free. She loves being in the outdoors with all of the seasonal changes and smells: "After the pelt had been stretched inside-out [there was] the smell of blood and animal fat . . . with the strong primitive odour of the fox itself I found it reassuringly seasonal" In her mind this is a freedom from the oppression of doing women's work; to her the animal work is of the utmost importance. In stark contrast,

she dreads being indoors and all that traditionally female roles entail. The farm setting really gives the reader that sense of what society thinks of as traditionally male and female roles, and this drives home the inequality that young girls face.

Munro ends this story by brilliantly highlighting the struggle for a sense of self under the expectations of others, which defines female adolescence. The reader sees the narrator dramatically open the gate wide for Flora the horse to run free. In this moment, she is, in essence, trying to free herself from the confines of the traditionally sexist gender role that is shoved on her by her parents. She is at this point aware of the lot that is the female condition. When, during dinner, Laird exposes that she let Flora out, it is more than she can bear. She cannot bring herself to speak or look up and waits in vain to be sent away from the dinner table. Of letting Flora go, her father says:

The outdoors is a setting of freedom, as opposed to in the house where women are confined.

“She’s only a girl.” This is a soul crushing blow of reality for her, and the reader sees this through her radio silence to this hurtful comment. She is beginning to believe that she is not capable of performing traditionally male work and learning that she as a girl is valued less than her male counterparts. The realization that she will now be expected to work in the house with her mother shows her loss of autonomy because she is now considered incompetent at traditionally male work.

Another story of female adolescence, in which a young girl has sexual expectations imposed on her, is “Lust,” by Susan Minot, which is centered around the life of a 15-year-old girl who lusts after love and acceptance. Minot sets the story at the Casey Academy boarding school where the children are allowed to run amuck with virtually no adult supervision. In the beginning of the

story, the reader witnesses the young narrator deal with sexual expectations being imposed on her: “He kisses my palm then directs my hand to his fly.” The reader sees the expectations imposed on the young narrator, and she devalues herself with meaningless sexual encounters where she gives into the peer pressure, losing herself.

Minot uses food as a symbol to get across the main characters’ feelings towards her encounters with boys and how she begins to feel consumed by the boys. Along with boys she often describes food items, which at times are metaphors for how she feels after a sexual encounter with a boy: “You begin to feel like a piece of pounded veal.” After most of her encounters she feels dehumanized because the way she is treated makes her feel as though she’s been beaten up emotionally when she is used in order to satisfy a boy. The reader sees the pain that the loss of self causes her and the insatiable hunger that she has for something more. The reader can clearly see that she does not know how to get what she needs, but she knows on some level that she needs something more than feeling like “watered-down stew.”

Minot uses the boarding school as the setting, and the reader sees the lack of proper adult supervision there. The children are left to their own devices and run amuck around the campus every chance they get. The adults are negligent at best and encourage the children to do things well beyond their years as a result of their inaction: “The joke was that the school doctor gave out the pill like aspirin. . . . I was fifteen.” This is one of many instances where the adults charged with looking after the children are not providing the proper guidance needed for these budding sexual beings. The setting supports the theme in that the main character is often confused about what is expected of her sexually, and this contributes to her loss of self.

The ending reinforces the theme when the reader finds

the main character alone and feeling as though she's falling into an abyss. The narrator is hopelessly slipping away into nothing after another meaningless encounter leaves her feeling used and alone: "You're gone. Their blank look tells you that the girl they were fucking is not there anymore. You seem to have disappeared." The reader sees her having completely lost herself after this final sexual encounter and it's as though, in her mind, she has become invisible. The last lines haunt the reader as the girl clearly feels like less than nothing because giving into expectations has chipped away at her self-worth.

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" by Joyce Carol Oates, is by far the most lethal of these three stories of young female adolescence, where the main character struggles to deal with the unrealistic expectations she has about being a young girl. Connie is infatuated with her looks and cannot resist the mirror, which is tied to the ideals she gets from television and the movies. She uses music, movies, and television to educate herself on life, which leads to unrealistic expectations. Connie has lost her sense of self while in the crosshairs of a nefarious madman. Connie is listening to music in a fantasy land while the rest of the family is off at a barbecue: "She sat on the bed, barefoot, and listened for an hour and a half to a program called XYZ Sunday Jamboree." Connie fancies herself old enough to stay at home and is happily enjoying her day when Arnold Friend shows up.

Arnold Friend is a symbol of danger, the very real danger that is out in the world that Connie is unaware of. When Arnold and his friend show up, Connie is intrigued and at the same time rightfully cautious: "And honey, no matter who you were with last night, today you're with Arnold Friend and don't you forget it! Maybe you better step out here." Arnold is terrifyingly menacing with his taunts to Connie through the screen door. When Oates uses the numbers 33, 19, 17 in

an ominous way on Arnold's car to memorialize his kills, the reader can feel how dangerous Arnold truly is. The numbers on Arnold's car are foreboding for 15-year-old Connie. The events of the story lead the reader to believe that Connie will be number 15 on Arnold's ghoulish list.

Oates plays on the rural setting and the isolation of the house to give the reader the sense of being alone with Connie and all of the sexual expectations Arnold is trying to impose on her. The house is not the most secure structure and leaves naïve Connie vulnerable because she has a false sense of security. When her family leaves for the day she happily goes inside the house to listen to XYZ Sunday Jamboree and "drown out the quiet". When Arnold comes around Connie is completely alone. Her safe place has now been compromised and she is easy prey for this diabolical sexual predator. No one is around to help her. Arnold is fully aware of this and manipulatively taunts Connie from outside the home: "I mean, anybody can break through a screen door and glass and wood and iron or anything else if he needs to, anybody at all, and specially Arnold Friend." Arnold continues his manipulation by referring to the house as cardboard, incapable of protecting her from danger. It is at this point Connie is terrified and knows she is in real danger of losing her life because Arnold tells her as much.

Connie has lost her sense of self while in the crosshairs of a nefarious madman.

"Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" has a significant ending in that the reader sees Connie vulnerable, afraid and in real danger. Connie is struggling with the fact that she has totally lost herself and is in dire straits because of the sexual expectations that Arnold is imposing on her. With the

opening of the screen door, Connie has lost herself, having given into Arnold's manipulation and inviting in danger: "She watched herself push the door slowly open as if she were back safe somewhere in the other doorway, watching this body and this head of long hair moving out into the sunlight where Arnold Friend waited." It is in this moment that there is no turning

Each author addresses female adolescence from the girl's point of view, and the reader is enveloped in each of these distinctive tales.

back for Connie; her safe space is no longer safe, and she is about to meet her end. Oates' portrayal of Connie's stepping out of the door is surreal, as she slowly walks towards her doom. Arnold has every intention of carrying out his well-orchestrated plan of making her the next number entry on his precious car.

Female adolescence is undoubtedly one of the most incredibly trying times in a young

girl's life, and as these three stories highlight, the possible outcomes are unique to each girl, but they all share the struggle of facing a challenging time dealing with expectations imposed on them as they try to find their true selves. Each author addresses female adolescence from the girl's point of view, and the reader is enveloped in each of these distinctive tales. With these three stories Minot, Munro, and Oates use a symbol and their setting to uniquely portray adolescence as a challenging time in a young girl's life, that, as these stories highlight can have a variety of outcomes from troubling to downright awful. The general theme of female adolescence, coming-of-age, the struggle for identity, and dealing with imposed expectations are timeless, and Minot, Munro, and Oates all write about them in styles that are beautifully expressive, painting life-like worlds for their reader.



CAITLYN SCHORK

PRINCE HAL THE GENIUST

Throughout the play, Henry IV, Part 1, Prince Hal or Harry demonstrates time and again that he is not fit for being the next king. He is shown to be immature, lazy, and reckless. Hal shows the audience that he is incapable of leading a group of people, as he finds it hard to keep himself in order. Hal gets a lot of his behavior from his mentor, Falstaff. Falstaff seems to have a negative impact on Hal, though he idolizes him in a way. Hal loves to hear Falstaff's tales of recklessness and even participates in some of these extreme activities.

Though it seems that Hal is not fit to be king, I believe he will be a great king. Contrary to the popular belief that Hal is an irresponsible mess I see right through his tactics and know that there is something larger he is planning, and to be completely transparent I believe it is genius and works in his favor. Hal is clever with his plan, and though the rest of the people in his life do not know it, his plan proves him to be a genius and shows that he will be a great king and an effective leader.

