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Stacy Roth

Lisa Melchert

Taylor Brown

Cole Fielweber

Cassie Craig

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Stacy Roth, Lisa Melchert, Tailor Brown, Cole Fielweber, Cassie Craig, Naomi Debaene, and Nicholas Nelson

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DMACC Composition I Student (Name withheld upon request)

This essay was written for my Composition I class in the summer of 2015. My purpose is to discuss my decision to leave the workforce in order to attend college, despite being a non-traditional student. As part of the assignment, a thesis statement was supplied, and the writing was a good exercise in how to adapt my own words in order to make the required statement fit. I also learned the value of editing my work to streamline the narrative and focus on the particular theme.

A Prodigal Student

When I tell people that I have returned to school, many of them assume I have enrolled in a graduate program or want to add another degree to my résumé. They're wrong. I am, at the tender age of thirty-five, a most humble college freshman. In any given class, a fair number of my fellow students—and even some instructors—are younger than me. I spend my evenings and weekends working through assignments and penning essays, accruing maternal guilt for missing grade school concerts and soccer games, so I can finish my homework. Despite the occasional twinge of remorse, I know that this experience will be, in the not-too-distant future, worth everything I'm missing now. Studying and writing papers when I'd rather be having fun or even sleeping may seem painful, but earning a college degree leads to personal growth and development.

After I graduated from high school, I thought that I had my future laid out before me. A good student, I had scored high on the ACT exams necessary to gain entrance to college. I was offered a full-ride scholarship to my top choice, the University of Iowa, and planned to major in anthropology. The award even covered the cost of room and board and was renewable for my entire undergraduate career, provided that I remained in good academic standing. I had a solid framework in place for the next four years of my life, and all I needed to do was show up.

Then, I met a boy. Like every overwrought cliché of first love, I thought our relationship was something special and profound, and when he told me that he would be coming along with me when I left for school, I was overjoyed. This should have been a portent of things to come,

especially when he strongly suggested I cancel my plans to move into my allocated dorm room and instead rent an apartment with him. My parents were bewildered by my decisions, but fueled by their disapproval and the self-assurance only an eighteen-year-old can possess, I moved in with him. A few weeks later, reality set in. Rent had to be paid, and there was no meal plan for off-campus students. I interviewed with a staffing agency and was placed in a full-time job to help pay our bills, but found I couldn't handle the stress of both working and studying full-time. Ultimately, my capricious fiancé realized that he wasn't ready to grow up yet either and moved several states away to bunk in in his parents' basement. I was left with a broken lease, an abrupt withdrawal from school, and a healthy dose of cynicism about romantic entanglements.

I exited Iowa City to move in with my own clearly disappointed, but still supportive, parents. Shortly thereafter, I found a full-time job in Des Moines. My daily commute was an hour long in each direction, but the time by myself during the drive was a welcome contrast to the previous months spent in stifling closeness to my former partner. My employer was a small data entry company, and in the downtime between batches of information to be keyed, I began helping the information technology department (consisting of one wretchedly overwhelmed man) with troubleshooting computer problems around the office. It became apparent that I had a knack for technical support, and I eventually left the company to work elsewhere as a full-time system administrator. Over the next several years, I was fortunate enough that my career took an upward trajectory. Despite that luck, however, regret gnawed at my gut. I felt like a fraud amongst my educated co-workers with degrees in computer science or business. My former high school classmates were graduating from college and becoming actual adults while I was merely playing at adulthood. I was working, paying taxes, and being responsible, but there was no real sense of accomplishment in any of it.

I met another boy, one of those computer science degree-holders, and eventually married him. Adhering to the modern American fairy tale, we had a child, bought a house, and had two more children. As these tiny humans grow and mature, going to schools of their own and questioning the world around them, the regret I feel for not having a college degree looms large. All three of my children are bright and inquisitive, and like any good parent, I know they can do absolutely anything that they set their minds to. My husband and I tell them as much, just as we tell them that school is critical to success. But I want to go one step beyond parroting those motivational catchphrases—I want to embody them myself. After all, I can't very well insist that my kids value education and plan on going to college if I'm not willing to do the same.

There are, of course, things I would rather be doing than studying, most of which involve spending time with my husband and children. I've missed soccer games, more than a few family gatherings, and one parent/teacher conference so far. The list of school and sporting events that I haven't been able to attend is only likely to grow longer, and there is a distinct possibility that my kids will come to assume that my default response to any question will be, "Talk to your dad." As they grow older, though, and begin making plans for their own lives post-high school, I hope that my dedication to earning a degree influences their decisions.

It has been six months since I enrolled for my first semester at DMACC. In that time, I have rekindled a zeal for learning, spent an obscene amount of money on textbooks, and even made a few friends. I have also been absent from a few things that some parents would find unforgivable, and have had to cut short activities far more pleasant than homework in order to submit assignments on time. These small sacrifices are certainly going to add up, but in the end, a degree—my degree—will be its own reward.



Stacy Roth

This Composition I assignment was an essay of my own design. My purpose is to inform readers of a historical personality and to demonstrate the complexity of historical research. In addition, I argue why the current focus on historical reality is important and valuable to society. I practice keeping a thesis strong throughout a long essay that goes many different places and giving a useful overview of complex and extensive subject matter.

Semiramis, Sammu-Ramat, or a Lady of the Court: A Lesson on the Uncertainty of History

The goal of history, in modernity, is pretty simple; figure out what happened. Modern historians aim to be objective; they wrestle with validating sources; they check their work against archaeological, astronomical, and dating evidence. They try to understand human experiences on small or large scales, thus building a comprehensive understanding of who we are and where we came from. The only way this narrative is meaningful is if it's true. False historical narratives, however, are tools of oppression. They are overturned time and again for more complex, and usually truer, narratives. If this element of truth—discovering the reality of the past—wasn't important, it wouldn't be so persistent. In a guide to building history curriculums, for example, the goals of teaching history are critical thinking, analysis of different interacting systems, communicating views logically, and assessing sources (“Goals of a History Curriculum”). History isn't storytelling, it's fact finding. Just as what we now consider natural science was known in the past as philosophy, what we now know as history, is more and more a science (Pitcher 8), which is why the journey of learning about a semi-famous ancient queen is so distressing.

Say someone hears about Semiramis, and wonders who she is. Perform a quick Google search, read a Wikipedia article, and she sounds awesome: a warrior queen, builder of the great city of Babylon, beloved by her people, who conquered the world with a keen military mind! I know I

was immediately in love. It only took minutes more of scanning search results for academic sources for the bloom to lose its blush: the story of Semiramis is as much about an unprovable, controversial mess as it is about an ancient Babylonian warrior-queen. What is passed off in the most accessible sources and cultural imagination as fact is in actuality something else entirely. The figure of Semiramis is a good teaching tool to show how the radically different way history was handled in the past still deeply effects our understanding of things today and undermines the hard work of historians trying to explain to us a complex, interesting, and insightful historical reality. So to look at Semiramis, we go to the Greeks.

The earliest and most extensive source on the supposed Babylonian queen is *The Library of History of Diodorus Siculus*, written, it is believed, between 60 and 30 BCEs (“Diodorus Siculus Biography – Greek Historian”). This Greek historian, Diodorus, begins with Semiramis’ miraculous birth, already an ancient even to him. In Assyria, as the story goes according to Diodorus, a local fish goddess Derceto offends Aphrodite, and to punish Derceto, Aphrodite makes her have amorous feelings for a human youth, and by him Derceto has a baby. She’s so ashamed she kills the father and abandons the child in the rocky wasteland. But instead of succumbing to exposure, the newborn is tended, fed, and kept warm by a flock of doves.

