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Hoi Polloi
An Anthology of Essays

Volume 3 Number 5 February 2000
Contents
For many, communication occurs through writing. This simple act, which we all learned as children, of combining letters to form words, and then taking those words and, somehow, completing whole thoughts and ideas, has been refined by a fine group of student writers featured in the 2000 edition of *Hoi Polloi*. With a small nudge from Gainesville College’s excellent English Department, these students were able to take the twenty-six letters of the alphabet and combine them to create the formal and informal essays that make up this year’s magazine. Congratulations to those writers whose essays are included this year. Way to work those ABC’s!

To any Gainesville College students interested in submitting essays to future editions of *Hoi Polloi*, contact your English professor or the *Hoi Polloi* faculty advisor for more information.

Although writers provide the main ingredient in creating an anthology of this kind, many other individuals worked behind the scenes to produce this fine literary magazine and deserve many thanks. First and foremost, thanks to Dr. Croft, who, with his intelligence, insight, and genuine love for literature, was the mucilage that kept the production of *Hoi Polloi* together. Equally important were the faculty and student advisory boards. Thank you for your meticulous eyes. In addition, we appreciate our contest judge, Professor Russ Greer of Texas Woman’s University. Finally, a special thank you to Lisa Kennedy for lending her artistic abilities to us by creating this year’s “eye-catching” cover.

Please note that, unless otherwise noted, all citations for quotations in the text refer to *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*, Fourth Edition, edited by Michael Meyer.

Now with great honor, we present the 2000 edition of *Hoi Polloi*.

Christine Goss
Editor
Everyone who knows my maternal grandmother calls her Gram. Coyly, she estimates her age to be seventy-three or seventy-five. Except for the growing size of her bell collection, her home has remained virtually unchanged for decades, from the smell of oatmeal that lingers in her kitchen long after breakfast to the floorboard that creaks out its greeting to all who enter the dining room. Gram enjoys reading and embroidery, dotes on her dog, cat, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, joyfully decorates her home weeks before every holiday, and knows her mailman, paper-boy, and all her neighbors by name. Yet, for all her charm, whenever this seemingly harmless widow asks, “Will you take me to the market?” she instantly strikes terror in the heart of whichever family member is the recipient of her request.

Gram’s escapades at the grocery store are notorious. However, the day that stands out in my mind is the day I thought I was about to make family history. I was soon to become the first to survive a shopping trip unscathed. I would be a living legend. Gram had actually filled her cart and made it to the checkout line without incident. No ears of corn were stripped then discarded. No deli clerk was chastised for the extra slice of roast beef that tipped the scale at just over Gram’s requested one-half pound. She even waited until fellow shoppers were out of earshot before commenting on their clothes, hygiene, or whatever sordid gossip she had heard about them. We had made it to the home stretch.

Standing at the counter, I felt myself begin to breathe freely. The last few items swiftly made their way into the appointed bags at the hands of the boxboy, and the register clicked out its final numbers. The cashier announced the grand total while I took my place at the head of the cart. I was ready to make my way out to the car and into the family history books. I watched Gram methodically take out her checkbook, rummage for a pen, and suddenly, before I knew what hit me, I heard her demand, “I want to see my receipt before I pay for this.” To my mortification, I realized she was about to hold up a line full of shoppers for as long as she saw fit. Predictably, my desperate plea for her to simply pay her bill and perform her audit in the parking lot was in vain. Sweaty hands in my pockets, I stood by helplessly, knowing that if one really could die of embarrassment, I was about to be struck down. I wondered what I would be buried in and hoped the cause of my death would be omitted from my obituary. My thoughts were interrupted when Gram, now completely transformed into a drill sergeant, ordered me to search through her bags as she barked out each item. The cashier, though thoroughly flustered, managed to hold her tongue and obliged Gram’s many requests for price verifications. Meanwhile, I tried to focus on more pleasant things, such as root canals and food poisoning. Finally, we came to the end of the list. The only thing standing between me and the exit was a can of peas, which I managed to locate using my last bit of strength. Sighs of relief echoed throughout the store as Gram at last handed over her check.

The boxboy, who until then had watched in amazement as I ransacked the bags he had so artfully packed, took a deep breath and offered to assist us to the car. I think he took pity on me and was probably concerned that my now wobbly legs might not carry me across the parking lot. Gram walks with a cane, taking each step as if she were on eggshells, so our journey to the car was slow. Gram used this time to engage the boxboy in pleasant conversation about where he lived, where he went to school, who his parents were, and how long he had worked at the store. By the time the last bag had been placed in the trunk, Gram was promising her new friend she would look for him the next time she went shopping and offered him a stick of gum. Before my eyes, the sweet little old lady had reemerged.

Obviously, I did not make family history that day. Instead, my tale was added to countless others similar in nature. Reliving over dinner about Gram’s antics is a cherished ritual at family gatherings, and rarely does anyone leave the table without having nearly strangled to death with laughter. Events that seemed extremely embarrassing at the time they occurred are, in time, transformed into wonderful memories. That is why Gram is never denied an escort to the market.
Kolya Review
Michael Franklin

Some films succeed despite themselves. Kolya is one such film. Despite its shameless sentiment and unabashed “heart tugging,” it came from nowhere (well, Czechoslovakia actually) to capture an Academy Award in 1996 for Best Foreign Language Film. From the very beginning of the film, you know that Kolya is the kind of film you are going to fall for. There is no use trying to fight it. No matter how hard you try to resist its grumpy-old-man-meets-cute-little-kid plot, you know it is going to be a hopeless battle. No matter how flinty your heart, no matter how iron your will, you are just doomed to be grinning and weeping by the time the credits start rolling.

Frantisek Louka is a confirmed bachelor in his mid-fifties who lives in a top-floor garret flat near Hradcany Castle in Old Town Prague. Fired from the symphony orchestra (apparently for political reasons, although he seems to possess a grumpy mischievous attitude that could easily be misinterpreted as subversive), he spends his days in a desultory quartet playing the cello for funerals at the city crematorium and his nights entertaining other men’s wives — when he can coax them away from their husbands. His most recent conquest is Klara, who sings with the quartet at the funerals. Louka always seems to be short of cash; therefore, he takes on odd jobs such as replacing the gold trim on tombstones when he’s not racing from cremation to cremation.

Louka’s gravedigger friend, Mr. Broz, to whom he owes a great deal of money, comes to him one day with a business proposal: a marriage of convenience to a distant Russian niece who needs Czech citizenship papers. At first Louka resists (like most Czechs, he views Russians with discrete contempt) but relents when Nadezda turns out to be beautiful. As soon as they are married, she promptly immigrates to West Germany to her distant lover, leaving the responsibility for sheltering her five-year-old son Kolya — a little Russian, but Russian nonetheless — to Louka. Not only must Louka make room for Kolya in his flat and his life, but he must manage an existence that, in 1988 Prague, includes such annoying minutiae as taping Russian flags to his windows for holiday celebrations and being hauled in for the occasional inept but nonetheless sinister interrogation. Each will change the other’s life in subtle but tangible ways, climaxing in the Velvet Revolution of late 1989 (mixing documentary footage with a stage concert in the Old Town Square) and their inevitable parting. Along the way, their life together unfolds with humor.

Kolya is full of graceful, provocative imagery and metaphor, beginning with the musical motif of Dvorak’s theme for the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is My Shepherd, I Shall Not Want.” It opens the film and serves as a sublime coda while the boy recites the psalm — in Czech! — as he flies to Germany at the end. An eagle is glimpsed briefly, as Louka drives from the city to the country, mirroring the reverence and eagerness with which many Czechs view trips to the country. Perhaps the most fully fleshed-out visual analogy of the film is the bauble that Louka finds as he cleans out the gutters at his mother’s house. Nobody seems to know whether it has value (he rejects a low offer from a jeweler), and speculation varies wildly on how it could have ended up on a roof. Young Kolya, too, is a treasure of indeterminate value, and there is puzzlement over how he got where he is and what to do with him.

As is common with foreign films, many language-based in-jokes are lost on the monolingual viewer. One of Kolya’s early words in Czech is “chemodan,” which means suitcase, and the wordplay between the boy and the man with the word “krasny” springs from its dual meaning: “red” in Russian and “beautiful” in Czech. The fun even extends to proper names, as the distracted social worker that Louka has forgotten he summoned — and no longer wants — is named “Zubata,” Czech slang for the grim reaper.