The prince has a bit of a rough background. Though he is technically royalty he does not act like it at all. With Falstaff being his mentor, Hal doesn't have the very best role model

to look up to. Falstaff is a known criminal and Hal spends a lot of time with him. At first, it seems as though Hal has no interest in being king. He enjoys spending most of his time in the pub, flirting with women, and playing jokes on and with his friends. However, Hal has a deeper plan. He is creating this false character of himself that he is incapable of doing anything serious, just for the world to be surprised when he can do it. It seems like his entire life is a lie as he is the only person besides the audience who is in on his plan. Hal believes that if he sets low standards for himself the respect gained if he became king would be greater. Hal admits to this in the play when he states, “My reformation, glitt’ring o’er my fault, shall show more goodly and attract more eyes than that which hath no foil to set it off. I’ll so offend, to make offense a skill, redeeming time when men think least I will” (Act 1 Scene 2 Line 191-195). It is at this point, which is quite early on in the play, that the audience is aware of just how smart Hal’s plan is. To me, this is an excellent quality of a leader and proves that Hal will be a great King due to his critical thinking and manipulation.

But what makes a good leader? Let’s dive into some of the qualities of strong leaders and compare them to some of Hal’s actions and behaviors. A leader is a person who commands a group. As of the beginning of the play, Hal does not show this quality. A leader is someone who can gain the attention of their group and is well respected. And originally Hal is not that King. Though he comes across as having a bad work ethic, his plan to deceive everyone into gaining more respect for him is an excellent plan. Compared to politics today, there is a lot of lying and manipulation which works on us. Hal is a natural born political figure. If he can do these things even before he is crowned as king, he will be able to gain the utmost respect from people all around the world.

Another point is that Hal works well with everyone. Yes, he is royalty and is technically a prince, but he spends a lot of his time at the pub. Truthfully, I wouldn’t know many royals that would spend most of their free time with the common folk. This shows that he has something the rest of them don’t have: humility. Though this is a part of his plan, most royals would stick their nose up to these folk, but he gets along great with them, even pulling jokes with and on them. This shows the audience that he will gain even more respect from the people when he is eventually crowned king. They’ll remember his treatment of them and how he never shied away from spending time with them.

In Henry IV, Part 1, Hal is constantly compared to his rival Hotspur especially by his own father. Though they are not blood-related, the king wishes every day that Hotspur was his true son instead of Hal. This is also no secret. The king says it out loud a few times and even has an argument with Hal about all of the ways that Hotspur would be a better king than he. In a way, I think that this is the true reason that Hal created his plan to deceive everyone into thinking he doesn’t care about being king. It is a way to disrespect his father after the way he treats him, even referring to him as a rotten son. Hal shows he would be an effective leader as the man who rose from debase behavior to become an amazing and fearless king, such a surprise that even the King, his own father, would be completely blindsided by this sudden personality change.

Though it seems that Hotspur would be a better leader because of his harsh attitude and courage, he would be a terrible king. King Henry admires him all around but with his stubbornness with the prisoners being held captive, the audience learns that Hotspur doesn’t have complete respect for the king as he begins to question his ethics compared to his own. If finding a middle ground with him already proves difficult, I would fear

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that Hotspur as king would lead to more violence than necessary.

In comparison, Hal eventually shows that he has excellent qualities that would make him a great leader. To me, a leader is someone who can work well with others and not believe that he is better than the rest. Hal shows signs of empathy and compassion alongside his own bravery. At the end of the battle, Hal asks for mercy for Douglas when he could have been sent to death. After all, the qualities of a good leader include not just bravery and strength, but also empathy and compassion, which Hal holds all of.

Overall, Hal gets a bad reputation from the start of the play. The audience believes that he is no good and will lead a life of only fun and jokes. His attitude is lazy and his work ethic seems non-existent, but eventually, we learn of his genius plan that allows us to learn he is more than what we see. Hal's ability to work with anyone and find companionship anywhere shows he is a true leader. His compassion for everyone and his presence with the people show he does not think he is better than anyone else. Lastly, his bravery on the battlefield shows that he is willing to die for his people, and he does not want to be protected and sheltered by someone else. Henry IV, Part 1 allowed for the audience to get to know Hal, who I believe has the power to be a fantastic king and an effective leader one day.



CORINNE VERGARI

REIMAGINING R&J: A REVIEW OF TWO RIVER
THEATER'S ROMEO & JULIET

Two River Theatre truly never puts on a bad performance, and this was no exception. Honestly, going into Thursday night's performance, I was less than thrilled. I was worried that because the play was clocking in at three hours, that I would be exhausted for work the next day. But, as soon as I stepped through the doors of the theatre, I knew it was going to be worth my while. Two River Theatre proves time and time again that they are one of the best local theaters that New Jersey has to offer.

This review can begin nowhere else than on the stage itself in our seats. This single aspect made this experience one of the most unique I have ever had. Sitting on the stage added an entire new layer to the experience. Because our seats were on the larger stage, it felt as though we were part of the performance itself. Being that close to the actors and watching them prepare before the show started truly added a layer of appreciation for the actors. The only part of our seats that I did not like that much was that the other side of the theatre could see us on the stage. I felt like I could not react as I normally would because half of the audience could see me. But, other than that tiny detail, our seats were amazing. I loved being right in the thick of the

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performance. When the curtain was closed, we were backstage and that felt so special. Seeing the actors prepare and getting to interact with them before

the show started made me feel like the actors were genuinely appreciating our attendance. It was so personal and sweet!

This modern interpretation was more modern-ish than modern. The language was still mostly Shakespeare's original text but with a few modern words or lines thrown in here and there. The modernity was truly showcased through the costumes and the music. The costumes were modern day street clothes which brought the performance, as well as the text, straight to the present. It truly added so much relatability to the performance. If Juliet can wear llama slippers in Verona, then I can wear them to class! The costumes also made the show feel a bit less formal which made me more comfortable. If the characters could be comfortable physically on stage in their modern-day clothes, I felt like I could be comfortable observing them. Another aspect that thrust this production into the present was the added aspect of music and singing. We were told in class that music was featured a lot in Shakespearean comedies but not really in the tragedies. Seeing Romeo and Juliet sing to each other was very interesting and unique. Romeo and Juliet were also the only characters who sang. It gave them an edge and they stood out from the other characters in that way. The songs also did a great job of incorporating some of the most iconic lines of the play into this version. When Romeo sang to Juliet during the balcony scene, it gave it a sense of uniqueness that can rarely be found in productions of R+J. The music was beautiful, and it made this modern adaptation stand out even more in my mind than in other versions of the play I have seen.

The acting in this production was stellar. They added

such a great amount of comedy to a story that is usually portrayed as depressing. The first act was a completely different play than the second act. The audience could tell that the actors

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were having the time of their lives up on that stage. Their chemistry was palpable from all corners of the theatre. The one actor that I would like to focus on is the actor who played Tybalt and Paris. These two

characters are complete opposites of each other so it must be such a challenge to play them both. But the actor, whose name is Rob Kellogg, did a fantastic job of separating both characters and giving them their own goals and personalities. One specific instance that I would like to spotlight in Kellogg's performance was after Tybalt kills Mercutio. In this performance, because the ensemble created such a fun and energetic first act, as soon as the first death hits, Mercutio's, the entire tone of the performance shifts. What started off as a fun and entertaining story about two kids falling in love, became a story where beloved characters can die. Tybalt is the character that deals the first blow. But where other actors may portray Tybalt as being proud to have killed Mercutio, Kellogg takes a different approach. I noticed, after Tybalt kills Mercutio, that Kellogg climbed the scaffolding on stage right to try and escape what he had done. I did not even notice that he had done that until I could hear his heavy breathing. As I turned and looked up to find him, I could see that he was crying. It was the first time I comprehended that Tybalt may have felt remorseful for killing Mercutio. This small detail changed my entire view of Tybalt as a character. It gave the character so much more depth than Shakespeare ever gave him.

The one drawback to this show that was also mentioned by another professor of mine who saw the show after we did was

that, at the very end ,all the props got put on the oval stage. This is obviously meant to symbolize the family tomb and is meant to contain offerings and material items for the deceased to take with them to heaven. When Juliet was supposed to be in the tomb, she was so surrounded by props that we could barely see her. In addition to this, when Paris died, we could not see him. My other professor was across the stage in the traditional seats when he went to see it and he said that he lost so much of the

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performance because his view of Juliet was blocked! If they had made different choices when placing the props, it would have been more beneficial to the entire audience.