Despite the word "history" in the title, this work is mostly mythologized folklore. We can be pretty sure that a human infant couldn’t survive on the love of doves alone, nor is she likely a daughter of a shamed fish goddess. But creating legends around beloved leaders is common. George Washington never chopped down his father’s cherry tree either. And adding a little of the homeland’s religion into a historical text is a very ancient Greek thing to do (Pitcher 12). They would see a goddess of the region like Ishtar, and find the nearest Greek equivalent (in this case, Aphrodite). Diodorus does it again in his *Library of History* with the Babylonian god Belus, by claiming that Belus is just the Assyrian word for Zeus.

Semiramis's story goes on to be one worthy of a Hollywood movie that I would totally go see. Diodorus tells us about an amazing woman: she disguises herself as a man to visit her husband on the front lines of a battle between the Assyrians and Bactreians. She arrives and devises a clever strategy to lead the Assyrians to victory. The King, Ninus, is so taken with her beauty and intelligence he dogs her husband into suicide and marries her. After having a son with her, the king dies too, leaving Semiramis as Queen Regent (Diodorus).

Semiramis takes to the role with gusto. She leads impressive military campaigns conquering a lot of the Middle East and nearly Asia too. She founds the city of Babylon, planning the ingenious construction and devising the city's most amazing building projects (Diodorus). But then the story goes to an odd place. Where before her story was one of an intelligent and respected leader, it now ventures into sordid territory. There are differing stories of her killing lovers, of engaging in necrophilic acts, of dying of old age and turning into a dove, of being killed by her treacherous son and again turning into a dove, now to ascend to heaven and become a goddess. Some versions were elaborated by Diodorus, others in later Greek revisits to the Semiramis story (Smith).

It's not new or shocking information that folklore and religion has shaped historical writings more so in the past than today. A goddess-born queen who is a little too good to be true isn't the real affront to modern idea of historical reality, just the noble whimsy of our ancestors. No, it's that other than this account by Diodorus of Sicily (to whom he attributed the bulk of his information to a work by Ctesias, which is lost), there is no other corroborating evidence that "Semiramis" even existed (Mark, "Semiramis"). No archaeological evidence can be found nor records from Syria dated before this Greek account.

This isn't just a matter for historians to fret over. Semiramis is a cultural figure in some comparatively contemporary sources. Semiramis appeared in *The Divine Comedy*, in the inferno being punished for uncontrollable lust. She was the subject of a play by Voltaire, and six separate operas,

including one by Rossini (Bauman). There were films about her in 1910, 1954, and 1963 ("Cinema of the Ancient World"). She was referenced by William Faulkner and Ingmar Bergman, and Semiramis of the North was a nickname for both Queens Margaret I of Denmark and Catherine the Great (Mark, "Semiramis"). If authors and artists are going to take her qualities and ascribe them to leaders, or use her to teach us religious lessons, shouldn't consumers of the story be able to evaluate the usefulness of the information? How are they supposed to do that if they don't at least know if they are learning from a story based in fact, or one of total fiction?

Before deciding to classify any lessons learned from Semiramis as lessons of mythology rather than history, however, a casual researcher can look past operas and lusty legends and anti-Catholic slander (which I'll get to later), and see something intriguing. A new name. A queen who at least possibly existed: Sammu-Ramat.

Sammu-Ramat most likely ruled, if she ruled at all, around 800 years before Diodorus cribbed from Ctesias and gave to history warrior-Queen Semiramis (Richardson). Semiramis, Sammu-Ramat. Maybe a little oral history and local legend passed on all the way to Greece and there it is, like game of telephone. Just a little appellation obfuscation. If only it were that simple, rather than a "source of considerable controversy for over a century now" (Mark, "Sammu-Ramat and Semiramis").

This is a complex issue and a good example of historians doing what they do now: debating and using many different sources of evidence to suss out the truth regarding an issue with no one answer. Yet Semiramis and Sammu-Ramat are equated with ease and an air of accepted truth, in encyclopedias as well as in article asides. Perhaps there is a little hedge word like "probably" in there somewhere. Then in other texts, Semiramis is no one, Sammu-Ramat may be a queen regent that did little, or even only "an obscure Assyrian lady of the eighth century B.C. of whom we know nothing for certain except that she is named on an inscription as lady of the palace" (Mark, "Semiramis"). In

one source, a record of ancient inscriptions found in Syria, which describes the lineage of the Queen Sammu-Ramat, introduces the inscription with a dismissive hand wave of “Sammu-Ramat, Semiramis of legend,” (Luckenbill). Very tidy.

But for some scholars equating the two is enough for a work to be panned as a symbol of bad research. In one folklore journal, it is a given that a connection between them is faulty, as exemplified in this review of a folkloric encyclopedia which apparently is filled with “...dubious philological explanations, e.g. Sammu-Ramat as the source for Semiramis.” It was a short review and the connection between the two was the chosen example of just how bad this the scholarship was in this encyclopedia.

Many of the deeds attributed to Semiramis, and therefore fleshing out the Sammu-Ramat’s possible reign, are on record as done by others, never happening, or often being the military exploits of Alexander the Great. There are buildings and land works with no recorded source which are considered possibly of Sammu-Ramat, because they were mentioned in the long list of Semiramis’ deeds. That is Semiramis who never existed, being the source of facts about a queen, one who in some sources, including some encyclopedias, is given a specific period for her reign and attributions about her accomplishments. Yet in other in other just as trustworthy, just as numerous sources, she is thought to have maybe been a courtesan that *probably* existed.

The similarity of their names can’t even be considered easy or obvious evidence. A popular article on the subject by W. Robertson Smith from the *English Historical Review* of 1887 declares that there is no etymological connection between the two, or with another less often mentioned possible source, ancient Semitic goddess Shemiram.

Shemiram’s nebulousness of identity as either an unrelated goddess in her own right or a proto-goddess for Ishtar/Inanna/Astarte (the equation of those three, to be honest, some scholars also take issue with), has her cast by some as a possible source for Semiramis (Smith). Were myths

of Shemiram taken and mistranslated by the Greeks, who also heard the name of possibly real historical queen Sammu-Ramat, assumed they were one in the same, added in a bit of what they knew of Babylonian religion with the doves, and gave it a little Aphrodite relish? It would seem likely, but Smith says no. According to him the etymology tying Shemiram to Ishtar is all wrong, and that her otherwise minor reach makes her unlikely to be involved in this historical fracas. His work is a citation on nearly any internet article about Sammu-Ramat one can find. It should be noted that his work is also a criticism of another scholar's article. This debate has been going on for quite a while. Historical reality is not as tidy as "Sammu-Ramat, Semiramis of legend."