Several very strong emotional scenes give the audience, whether in America or the Czech Republic, insight into the actual events taking place in the movie’s background. Symbolically, Kolya is trying to build a bridge between the occupied Czech people and the occupying Russians. To some extent Kolya is asking for forgiveness for his country and tries to soften the hearts of the people in the invaded land. The heartbreaking scenes of Kolya drawing pictures of graves and playing for a funeral alone with his marionettes reproduce for the audience the feeling of desolation felt by the Russians who have been forced to leave their adopted country and return to Russia where there are no space, no jobs, and no welcome for them.

Kolya seems to have an international influence and deeper meaning conveyed by a child and an adult as they struggle through changes, not just in their own lives but also the big changes that mark the end of communism and beginning of democracy in Eastern Europe. Kolya is not a movie with action and violence; rather it must be viewed in the context of recent Eastern European history. Viewed in such a light, it is a very emotional and, for the world, educational movie.
There is a word I have made up for myself that I think would make an excellent addition to Webster’s Dictionary. The word is chazwizzle. It does seem strange enough at first glance, but if you say it a few times out loud you immediately recognize its charm. Chazwizzle can be defined in basically one phrase: a noun meaning nonsense. Anyone can pick up a thesaurus and find a half-dozen more commonly known synonyms that would suffice, yet none of them roll off the tongue with quite the same effect as chazwizzle. Chazwizzle is just so much fun to say, whereas baloney or rubbish is not.

Chazwizzle could be used in a number of ways. One could use it in its simple noun form, as in “That’s all chazwizzle” or “What a load of chazwizzle.” Where you would normally use nonsense, just substitute chazwizzle. To be truthful, the word might even make a good substitute for a number of words, unmentionable here, that people are fond of applying to bothersome circumstances.

Continuing, a distributor of nonsense would invariably become a chazwizzer. “You don’t know what you are talking about, you chazwizzer,” might in time become a standard expression. The word eventually might lose its initial meaning of nonsense and turn into an insulting epithet. The shout of “Chazwizzer!” in someone’s direction might even promote fistcuffs.

Chazwizzle, though, is not restricted to noun usage; it can also function as a verb. To chazwizzle somebody is to spout off nonsense to him or her. This is one use of the word that cannot be rivaled. In grammatically correct English, no one can nonsense someone else. Instead, he or she must speak nonsense to the person. Chazwizzle overcomes this hurdle in our language. It is the first word meaning nonsense that can be used as a verb.

To further the discussion, chazwizzle also makes an incomparable adjective. Any situation or speaker could be labeled chazwizzly, or chazwozzlish if you fancy that form better. Therefore, a chazwizzer could also be described as a chazwizzly man or woman. Chazwozzlish could even be extended to form an abstract noun, as in chazwozzlishness or chazwozzlishity. Perhaps, though, this is carrying the word too far.

After taking the word through its full cycle of forms and possible uses, one cannot help but agree that this word is sorely missed in our lexicon. To be short and to the point then, chazwizzle is superior, in all its forms and functions, to the word nonsense. It sounds better, too. One person, however, cannot change the masses. Sadly, chazwizzle seems destined to remain only a fleeting whim.
The Importance of Coffee Makers in Western Society

Mark Richter

If I woke up tomorrow morning and all appliances had disappeared from my house, the only one I would miss would be my beloved coffee maker. My coffee maker has many important functions. It also lightens the burden of my poor checking account. Most importantly, it provides me with the one substance I could not live without — coffee. It makes rich, glorious coffee, the kind Genghis Khan and Julius Caesar must have drunk before setting out to conquer the world. If it were not for my coffee maker, I could not make it through my long, tiresome day.

My coffee maker may not slice, dice, or make julienne fries, but it serves a number of purposes in my household. First of all, it's terrific for the kind of poetry readings and Broadway nostalgia parties I throw. It has a side adjustment that allows it to make espresso and cappuccino. It makes espresso, strong and bitter, for the beatniks who seem to live in my den. It also has a side nozzle for making steamed milk and froth, so I can make cappuccino for those yuppies who live next door. It produces a stiff cup of joe for that early morning commute. I can't stand to be parked on I-985 watching Department of Transportation workers leisurely sipping their own cups of coffee and not have any for myself. Finally, it makes plain hot water for those days off, when I just want to sit on the porch, sip hot tea, and read Nietzsche.

Another reason I love my coffee machine is all the money it saves me. Instead of buying coffee at the cafeteria or at a gas station, I have the freedom to make my own. When Sally Struthers said, "For the price of a cup of coffee each day you could save the life of a child," she wasn't joking. I am now the sole financial support of half a dozen Cambodian children, who all write grateful letters at three-month intervals. In addition, my coffee maker is mostly self-cleaning, and therefore does not necessitate hiring a maid. But these savings are dwarfed by the money I save from lawsuits and lawyers' fees. When I am made fully alert by the coffee, I notice that dog in the road or that tractor trailer running the yellow light.

The most traditional (and most important) function of my coffee maker, however, is simply to make coffee. Usually, it makes the normal mildly bitter, mildly acidic cup of joe which is the first thing a person smells when he or she climbs into my car. Sometimes for a little change, I'll get some French roast, which tastes a little less tart. For those special days like Easter or Fridays, I get up early, reach to the back of the freezer and retrieve the espresso beans. I take the grinder out of the cabinet and run the beans through twice. When the espresso maker is finished hissing and humming, the richest, most flavorful coffee known to man sits ready to pour into my waiting Opryland coffee mug.

I am still confounded by the fact that man's first actions were to invent useless items like fire and the wheel, when the invention of the coffee maker could have immediately put evolution into high gear. My coffee maker is more than a friend and companion. It makes the traffic flow and it turns the street lamps off. It feeds the children and saves the whales. In my humble opinion, there is no greater joy known to man than that first sip of coffee in the morning. It's the little things like my coffee maker that make America great.
I always assumed that, by the time I entered college, I would have outgrown the annual family vacation. So this summer, thinking this was my last trip with my family, I packed my suitcase with a few pairs of shorts, a couple of T-shirts, and one bathing suit and climbed in the car without complaining. At least when I got to the beach, I thought to myself, I could look forward to buying some postcards at the general store. What I found on this vacation, though, was more precious than seashells or cheap souvenirs. I found on my vacation that everyone grows up and grows old, so some things inevitably change. But a family always remains the same.

Every year my mother, father, my two older brothers, and I go to a little island just off the coast of Florida called St. George Island. There is not a whole lot there, save a restaurant or two, a few local bars, a general store, and an old abandoned lighthouse. The only vegetation on the island is some stubby looking pines and Florida's trademark scrub bush. The island itself resembles a giant sandbar that is almost unbearable during the daytime because of the heat. Only when the sun begins to set can the island and all of its wonders be admired.

Around dusk the ghost crabs that inhabit the wide beaches emerge from their homes and scavenge the sun-bleached sand for anything they can eat. Hundreds at a time scamper over the dunes. It seems that the sand itself has come alive and is moving in different directions. The stars begin to twinkle by the millions, giving me the sense of uniqueness and utter humility under the shining eyes of those who have lived before me. The moon, so massive in the sky, illuminates the island, turning the night back into day with its soft white glow. The light from the moon makes a perfect lantern for anyone who wishes to take a moonlight walk down the beach, look at crashing waves in the night, or even fish, especially fish.

In the morning Dad would always wake my brothers and me up before the sun would have a chance to rise above the watery horizon. We would eat a quick bowl of Frosted Flakes, and with our fishing poles and crab nets, we would set out for a day of fishing. We would take our little boat around to the bayside of the island and into a marshy cove. In the early morning, the fog would blanket the water, casting a mystical and eerie aura over the cove. I had always loved that little cove in the marsh. It was so quiet there, giving me refuge from the roar of the breaking surf, allowing me to think without the distractions of the world interrupting. We would return around noon, when the sun became too unbearable, and my mother would be waiting for us at the screen door. She would praise each of us for our big catches, whether they were really big or not. Then she would start cleaning and scaling the fish.