Overall, this performance was spectacular. I will never have a bad thing to say about a Two River Show. They have proved time and time again that they

have mastered the craft of putting on a good performance. I am so glad that I chose to go even though I was having reservations about it. It heightened my understanding of the work as a whole, and it absolutely changed my opinion of the play. I recommend it to anyone who enjoys Shakespeare or theatre at all. I would definitely go see it again! It was a once in a lifetime opportunity.



NATALIE VILLALPANDO

REMEMBRANCE AND APPRECIATION

The father is a cherished and revered being in the eyes of the son. He sets an example of masculinity, stoicism, and fatherhood. An adult man will often channel the lessons learned from his father as he approaches the trials of family life in his present, reflecting upon what he has viewed through the eyes of a child as being exemplary and ideal. In the poems “The Gift” by Li-Young Lee and “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden, both poets reflect upon specific and small remembrances of their father, and how these little flashbulb memories have impacted them in the present. In “The Gift” by Li-Young Lee, a father recites a story to his son as he pulls a splinter from the boy’s palm, carefully distracting the child so he does not feel the pain. The speaker in the poem demonstrates the depth of this moment and how it has affected his relationships in the present. In “Those Winter Sundays” by Robert Hayden, the adult poet looks back upon his overworked and stern father as he lights a fire to warm the cold house. The poem concludes with the speaker revealing how his view of his father has changed with the gaining of wisdom. While these two works have different tones, one light and the other solemn, the subject matter and conclusions mirror each other in a way that connects these poems thematically. What both poets

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draw from these experiences is a lesson that wasn't clear or fully realized in the moment, but now takes on a whole new level of depth and importance in adulthood. Through the careful examination of these little memories, each poet

experiences their own revelation about their fathers.

"The Gift" by Li-Young Lee describes an incredibly powerful yet modest moment between a father and son. As the speaker recalls, his father pulls a splinter out from the palm of his son while distracting him with a story. The tale ends with the boy too entranced within the moment of connection and love to notice that the splinter was removed. Li-Young Lee masterfully crafts tone from the onset of the poem in a way that narrows down the reader's attention and makes this moment feel almost microscopic. The narrator recollects, "To pull the metal splinter from my palm / my father recited a story in a low voice. / I watched his lovely face and not the blade" (lines one through three). The focus of the poem moves outward, from the splinter to the voice, and then to the lovely face of the father. This progression the poet uses to introduce the scene mimics the way in which the boy's distress ceases when he begins to listen to his father. The way in which the speaker remembers his father is told through metaphors, or rather the feelings which are kindled from his memory. In the second stanza, the poet envisions his father's tone, "...his voice still, a well / of dark water, a prayer." (lines seven and eight). The diction of the speaker helps enhance the small scale of this poem. The image of still water creates peace, of perfect tranquility and emotional stability. Water is commonly associated with emotions in literature, and the stillness of the water within the well portrays the speaker's

father as a perfectly balanced man. He is providing an example of emotional control to the young boy who was a moment ago frantic at the sight of the splinter within his palm.

The poem then shifts in the third stanza as the speaker flashes forward to present day; as he files the nail of his wife so carefully, she feels no pain. The reader understands through the mirroring of language that the boy has taken from his father what he learned that day. To be gentle with one's loved ones, to try to shield them from pain and suffering to the best of one's ability is the duty of the father. The boy was given "something to keep" and he cherishes that lesson within the present day.

"Those Winter Sundays" by Robert Hayden is a poem with a somber tone unlike "The Gift". The speaker begins by stating that on Sunday mornings his father rose early to light the fireplace and warm the house. It is clear that the speaker's father is a blue-collar man who performs hard manual labor throughout the week as his hands are described in the third line as "cracked" and "ached". This father does what is necessary for the survival of his family without recognition or respect. There is a sense of instability and tension in this poem that is established through diction. The boy rises from bed as the room is filled from the heat of the fire to dress, wary of the "...chronic angers of that house," (line nine). The word "chronic" implies that this family lives within a long-standing familial conflict, but

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it is vague as only the emotions are explicit in the recollection. In the final stanza, the tension is relieved as the speaker expresses his sentiments on the subject of the poem, his father. Hayden laments, "Speaking indifferently to him, / who had driven out the cold / and polished my good

shoes as well. / What did I know, what did I know / of love's austere and lonely offices?" (lines ten through fourteen). The last stanza expresses great contrition, yet an appeal to the reader in the name of ignorance. The speaker regrets the way he treated his father, the ways in which he allowed his hard work and love to go unappreciated. Yet he contrives within himself an understanding that is expressed at the culmination of the poem and all its emotions. The speaker was a child and knew nothing of the nature of an overworked and tragic man's love. The conclusion is one of regret and then acceptance.

The contrast in tone between "Those Winter Sundays" and "The Gift" is stark, but there are also elemental differences as well. In essence, "The Gift" seems to have an unmistakable loving spirit that reads from beginning to end, as well as a satisfyingly joyful core. The adult man who is now a husband reflects upon this extraordinary lesson he learned from his father that day. This important learning moment lends the poem its title; this brief instance was a gift in the eyes of the son. This theme is established through the author's word choice, which is best showcased in stanza three when Lee writes, "Had you entered that afternoon / you would have thought you saw a man / planting something in a boy's palm," (lines fourteen through sixteen). Lee's use of the word "planting" has strong thematic implications as it has multiple ways to be understood. "Planting" something in someone's hand means to give them something, such as this aforementioned "gift" in the form of a lesson his father is sharing. But if this word conjures associations with plants, it could be seen as the father building the character of his son so that it will grow as a tree or flower does. And the reader sees that come to fruition in the way the speaker interacts with his wife in the present. In "Those Winter Sundays", what the speaker concludes after describing his father is vague. This poem was written to be read several times before fully understood,

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unlike the more palatable clarity of "The Gift". Hayden uses long sentences with only three short interruptions between in order to build tension and make the reader feel uneasy. After the long introduction that ends as, "...hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather made / banked fires blaze." (lines three through five), the next sentence is the more abrupt, "No one ever thanked him." (line five). Diverging from the serene and unhurried structure of Lee's poem, the sharp way the speaker rambles and pauses helps create an entirely different tone that concludes in an unclear way.

The similarities between these two poems stem from their subject matter and themes. In "The Gift", the speaker of the poem gains new insight as he reflects upon this memory in adulthood. The poem is not spoken through the perspective of the child in that moment, but rather as a man describing a memory. The language telling the memory is in past tense, and it is not told as if the boy is experiencing the moment as the poem is happening. There is no child-like language; Lee writes in a sophisticated way which allows the reader to understand that it is the recollection that is important, and the poem will discuss the epiphany the poet had upon revisiting this memory. This is especially evident in the final stanza when Lee writes, "I was seven when my father / took my hand like this, / and I did not hold that shard / between my fingers and think, / Metal that will bury me, / christen it Little Assassin" (lines twenty-four through twenty-nine). It is clear that this is not the language of a child, rather the understanding of an adult man. This sophisticated style of writing to describe the memory of a child is a way to dedicate thought to something that wasn't previously

understood and explore its complexity. These retrospective ways of thinking and writing are parallel in “Those Winter Sundays”. After describing his father in detail while mentioning all the negative and painful things that are conjured with the memory, the speaker concludes he knew nothing of the way his father loved and the manner he expressed it: “What did I know, what did I know” (line ten). In essence, both poems are about two men who reflect upon a small memory of their father and understand its depth in hindsight.

“The Gift” and “Those Winter Sundays” mirror each other thematically and focus on a similar subject matter. Both contain the reflections of adult men on their fathers and how their views of these small moments have changed or developed a new depth. For Lee, this small moment of connection as his father pulled the splinter from his hand has gained a new significance for him as a married man. In Hayden’s somber

remembrance of his father, he finds it within himself to forgive or perhaps merely acknowledge his past inability to appreciate his father’s sacrifices as a child. “The Gift” tells of this moment between the father and son with clarity and luminosity, with an interpretation that presents itself to the reader in an accessible manner. “Those Winter Sundays” is more vague and obscure, with a tone that certainly cannot be described as bright. But what these poems share is a poet’s interpretation of their father through hindsight.