Semiramis' goddess-adjacent status had one large, influential, completely inaccurate proponent as well, and it still undermines a layperson's chance at understanding this historical thread today. In 1858 a man named Alexander Hilsop wrote a book called *The Two Babylons*. It was a very obvious work of anti-Catholic propaganda, claiming Semiramis as the source of all mother-goddess figures, including the Virgin Mary. His scholarship and conclusions were regarded as incorrect and sub-par, and the work was considered by historians of the time (as well as religious and folkloric scholars) having no actual worth. It is regarded the same today. Unless you aren't a historian, of course. In the case of a curious person looking to learn, however, the second and third webpages that come up, if one googles Semiramis, assert Hilsop's views as fact, and then the fifth result is a documentary on YouTube "exploring the role of Pagan Mother Goddess Semiramis". The truth about her is not easy, whatever it may be, and false historical narratives such as this certainly don't help. It is hurtful to numerous religious or spiritually minded people (from Catholics to modern pagan reconstructionists), as well the people in Syria who claim Semiramis as part of their cultural heritage. A lie made up out of hatred persists today, and the only silver lining is that it can be an example of why historical reality, historical truth, is important. Perhaps in the case of Semiramis it doesn't do significant harm, but as Howard Zinn showed with *The People's History of the United States*,

simplifying historical narratives, or living with false and one-sided ones, can have real consequences of political and social oppression.

The importance, then, of truth in history demands that the layperson, if not at least the average high school history student, knows how much signal interference there is in history. In this endeavor, going back to the father of history would seem a good place to start.

Herodotus. The father of history. It's a heavy name with a whole truck load of implications. He wrote history, and he travelled the world in search of sources to complete his epic accounts. He saw things we quote as truth about ancient Egypt or the Peloponnesian war today. He is, almost consistently in teaching aid websites and casual Internet records, known by laymen as the "father of history." When scientific evidence is found to disprove an assertion of Herodotus', scientists report it with corrective glee (Hayton), which shows what modern historians have always known: that Herodotus, his fellow Greek historians, his Roman admirers, and all of his progeny until recent times are not studying history the same way we study history today (Pitcher). What history was to scholars of the distant past, and into the Enlightenment, is not what history is today.

The concept of historical reality is taken for granted today. Even as we are aware of biases, that "history is written by the winner," we take for granted that the point in writing about the past was to tell what happened, as best as the author could. Cicero, the Roman orator who dubbed Herodotus with the enduring title as the father of history, wrote in clear terms what history was supposed to mean, what it was supposed to achieve. It is a rare and useful glimpse into what ancient historians were attempting to do. History wasn't about truth, the facts of what happened in the past, as much as it was supposed to be a teaching tool. "Histories" were folk lore, allegory, and local memory to be plundered for rhetorical needs. "In antiquity," says C.R. Ligota, "history was an art, not a science."

History was to describe glory, to elevate what not was chronologically true, but amazing. After the *Iliad*, the bar was set at topping the Trojan War. As Ligota points out, “Herodotus sets out to write about the Persian War because it was greater than the Trojan War.” What ancient writers chose to write about was different, how they structured it was different, every historical writing we have from the past was made of a dozen unseen choices and decisions that no historian would make today (Pitcher 1). The great recorder of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides, can be admired for his valiant attempts at citing his sources, but he also would go on to predict important events in the war based on signs he interpreted. St. Augustine compares history to a type of song and prose (Ligota).

It wasn't until the late 18th or early 19th century when historians wrote works on the field of history (emergence of the field of historiography), that the standards of reality and concrete knowledge were introduced, as opposed to simply instructive lessons (such as not cutting down your father's cherry tree) and culturally elevating tales of glory. History of the past was in flux. It was undefined as a scholarly field, slipping between legends and art, making a lot of sources we have not entirely trustworthy by modern standards (Ligota). Yet the extent to which history is unstable and uncertain seems to be completely a surprise to people outside of the field of history. We are left with the high-definition lens of historical reality that we learn in those history curriculums, to take academic language as fact, and then apply it over and over again to the artistic history of the past, to oft repeated conventional wisdom. George Washington cut down his father's cherry tree, and they wouldn't say it if it wasn't true, because we learned in history class, one must always have a source to make a claim. Modern paradigms pushed on old history.

The majority of historians aren't hiding the uncertainty of what their talking about, but it's not always easy. For example, in instances of controversy (such the Semiramis situation), a scholar with a worthy, educated opinion will present it with a lot less of the leeway than one would expect considering how much disagreement there is on a subject. If the reader is unaware of disagreement

in the field, and is, let's say, a producer of historical TV show, or a journalist, or an amateur encyclopedia editor, that person can pass on a semi-educated opinion as simple fact. So the general population ends up having no idea of how unstable the historical foundation they stand on really is. And then we end up with having most results in a google search about ancient history being about aliens. That's an obvious example of a fringe theory, but there are others that are considered false and still linger, or are only theories that the field considers unlikely, such as Stonehenge being built by druids or being an ancient astronomical calendar, both of which according to accepted historical theory and geological dating are false.

One entire academic specialty tries to scientifically corroborate through mathematics and astronomy if events even happened anywhere near where they are said to. It has its own fringe scientists and disagreements and academic controversy too. A good amount of the dates we struggle to memorize in high school history courses may be completely wrong.

All it takes is one episode of History's Mysteries with a date quoted as fact, when in truth it is simply an approximation from one source, and we have an unshakeable falsehood persisting in the public imagination. If the public knew how shaky so much of what they consider truth is, they wouldn't be very happy with it. Consider again Hilsop, the anti-Catholic propagandist, whose one nearly universally derided book from 200 years ago, still has an effect on first page Google search results about Semiramis today.

Where does that leave us? "History is neither an exemplar of realism," Richard J. Evans writes in *In Defense of History*, "nor a victim to relativism. It occupies a middle ground in which scholarly procedures are upheld in order to keep avenues of enquiry as close to the real and as far removed from the relative as possible."

With every "circa," "around," "alleged," "probable," "possible," "we believe," "as far as we know," "scholars think," "some historians believe," "it may have," and so on, historians are trying to

be transparent. With these words they try to bring us closer to the reality of history, yet we discard them for those concise encyclopedic dates, and easily digestible half-hour History Channel specials. History is for a side-bar headline on a news source, or a skimmed-over Wikipedia article. But even when we look closer at these types of examples, we see a lot more of these hedging words that we let our eyes gloss over.

This tendency isn't unique to history; we oversimplify science the same way. We read the newspaper's report on one small study with a possible correlation or negative link, while declaring that scientists have proven a new cause or cure for cancer. The follow-ups of peer review and replication of studies rendering results inconclusive go unreported or are simply ignored. So we live with in a world where regardless of the truth, autism is caused by vaccines and aliens built the pyramids. Semiramis was Queen Sammu-Ramat, founder of Babylon, pagan mother-goddess to every idol that followed, and obvious source of Catholic worship.

We follow the truth as spelled out to us. When presented with different evidence we ignore it or entrench ourselves in the extreme of a new stance. If you've never heard someone say, "Well, actually, the Civil war was about economics," you're lucky. After usually being taught that it was all about righteous abolition, these eager correctors have discovered it was more complicated and instead of allowing events to be messy and causes multitudinous, they choose one to paint themselves with this new, neatly-tied package.

History is complex. It is shaky, it is heavily debated, and little can be called true. But what is true is important, and history's modern goal of finding the truth is important. Hopefully if there is one lesson we can learn from Semiramis, Queen of Babylon, it is this.

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Lisa Melchert

My Composition I assignment was to choose a photo from my past and help my readers understand my memory of it. In my essay, do my best to describe every angle of what I remember, from the perspective of what I was feeling emotionally and physically. The picture in the essay is the backbone of my story.