It had been five years since my older brothers had last come on vacation with the family. Their bicycles had been replaced with cars, and their love for the ocean had been replaced with the love of parties. I had the feeling that things would be strangely different this time. Dad never said anything about the ritual fishing trip, and I thought that he must have given up on that family tradition. However, I was awakened early the next morning by one of my brothers slapping me gently, yet aggravatingly nonetheless, just as he always did before school or every Christmas morning. "Get up," he whispered. "We're going fishing."

With that I crawled out of bed and got dressed. In the other bedroom we left our mother sleeping. After we had eaten a quick bowl of Frosted Flakes, we were out the door and back to the little marsh-covered cove that I had missed so much without realizing. We put in our crab nets and fishing lines just off the edge of the water. The sun was now beginning to rise, igniting the chatter of the cicadas from the nearby pines. It was beginning to get hotter and I could almost see the blades of grass in the marsh starting to wilt. Along the bank of the cove I watched as the ghost crabs were beginning to return to their homes from the thousands of different directions they had ventured during the night.

It was then that it occurred to me that we had all grown up and each of us was moving in different directions, much like the crabs. However, no matter how far we ventured we could always return home and our family would still be the same. Our roots and our ties were so entwined within our hearts that the family itself could never change. When we returned home around lunchtime, Mom was standing inside the screen door of the little seaside cottage, smiling, and waiting to praise our fine catch.
Maturity through Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in Four Soliloquies
Donna Miller

William Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet* presents its intricate and complex protagonist Hamlet as he experiences the difficulty of becoming a responsible adult. As he attempts to cope with his father’s death and his mother’s hasty marriage, emotions overwhelm Hamlet, and he almost succumbs to despair. For the first time in his life, he knows he must accept responsibility. Yet, at the very moment when he most needs to act, his immaturity disables him and causes him to behave irrationally. Hamlet’s progress from this irrational young man who can’t take action to a rational man who takes action in the name of honor is clearly seen in his four soliloquies in *Hamlet*.

In the first soliloquy in Act I, Hamlet’s random thoughts lack any evidence of rationality. As he bounces from contemplating suicide, to loving his father, to disgust for his mother, Hamlet’s actions reflect his immaturity and irrational behavior. Hamlet’s thoughts of suicide reflect his inability to take action, as he wishes that his “too sullied flesh would melt . . . and resolve itself into dew” (I.ii.129). His irrational pattern of thought couples with his desire to melt into dew without having to do anything and sets the stage for Hamlet’s flaw: his lack of maturity. In a world that he perceives as “rank and gross” (I.ii.136), Hamlet’s immaturity and self-pity smother him as he tries to survive life in an unweeded garden” (I.ii.135). Compounding his anguish, Hamlet’s disgust for his mother’s hasty marriage only provides more ammunition for his irrational behavior. Certain that his mother’s marriage “cannot come to good” (I.ii.158), his inability to take action reveals itself as he “must hold [his] tongue” (I.ii.159).

Hamlet’s second soliloquy, in scene two of Act II, moves Hamlet closer to rational thought as he acknowledges his inability to take action. Witnessing an inspirational performance by the player causes Hamlet’s emotions to take a turbulent course. He comprehends that he possesses the “motive and cue for passion” (II.ii.501); however, he can’t “say nothing” (II.ii.510). Disgust courses through Hamlet as the player springs to action in an instant “for nothing, for Hecuba” (II.ii.498). The player’s ability to take such dramatic action in favor of mere words sends Hamlet into a deep rage in view of his own inability to take action. Redirecting his anger, Hamlet scorns Claudius as a “bloody, bawdy villain” (II.ii.522). The unleashing of Hamlet’s anger encourages him to plot his course and expose the actual devil. Hamlet’s progression of thought becomes meticulous, and his anger dissolves. Displaying a new sense of calm not present in his first soliloquy, Hamlet begins a new journey. Accepting his inadequacies, he begins evolving into a rational young man.

Hamlet’s evolution continues to emerge in the third soliloquy in Act III. Previously, Hamlet’s soliloquies have reflected his anger and his irrational thought process. In this soliloquy, as Hamlet contemplates whether he should “be, or not to be” (III.i.56), his maturity increases significantly as he reasonably ponders life itself. Moving rationally from one thought to the next, Hamlet’s tone displays a logical rhythm. No longer bouncing from one random emotion to another, Hamlet’s thoughts transcend to a higher conscience, as he examines his ability to take action. His mature insight enables Hamlet to understand that “conscience does make cowards of us all” (III.i.83) to the degree that we “lose the name of action” (III.i.88). Empowering Hamlet with a new sense of self-assurance, his emerging maturity attaches a sense of honor and obligation as he recognizes his responsibility for taking action.

Hamlet’s level of maturity peaks when he fully comprehends the depth of his obligations in the fourth soliloquy in Act IV. While on his way to England, Hamlet sees Fortinbras in route to Poland for “a little patch of ground, that hath in it no profit but the name” (IV.iv.19). The army’s overwhelming sense of honor forces Hamlet to further examine his obligation to his father. Comprehending his role as an observer while others spring into action, Hamlet realizes how little he has done: “How all occasions do inform against me, and spur my dull revenge” (IV.iii.32-32). Now completely rational, Hamlet’s shame increases upon the realization that his “cause and will and strength and means to do ‘t’” (IV.v.45-46) give him all the justification he needs to take action. An overwhelming sense of honor motivates Hamlet as he professes, “My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing at all” (IV.v.65). Brave and confident, a new Hamlet emerges. No longer unsure of himself, Hamlet’s transformation enables him to spring into action as he seeks vengeance for the murder of his father.

Exposing Hamlet’s transformation throughout the four soliloquies, Shakespeare develops an irrational young man with an inability to take action into a rational man who takes action in the name of honor. Hamlet’s motivation to act lies within his grasp in each soliloquy, but his immaturity constantly clouds his perception. Throughout the soliloquies, Hamlet’s realizations spark subtle transformations in his level of maturity. Unfortunately, his maturity evolves too late.
Written almost half a century apart, August Wilson’s *Fences* and Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* contain some astounding parallels and extreme opposites between them. *Death of a Salesman*, written in 1945, centers on a typical white family perhaps a little too caught up in the American Dream. *Fences*, written about an African-American family, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1987. Although domineering Troy Maxson, in *Fences*, and powerless Willy Loman, from *Death of a Salesman*, feel frustrated with their own lives, they tenaciously try to impose their own aspirations on their defiant sons: Cory, who invites competition, and Biff, who cannot decide to compete.

Troy Maxson shows aggression, jealousy, protectiveness, and sensitivity, and he decrees a stable lifestyle for his son Cory. Troy takes pride in providing for his family; it gives him the sense that he has accomplished one of life’s mandatory obligations. Ironically, one can tell by his three children, each with a different birth mother, that his family has by no means remained a static factor in his erratic life. Troy’s last child, a daughter Raynell, is born by Alberta, the object of Troy’s affair during his eighteen-year marriage to Cory’s mother Rose. Primarily because of the racial prohibition against playing professional baseball, Troy feels constricted — *fenced in* — by his life and determines to protect Cory from a similar fate. Troy is also secretly jealous to think that his defiant son would receive an opportunity Troy missed. He reasons that Cory should settle for a laboring trade guaranteeing a weekly paycheck, so as to have something stable in his life. When Troy’s anger, sometimes at Cory, begins to overwhelm him, he takes a whack at the baseball — his only true passion in life — hanging on a cord in the yard of his house.

Troy’s anger does not intimidate Cory, however. Cory — productive, formidable, competitive, proud, and independent — starts off as a rebellious 17-year-old, but by the end of the play he almost seems to acquire his father’s stature. While in high school, he obtains a recruitment for a football scholarship at a nearby college, much to his father’s dismay. Cory’s resistance to his father’s edict seems understandable to the reader, considering Troy’s bitter jealousy of his son. Cory challenges his father to a psychological (and physical) kill-or-be-killed battle for domination. Following his graduation, Cory goes job hunting and finally becomes a U.S. Marine. After Troy’s death, Cory finds he simply cannot elude the shadow of his father. Troy has made a lasting impact, fortunately a positive one, on his life, and the saying “like father, like son” rings true on observing Cory’s mannerism some time after Troy’s death.