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KAROLINA VLCKOVA

ARE WE HARDWIRED TO IMPROVE? THEMES OF REINCARNATION, KARMA, MORALITY AND ETHICS IN *CLOUD ATLAS* AND *THE GOOD PLACE*

Everyone has heard about reincarnation, karma and how to decide between good and bad, but is, but it can be challenging to bring these ideas to life and interpret them on screen. The directors need to be able to show some forms and signs of reincarnation and karma by examples that could be relatable to the audience and imply certain ethical questions connected to them. This process can be difficult and more so, its execution will vary, as it does in the TV show *The Good Place* and the movie *Cloud Atlas*. The TV series *The Good Place* is about an afterlife that is presented as the Good Place, their version of heaven, which in reality is the Bad Place, their version of hell. In the first season the main characters figure out they are in an endless loop of hell that is designed specifically for them to torture each other. The movie *Cloud Atlas* represents the repetitive cycle of life decisions people must make, showing that the personal traits of greed, power and money never change, no matter how much society develops and moves to the future (Shanahan 122). It tells six stories starring courageous good people and their lives filled with unfairness and challenges. *Cloud Atlas* and the TV show *The Good Place* take different approaches to reincarnation, karma, morality, and ethics to show that people are capable of a change

for the better without any memories or any learned lessons from previous lives.

To understand the themes in these works, it is important to know the meaning of the vocabulary and ideas used in them, starting with reincarnation. Reincarnation is a religious concept that states the non-physical essence of living beings is reborn in a different form. The form it takes is based on its karma which is a sum of previous life deeds that decide the future existence after reincarnation. The better the deeds in previous life, the better the life after reincarnation. There are ways to judge the morality of one's actions. In deontology the action is either good or bad based on what is generally considered as morally right or wrong (McNaughton 81). In consequentialism, actions are judged by their outcome (Bonde par. 26). Take, for example, being honest. It naturally comes to people that being honest is a good thing and that is what a deontologist would believe as well. However, being honest, no matter what, is not always a good thing. Sometimes people withhold their honest opinions for the sake of a good outcome, something a consequentialist would do. Utilitarianism and ethical egoism are both consequentialist approaches; the difference is that utilitarianism judges the morality of an action based on the effect it has on larger group of people (Bonde par. 7). Inversely, ethical egoism focuses on oneself believing what is good for them will be good for everyone, meaning if one is happy and does what they wish to do, it is beneficial for the whole society (Bonde par. 8).

The Wachowski sisters, the directors of the movie *Cloud Atlas*, took an interesting approach toward reincarnation in the movie where six stories are played by the same actors whose characters' looks change from actor-to-actor story-to-story (Peberdy). Many times, even the slightest resemblance of one character to another character gives the audience the feeling of knowing. It gives a feeling that they have seen the person before,

a feeling of familiarity that makes the viewer wonder "Who is it?" and "Where do I know this person from?" Another visual symbol of reincarnation is the birthmark. In every story of the movie *Cloud Atlas* one of the main characters has a birthmark in the shape of a comet to visualize the aspect of reincarnation and connects the protagonists. It connects the stories, suggesting that the soul of a person in one lifetime is the same as the soul of a different person in another lifetime.

The second season of *The Good Place* starts with a repetitive loop of the main characters Eleanor and Chidi figuring out they are in the Bad Place. Every time they conclude what the Good Place really is, Michael wipes their memory and the whole cycle starts all over again ("Everything Is Great!" 39:35-40:50). They are reliving the same situation and it takes them shorter and shorter periods of time to figure it out. Reincarnation itself could be also considered just the idea of an afterlife *The Good Place* is based on. However, in the case of the Good Place, the characters actually do remember their previous lives on Earth. Their memories play a role when they are trying to change, learn lessons and, in general, try to better themselves. Later in the show there is something of an ultimate afterlife, an out of the Good Place. Even though the main characters could remember their lives on Earth, every time they got their memories of the Good Place deleted, they all had the tendency to try and become better people.

The characters in the movie *Cloud Atlas* with the comet birthmark suggest they are reincarnating throughout the stories, showing progress in their karma throughout their storyline as they develop their character, grow and learn. The audience can clearly distinguish between good and bad. The actions, intentions and perception of certain figures in the stories are obvious to a person's eye and raise strong feelings based on the morality of their actions and behavior. On the other hand, the TV

show *The Good Place* takes the term karma quite literally and transforms it into a score. “The point of morality” is explained by a presentation displaying how people “accumulate goodness points” throughout their life based on everything they do (Matthews par. 22). Every individual scores various numbers of points based on the significance and impact of their actions. For example, a person scores 0.89 of a point every time they pet a lamb, 57.86 points for helping their mom with a printer 339 times, over 924 points for saving a child from drowning or even 814 292.21 points for ending slavery. On the other hand, people can get their points taken away by doing things such as using the term “bro-code,” when 8.20 points are subtracted from one’s score, lose 53.83 points for disturbing coral reef with a flipper or their score drops 433, 547.22 points when they commit a genocide (“Everything Is Fine” 4:28-5:32).

The main example of a character with a moral development in *The Good Place* is Eleanor Shellstrop, whose character absolutely changes. The audience is shown short flashbacks of Eleanor’s life on Earth: lying, cheating and being rude, to present Eleanor as an extremely selfish person. However, after taking lessons from Chidi, throughout the first season, the viewers can see immediate change in Eleanor’s behavior even though her reasons to improve are driven by selfishness. Eleanor often corrects herself or compares her newly learned skills with her old habits and is trying very hard to learn how to be better. The very breakthrough happens when Eleanor publicly turns herself in to save Chidi (“The Eternal Shriek” 21:01-21:25). This selfless act shows that Eleanor was able to change for the better and learned to put the well-being of her friends before her own. A similar moral development can be seen in *Cloud Atlas* with the story of Zachary. In the beginning, he cowardly hides to not be seen and killed by the tribe of cannibals and let his father die. Later on, when Zachary is helping Meronym, he fights his evil thoughts

represented by Old Georgie who is talking Zachary into killing her, but he internally fights Old Georgie and does not give in. He ends up helping Meronym, and eventually he happens to find himself in the same position with the tribe as his father did. However, luckily for him, Meronym helps him, and both fight and survive. It shows he gets his negative karma. However, because of his good deeds by helping Meronym, she saves him and provides him a future.

In *The Good Place*, morality and ethics are in the form of philosophy lessons. One of the main protagonists is professor of ethics Chidi. Even though his actions throughout his life were all well intended, because he often could not decide, the consequences of his actions were in the end mostly negative (Delston 203). He promises to help Eleanor and teach her how to be a better person, but since he is a strict deontologist, his hell is created when he is forced to break the rules in the Good Place in order to keep his promise to Eleanor. Throughout the seasons, Chidi is challenged to constantly decide things which develop his character. Some of the most important decisions he makes are to wipe his memory to save the experiment (“Pandemonium” 11:40-13:56). He is also asked to create a new afterlife and save humans from damnation (“The Answer” 20:23-20:38). Furthermore, he stays in the Good Place to make Eleanor happy (“Whenever You’re Ready” 27:47-29:37). It is an enormous act that is not easy for Chidi, but he does it to help Eleanor. The consequences of his selfless actions that are very difficult for him help other people and shape the whole afterlife, changing him into a utilitarian.

Utilitarian traits can be seen as well in Somni’s story In *Cloud Atlas* Somni is a clone that gains conscience and discovers the truths about what is really happening to all the clones in the consumerist society she is forced to work in. She escapes and dedicates the rest of her life before being captured to fighting and trying to change society.

Her actions are driven by a selfless thought to help others and create a better world. However, the last story in *Cloud Atlas* gives a look to the post-apocalyptic way of living with some of the last survivors. Cannibal tribes and the primitive way of life on planet Earth suggest the uprising was not so very successful. Somni's actions were driven by morally good reasoning; nevertheless, the consequences were probably not how she thought the world would change. This could confirm the deontologist argument of judging actions to be ethical or unethical based on one action itself, since it is impossible to predict the morality of an outcome

in advance.

In the end, they both ultimately express that people can change and break the cycle of karma and its aftermath.

The idea that people are capable of a change for the better without any memories or any lessons learned from previous lives can be seen in the example of Tahani in *The Good Place*. Tahani ends up in the Good Place because her motives to donate enormous sums of money and her philanthropy were driven by “jealousy, spite, desire for attention and approval and competi-

tion” between her and her sister (Delston 203). However, at the end of season one, right before her memory is wiped, Tahani is explained why she ends up in the Bad Place (“Michael’s Gambit.” 15:57-16:35). With her memory of the Bad Place wiped, Tahani suffers in the Good Place once again. She gets drunk, is mean, and embarrasses Eleanor (“Everything Is Great!” 24:39-25:52) However, at the end of the day, she comes to Eleanor to apologize for her earlier terrible behavior (“Everything Is Great!”