Farewell Trip

My husband Mitch and I have traveled to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, every other year for ten years now. Just looking at this picture brings vivid memories of that precise moment when the click and the flash of the camera occurred. The golden and burnt orange sunset behind me was simply breathtaking. Dressed up for a night out at the all-inclusive resort, it appears we are in paradise without a care in the world. The smiles and the embrace reveal the love that is shared between us. The ocean is far off in the background, but I can remember hearing the sound of it. The water in the immediate background was an overflowing pool on the fourth floor that fed a constant waterfall to the ground below. It was simply gorgeous! But there is so much more to this picture, the preparation, the posing, and the thoughts hidden behind our elated faces.

Out of the blue, Mitch said that since we were dressing up for dinner we should get our picture taken. At the time I thought, “Why in the world would we do that?” It was very out of character for him, but I agreed wholeheartedly. On trips past, we had simply asked a passerby to take our photo. Was his intention to give me this memory? This beautiful background, with us as the centerpiece? Those are the things I cannot tell you about this picture, such as the unspoken thoughts and intentions of a man who is severely disabled from a disease called Multiple Sclerosis. I posed him here looking strong and supporting; it took hours to get him ready for the

picture. Between getting him dressed, and endless hurdles, bathroom breaks, resting, it was much work, but we captured the perfect memory of our last trip to Mexico.

I do not enjoy shopping, but we both needed something fresh and new for this trip. We had gone to a mall in Des Moines the week prior. It is not often I spent money on anything for myself, having four daughters and a limited income. I hit the sale racks in several stores and had no luck. At the final store, I had a handful of sale dresses but my daughter grabbed a dress and said it was “me.” I added it to the back of the stack. I tried on everything down to the last dress, with no luck, and then I slid into the one my daughter was so eager for me to love. I adjusted and turned to the mirror, and the girls and I said, “Yes! This is the dress!” I proceeded to look at the price tag and it was \$100. I instantly said no and began taking it off. Mitch, hearing all the hubbub from outside the dressing room convinced me to at least let him see it. I stepped out of the dressing room, and he started to cry.

He said, “Get it.”

I said, “It is \$100.”

Tears flowing from his eyes, he said, “Buy that dress, it is beautiful on you.”

The dress came home with me. This is the dress I am wearing in the photograph.

Mitch’s coral-colored shirt that was purchased for this trip would not slide over his in-compliant arms that were tight from the Multiple Sclerosis. His shorts were an equal battle with his legs locking and convulsing. He was unable to stand so I could pull the shorts up. Exhausted from the process, I allowed him to rest a bit before I began to put on his shoes and socks. I transferred him into bed, and without delay his worn-out, afflicted body surrendered to sleep.

I started to reflect on many things. I thought back to the initial symptoms of Mitch’s Multiple Sclerosis. I thought about the weeks his left foot began to lag, with the naive thoughts that it was probably just a pinched nerve in his back. After multiple falls and deterioration of the use of

his left arm, Mitch finally agreed to go to the doctor. He was instantly referred to a neurologist in Iowa City. He was losing ability very rapidly. One morning he was unable to button a button. Within the next few weeks his trips over cracks in the sidewalk became falls. Because he had progressed so rapidly they diagnosed him initially with Lou Gehrig's disease. It wasn't until over a year later that they found the clues in his spinal fluid that gave him the label of Primary Progressive Multiple Sclerosis, a severely degenerative disease caused by damage to the myelin sheath of the nerves. There is nothing to stop it, or repair it. Within three years he was in a wheelchair full time, and the doctors informed us that his life expectancy would be three to five years after reaching that point. At the time of this trip to Mexico, he had been in a wheelchair full time for over three years.

A funny thing happens when there is a conscious known life expectancy. A person has an entire shift in thinking. With Mitch I could see a softening of his heart, an awareness of things that were never before important. A much higher value is placed on every month, week, or minute.

As Mitch's wife, the clock ticked as annoyingly in my mind as it did his. All of his years of working long days with no time to enjoy family shifted almost immediately into open days, but with the lack of physical ability to participate. As much as I tried to repress the thoughts of the different steps of this disease and his inevitable death, it was constantly in my mind. I felt scared even in the calmness of the night, as I lay awake listening to his irregular breathing.

There is no escape from this monster I have labeled Multiple Sclerosis. It follows me into the laundry room as I soak soiled clothing. It follows me to the store as I search for soft foods to feed him so he doesn't choke. It haunts me as I bring my already tired, unrested body to the fitness center every morning at 5 a.m. so that I can continue to get stronger to pick him up and care for him in our home. It follows me to the mailbox as I receive information on Living Wills and DNR orders. No matter where I try to seek reprieve from this disease and the loss associated with it, reprieve is impossible to find.

I remember sitting in the hotel room, watching him sleep. There were no phones ringing, no children beckoning me to cook, and no girls needing their hair braided. Just silence, with the faint, rhythmic sound of the waves coming through the sliding glass doors. It is not often I let myself “think.” I live in mother mode and wife mode. The only time I consider reality is during the wee hours of the night. My mind instantly races to our four daughters: Allison (seventeen), Mallory (fifteen), Holly (seven), and Allyssa (four). I have homeschooled them all. On top of being responsible for their education, I have to earn the income for my family. All of the girls are dual-enrolled with the public school system for athletics and music, so we are constantly running. But today, I had idle minutes. I allowed my mind to wander . . . to the deep stuff, the stuff that subconsciously gets hidden so that everyday life will continue.

With the gate to my mind wide open and with no one to judge or condemn or pity me, I began to daydream. I looked at other couples and couldn’t help but feel that this was unfair, or that I have been deprived or robbed. My plan was to have a strong, healthy man who I would grow old loving and making memories with. I want to be silly, play, tease, and run with him. I crave his 6’4” broad-shouldered frame, standing tall, his arms wrapping around me. I long for the intimacy that can only be given by my husband. I desire it as I desire the air I breathe and the food that nourishes me. And in this tropical paradise, with the warm breeze, and the smell of the ocean taunting me, I deem myself a victim and allow several tears to fall.

These are dangerous grounds. But with Mitch’s mouth hanging open in his deep slumber, I think about the life I used to anticipate. With four daughters, there would be father-daughter dances, and a proud father walking his girls down the aisle. Mitch was a star athlete, so he was supposed to be throwing balls and coaching their teams to the championships. Grandchildren, anniversaries, growing old, going for walks hand-in-hand with the love of my life. Not being a widow.

Constant twitches from the impaired body on the bed in front of me put me back on guard. If he sees tears of sadness or fear, especially when I have painted the illusion of complete felicity on this vacation, it will be heartbreaking for him. I compose myself immediately, wiping forbidden tears away and stepping out of my weak state. I compose myself with strength that comes from who knows where. I will forge on for this man.

Finally, Mitch awakens. We proceed directly to the photographer. It is obvious that the photographer does not deal with handicapped people very often because every potential site is an impossibility. I finally say, “The ocean . . . could you take us to a place where we can see the ocean?” And here we landed. The sound of the ocean is my favorite sound on this earth. On this vacation I longed to feel the water on my toes and the hot sand on my feet, the roar of the mighty ocean, and the waves striking me. This trip had not yet included any ocean play, no romantic stroll down the beach, hand-in-hand while the sun was setting. My husband’s electric wheelchair was not able to go in the sand. I was so close, yet so far away from the ocean. The sound alone was soothing, but it left a longing.