Willy Loman succeeds in having this type of lasting impression on his son Biff long before he dies. Willy portrays an impulsive, weak, irrational, and insensitive character, unsatisfied with the life he has cut out for himself. Like Troy, Willy takes pride in providing for his family, but only for the appearance it presents to others. Whether he has pride as a source of motivation or not, he does not succeed in providing for them. Willy bears the mark of a true salesman; the “salesman philosophy” runs through his veins. Although far from being a success himself, he tries vainly to instill this same passion in Biff. Willy’s frustration at his own failure to succeed causes him to impose all of his personal ambitions for the future on Biff. Regardless of the risk that Biff might encounter the same problems as he has, Willy wants his son to do a better job selling himself than Willy has done. Willy confronts his frustration passively by placing a piece of rubber tubing with an attachment in the basement and a new nipple on the gas pipe on the water heater. This contraption is his threat to commit suicide just in case life gets too rough for him to handle. Willy also surrenders to an affair, but — unlike Troy — he experiences little difficulty “justifying” it to his ever-faithful wife Linda. Much as Troy puts up metaphorical fences between himself and his family, Willy leaves bridges between himself and his loved ones when he ventures out on his lengthy trips.

Perhaps this distance somewhat incites Biff’s idolization of Willy. Biff — indecisive, emotionally fragile, noncompetitive, and unmotivated — progresses from idolizing his father, during his teenage years, to resisting his mandates and eventually following his own dreams and ambitions, by the end of the play. Biff, who (like Cory) is 17 years old, in the flashback portions of the play, also succeeded in football. In his adult years during the play, however, his views on identity, aspirations, and values conflict with his father’s. Pulled between his father’s words of wisdom and his own impulses, Biff flounders for almost twenty years, unsure of what to do with his life. Already like Willy in at least one aspect, Biff lacks power, and when he finally feels brave and confident enough to confront his father with his true feelings, he experiences an emotional breakdown. Rather than trying to compete with his father, as Willy might have hoped, Biff tries to make his father see his simplicity and vulnerability. After undergoing a period of rebellion and resentment toward Willy (especially after witnessing his affair),
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Troy's anger does not intimidate Cory, however. Cory — productive, formidable, competitive, proud, and independent — starts off as a rebellious 17-year-old, but by the end of the play he almost seems to acquire his father's stature. While in high school, he obtains a scholarship for a football scholarship at a nearby college, much to his father's dismay. Cory's resistance to his father's edict seems understandable to the reader, considering Troy's bitter jealousy of his son. Cory challenges his father to a psychological (and
Biff decides to take control of his own life, and—unlike Cory—refrains from the oppression of his father’s shadow after Willy’s death.

Throughout the play, Troy and Willy stubbornly impose their misguided views about life on their impressionable sons, even though both Troy and Willy are exhausted to the point of death with their own lives. Troy views death as nothing more than “a fastball on the outside corner,” or something he can handle, and near the end of Fences, he stands still to stare death resolutely in the eye. When Willy finally decides to kill himself, he approaches death calmly and without hesitation. Any modern reader can reap the benefits of learning from Troy’s and Willy’s mistakes; Fences will probably remain applicable to modern life for as long as Death of a Salesman has. Although fences and bridges must exist sometimes in life, one must realize that putting them up in the wrong place or at the wrong time can devastate the most important relationships of all.

Ask yourself, “Are you the type of person who acts in the moment, or do you always look before you leap?” Moreover, if your uncle murdered your father, could you react by killing him before thinking the situation through? At some point in time, we all end up in situations where we must decide either to take flight or to stand and fight. William Shakespeare forces his character, young Hamlet, to answer these questions in the play Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Examining Hamlet’s four soliloquies allows one to see the character’s transition from procrastination and obsessive thought to uninhibited action.

Reading Hamlet’s first soliloquy allows the reader to gain insight to his disturbed thoughts. One can also see that Shakespeare’s repeated use of exclamation marks is an important clue in revealing Hamlet’s depressed state. Hamlet’s dialogue suggests that he struggles with suicidal thoughts and finds no purpose in his existence. The reader can see Hamlet’s struggle when he states his wish that “the Everlasting had not fix’d / His canon gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!” (I.ii.132). Furthermore, he exclaims, “Flat and unprofitable, seem to me all the uses of this world!” (I.ii.132), a statement that also reveals an inability to rationalize his own life. Here Hamlet’s personal thoughts become so overwhelming that he never brings himself to the act of actually taking his own life. Hamlet goes on to say, “But break, my heart; for I must hold my tongue” (I.ii.158), a statement that again reveals his inability to take action. Thus, the first soliloquy gives the reader the first glimpse of Hamlet’s procrastinating nature.

In the second soliloquy, Hamlet allows himself to continue with an analytical behavior, thereby losing his ability to take action. The reader can, however, see a much more coherent Hamlet with fewer exclamation marks appearing in his dialogue. Nevertheless, he opens the soliloquy by comparing himself to a “rogue and peasant slave” (III.i.490). Furthermore, he explains why he cannot act: “I am pigeon-liver’d and lack gall” (III.i.519). Hamlet continues to display his displeasure with himself when he states, “Why, what an ass am I!” (III.i.525). At this moment, Hamlet begins to realize that because of
his procrastination he “must, like a whore, unpack [his] heart with words” (III.i.528). With doubts clouding his mind, Hamlet concludes that the ghost of his father “may be the devil” (III.i.548). Finally, however, Hamlet proposes that, if Claudius displays a guilty conscience, nothing will keep him from taking revenge.

Even though the mouse trap reassures Hamlet’s conscience, he continues to avoid action in the third soliloquy with a philosophical conversation about death. Here he examines the reasons why he thinks an individual would fear death. For him, death remains “the undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveler returns” (III.i.79-80). Hamlet also states that fear alone gives an individual the ability to suffer “heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to” (III.i.62-63). In the third soliloquy, Hamlet goes on to define the reason for his procrastination first with the statement, “conscience does make cowards of us all” (III.i.83). To prove his point, he states, “With this regard their currents turn awry, / And lose the name of action” (III.i.86-87). Although Hamlet continues to procrastinate, the third soliloquy conveys very important details about his character. As a result, one can see the transition thus far, from suicidal unfocused thoughts to the coherent, alert character who presents himself now.

In the fourth soliloquy, Hamlet becomes fully aware of the developments of his situation. He opens the soliloquy with the statement, “How all occasions, do inform against me” (IV.iv.32). Here he concludes that unless he acts his procrastination could lead to his own downfall. Nevertheless, when he sees Fortinbras’ army, he realizes, “A thought which, quarter’d, hath but one part wisdom / And ever three parts coward” (IV.iv.42-43). One can clearly see through his dialogue that he admires Fortinbras’ actions: “When Honour’s at the stake” (IV.iv.56). Afterwards, Hamlet compares his situation to Fortinbras’ and begins to question his own character. However, he makes a decision to take action: “My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!” (IV.iv.66). At that moment, Hamlet’s transition becomes complete, and as a result he finds himself empowered to take revenge for his father.

Clearly then, one can see how Hamlet moves from a man of thought to a man of action. His personal transition is a continual process that starts with his first soliloquy and ends with his last. This development proves that, even though Hamlet’s character remains highly analytical, he does eventually act to avenge his father’s murder.

O’Connor’s Use of Color to Create Better Understanding
Sarah Lowman

Throughout “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” and “Good Country People,” Flannery O’Connor uses different methods of making her characters more dynamic. She tends to use the technique of colors not only to describe surroundings but also to give the reader a deeper view of her characters. Through her descriptions of clothing, physical characteristics, and surroundings, O’Connor provides an insightful source of information about her characters.