37:53-38:08). Throughout the many experiments Michael puts Tahani through, she eventually ends up reflecting on her own actions, healing, reconnecting with her family and becomes an architect in the afterlife immensely improving her karma by helping others “and by finding meaning with morality” (Delston 206). Quite extensive growth in karma happens as well in Timothy Cavendish’s life, more so after his reincarnation into Somni. His story starts quite poorly with him owing money or having an affair with his brother’s wife, but later he helps to escape himself and three other people from a very strict elderly house and reconnects with his old love, turning his life for the better. After the reincarnation of his soul into Somni and her uprising that changes society, the story shows possible improvement within one’s life and the tendency for improvement in a different life without any recollection of any previous endeavors.

The Good Place and *Cloud Atlas* take a different approach with the concepts of reincarnation, karma, morality and ethics and show it through texts differently. The stories use various moral theories such as utilitarianism, consequentialism, and deontology. These theories are used in practice and help the viewers understand the different approaches to ethics and morality of one’s actions. Both media display good and bad choices and lessons people learn throughout their life and their consequences. In the end, they both ultimately express that people can change and break the cycle of karma and its aftermath. It indicates that people are inherently capable of moral development throughout their lifetime and could change their future or future life with no memories of their previous lives whatsoever.



SCOTT PENDELL

THE NEW COUNTERCULTURE

Punk rock is often ascribed a kind of nihilism. Sure, many punk songs have themes of social and economic decay and reject traditional moral values. Richard Hell's "Blank Generation" is a genre-defining anthem of the early punk movement, and it speaks to a sense of disillusionment with the state of the world. "I belong to the ___ generation and I can take it or leave it each time" (Hell). I would wholeheartedly disagree, however, that this can be equated with nihilism. If we look at the birth and heyday of punk rock in New York from the mid to late seventies, the themes of decay are prevalent, but the music is simply reflecting its surroundings. New York was in the midst of a major financial crisis and subsequent rise of unemployment and violent crime. Historian Kim Phillips-Fein calls the period "an era of social breakdown, economic malaise, and political collapse" (4). As for the rejection of traditional values, they weren't tossed out in favor of hopelessness or meaninglessness. Traditional values were replaced, successfully or unsuccessfully, with "new values" as Iggy Pop puts it, "I'm looking for one new value / I'm looking for one new value but nothing comes my way."

The ideals of the hippies in the 1960s had come up largely empty and a new approach was being taken, though it was in many ways similar. There was still an eye towards a kind of spirituality from some, an emphasis on building artistic communities and creating space for new kinds of expression and, of course, plenty of illicit drug use. Punk was the new counterculture.

"Your lack of conscience and your lack of morality / well, more and more people know all about it" (Reed).

New York City in the 70s was not a particularly nice place to be. Kevin Baker writes in *The Guardian*: "New York, like F Scott Fitzgerald, had gone broke in the usual way: slowly at first, then all at once." A combination of the city's high state and federal tax burden, robust welfare state, deindustrialization and the middle class fleeing to surrounding suburbs led to a quick ballooning of debt which President Ford refused to remedy (Baker). In a 1975 address, Ford declared: "I can tell you now that I am prepared to veto any bill that has as its purpose a federal bailout of New York City to prevent a default." The next day, *The Daily News* ran a now infamous headline. It read "Ford to City: Drop Dead" (Roberts).

"I'm just a dead boy / you know that I'm just a dead boy / I wanna be a dead boy" (Bators).

What preceded and followed this was a rise of austerity policies in the city with severe budget cuts across the board. In the Fall of 1974, the city laid off a staggering 3,700 employees, including 400 police officers (Phillips-Fein, 68). A concerned citizen at the time warned that "without sufficient police protection, this city will become a jungle" (Phillips-Fein, 69).

"Living in a jungle, it ain't so hard / living in the city, it'll eat out, eat out your heart" (Thunders).

Exploitation films of the time such as *Death Wish* and *The Warriors* depict New York as an urban hellscape crawling with roving gangs of murderers.

“Warriors, come out to play” (The Warriors)

Though it seems like something out of one of these gruesome B-movies, the NYPD actually distributed a survival guide pamphlet that referred to New York as “Fear City” and featured a visage of the grim reaper.

“This is the story of a man who decided to clean up the most violent town in the world” (Death Wish 1974 Theatrical Trailer)

It is prefaced with the following dire warning: “by the time you read this, the number of public safety personnel... may already have been still further reduced. Under those circumstances, the best advice we can give you is this: until things change, stay away from New York City if you possibly can” (Welcome to Fear City). How could such a bleak reality not manifest itself in the art of that time in that place. The Ramones song “53rd and 3rd” tells a harrowing story of a male prostitute turning tricks in midtown Manhattan and pulling a knife on a john:

*53rd and 3rd standing on the street
53rd and 3rd I’m trying to turn a trick
53rd and 3rd you’re the one they never pick
53rd and 3rd don’t it make you feel sick
then I pulled out my razor blade
then I did what God forbade
now the cops are after me
but I proved that I’m no sissy” (Ramone).*

It’s like a bubblegum pop version of a Hubert Selby Jr. Novel.

The Ramones are from New York (Queens to be precise) and are reporting on their environment.

Other key contributors to the scene came from away. Richard Hell from Kentucky, the Dead Boys from Ohio, and Patti Smith from South Jersey. Why would anyone choose to enter into this violent place? This city on the verge of bankruptcy literally warning tourists to keep away? The Dead Boys seemed to truly revel in the sleaze of the city and equate danger with excitement, a kind of excitement which obviously comes with real risk; in 1978, Johnny Blitz, drummer of the Dead Boys, was stabbed multiple times by gang members on the street (Chrome 239).

Patti Smith came to the city earlier, in the late 60s, when a different image of the city prevailed, that of a haven for artists. Smith and her then-boyfriend, the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, moved into the legendary Chelsea Hotel (Smith, *Just Kids*, 94). The place that had previously been the home of some of the Beat writers that Smith admired such as William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg as well as countless other artists, writers, musicians and film stars. In the song “Piss Factory,” the b-side to Smith’s debut single, the narrator is a factory worker who dreams of going to New York to be a star:

*I’m going to be somebody
going to get on that train
go to New York City
I’m going to be so big
I’m going to be a big star
and I will never return
never return
no, never return to burn at this piss factory
(Smith, “Piss Factory”).*

In this track, the working class reality of having a demanding factory job and making just enough money to get by is a meaningless existence. “I get this job in a piss factory inspecting pipe” (Smith, “Piss Factory”). The work is nothing. Just mindless labor. “It don’t matter whether I do labor fast or slow / there’s always more labor after” (Smith, “Piss Factory”). Life isn’t meaningless though. The narrator’s life is something that has greater potential. I don’t think this is a superficial sentiment of needing to be famous to matter. It’s not that they need to be a star; it’s that they need to be able to create something that isn’t “piss.”

This is the story of many of the New York punks. Though there are some exceptions like the Talking Heads, made up of art school students, many of them didn’t exactly have bright career prospects. Yet they built something important. A community of artists that put on shows and created a body of work that continues to be talked and written about today. Remember Johnny Blitz, the drummer who was stabbed? The New York punk community organized a massive 4 day music festival at local club CBGB to raise money for Blitz’s medical treatment (Chrome 239 - 241). The lineup featured performances from over 30 acts including the Ramones, Richard Hell, and Blondie. The Dead Boys performed with comedian John Belushi filling in on drums. There was an outpouring of support to help get Blitz back on his feet. And he is still drumming today.

“[They] proved determined to challenge prevailing norms and sensibilities. That resulted in ostracism and even incarceration, however temporarily, as well as the cultivating of an outlaw image” (Cottrell 17). This actually isn’t in reference to punks at all, but rather the key figures of the Beat Generation, though the description fits both groups. They are in many

*the spirit is
where you
find it.*

ways similar with punk being the next step in a lineage of countercultural movements. Jello Biafra of Dead Kennedys would rise to prominence a little later than (and on the opposite side of the country of) the punk scene in question here, but I appreciate his framing of the idea of punk: “the spirit of punk goes back to the anti-war hippies, the people who did all the revolt in 1968 in France. It goes back to the Beat Generation, the early rock n’ rollers, the spirit is where you find it” (0:01:12). I began with Richard Hell’s punk rock rallying cry “Blank Generation.”