All a person can tell from that moment in time is that we looked happy and in love. But the reality is this: His arm that is wrapped around my leg had to be physically placed there. It was not a soft, warm touch. His muscles were rigid and tired and heavy. His legs had constant uncontrollable spasms and were literally bouncing underneath me. He was uncomfortable and I was uncomfortable, but we sacrificed our comfort to create this keepsake.

If you could see what was going through my mind while I smiled and sat lightly upon the feeble lap of my husband, it would reveal, “This will be our last trip here together. This picture will be the ‘Farewell to Mexico picture.’”

I was happy and thankful for our time together. But you won’t see the sadness I was hiding, or the desire for the story of this picture to be different. A part of me was also excited for the mere chance to have a souvenir in hand to share with family and friends upon our return to Iowa, to show everyone how “perfect” it was. Maybe I could even trick my own eyes and remember it a little bit more perfect than it was. A married couple, husband and wife, not caretaker and disabled man. The illusion created in this photograph is that of a man and a woman who are in love and sharing an amazing getaway to Mexico. But my memory of the trip is that of being a woman in a foreign country, responsible for the well-being and safety of herself and a full grown man with no physical abilities.

Finally, I slip the sandals from my feet and drop them on the edge of the wooden boardwalk, the boundary line for his electric wheelchair. I step down into the soft, silky white sand. I unthinkingly drop my possessions and begin to run to the ocean. The air feels cooler now, coming off of the water. It is as if I have stepped off the wooden prison of the boardwalk into a new land! For this brief moment everything is forgotten, not a care in the world. Just me and the omnipotent body of water before me. The tide pulls the water back to reveal the flat untouched wet sand with tips of ivory seashells peeking through. So I stand with my feet sinking in the cold, wet sand. I patiently await the rush of the tide to return. It arrives. I sink further down in the sand. Reunited. I soak up every sensation, every smell, every feeling, and every sound. I listen to the seagulls as they dance around the sky immediately above my head. Then I hear a faint calling of my name. A louder plea for my attention awakens me.

I open my eyes and sit up in the dark hotel room. I massage the leg cramp from Mitch's leg and readjust him. I turn and look out the sliding glass door and listen to the distant sound of the ocean.



Taylor Brown

I was born and raised in Des Moines. I am 26. I am not sure what I want to go into, but I am thinking something in physics, chemistry or computers. Though film is my number one passion and I would love to be a director, the market is flooded and bleeding integrity.

It's Alright, Ma (I'm Just Bleeding Oil)

A mother and her children, shown bathing with petroleum saturated river water in Richard Fox's image from 1999, aren't the only Nigerian victims of oil spills. Nigeria, in particular the Niger Delta, is one of the world's top producers in crude oil, and in the past 50 years it has been more vulnerable to spills than any other nation in the world (Zabby). Independent inspections have provided evidence that The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) has been severely misrepresenting the quantity of oil spilt and their efforts to clean them up (Vidal). Fox's photo shows how negligence and disregard of big oil companies has affected the environment and the people of the Niger Delta, and how help is needed if there is to be hope.



The oil in the water is almost as unstoppable a force as water itself can be in a tidal wave; nothing in the reach of its dirty currents can escape. Oil saturated water settles into the soil, contaminating it and dooming any flora that may grow from it. Those who may depend on said vegetation for sustenance, or do not have another source of available drinking water, suffer as well. The colors in Fox's photograph are almost testament on their own of these demoralizing effects that oil spills have had on not only the water and soil, which the oil initially contaminates, but also all life that depends on the natural resources to survive. The water is a muddy murky brown, the tree line on the far bank is black, and even the wood steps and rail are covered in slime. Only the metal waste of decrepit forgotten oil jetties loitering in the background seems to be at home in this sickly nuance. Ultraviolet light is just as important a resource to most beings as water, and by choosing an overcast day, Fox emphasizes the separation from natural resources as well as the gloomy disposition cast onto the environment by the oil companies.

Fox emphasizes that idea further, showing that humans are the focal point, by drawing the viewer's eyes to the middle section where the Obojo residents have to settle day in and day out for unsanitary water. He uses shading on the edges of the picture to emphasize how humans being at the top of the food chain can be affected most as they depend on sustaining other forms of life around them with water. In this way, Fox promotes the notion of humans coming in and destroying other people's lives only to turn a blind eye and cover it up, leaving aboriginals to deal with the mess.

The abandoned oil jetties in the background were built by a foreign oil company as a contribution to local infrastructure (Fox). The half-finished pillars that hold no pier give a melancholy nod to the futility of man meddling in locales where such fiddling has no place. The intentions are stated in the name of amicable assistance, but end up adding more detriment to an

already struggling country. The man-made waste stands tall with no use as the much-needed vegetation and human life is bent out of ideal shape.

Things will not change on their own in Nigeria. Reports have been made to misrepresent the facts; severity of spills has been greatly understated and clean up procedures have been languidly abandoned or reduced for personal gain. The Nigerian mother helplessly struggling through the daily routine still has hope. She pleads to the camera with hopeful eyes shining through a face of broken promises that has been denied the most basic resources in a land where many people are still fighting to develop from a third world. Her eyes might be pointed towards the camera, but she is looking through it to the people who can make a difference. She calls to the willing and able to end the reign of oppression littered out the windows of Hummers owned by oil enterprises as they speed by.

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Cole Fielweber

My purpose is to show readers the strength of the “Black Lives Matter” movement and why the exclusiveness of saying “black lives” instead of “all lives” is not another example of racism. My hope is that people who read this and look at the photo come to an understanding of the movement and put their support behind it as well and that people will realize, based on my analysis of the photo, that the subtle techniques used have a much broader application to the black community as a whole.

#BlackLivesMatter

With the influence of social media on this generation, social movements gain traction incredibly quickly, with one of the most important being a modern day fight against racial inequality. Though the discrimination is not as blatant as it was in times of slavery or segregation, the systematic prejudice our judicial system holds towards minorities, especially black people, has prompted hundreds of protests and demonstrations calling for a change. Some of the most iconic protests are known as “Die-ins” where people protest the way black people’s lives are treated with such indifference. This photograph illustrates one such protest at the HUB building at Penn State, which lasted for 45 minutes.



Though there is immense prejudice in the way black people are treated in our judicial system, this picture shows that people will not allow these issues to just be swept under the rug, and suggests that until there are widespread reform and improvements, protests such as these will be commonplace.

The composition of this photo makes it impossible to not notice the unorganized way the bodies are laying across the floor, a significant contrast between their signs saying “Black Lives Matter.” The randomness and lack of thought as to where the bodies are placed reinforce the belief that when a black person is killed many people do not care, especially in the case of police violence, with society just assuming the killing was justified. The signs, however, show that this is not the case, and that people of color will not allow another death in their community to be ignored or forgotten. This was not just some faceless thug as the media might try to portray; this person mattered: someone with a family, someone with goals, someone just like anybody else. But now, a person’s life has been cut short, for seemingly no reason other than an immense overreaction. Simultaneously, it shoots down the most common complaint voiced about these protests, where people claim that “all lives matter,” by explaining that if that was the case, demonstrations like these would not be necessary.

The color scheme puts a strong emphasis on the signs. While the people are wearing all black, the brown and white colored signs contrast noticeably, bringing the viewer’s eyes immediately to them and giving context to the demonstration. In addition, the viewer’s eyes are drawn to the white duct tape over the demonstrators’ mouths, a strong contrast to the black clothing, perhaps having a deeper symbolic meaning for the black community. Due to the disproportionate amount of black people, especially black men, in jail or likely to be killed by police to that of white people, the duct tape could be a simple yet powerful symbol of how the judicial system is biased against the black community.