O’Connor uses colors of clothing to display her characters’ inner qualities and temperaments. In “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” the grandmother wears all navy blue and white clothing for her trip with the family. The navy blue’s representation of vision displays the grandmother’s belief that only she can see clearly; only she can properly see that the family should be heading to Tennessee and away from Florida and The Misfit. The white in her outfit portrays her assumed innocence. In the grandmother’s eyes, her innocence of all wrongdoing shows even though she brings the cat, an act of deception which causes the wreck in the first place. White also represents the sanctification of the grandmother through her spiritual beliefs. Yet color can also display negative qualities. Bailey’s yellow shirt tends to depict cowardice. Because of his hesitancy, he does not stand up for himself and lets the grandmother ramble on and on without stopping her or leaving her behind. He chooses to remain silent on most issues. With the approach of The Misfit and his henchmen, the blue parrots interwoven in Bailey’s shirt represent his vision and insight of impending doom. Unexpected qualities surface with the use of color. The Misfit’s silver-rimmed glasses make him look intelligent while likening him to something rare and intriguing. The black hat The Misfit wears suggests death and evil.

O’Connor also uses the description of clothing in “Good Country People” to reveal her characters’ dispositions. In this story, Mrs. Hopewell wears a red kimono in the mornings while she eats breakfast. The red represents her love for other people such as Mrs. Freeman and Hulga. Unusual
traits of a character may surface from descriptions. Hulga’s yellow sweatshirt suggests that her boldness in life is only a cover-up for her running from the world. In a sense, Hulga’s timidity of real life forces her to create a life of her own in her mind. Manley Pointer’s blue and yellow clothing serves a function similar to that of Bailey’s clothing. While Manley possesses vision, he still appears timid. Manley’s appearance as timid and easily dominated makes itself known by his yellow socks. His bright blue suit displays his understanding of life, even though Hulga and Mrs. Hopewell don’t care to admit his intelligence. Pointer actually sees life, though in a twisted view. Through a transformation of clothing before she leaves to meet Manley, Hulga attempts to change her image. Hulga puts on a dirty white shirt as she goes to meet Manley, a garment which represents her distorted view of purity. Hulga’s feigned innocence reveals itself in an attempt to seduce Manley. Just like the dirty white shirt, her enlightenment is partial. Pointer’s hatband depicts a mixture of purity and impurity. His true role emerges as a betrayer (red), yet he mixes purity with his ruse (white).

As well as clothing, O’Connor uses colorful descriptions of the actual self to indicate personalities and, in some cases, changes. Red Sammy’s name in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” reveals strong emotion through the use of color. His anger, evidenced by the color red, builds up in him and reveals itself through distrust and gossip. Just as wisdom occurs through aging, the graying hair of The Misfit indicates his seemingly wise thought. The Misfit believes in the good judgment of his actions and rationalizes his killing by forming his own logic. When The Misfit smiles, he shows a set of very white teeth. The color perhaps shows The Misfit’s inherently good side soiled only by his environment. O’Connor mentions Bailey’s eyes as being very blue right as he realizes the fate of his family. Blue serves to symbolize Bailey’s enlightenment, and the color is even tied back into the color of the parrots. Directly before their deaths, the mother’s and June Star’s faces turn white, indicating innocence.

The reader no longer remembers the low mentality of the mother or the rudeness of June Star. The reader can only sympathize with them; they now appear pure and clean. At the end of the story, The Misfit’s eyes appear red-rimmed as he contemplates what has just happened. Just as the color red represents blood, The Misfit becomes the epitome of betrayal and murder. Similarly, in “Good Country People,” Mrs. Freeman’s piercing black eyes absorb everything just as the color black does. Mrs. Freeman envelopes everything in her surroundings. Hulga’s eyes, however, are icy blue. Blue eyes, representing vision once again, show Hulga’s belief of knowing and understanding every possible idea.

After presenting the characters in full view through their appearance, O’Connor uses the color of surrounding objects to complete the reader’s view of each person. The grandmother’s black valise hides her cat, Pitty Sing, representing oncoming death caused by both the owner and the cat. The color of The Misfit’s car, black, similarly foreshadows death and approaching doom. Light often represents purity and heaven, as in the silver-white sunlight shining through the trees during the family’s drive in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find.” The grandmother describes the house in Tennessee as having white columns. Just like the house, white represents hope and the brightness of life that once was. In “Good Country People,” Hulga uses a blue pencil to underline her studies about nothing and science. She claims to believe these views, yet she uses blue to emphasize enlightenment and divine understanding.

Because of the vivid descriptions made possible by color, O’Connor’s character development reaches a higher level. By the end of each short story, the reader has formed many assumptions simply from the discussion of colors used in each context. Thus, O’Connor’s characters become more dynamic due to her skillful use of color.
The influence of evil within human nature is a subject that has animated the creative passion of many great writers. This focus is particularly true in the American Puritan Era, during which many prolific writers dedicated much of their efforts to discern the mysteries involved with evil encounters. Nathaniel Hawthorne, although writing much later, nevertheless, describes very well this inner struggle humans face when fighting against evil initiations. Two of Hawthorne's masterpieces, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and "Young Goodman Brown," epitomize his intimate beliefs in regard to this enigmatic theme. The resulting evidence of the protagonists' confrontation with evil directs the reader to assert that Hawthorne supports the idea of man's aptitude to identify evil, as well as his helpless inability to control this powerful force.

Robin, the main character in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," is "a youth of barely eighteen years...country bred...and...upon his first visit to town" (Hawthorne, "My Kinsman" 3). Robin has come to the city to visit his kinsman Major Molineux, a close relative of his family "with civil and military rank," who offers to help him with "[his] future establishment" (13). When Robin arrives in the city, he has no idea about the changes that his kinsman is experiencing; in fact, he thinks the Major enjoys a general respect. Ironically, the protagonist thinks of himself as being "a shrewd youth" (5), but he blatantly fails to understand the evil intentions of the inhabitants each time he inquires about his kinsman. Robin's country cleverness is not enough to make him understand that the people's refusal to assist him in his search is due to some grotesque purposes. The author describes a period of political turmoil in the city that is all but unknown to Robin's innocence on such civic matters. The reader can see Robin's "little superfluous civility" (6) when the young man thinks that the amiability of the innkeeper comes out of respect for Major Molineux. Furthermore, Robin fails to sense the sarcasm with which many people respond to his questions, and in some instances "he interprets[es] those reactions...as...the eagerness of each individual to become his guide" (7).

In some instances, it's not only Robin's innocence that gets exposed; he also sees his courage and dignity threatened by the city's evil influences. Once the protagonist becomes more insistent on his search, he also feels the population grow meaner in the same proportion. When the innkeeper accuses him of being a criminal and tells him, "Better trudge, boy, better trudge" (7), Robin reacts angrily. But then he becomes intimidated by "[the] strange hostility in every countenance" (7) and leaves the tavern in dismay. Robin is an honest young man, but the indifference of the city and the pompous ways of some of its inhabitants make him "ashamed of his quiet and natural gait" (8). The protagonist cannot comprehend the strange vocabulary with which the people communicate, and when he is unable to respond to them, the only words he understands are curses against his person. Eventually, Robin experiences the crudeness of his reality, and he sees his naive personality succumb under the hypocrisy of society. Robin meets his kinsman in a way that he least expects; he sees Major Molineux humiliated by the crowd in a midnight parade "in tar-and-feathery dignity," and the sight of this event leaves him with "a perception of tremendous ridicule" and "a sort of mental inebriety" (17). Finally, Robin is overcome with evil, and in desperation, he joins the mob and laughs at his feathered kinsman too. This evil encounter is a moral disaster for Robin because his naive personality does not understand how to gain strength from his flawed initiation into mankind's evil nature. By the end of the story, Robin is "weary of a town life" (17), eager only to return home after living an adventure that has destroyed his trust toward the social world.

According to Herman Melville, author and close friend of Hawthorne, Hawthorne is "a man of deep and noble nature" (337). Therefore the reader agrees that Hawthorne possesses an authoritative opinion about the pure and innocent personality like the one Robin embodies. Obviously, Robin's exposure to evil literally destroys his good nature. Another critic suggests that "intellectually and spiritually [Robin] can never be the boy he was" (Doubleday 237). Furthermore, the laughter that Robin sends as a response to his ultimate encounter with evil denotes "an inarticulate kind of self-condemnation" and "a sure sign of his damnation" (Newman 225). The reader, thus, can clearly see that Robin is at last able to perceive evil, but he inevitably succumbs to its corruptive influence.