“I belong to the blank generation and I can take it or leave it each time / I belong to the __ generation and I can take it or leave it each time” (Hell).

This track is actually a reinterpretation of a 1959 novelty song by Bob Mcfadden called “The Beat Generation.” “I belong to the Beat Generation / I don’t let anything trouble my mind / I belong to the Beat Generation / and everything’s going just fine” (McKuen). The Beats had inspired the punks. The punks weren’t primarily working in the same mediums, they didn’t seem particularly interested in eastern religions, and they opted for heroin over psychedelics, but the spirit is where you find it.

The punks were hardly any more nihilistic than Allen Ginsberg. Themes of social and economic decay are to be expected in art coming out of a state of social and economic decay. Despite their sometimes threatening appearance and sneering attitude, the punks built a vibrant artistic community in the middle of fear city. And though the punks, on the surface, may seem diametrically opposed to the hippies of the 1960s, they were more like a continuation of the same underlying spirit. Punk was the new counterculture.



*To listen to Scott's podcast,
kindly scan the QR Code*



**SPECIAL THANKS TO
SANDRA CISNEROS**

BY:

*ENGLISH FACULTY MEMBER
MARCIA KREFETZ-LEVINE*



Why do I teach *The House On Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros? It is amazing to introduce a text into a classroom, and, as a result, everyone inside the class, including me, is transformed. Yes, coming-of-age novels are relatable, and addressing culture, diversity, dreams, and disappointments appeals to all of us. However, it's Cisneros's voice that compels us to consider the novel as a mirror for us to look into, to delve deeply into what makes us human.

I am proud, touched, and changed not only by the conversations we shared in class and the messages the author shared in her novel that reads like a poem but, most significantly, by my students' writings in response to the novel. They are insightful, honest, raw, and at the same time polished. Why teach *The House on Mango Street*? Read the students' essays in Interpretations, and you'll have your answer!



JAHNIA BOONE

BUILDING IDENTITY IN THE FACE OF HARDSHIP: AN ANALYSIS OF THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET

The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros, is a novel that shows a theme of identity, with a specific focus on the coming-of-age experiences of Esperanza. The story follows the challenges of growing up in a predominantly Latino neighborhood in Chicago, where poverty, prejudice, and gender expectations shape her daily life. Through Esperanza's journey, the novel portrays the challenges of building an identity in the face of suffering and prejudice. The House on Mango Street examines how personal and outside factors shaped Esperanza and how she changed facing the world's challenges.

In the vignette "A Rice Sandwich" Esperanza expresses her jealousy of the "special kids" who get to eat lunch in the school canteen. The fact that they live far from school and can stay to eat there while Esperanza, who lives nearby, must eat her rice sandwich at home makes her feel like she is missing out on something and jealous. When she hands her mother's note to Sister Superior asking if she can also eat in the canteen, the Sister Superior responds by pointing out the "row of ugly three-flats, the ones even raggedy men are ashamed to go into" (Cisneros 45) assuming she lives there. Esperanza cries and nods despite

This highlights the impact of poverty on one's sense of self-worth and belonging, as Esperanza feels inferior due to her living situation.

it not being her house. The fact that she cries when the nun points towards these homes shows how deeply this sense of shame and embarrassment affects her. This highlights the impact of poverty on one's sense of self-worth and belonging, as Esperanza feels inferior due to her living situation.

Cathy gets introduced at the novel's beginning in the vignette, "Cathy Queen of Cats," who is Esperanza's friend for only a few days. Cathy mentions she must move by Tuesday as the "neighborhood is getting bad" (13). She explains that she and her family must move farther away "every time people like us keep moving in" (13). Esperanza can imply from what Cathy said that her family is moving away from Mango Street because they do not want to live in a neighborhood with an increasing Hispanic population. Cathy's comment that "the neighborhood is getting bad" implies that she and her family see the growing population of Hispanic families in the area as negative. Esperanza may feel she doesn't belong or isn't accepted in her neighborhood if Cathy's family moves away because of the growing Hispanic population, which might harm Esperanza's identity development. This feeling of social exclusion might make Esperanza's path toward developing her Hispanic identity more challenging and complicated.

The "My Name" chapter highlights gender norms and the restrictions they set. The name Esperanza has a different meaning in Spanish than in English, with the Spanish version having a pejorative connotation of "sadness" and "waiting." Esperanza inherited her name from her great-grandmother, a tough woman born in a horrible year for females—the year of

the horse. Esperanza continues, “because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don’t like their women strong,” (10) highlighting the constraints and cultural expectations put on women in both countries. This chapter shows how gender norms may influence and constrain a person’s identity and how Esperanza pushes back against these expectations to create her identity. By rejecting the negative connotations of her name in Spanish, she is rejecting the gender expectations placed on her as a woman in Hispanic culture.

The House on Mango Street is a coming-of-age narrative about Esperanza, a young Latina girl growing up in a primarily Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago.

The story explores the hardships of forming an identity in the midst of poverty, prejudice, and gender expectations. As poverty and social exclusion have an impact on Esperanza’s development, she battles with her sense of self-worth and belonging. In addition, gender expectations have an impact on how she develops her identity dealing with the expectations Hispanic culture has for women. Ultimately, The House on Mango Street shows how personal and societal factors can shape one’s identity, particularly for those who face hardship. The novel serves as a reminder that identity is not fixed but is a constantly evolving process that requires courage, resilience, and self-discovery.

By rejecting the negative connotations of her name in Spanish, she is rejecting the gender expectations placed on her as a woman in Hispanic culture.



AMBER CONRAD

HOME IN OUR HEARTS

Do you ever feel yourself searching for ‘home’? Whether it’s a physical place or an emotional state, the search for a sense of belonging and a place to call home is a universal experience that resonates with people from all walks of life. In *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, the theme of ‘home’ is crucial to the plot of the story. Cisneros explores this theme through the experiences of its protagonist and narrator, Esperanza, and other characters. The novel follows Esperanza’s journey as she grows up in an impoverished Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago. Esperanza and the other characters encounter various challenges, including poverty, sexism, gender inequality, and racial discrimination. However, the most significant challenge they face is the quest for a sense of home. While Esperanza believes that a physical home is key to feeling secure and stable, she learns that home is something that lives within us and we can carry it with us wherever we go.

Throughout the novel, Esperanza expresses her dissatisfaction with her family’s current living situation and dreams of a house that is hers alone. We initially see this dissatisfaction and dream in the vignette “The House on Mango Street”: “You live there? The way she said it made me

feel like nothing. There. I lived there. I nodded. I knew then I had to have a house. A real house” (Cisneros 5). Esperanza describes the rundown apartment they move into on Mango Street as a temporary home, “The house on Mango Street isn’t it... Temporary, says Papa” (Cisneros 5). In the vignette “A House of My Own” she dreams of a house of her own, “With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed” (Cisneros 108). Her vision of a dream home is a place where she can feel safe and secure, away from the chaos and uncertainty of her current living situation. “Only a house as quiet as snow, a space

However, the most significant challenge they face is the quest for a sense of home. While Esperanza believes that a physical home is key to feeling secure and stable, she learns that home is something that lives within us and we can carry.

for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (Cisneros 108). However, as Esperanza grows older, she learns more about the lives of those around her. She realizes that a physical home is not enough to give her the sense of belonging and safety she craves. We get to see parts of this realization for Esperanza in the vignette “Our Good Day”.

In the vignette “Our Good Day” Cisneros uses the image of Esperanza, the protagonist, riding a bicycle with friends to depict the feeling of belonging

that comes from being with loved ones. “We ride fast and faster. Past my house, sad and red and crumbly in places, past Mr. Benny’s grocery on the corner, and down the avenue which is dangerous... Down, down Mango Street we go. Rachel, Lucy, me. Our new bicycle. Laughing the crooked ride back” (Cisneros 16). Cisneros uses the physical space of Mango Street to represent

the difficult circumstances that her characters face. She then uses the experiences they share on the bicycle to represent the emotional connection they have with one another. The description of Esperanza’s house as “sad and red and crumbly in places” (Cisneros 16) shows that she is not happy with her physical home and feels embarrassed by it. However, Esperanza feels such a strong sense of belonging with Rachel and Lucy that she’s willing to steal money to hold onto her new friendships, “I have three dollars saved and I take two of Nenny’s... I have two new friends and a bike too” (Cisneros 15). Despite her poor living conditions, she feels at ease being with Rachel and Lucy, “Laughing the crooked ride back” (Cisneros 16). The excitement and laughter that the girls share create a sense of joy and happiness that makes Esperanza feel at home in their friendship and companionship. The novel serves as a reminder that, no matter where we are, we can create a sense of home for ourselves through our connections to our culture, our community, and our loved ones. However, unlike Esperanza, Cisneros shows us that not everyone discovers their sense of home through their friendships. Esperanza’s neighbor, for example, discovers her sense of home pursuing her dreams despite her family’s circumstances.