This picture has several different aspects to what it is appealing. The nature of the demonstration, a “die-in,” has strong emotional appeals based on the name alone, as the discussion of death in general is often considered taboo. Additionally, the plea for society to pay attention to the subtle way society is built against the minorities appeals emotionally. The slogan of the movement, “Black Lives Matter,” has a logical appeal to it—while a seemingly obvious statement to most people, especially in modern day society where blatant racism is widely condemned, the discrimination in our judicial system towards black people is something that is often overlooked.

When discussing racial inequality, many think that those problems were resolved after slavery was abolished and society became integrated. The idea that there is any sort of racism in modern day society is hard for many people to grasp, especially at the scale that the judicial system has been set up to target minorities. However, the subtle and nonobvious ways that society has been prejudiced against black people has caused a modern day civil rights movement of its own. Until recently, many stories such as the Trayvon Martin or Freddie Gray murders would not receive nearly the attention they are given now in the major news outlets. However, with the advent of social media, especially Twitter, injustices such as these are kept largely in the public’s view, with activists refusing to let these stories go unnoticed. Though the Civil Rights Movement ended in the mid-20th century with blatant and public racism being outlawed, a new Civil Rights Movement has begun, fighting against the subtle and often unintentional racism that has been embedded in modern day society.

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Mark K Nabil. 2014. University Park.



Cassie Craig

My purpose is to share a personal memory in a way that reflects the writing style of Ray Bradbury's "Dandelion Wine." I wrote this essay for readers familiar with Bradbury and his writing style. I focused mainly on description, and I practiced showing rather than telling. Description is one of the most important parts of creative writing, as well as one of the most difficult to master. One of the biggest problems that I ran into was an overuse of description, which took away from the content.

Bradburyesque

The summers spent at my grandparent's farm were always exciting. The days spent exploring the basement and outbuildings, helping my grandmother in the kitchen, and playing games like hide-and-seek are what always come to mind when I think of my childhood, but one of the best parts of my annual visits were the trips down the road to the open field owned by my grandfather.

My mother, sister, and I would ride in the bed of the truck during the short drive down the moon-colored gravel road. I remember the small clink as the wheels kicked up gravel and threw it against the sides of the truck and the pale cloud that trailed after us, as if some miniature dust bowl had been left over from the 1930s. I can smell the warm summer scented breeze as it blew my hair back from my face. Pale pink and purple replaced baby blue as the sun slowly slunk across the western sky before finally disappearing over the horizon, like a ship sailing out of sight on the gentle ocean waves.

My grandfather would pull into the field and stop in our special spot just out of sight of the road. Eagerly, I would spring over the side of the truck, the sound of my feet hitting the ground muffled by the thick grass. The grass whispered to me softly in a foreign tongue as I slowly pushed through the sea of emerald waves blowing gently in the breeze. The forest bordered the field on two sides, the thick, close-growing trees frightening, ominous, and all together, utterly exciting. Although

I technically lived in a small central Iowa town two hours away, I was raised in the forests and fields of my grandparents' farm.

My father and grandfather would set up the picnic table and the grill while my siblings and I played in the grass nearby. My aunts would arrive, often with their current boyfriends. (Throughout the years, I could never keep the boyfriends straight, they changed so often.)

Whenever my aunts arrived, I instinctively ran to meet them, my small legs seeming to fly across the ground, sending clods of dirt in all directions. My aunts were my idols, and to my naïve eyes, they seemed like goddesses from the legends of old, beautiful and perfect. I remember being awestruck, and I wanted to be just like them. I would follow them like a loyal puppy, bouncing along behind, trying to imitate their every move.

The arrival of my aunts always signaled the official beginning of our gatherings. The familiar scents of burning wood and succulent hamburgers sizzling on the grill filled my nose, and my stomach rumbled with a low, deep sound like distant thunder just before a summer storm.

The gatherings were always a time of good food and family. That field always offered feelings of happiness and security, that is, as long as the sun was up. Once the sun set and darkness took over, though, I would immediately become frightened, yet at the same time, excited. One night in particular sticks out in my mind.

It was a night like any other, warm and fragrant with the many scents of summer. My father and I had decided to camp in the field, just the two of us, and the imminent excursion greatly excited me. Growing up, I was always Daddy's little girl, so spending quality time with my father always appealed to me.

I remember we left after dinner, bidding farewell to my mother and grandparents before setting off down the road. My little body was a bundle of excitement, bouncing uncontrollably in the passenger seat during the entire duration of the short drive. Upon arriving, I waited impatiently for

my father to park. Finally, after what seemed an agonizingly long time to park a truck, I immediately flung open the door and leapt out, headed for the tent, already pitched, only a few feet from the forest's edge, its wide, cavernous mouth zipped up tight. A cone of small logs stood in the fire pit like the skeleton of some miniature teepee.

The night passed in a blur of games, stories, and overall, pure unadulterated happiness, a feeling I have not experienced in a long time since. After night fell, I lay stretched on a blanket near the warmth of the crackling fire as it cast its dull orange glow on my surroundings, causing the shadows to shy away from the unwelcome light. I watched the flames, twisting and dipping like tiny orange dancers while my father sat nearby, attempting to read a tattered copy of *Tom Sawyer* by the firelight.

“Dad?” I asked, my voice seeming unusually loud in the quiet night.

He looked up, setting the book aside.

“Will you tell me a scary story?”

He looked wary. He knew how easily I could get scared, but I persisted.

Finally, after a barrage of pretty pleases that battered his defenses, he relented. He spun a tale that caught my attention in an instant. He told of a race of wolf men roaming the forests in search of fresh victims to satisfy their unquenchable bloodlust. Walking upright like men, coarse inky-black fur covered their thickly muscled limbs and torsos. Traveling in packs, they communicated through ghostly howls. The last thing anyone unlucky enough to encounter these vicious beasts would see was a set of yellowed, dripping fangs, dagger-like claws, and beady red eyes that glowed like the fiery pits of Hell.

As my father told his tale, I sat as still as a stone, completely engrossed. The shadows danced eerily across his face in the glow of the fire. I remained completely motionless after he finished, allowing his words to sink in. For several seconds, nothing but the sound of the crickets broke the

silence, that is, until the coyote howled. At the sound, a scream tore from my throat, echoing off the trees. The hot tears seemed to scorch my skin as they rolled down my cheeks like drops of molten lead.

“I want to go home!” I cried as my small frame shook with fear and the force of my sobs.

No amount of comforting on my dad’s part could convince me to stay. I wanted my bed. I needed the warmth and security it provided. When I nestled beneath the covers, I felt nothing could hurt me.

Eventually, my father drove me home. The next day, in the warm morning light, I felt silly and childish for reacting the way I had. Silly, childish fears are always much less frightening after the sun has risen.

Looking back now, I regret not staying the whole night. I did not know it at the time, but the farm and the field would soon be gone. When my grandparents sold the farm, it ultimately symbolized the end of my childhood. To anyone else, that farm would seem like nothing more than a plot of land, but to me, it was home. It offered protection and happiness, my safe harbor in a world of danger and doubt. I have driven past the farm several times since it was sold, and every time I’m helpless to stop the tears that spill from my eyes. I miss it and always will. I know one thing for sure, that land will always hold a place in my heart.