On the other hand, in the story "Young Goodman Brown," the main character is a young, newly married man with Puritan religious beliefs toward evil. Nevertheless, the protagonist appears to possess certain evil within himself when he agrees to meet the Devil under rather obscure circumstances. Furthermore, Goodman Brown naively thinks that he can have communion with the Devil, refuse his wicked nature, and subsequently build a stronger
faith in God. In addition to that, Goodman Brown thinks that everyone else is as pure as he is; in fact, he even regards his wife as “a blessed angel on earth” (Hawthorne, “Young” 65). Obviously, Goodman Brown strongly believes that he is immune to evil influences, and all these innocent conceptions make him feel “justified . . . on his . . . evil purpose” (66). Furthermore, Goodman Brown’s good faith maintains him in an inner struggle about his encounter, and he tells his companion that he intends to return because he “has scruples touching the matter [of the initiation]” (67). The innocence that Young Goodman Brown embodies is properly associated with his Puritan background.

Unfortunately for Goodman Brown, the series of incredible events in the forest methodically changes his godly innocence into a horrible feeling of terror and disbelief. As the journey unfolds, the protagonist’s old companion becomes more persuasive and tells him that even Brown’s grandfather and father were his good friends” (67). Young Goodman Brown rebukes him in disbelief, but he is unable to reverse the morbid curiosity the devil implants in his mind regarding the governor and other respectable persons as he continues his journey. To his amazement, Goodman Brown discovers that Goody Cloyse is among the evil worshipers in the forest and says with incredulity, “That old woman taught me my catechism” (69). To make matters worse, the protagonist discovers that the minister, Deacon Gookin, and even his beloved wife, Faith, are on their way to the initiation ceremony. At this point, Goodman Brown is in shock with his new knowledge of human nature and says, “There is no good on earth . . . Come devil, for to thee is the world given” (71). Nevertheless, Goodman Brown finds enough strength in his soul to urge his wife “to look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one” (74). Young Goodman Brown’s initiation into evil yields somber results because it ruins his marriage, destroys his social life, and even “his dying hour [is] gloom” (75). Undoubtedly, the most negative result of this unsuccessful initiation is the isolation that Goodman Brown endures for the rest of his life.

Again, the central figure of this short story experiences a frontal and dramatic encounter with evil, but the consequences are different and somewhat worse than those in “My Kinsman, Major Molineux.” The impact is, in fact, so great that a critic affirms that “Brown condemns others to damnation and himself to misery” (Newman 344). Many other literary critics support Hawthorne’s belief that in any evil encounter, even if an individual resists temptation, the possibilities for vindication are practically meaningless. Michael J. Colacurcio exemplifies this assertion in his interpretation of “Young Goodman Brown” and says, “neither [Goodman Brown’s] . . . refusal of baptism nor his returning ambivalence can save him from . . . moral gloom” (Colacurcio 402). The aforementioned facts reveal to the reader Hawthorne’s belief that once an individual gets into intercourse with evil, and despite the circumstances of it, the invariable result is defeat.

Consequently, both of these stories, “My Kinsman, Major Molineux” and “Young Goodman Brown,” present a perplexing enigma to the reader. However, Hawthorne solves the mystery by dutifully certifying that eventually all humans confront evil, recognize the power of it, but inevitably succumb to it. The vast majority of literary critics seem to support Hawthorne’s ideas of evil influences. One author affirms that Hawthorne “does not . . . propose flatly that man is primarily evil” (Fogle 16), but he obviously thinks that once one enters into contact with evil the result is the corruption of the soul. Furthermore, “Hawthorne [knows] that he live[s] in a fallen world . . . and [that] sin is inevitable” (Wagenknecht 195); therefore any effort to overcome evil is futile. In conclusion, these two stories reveal Nathaniel Hawthorne’s innermost conviction that evil prevails over human nature.

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The Call of the Sea in The Awakening

Laura Miller

*The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, is the story of a woman who realizes that she is more than a wife and mother; she is a unique individual all by herself. Her awakening occurs during one summer at Grand Isle. Although a number of influences bring about her realization, the predominant influence on Edna is the sea. Throughout the novel, the sea is the constant call to Edna, its voice refuses to let her be.

In the beginning of the novel, the sea is new and exciting. Edna tries all summer to learn how to swim, but no amount of teaching from her friends enables her to achieve this goal. The sea is something elusive that she cannot grasp just yet, but she knows that she wants to be a part of it: "The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation" (Chopin 14). The sea calls her to contemplate herself, and it is only when she has a glimmer of the truth that she is able to come to the sea. The sea reminds her of the first time she had run away from the house; "a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass . . . She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water" (17). The water reminds her of the freedom she felt on that day. The night of the party when Mademoiselle Reisz plays and Edna feels the first stirrings of her awakening, she is able for the first time to swim out into the sea. Edna feels independent and wants to swim out as far as she can, but she becomes afraid when she sees how far she is from the shore. As Ringe notes, "[The sea] can turn the soul's attention outward to the infinity suggested by the endless expanse of encircling horizon and sky—to confront the universe alone—or it can cause . . . an intense concentration of self that can hardly be endured" (223). Edna finds her soul being awakened, and she feels excited and scared at the same time because of this new experience. She is not ready to embrace the sea completely, but she begins to answer its call.

After Edna leaves Grand Isle, she begins to act out what she has experienced in the sea. She tries to "swim out" where no woman has gone before. She decides not to receive visitors on Tuesday and to leave her husband's house. With all her might, she strains to feel that independence she felt in the water. As Ringe observes, "It is [New Orleans'] community, with all the demands that the social organization makes upon the individual, and which the self sometimes finds hard to accept after the expansive experience on the sea" (224). After she knows that her soul can fly in the sea's depths, it is hard for Edna to clip her wings in a society that expects certain behaviors from a woman and a family bond that demands everything from her. Ironically, then, "the sea which at first spoke sensuously to Edna of freedom has become finally the symbol of her liberation—but, also . . . of her complete withdrawal from society, her total isolation" (May 214). Edna yearns for the solitude she found in the sea, when "as she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (Chopin 28). At the same time, Edna remembers the dark side of the sea that could swallow her whole. When she starts to awaken, it feels like drowning: "the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her" (26).

Edna resembles the character in Maupassant's "Solitude" who says: "You may think me a little mad, but since I have realized the solitude of my being I feel as if I were sinking day by day into some boundless subterranean depths, with no one near me, no other living soul to clasp my out-stretched, groping hands" (qtd. in Culley 248). There are times during her moments of independence and freedom when she feels the hopelessness of it all and finds the solitude of the sea depressing. However, Edna knows that she cannot rest until she is free no matter what the cost. She can never be truly free in life; there will always be the chains of society and love that bind her.

At the end, Edna realizes that in answering the sea's call she must obey its demand for everything. In finding out who she is, Edna sees what can never be. She cannot love Robert, she cannot live apart from her husband, and she cannot abandon her children. From as far back as she can remember, Edna believes that life holds something for her, something that will bring infinite happiness. She cannot reconcile herself with the reality of being a complacent housewife who gives all for her family. The sea has offered her a chance to be something more. It has cast a spell of restlessness on her, even though "the birth of Edna's new life, occurring as it does in the 'abyss of solitude' which is the sea, brings with it its attendant vision of death" (Culley 249). Edna finally sees that there will always be someone who will hold her down and keep her from being who she is—her children, Leonce, Robert. Only the sea offers its embrace without the threat of "possess[ing] her body and soul" (Chopin 109).
Therefore she returns to Grand Isle, takes off all her clothes, and swims, never looking back at what she has left behind. At the moment of her death, “she looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again” (109). The sea will not stop its insisting call until it has everything, so “Edna drifts into death because she does not stop it; in this action, as in preceding ones, she has not controlled her own destiny” (Walker 256). It is the sea that holds her fate, and Edna will have to give her life because she has awakened.

The sea in The Awakening is constantly calling to Edna to awake. At first, it is inviting, something new and exciting, but dangerous. Then Edna leaves the sea, but the sea never loses its grip on her. Later Edna begins to obey the sea’s command to freedom. At the end, Edna answers the sea’s final call and gives up everything for its warm embrace. She is not ignorant of the sea’s dark side, but she is hungry for the discovery it brings forth of herself. After all, “perhaps it is better to wake up . . . even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life” (Chopin 105). The sea has brought forth Edna’s awakening, and in return, she gives everything for this realization.