She realizes that a physical home is not enough to give her the sense of belonging and safety she craves.

In the vignette “Alicia Who Sees Mice”, we meet Alicia, who is a young, bright, and hardworking girl. She dreams of completing her studies, “is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university” (Cisneros 31). However, her dreams face possible setbacks after her mother’s passing. “Alicia, whose mama died, is sorry there is no one older to rise and make the lunchbox tortillas” (Cisneros 31). It leaves her tired having to take care of her family while studying full-time. She struggles

The novel serves as a reminder that, no matter where we are, we can create a sense of home for ourselves through our connections to our culture, our community, and our loved ones.

in as a single parent figure. He reduces his daughter's position in his life to that of a house servant who has to follow the gender roles set out by society and deems it reasonable. "A woman's place is sleeping so she can wake up early with the tortilla star, the one that appears early just in time to rise" (Cisneros 31). This shows the impact of parental absence on children's lives and their prospects. It emphasizes the importance of empathy, compassion, and understanding, particularly for those who are facing difficulties because of their lack of resources and support. However, while Alicia may not have a physical home that meets her every need, she possesses an inner strength and determination that allows her to feel at home in the world. Despite the challenges she faces, Alicia manages to stay in good spirits, "[She]Is a good girl, my friend, studies all night and sees the mice" (Cisneros 32). Her story illustrates the idea that home is in the pursuit of one's passions and interests. For Alicia, studying and education provide a sense of purpose and belonging that she cannot find in her home. Cisneros also

to balance her education with her responsibilities at home but is determined to pursue her education to better her own life. "Two trains and a bus, because she doesn't want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling pin" (Cisneros 31 & 32). Her father is responsible for the uncertainty of Alicia's future. He places his late wife's responsibilities onto his daughter instead of stepping

illustrates the longing for home through the character of Marin in the vignette "Marin."

Marin, a friend of Esperanza's, is another character who searches for a sense of home. She is a young woman who moves to Mango Street from Puerto Rico. Though Marin is living with her aunt, "We never see Marin until her aunt comes home from work" (Cisneros 27), she spends most of her nights outside in hopes of finding the sense of belonging she so desperately craves. Even though Marin's aunt's apartment is not hers, she creates a sense of home through her actions and attitude. "She is there every night with the radio... Marin lights a cigarette and it doesn't matter if it's cold out or if the radio doesn't work or if we've got nothing to say to each other" (Cisneros 27). Her desire for a better life and her willingness to take risks also contribute to her sense of home, "...she's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are... and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away" (Cisneros 26). Her focus is on the possibility of something new and exciting happening, something that might change her life for the better. She waits "for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" (Cisneros 27). She finds comfort in being seen by boys, "What matters, Marin says, is for the boys to see us and for us to see them" (Cisneros 27). Her desire to be seen by others shows how the feeling of home is often linked to social connections and validation from others. "Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere" (Cisneros 27). Marin's dance under the streetlight represents the human desire for a place to belong and feel free. The streetlight serves as a symbol of hope for Marin, representing her desire for something to change in her life. In the end, she realizes the only way to feel at home is to embrace the contradictions that make her who she is. Through her portrayal of Marin, Cisneros shows we cannot rely on

others to provide us with a sense of home; it is something we must cultivate within ourselves. However, not everyone gets to experience or find their inner concept of 'home'.

In the vignette "What Sally Said," we learn about a beautiful young girl named Sally who lives in an abusive household. Her father cruelly beats her and her mother seems powerless to stop the abuse. "He never hits me hard. She said her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts" (Cisneros 92). Sally's home life is chaotic and unpredictable, and she often goes to school with bruises and cuts. "Then at school she'd say she fell. That's where all the blue places come from. That's why her skin is always scarred" (Cisneros 92). Sally soon finds herself in a dangerous and possibly life-threatening situation with her father as her father sees her talking to a boy and nearly beats her to death. "Until one day Sally's father catches her talking to a boy and the next day she doesn't come to school. And the next" (Cisneros 93). Sally's father, who is supposed to be her protector, the man who makes her feel love and safety, is the one to turn her world upside down. "He just went crazy, he just forgot he was her father between the buckle and the belt" (Cisneros 93). The very world he fears for his daughter is the world he hands over to her through his own hands of abuse. "You're not my daughter, you're not my daughter. And then he broke into his hands" (Cisneros 93). Sally's lack of a stable and supportive family leaves her vulnerable and at risk of harm not only outside of her house but within. She is desperate to escape her home life and seeks the attention of boys around her. She does this as she is looking for validation from strangers that she cannot get from her father. She constantly searches for a sense of safety and security that she cannot find in her own house. Her desire for love and acceptance is understandable, given that she comes from an abusive household where she lacks these things. Sally's story shows that a physical house does not guarantee a sense of

home. Sometimes we must look beyond our surroundings to discover the sense of belonging we crave. As I read *The House on Mango Street*, I cannot help but reflect on my life.

I live in New Jersey with a host family and hope to consider their house my home. However, the experience causes me more anxiety than anything else. I remain a full-time student with a full-time job, and living with a host family causes sleepless nights. My life does not feel like my own, as I pour my time into work. It is only during the intimate moments I spend with friends and companions that I feel like I can breathe. They are my places of comfort and sanity during a time in my life when my house feels like it's falling apart. They give me a feeling of belonging I didn't find in my previous living situation. Like the characters in *House on Mango Street*, home is not only a physical place but a feeling of connection with others.

The House on Mango Street is a powerful exploration of the concept of belonging and home and the impact that it can have on our lives. As Esperanza gets older, she understands what makes her feel at home are the people she loves and the experiences she treasures. In the final vignette of the novel "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes," Esperanza imagines a future where she leaves Mango Street behind and becomes a successful writer. "I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong... but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to" (Cisneros 109 and 110). She realizes that even if she achieves her dreams, she will still carry the memories and experiences of Mango Street with her. Mango Street will always be a part of

Like the characters in House on Mango Street, home is not only a physical place but a feeling of connection with others.

who she is. Esperanza's realization is perfectly put in the novel's final lines: "They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot get out" (Cisneros 110). Like Esperanza, the other characters such as Sally, Alicia, and Marin, come to find that home is indeed within us. It's where we feel we belong. We carry home with us wherever we go.



ROSE JOHNSON

MANGO AND MORTAR

Do you feel like we ever reach the expectations our younger selves have for us when we get older? In Sandra Cisneros's novel *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza, the main character and narrator of the novel, is a young girl who lives in a small poverty-stricken town in Chicago, who dreams of a better life for herself away from Mango Street. She recognizes the obstacles she must overcome, including economic injustice and racial bias that is ingrained in how her society views her. As Esperanza finds her passion for reading and writing, she begins to recognize the setbacks her community will have on the opportunities she will be given. The theme of not letting economic injustice define who you can be, whilst never forgetting where you came from, is the underlying message in *The House on Mango Street* and is connected to my own life.

In the vignette "And some more," the plot is set on a snowy day in winter as Esperanza is playing in the snow with her friends. The tone of the chapter starts off juvenile as Esperanza is telling her friends about how "Eskimos got thirty different names for snow" (Cisneros 35). However, the mood shifts as Esperanza's friend Lucy delivers a gut-wrenching outlook on

it. “There ain’t thirty different kinds of snow, Lucy says. There are two kinds. The clean kind and the dirty kinds, clean and dirty. Only two” (Cisneros 35). This line, ironically coming from one of the poorest kids in the novels, shows that even from an early age, kids understand social views. The symbolism of using snow in this chapter illustrates the outlook some people have on life. The stance that there is only “clean” and “dirty” snow not only creates a divide in the way we view people but also ourselves. Given the fact that Esperanza does not live in a good area, she would be classified as the “dirty” kind of snow. Even though Esperanza recognizes that there is more snow than just two kinds, we begin to see a shift in how she starts to see her community. In the vignette “Those who don’t” we start to see Esperanza’s perspective on Mango Street is both her saving grace and her hail Mary.