Naomi Debaene

In this paper, I draw attention to the United States' lack in foreign language learning. It is written for parents and educators as well as those who may not understand the importance of learning a foreign language. I examine the current foreign language program in the United States and aspects used for cultural and linguistic education, including cultural and historical education, foreign language study in high school, and immersion elementary schools.

America Close the Gap: Implementing the Benefits of Foreign Languages

The United States is the largest English-speaking country in the world. This country, however, is linguistically, culturally, socially, and politically at a disadvantage because of a lack of foreign language learning. As journalist Lewis Beale states, "Other countries, often by mandate, require their children to learn English to supplement their native language. And some require a third language, affording their students a flexibility in the global job market that American students lack." Concerning foreign language, the American attitude and educational structure hinders the United States in today's global society. The effects of this disadvantage are lessened by the study of history and culture, in addition to the varying levels of foreign language that are presently taught in different grade levels of American schools. Studying history, cultures, and a smattering of foreign language can help to reduce the gap between the US and other countries, but the current system could be arranged to be more effective.

Foreign language teaching in the United States is not implemented effectively and not seen as important. In the United States, foreign languages are usually taught in middle and high school. Psychologist David G. Meyers writes, "The window for learning language is wide open in our early years, then after age 7 gradually closes." It can be seen that foreign language is taught in United States schools most commonly as the window is closing instead of taking advantage of the period of time it's open. As a result, students must try to balance many demands and subjects, and a foreign

language is often seen as an unnecessary burden. Even those interested in foreign languages have to weigh which classes are most important. STEM (Science, Math, Engineering, and Technology) are largely considered crucial for future success in life, so there is pressure to eliminate languages to concentrate on those.

Americans' negligence of foreign languages not only affects their linguistic abilities but also causes cultural, social and political problems. Beale describes this gap as a result of "geography and Americans' sense of cultural chauvinism." Many US citizens feel that because they speak English—the predominant business language used worldwide—they do not need to learn another language. This attitude contributes to a lack of emphasis on language learning and to other countries' negative perceptions of Americans. Studying another language can give a better understanding of another culture. Language and culture are tightly intertwined. Understanding someone else's culture can help to connect on a social level. People of any culture appreciate even the smallest effort in speaking their language; this shows a willingness to meet the other party in the middle and a recognition of the value of their culture. When my family lived in Bangalore, my mother made the effort to learn some of the local language, Kannada. When she would go to the market she would often try to communicate in Kannada; this often tickled the vendors that she would try to talk to them in their own language.

In a political sense, using another culture's language also shows a willingness and effort to reach out to other parties. A president, senator, or ambassador who cannot correctly pronounce the name of a country, much less those of its leaders, does not appear to know or care. Increased global awareness also provides a better base politically and shows less ethnocentrism and more cooperative spirit. Neglecting foreign language education inhibits the United States culturally, socially, and politically in addition to linguistically.

This disparity between the United States and other nations caused by lagging language learning can be improved. There are currently steps directed towards bridging this gap, including: cultural and historical education, foreign language learning in high school, and in some cases, immersion elementary schools. While all of these help, none is a holistic remedy to the problem.

Studying the history and culture of other nations can boost intercultural understanding and knowledge. A broad familiarity with global events and cultures makes a person more aware and well rounded. For example, basic historical knowledge brings to light the fact that Sunni and Shia Muslims have been divided for centuries. This knowledge leads to a better understanding of conflict that is going on today in Islamic countries. In the United States much of the history and culture taught is presented from the perspective of Western civilization and with a Western emphasis, which can skew the global depiction that one develops. Although studying history and culture is important for intercultural understanding, it cannot provide the depth of insight into another culture that learning the language can. Figures of speech, pronunciation, and speech patterns all give shape to a language and interactions in that language. Merely studying history and culture, although essential, does not supply the full scope of intercultural awareness that learning the language provides.

The option to learn an additional language in the United States is typically presented in high school. It is wonderful that students are given the opportunity to learn another language and its culture. My mother took four years of Spanish in high school, and although she does not use it in her work, she often will use basic Spanish to reach out to other people. Many colleges now require a minimum of two years of foreign language to graduate. UCLA, for example, requires two years of a foreign language and recommends three years. MIT and the University of Illinois also require two years of foreign language (Grove). This is beneficial since it spurs many students to pursue another language, even for a short period of time. Unfortunately, students often take the minimum amount of foreign language required and then forget what they learned. Learning a foreign language

becomes a chore, a box to check off. This effect is also caused by the fact that high school is when other subjects get very busy; students feel that because they will not major in the language it is a waste of time, that their time and effort should be spent in the direction of the career they will pursue. Not only does beginning to learn a language (which is often a completely different way of learning) add to an already full load, learning a language in high school misses the optimal time for language learning. Kuniyoshi L. Sakai, an associate professor at the University of Tokyo and a well-respected neuroscientist, notes, “L2 [second language] ability rarely becomes comparable to that of L1 [first language] if it is acquired beyond the hypothesized ‘sensitive period’ from early infancy until puberty (~12 years old). The notion of a sensitive period for language acquisition comes from the loss of flexibility for cerebral reorganization due to acquired aphasia after puberty.” This demonstrates the power of beginning language learning at a young age. Learning a language at any age is beneficial, but it is easier to attain near native fluency when a language is learned early on. This process is made more difficult at high school age because other demands increase and developmentally the brain is less flexible.

Foreign-language-immersion elementary schools are becoming a more popular choice for parents who want their children to learn another language. This can be beneficial because it catches the period where, as Meyers put it, the “window” is still open, where children can still hear the sounds and develop the majority of their language skills. These schools do not simply teach a few words or phrases in another language, they practice immersion. One French immersion school in New Wales, Australia combines French and English languages through team teaching. French and English teachers work together to build the curriculum, so there can be instruction in both languages (Harbon and Wiltshire). For some schools, this means that besides having class to learn the specified language, students study parts of each subject in the language. This type of study provides a better way to absorb the language; when surrounded by a language, learning another

language comes more naturally. An immersion program is an ideal start. However, where does it go from there? Many middle and high schools don't offer a foreign language until eighth or ninth grade. Language tutors, although beneficial, are not the same as taking a class or immersion program and can be costly. Foreign language immersion elementary schools are an optimal choice to help children learn another language, but there is a lack of infrastructure to support the students afterwards and the percentage attending such schools is small.

A more comprehensive solution would combine aspects of each previously discussed approach. Foreign language education would begin in elementary school to catch the open "window." In this way, learning the pronunciation and language form would come more easily. Early language learning also teaches *how* to learn a language, which requires different skills and practices compared to, for example, STEM courses. Some say that foreign language learning in elementary school would take away from time that should be spent on math and science, since our nation is already behind. However, research shows that foreign language learning can improve a student's proficiency in such subjects. Janice Hostler Stewart, who earned a Doctorate of Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, wrote in her dissertation, "Given the evidence, foreign language study in combination with a strong core curriculum in the elementary school may be the key to improved achievement in reading and math as well as to preparing our children to be successful participants in the global community." Classes studying history and culture would be included throughout a student's education to help foster broader horizons and better understanding of other cultures. This would combat the ignorance and "cultural chauvinism" that has become the stereotype of the United States. As students advance in school, time spent studying foreign languages could decrease, allowing for time demands of other classes to grow. Flexibility in programs would be necessary to help each student with academic goals. Students would be able, as they continue schooling, to discontinue study of the secondary language, pursue it to a greater

degree, or add an additional language. In this way, students can have a say in their own education and can also, if desired, continue to pursue other languages. Implementing foreign language learning in this manner would not only improve linguistics learning but would also expand American students' social, political, and cultural knowledge.