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which then lead to withdrawal and isolation. These shameful emotions are so intense and painful that Brett desperately wants relief. Obsessive thoughts soon begin to suggest that acting out will produce the desired relief and thus, an addictive cycle is begun (Nakken 24). The five necessary characteristics that are the hallmark of an addiction are: (1) loss of willpower, (2) increased levels of tolerance, (3) self-deception, (4) unmanageability of life, and (5) withdrawal symptoms (Kasl 15-20). Other typical behavioral traits of an addict include low self-esteem, depression, impulsiveness, anxiety, manipulative behavior, a lack of personal boundaries, and feelings of insecurity, loneliness, worthlessness and powerlessness. As one can clearly see, most of these characteristics describe Brett Ashley as she is portrayed in the text. There is ample evidence of her lack of willpower in controlling her behavior, and her excessive consumption of liquor implies an increased level of tolerance. It certainly stands to reason that her need for so much alcohol could be the result of withdrawal symptoms that necessitate her regular overindulgence. The vacuousness of her life suggests a lack of goals or purpose; this aimlessness definitely contributes to her drifting from one man to the next. Brett is typical of someone who is in denial about the true state of her existence. She seems perfectly content to avoid dealing with anything painful altogether and in fact, appears almost oblivious to her behavioral excesses.

The text also presents abundant evidence that Brett Ashley not only suffers from a substance addiction but also a process addiction; since she appears to be both an alcoholic and a sex addict. Both kinds of addictive processes progress in a similar manner and manifest many of the same dynamics. Substance addictions involve the ingestion of a substance such as alcohol or drugs, while process addictions involve the addict’s participation in a process such as sexual activity or gambling. Addicts use their addiction as a way to alter their mood. This altering of mood is often a desperate attempt to delay dealing with painful emotions and to avoid reality. Most addicts are usually completely unaware of major aspects of themselves, especially their feelings, because these emotions are usually repressed to such a degree that they simply cannot be acknowledged (Schaef 19).

In many ways, alcoholic indulgence functions to provide some sense of structure to Brett’s life, and her numerous sexual encounters seem merely to provide a way of denying the emptiness and purposelessness of her existence. Ernest Hemingway, in the original but unpublished first chapter of The Sun Also Rises, states that Brett “spent [her] time sleeping as late as possible and then drinking... . There was nothing to do but drink” and that it was because of “the boredom and the uncertainty of [her] position... [that] each day became a replica of the day before” (qtd. in Bloom 6). Taking into consideration that Hemingway’s story takes place during a time of great social upheaval and discontent, the reader finds that Brett seems to embody the quintessential characteristics of post-war indolence and boredom. John Atkins alludes to the vacuousness of Brett’s life and her addictive behavior:

She is a convenient symbol of the expatriate woman of the twenties, with no purpose in her life, and attempting to fill the void with drink and sex. ... [She] is simply a woman who has slept too easily with too many men and lost all normal feeling and self-respect. (13-14)

Brett has experienced much emotional trauma through the death of her first love during the war and from her marriage to an alcoholic who tries to kill her because she does not love him. This information provides us with some insight into Brett’s emotional state and gives us some basis for understanding her alcoholism and sexual promiscuity. In the words of Mimi Reisel Gladstein, she “is a complex woman who has suffered much and endured” (59). According to Carol H. Smith, Brett “attempts to conceal her pain by remaining drunk...[and] when she goes off with other men, she hopes to find in the drug of sex a way to forget the future and the past” (55). Smith further states that Brett’s “abnormality is actually a brave attempt to conceal her pain and to find substitute comforts for true love” (55). Her statement poignantly identifies Brett as a true addict and clearly indicates Brett’s psychologically wounded life: she avoids dealing with painful feelings by medicating them with anything that feels good—namely sex and alcohol. Matts Djos simply says, “As such, [she] is a portrait of what can begin to happen when emotionally damaged people seek refuge from themselves in the desensitizing and addictive effects of liquor [and sex]” (76).

The text of The Sun Also Rises provides us with many telling signs of Brett’s habitual reliance on alcohol. At one point, Count Mippipopolous remarks to her, “You’re always drinking, my dear. Why don’t you just talk?” (65). Were she in therapy, a competent therapist might ask her the same question in an effort to discover the source of her emotional pain. It does seem as if Brett’s primary focus each day is the consumption of alcohol and that often she consumes enough to substantially alter her behavior. Hemingway, in the unpublished first chapter, states:

Alcohol, either brandy and soda or whiskey and soda, had a tendency to make everything much better, and for a time quite all right ... Drinking ... affected Brett in three successive stages. [She] first lost her power of speech... then she lost her sight and saw nothing that went on, and finally she ceased to hear. (qtd. in Bloom 6-7)
This account certainly appears to describe someone who is more than just a moderate, casual drinker. On at least two occasions in the text, Brett is described as “quite drunk” (Hemingway 40, 61), and there are numerous accounts of her consumption of seemingly inordinate amounts of liquor. According to Matt Djos, “Drinking on this kind of scale cannot even begin to resemble normalcy and is most certainly a substantive foundation for addiction and obsessive dependence” (66).

We also know that Brett “[hasn’t] a friend in the world” (Hemingway 65), which indicates an isolation from intimate relationships and which is quite common for addicts whose primary emotional relationship and interaction are with the addictive process. In his unpublished first chapter, Hemingway also states that Brett “had never been very good at being alone” (Bloom 7). This trait could explain why she is engaged to yet another man she does not love and who is, like her, also both financially and spiritually bankrupt. She does not appear to be deeply in love with him either, since she does not write him letters and remarks, “I haven’t thought about him for a week” (Hemingway 69). Brett seems to exhibit a craving for physical connectedness that stems from her deep longing for emotional intimacy, which is thwarted by her inability to love. According to Marts Djos, “None of the people [in this novel] seems to have any real understanding of the meaning of love or friendship—in the deepest sense of the word” (70). Leslie A. Fiedler agrees that Brett is “incapable of love except as a moment in bed . . . the brief joy of a drunken ecstasy—followed by suffering and deprivation and regret” (28). Theodore Baraduce describes Brett as “[having] been emotionally stunted by a shallow world without spiritual meaning” (12), which encompasses yet another important characteristic of all addicts: spiritual emptiness.

To say that Brett tries to fill her spiritual emptiness with sex and alcohol would be an understatement. She appears, in her innermost self, to be quite unhappy and several times she admits, “I’m so miserable” (Hemingway 32, 70), further proof that her outward mask of gay frivolity belies the utter barrenness of her soul. We know from her own words that church makes her “damned nervous” and that she believes that she is “damned bad for a religious atmosphere” (212). She further admits that prayer “never does me any good. I’ve never gotten anything I prayed for” (213). These are distressing words that are, sadly, quite common among those suffering with an addiction. In all reality, addiction is a spiritual disease born out of a fundamental misconception about the nature of God and the purpose of spirituality. Charlotte Kasl states that “addictive sexual behavior reflects a great spiritual malaise . . . Spirituality is the antithesis of addiction, which is essentially a spiritual breakdown” (10).

W.M. Frohock, in addressing “Brett’s nymphomania,” argues that for her recovery to be more than “the eradication of a symptom,” it must address “the sickness of the soul” (26). This sickness is best summed up by Roger Whitlow:

Her unsuccessful marriages, her engagement to a man she has no serious regard for, her inability to commit herself to anything meaningful—indeed her inability to even define what is meaningful—denote a mental confusion in Brett, on the matter of her own worth, which is compounded by her chronic cycle of drinking-drunkennes-recovery. Another overlapping cycle taints Brett’s mind as well: alcohol-sex-guilt. (154)

One could definitely argue that Brett’s behavior is extremely self-destructive and that she unconsciously seems to be engaging in an endless cycle of self-abuse. When she comments to Jake in reference to Michael, “He’s so awful. He’s my sort of thing” (Hemingway 247), it is obvious she sincerely believes she really does not deserve to be in a relationship with an emotionally healthy man who truly loves her. This belief provides further evidence of an addiction since the addictive profile includes feelings of insecurity and worthlessness, as well as self-defeating behavior. As Robert Lewis so aptly says, “Brett is compelled to torture herself and to enjoy her torment” (69). This kind of self-abasement is yet another characteristic quite common among addicts. People who are overwhelmed with feelings of shame and guilt often feel compelled to punish themselves with “consistent patterns of self-abuse” (153), according to Roger Whitlow, who adds that “Brett’s sexual activity reflects not her threshold of lust but rather her threshold of self-abasement” (154). Her “attitude toward herself and the self-destructive behavior which grows out of that attitude” is central to her “nymphomania, her alcoholism, [and] her constant fits of depression” (153). In essence, she will continue in an endless cycle of sexual promiscuity, alcoholic excess, and pervasive emptiness until she addresses the powerful forces within her that drive her to seek constantly the familiarity and comfort of her addictions.