In the vignette “Those who don’t,” Cisneros lets the reader into the mindset the protagonist, Esperanza, has on the community around her. Esperanza recognizes that outsiders view her neighborhood as “dangerous” (Cisneros 28). The outsiders are under the ignorant assumption that they will get attacked with “shiny knives” (Cisneros 28). Esperanza sees their viewpoint on her community as “stupid” (Cisneros 28) because she recognizes that outsiders only view them as dangerous because they are a poor community of color. Esperanza knows the people in her community and finds safety in that they are “all brown all around” (Cisneros 28). However, she lacks solace when she “drives into a neighborhood of another color (Cisneros 28),” to the point where her knees go “shakity- shake” (Cisneros 28). Esperanza feels “uneasy” because she knows that when she is not in her community she will be profiled and targeted. Racial discrimination is the fate of Esperanza’s existence as she will always be a girl of color. However, Esperanza does not want to follow the path that others believe that she is destined to live. Esperanza sees a bigger future for

herself that is too big to be contained in a place like Mango Street. In turn, we see Esperanza try to see what the future will have in store for her in the vignette “Elenita, Cards, Palms, Water.”

In the vignette “Elenita, Cards, Palms, Water” the underlying theme reveals that it is not always about what things are, instead it is about what they mean to you. The plot focuses on Esperanza going to see a witch woman to find out about her future. The witch woman does her psychic readings at her home while her children are playing. Even though the woman does readings at her home, she does her job like any psychic using a shop would. She tells Esperanza to get the water: “I go to the sink and pick the only clean glass there.... Then put the glass of water on the center of the table, the way she taught me” (Cisneros 63). While the witch woman starts to cut the cards, Esperanza sees that her favorite show is playing on the TV. Even though her childlike instincts want her to sit and watch TV, her “whole life is on the kitchen table” (Cisneros 63), so she must pay attention. The witch woman starts to lay down tarot cards in front of Esperanza. As the witch woman reads her a fortune that is not to Esperanza’s liking, she begins to grow impatient: “What about a house, I say, because that is what I came for” (Cisneros 64). The witch woman proceeds to tell her that she sees “a home in the heart (Cisneros 64).” Disappointed by the fortune she was given, she asks the witch woman if that was all she saw. Esperanza’s desperation for wanting to see a future away from Mango Street stems from her shame of where she comes from. The tunnel vision she has for not seeing the beauty in the things around her, makes her miss the underlying message the psychic was trying to tell her; “a home in the heart” (Cisneros 64). Even though Esperanza could not see the message at first, she begins to have a true understanding of the meaning behind those words. Through the many endless cycles of violence

and discrimination that threatened to crush Esperanza's will to fight, she never gave up. Because Esperanza was fighting for something greater than herself, she was fighting for her family, a family that society would cast aside due to their lack of monetary value in the world. As Esperanza grows up, from hardships and her love of writing, we see the turning point of her acceptance of her life in the vignette "The Three Sisters."

In the vignette "The Three Sisters," Cisneros shows Esperanza beginning to realize that even though she is outgrowing Mango Street, a part of her will always be there. The plot focuses on Esperanza attending a wake for her friend Rachel's sibling. As Esperanza

stands in the living room of her friend's house, she is anxious: "I had never seen a dead body before, not for real, not in somebody's living room" (Cisneros 104). She is put at ease when the three spiritual sisters come into the room: "They must've known, the sisters. They had the power and could sense what was what...then I did not feel afraid" (Cisneros 104). The three sisters begin to have a conversation with her. They ask her what her name is and when she tells them that her name is Esperanza, the older sister says it is "a good name." Esperanza's name can mean either hope or sadness. For Esperanza's grandmother, the name brought a curse to her--a curse that Esperanza fought most of her life to break. The three sisters see something in Esperanza that many would consider impossible for someone in her situation to have; the power to break the cycle. Due to them seeing this power, the sisters leave her with a reminder: "When you leave, you must remember to come back for the others. A

The three sisters serve as a sign to Esperanza that it is ok to embrace parts of ourselves that are molded from hardships.

circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You cannot erase what you know. You cannot forget who you are" (Cisneros 105). This reminder has an impact on Esperanza as she spends most of the novel trying to break free from her life. Even though this same message was given to Esperanza from the witch woman earlier in the novel, we see the growth in Esperanza's acceptance of herself. The three sisters serve as a sign to Esperanza that it is ok to embrace parts of ourselves that are molded from hardships. Even though she never sees the three sisters again, that one fateful moment in Esperanza's life plays in her mind when it comes to how she sees herself. When it comes to remembering where you came from, I find myself struggling to define who I am.

When I was growing up, I knew from an early age that I was poor. Even though I had a place to live, I remember the moments my sister used to carry water from our grandma's house to be able to cook and clean. My sisters always tried their best to make sure that I still grew up with everything that I wanted. However, that did not stop me from developing an anxiety about if the bills were going to be paid. The kids that starred on the TV shows that I used to watch did not have to worry about if they were going to lose their house; they were free. They were the kind of kids who would have made fun of someone like me if I were on their show. The House on Mango Street uses snow to illustrate the hollow view people have on the world: clean and dirty. Such a view strips people of the fight to want to better themselves. I never stopped trying to better myself even when the odds were stacked against me. Just like how Esperanza did not subscribe to the notion that there were only two different kinds of snow. Even when it was easy for me to give up, I kept on going. I owed it to myself to make my dreams come true. In turn one of them did, I am getting married.

*In life you
do not get to
choose the hand
that has been
given to you.
However, you
do get to choose
what you decide
to make of it.*

I always knew that I wanted to get married. Even though I never saw a happy marriage in my family, I wanted to be the one to break the chain. Now that the time has come for me to get married in five months, I find myself struggling to enter this new stage of adulthood. Taking on a new last name and being a part of a different family feels like I am saying goodbye to my younger self, a young girl that was trying to grow up for so long but now that the

time has come, I feel apprehensive. Who will I become if I heal from all the things that hurt me? Like Esperanza, I find myself fighting to accept the parts that came from poverty. Even though coming from poverty gave me the fire that I needed to fight for my dreams, sometimes I wished that I never had to fight at all. The isolation of feeling like you're poorest person in the room fills you with impending dread that people will pity you, pity that can fill you with shame for even existing in a world full of "clean" people. However, I refuse to be ashamed of where I come from anymore. Like Esperanza, I may not have had a lot growing up, but I had something that people look for their whole life; love. The love that my family has for me made me the woman that I am today: a woman that still sees that younger girl in the mirror and instead of turning her back on her, she holds her.

As we go on a journey of self-discovery with Esperanza

in *The House on Mango Street*, the journey unlocks an inner child in all of us. Whether you come from poverty or have lived a privileged life, we are all searching for acceptance from ourselves and those around us. In life you do not get to choose the hand that has been given to you. However, you do get to choose what you decide to make of it. The message of never forgetting where you come from serves as a reminder to embrace every part of us. For Esperanza, embracing the parts she was ashamed of did not come easy. She had to experience different moments in her life to understand that to truly have peace from within, you must heal the parts of yourself that come from pain. The past that people might see as "dirty" will always be beautiful in Esperanza's eyes. Because Mango Street is the place where Esperanza's true love was born; poetry. Even though Esperanza will eventually grow up and move away from Mango Street, a part of her will always be there. Just like a house that needs mortar, Esperanza will always need Mango Street.

BIOGRAPHIES



ALEXA GLASSMAN

is currently working towards achieving an Associate's degree in Psychology with plans to help those losing their lives to severe mental health disorders. She plans to transfer to a four-year college in the future and continue to work her way to a Master's Degree. She wrote this essay in English-155: Short Stories.

SACHA JORDAN

was a Brookdale student from 2021-2022. She transferred to Rutgers in Fall 2023, where she will continue to work towards her Bachelor of Science. She is a laboratory researcher and science is her passion, but she enjoys writing very much. Sacha wrote her essay in ENGL 155: The Short Story.

CAITLYN SCHORK

is currently enrolled at Brookdale earning her Associate's Degree in English. Following her acceptance to New York University, she is transferring there to gain her Bachelor's Degree in English Literature. She wrote her essay in ENGL 275, Shakespeare's Plays."

CORINNE VERGARI

is a graduate of the BCC class of 2022 with an AA in English. She is currently a senior at Georgian Court University pursuing a Bachelor's degree in the same subject. After graduating, she hopes to dive into the world of publishing. She wrote this essay for ENGL-275: Shakespeare's Plays.

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