We are witness to the rapid escalation of Brett’s sexual addiction when she glimpses Pedro Romero for the first time and is apparently overcome with lustful thoughts and feelings upon seeing him in his tight-fitting green pants. It is quite noticeable to those around her that “[she] never took her eyes off them” (Hemingway 169). She must have been unabashedly staring as several references are made to this effect and Mike soon comments, “I believe . . . she’s falling in love with this bullfighter chap” (172). It makes no difference to Brett that she is 34 years old and that Pedro is a “lovely boy” (181), just 19 years of age. The addict part of her is definitely in control, the obsessive thoughts have obviously begun, and she begins her ritual drinking which
always seems to precede her acting out behavior. In a very short time, her need for sex is so overwhelming that she callously disregards Jake’s feelings and asks him to set her up with Pedro. We are given further proof she is in the addictive cycle when she remarks to Jake, “I can’t help it. I’m a goner now... I’ve got to do something I really want to do. I’ve lost my self-respect” (187). These statements not only attest to the strength of the compulsions driving her to act out, but also sadly testify to her powerlessness to control her behavior.

When Brett confesses to Jake that she’s “mad about the Romero boy” (187), she is in reality objectifying Pedro, or reducing him to the status of a sexual object. This objectification is most typical of sex addicts who tend to see themselves as sexual objects, and who view others as sexual playthings, too. Several times Brett is described as “a lovely piece” (85), which would be a proper description for an object but which seems quite inappropriate for a human being. It is interesting to note that Brett voices no disapproval at being referred to in this manner, an attitude which seems to indicate that she accepts, and is comfortable with, this kind of dehumanization.

What Brett feels for Pedro could in no way be described as love, although she does say, “I’m in love with him I think” (187). It is obvious that she is not enough in control of her faculties to be thinking clearly since she is definitely in an addictive mind-set. It appears more likely that the only thinking she is doing is with her genitals and that what she feels for Pedro would be more aptly described as sexual attraction, lustful desire, or horniness. She has only known him a very short period of time, which makes it highly unlikely that they have fallen in love. Love is not something one “falls into,” and neither can it be described as simply a feeling. Love is a decision, a discipline, a commitment of unconditional positive regard for someone that grows slowly over time through careful attention and nurturance. This definition of love hardly applies to Brett and Pedro. Addicts often have great difficulty engaging in intimate relationships as their primary consideration is usually the selfish pursuit of a sexual conquest. This description would better describe Brett’s attraction to Pedro. Addiction robs the addict of the ability to experience normal emotional intensity and to be fully present with a partner. Therefore, the focus tends to be on immediate sexual gratification and not the intimate sharing of one’s most sacred self.

After her sexual encounter with Pedro, Brett is described as “radiant... [and] happy” and as feeling that she has been “altogether changed” (211). One might also describe her as being intoxicated from her recent sexual episode as these kinds of feelings would certainly be characteristic of someone who was in the acting-out phase of the addictive cycle. It is not long, though, until the feelings of shame and despair set in for Brett, and we find her alone in Madrid, “rather in trouble” (242), and asking for Jake to come to her rescue. When Jake arrives, she breaks down “shaking and crying” and wanting “never [to] talk about it” (247). These reactions are highly typical responses for addicts who are deeply embarrassed and ashamed of their actions from an acting-out episode. Brett’s reluctance to discuss what has taken place is also typical of addicts who are eager to repress and forget painful experiences. Moreover, future episodes of binge drinking and sexual activity are necessary ingredients for her continued repression and forgetfulness. In essence, they are the fuel for the continuing fire of addiction to consume her life physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

It is obvious that Jake deeply loves and cares for Brett and wants nothing more than for them to be together, but her addictive behavior precludes this possibility. In fact, “her actions scarcely show abiding love” (Spilka 197), particularly in light of her having asked Jake to set her up with Pedro Romero. If Brett truly cares for Jake, if he really is, “her own true love” (Hemingway 62), she would be willing to confront her emotional pain and grief and give up her addictions to be with him. That she does not give them up, in order that they might have a future together, shows her utter powerlessness to control her behavior. Beneath her aura of understated glamour and sleek sophistication, Brett presents the image of a woman struggling under the heavy weight of unresolved grief, loneliness, and a life devoid of meaning and purpose. In the words of Matts Djos, she is “a remarkable portrait of the pathology of the disease of [addiction]” (64).

In spite of numerous sexual encounters, sex addicts are often extremely lonely and constantly searching for someone or something to assuage their emptiness. Brett’s desire for sexual union is actually a fundamental desire for wholeness that cannot be satisfied merely through sexual arousal and orgasm. Sexuality is a way to connect intimately with another person as an expression of deep love and commitment—not as a way to mediate painful feelings in order to feel better. According to Sibbie O’Sullivan, “[Brett and Jake] can never be completely, physically united, and for a woman as sexually alive as Brett, this loss is deep and sad” (231). That Brett cannot be sexually satisfied by Jake, even though she “turn[s] all to jelly” (Hemingway 34) when he touches her, indicates that she is seeking to fill a void that no amount of sexual gymnastics can fill.

Consequently, Brett’s emotional wounds, and not Jake’s physical ones, are the primary cause of her sexual dissatisfaction. As a sex addict, Brett is absolutely incapable of experiencing deeply fulfilling sexual intimacy even though there are innumerable ways of sexual expression, many of which are
also non-genital. It is incomprehensible and most unfortunate that Brett has attached such significance to Jake’s penis for, in all actuality, it is not a necessary requirement for lovemaking. Jake’s primary sex organ—his brain—has not been truncated and much textual evidence exists to confirm that he is, indeed, quite a sensual man. It stands to reason that someone who is so alive to his senses has the capacity to become a consummate lover even without the requisite penis. When Jake asks Brett, in reference to her sexual desire, “Isn’t there anything we can do about it?” (34), perhaps neither of them had considered “those oral-genital solutions” (Spilka 178) which nowadays would constitute a replete sexual repertoire. Nevertheless, because of Brett’s escalating addiction, it is doubtful that any kind of satisfactory and enduring solution exists for her. Several critics have suggested that Brett Ashley was the prototype of the “New Woman” who was challenging the patriarchal status quo by dismantling the traditional gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. It is certainly true that the 1920s was a period which heralded the beginning of a decidedly feminine consciousness and which espoused an egalitarian cultural shift of conventional sex roles. According to Wendy Martin, “Brett represents the principle of female eros unbounded by patriarchal control . . . [since] masculine eroticism confines women” (70). However, Brett’s empty and meaningless sexual behavior, which focuses on immediate gratification of sexual desire regardless of personal values, precludes any hope for deeply fulfilling intimate relationships and, as such, is not a desirable model of sexual intimacy.

Brett Ashley’s extreme reliance on alcohol and sex as a way to cope with her emptiness and despair, in essence, keeps her alienated from herself and from the man whom she professes to love, Jake Barnes. Her insouciant manner disguises the bleakness of her inner self which she so recklessly tries to deny with casual sex and drinking. Brett is the epitome of an addict who has reached the bottom and has only one hope left for happiness and peace: recovery. Gertrude Stein’s “lost generation” not only aptly describes Brett, but also encompasses those who continue to refuse to abnegate their obsessive and compulsive behavior, choosing instead to drift aimlessly from one high to the next in the selfish pursuit of momentary pleasure. Such behavior is the hallmark of an addiction as well as the single most defining characteristic of Brett Ashley’s life.

Works Cited


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