The United States, although a powerful nation that speaks the “business language” of the world, disadvantages itself linguistically, culturally, socially, and politically by not effectively teaching foreign languages. The current structure of foreign language teaching and the attitude it creates has flaws. Teaching history, culture, and foreign language education in high school help the United States, but current programs need improvement. A growing demand for early language education is an improvement in the effort to attain better secondary language skills. However, combining all elements of language, culture, and history in some form of immersion-like programs could help create a more holistic remedy to the problem.

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Nicholas Nelson

When I was in the sixth grade, a field trip to the Omaha Zoo was canceled, and my entire class was devastated. We wanted to see the animals! I now can see why the school wouldn't want to finance that entertainment with an educational façade. My intended readers are a mature audience who isn't distracted by their personal feelings for the zoo. I lay out the facts, and the audience can make of it what they will. I learned how writing a research paper is more of a process than any other style of writing, with research, organization, reorganization, and more research before the actual writing starts. And even then questions arise that prompt further research.

Official Monkey Business

Sociologists have recently begun diagnosing people with a newly recognized mental illness. Provoked by the urbanization and the exceedance of technology in the world, nature deficit syndrome creates more motivation for zoos, worldwide, to bring nature to the public and battle this new ailment (Wildlife Conservation Society 61). The resulting formation, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, has led to zoos infiltrating classes instead of classes visiting zoos. For over eight thousand students and six hundred teachers from fifteen different United States, several New England zoos cooperatively offer ninety-minute videoconferences. These conferences come with a full package of preparatory worksheets for the kids, before and after the ninety minutes. To help enhance the experience, zoos have even installed remote-controlled cameras within their exhibits (Wildlife Conservation Society 59). Meanwhile, chimpanzees are injuriously biting their own fingers because of their mental instability, and orcas are chipping their teeth, biting metal bars. Elephants, who typically traverse up to thirty miles in a day, are swaying back and forth in pens the size of a city block (Winders). And filmmakers can capably capture the essence of these same exotic animals in the wild. Does the educational value of zoos rectify forcing wildlife to suffer, or are zoos actually a glorified Alcatraz for animals? Visitors at zoos generally spend the most amount of time observing animated and infant animals (Jamieson 63), and these sightseers average less than three

minutes at each exhibit (Captive Animals' Protection Society 17). To attend exhibits in this fashion is to gain a superficial knowledge of the animals observed. Zoos cage animals for their lifetimes so that people can observe the animals for less than three minutes. Are the entertainment and education for people worth the price paid by the animals? Zoos portray themselves as being "on a greater mission than simple entertainment: for conservation [and] education" (Captive Animals' Protection Society 13). However, mismanagement misdirects the educational and conservational efforts of zoos, negating the experience for children, adults, and animals alike.

Full of energy and natural curiosity, children represent the stereotypical zoo attendee. Thus, zoos provide ideal field trip opportunities for schools. However, many schools are not exploiting the full utility of zoos, and a study performed by New Zealand researchers lays out steps that can be taken to maximize learning at the zoo for children. In the study, two New Zealand classes, observed closely by the researchers, each visited a different zoo on a field trip. The study was conducted in four stages. During the first stage, observers dissected how the classes prepared for the field trip. The classes actually attended the zoo in the second stage. For the third stage of the study, the observers from the first stage once again watched the classes until coverage of the trip finished; some of the kids were also interviewed about the trip during this stage. Lastly, the students were interviewed three months later to test for what knowledge they had retained. Ascension High, the first of the two schools from which the classes came, was a private, religious school, and the twelve-year-olds represented the youngest students in their building. Valley Primary, the other school, was a public school; the twelve-year-olds there represented the oldest students in their building (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 127).

In stage one of the study, researchers noted that Mrs. Antoinette (from Ascension High) taught with structure. Beginning with the day's agenda and ending with worksheet summaries, every day played out similarly. Visiting the zoo was intended to put a break in the daily routine, as a

reward for the students' hard work. Therefore, little was done to prepare the class for the zoo trip, and Mrs. Antoinette never offered a clear objective for the trip. She told researchers that she wanted the students to strive to learn something, and to try to learn something was what the students knew was expected from them. What they actually aspired to do, according to them, was to socialize and have fun (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 132). Mrs. Valentina (Valley Primary) taught oppositely from Mrs. Antoinette. Instead of being scripted every day, Mrs. Valentina's class was open for alteration. Class always began with a positive open group discussion, where no one was shamed and everyone was always encouraged to speak. With conscious effort, Mrs. Valentina focused on improving her students' comprehension and application of ideas. Memorization and recollection was not a process commonly found in her class (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 133). Mrs. Valentina's goal for the class trip was "to become aware about endangered animals and the types of things that contribute to their endangered status, to learn what people can do to help, and what organizations exist to help as well." With this goal in mind, she organized a two-week preparation for the zoo trip, and each student selected an endangered species to pay particular attention to. The field trip and preparation all tied into the course curriculum (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 134).

Starting with how the zoos prepared for the classes, researchers turned their attention from the classrooms to the actual field trips that the classes took. The zoo Ascension High attended put together some exhibits, lectures, and a four-page packet for the kids. The zoo touched on a broad range of conservational ideas, never focusing on one for long. After the lectures, the students were divided into groups of six (with an adult supervisor) to complete their packets. These groups were created to subdue misbehavior (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 132). In a setup similar to the Ascension High trip, the zoo for the Valley Primary class organized speeches, videos, and animal exhibits for the field trip, but these preparations deliberately were more closely catered to what the

kids had been focusing on in class. After lectures, the zoo guide provided an introduction to three animals before allowing the students to break off. Instead of divvying up the groups herself, Mrs. Valentina allowed the students to pick groups and explore the zoo without supervision. The students all found and investigated their respective animals, and after lunch, all were turned loose to explore the zoo simply to have fun (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 134).

After the zoo trip, the researchers sat in on classroom discussions to analyze how the teachers covered the field trips afterwards and what the kids thought about the trip. Mrs. Antoinette avoided spending much class time to reflect on the trip. The day after, she had students record two interesting facts they had learned from the zoo. No class discussion occurred, and their study on the solar system resumed (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 133). Many of the Ascension High kids claimed (to the researcher) that their favorite part was either the animals acting strangely or the bus ride to and from the zoo. The students also remembered some unique facts, like how many teeth a shark grows in its life (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 133). As for Mrs. Valentina, she spent over two weeks conducting in-depth class activities to review what was learned at the zoo. Her students compared their animals and conservational ideas through the creation of models and presentations (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 135).

Lastly, the researchers followed up on their research three months later, testing for retained knowledge. The Ascension High students failed to remember the interesting facts that they had offered the day after the trip (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 133). The Valley Primary students effortlessly recalled information about their specific animals and the conservational effects of zoos. Capable of backing themselves up with facts, the students also took sides on conservational ideas (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 135).

What information can be gleaned from the examples of Ascension and Valley? First, the environment of the classroom has the biggest effect on how much can be learned on a field trip to a

zoo. If teachers give specific goals to the students and encourage understanding and application as Mrs. Valentina did, then learning has a better chance of taking place. Also, preparing for the trip and reviewing it synergistically fulfill the opportunity for learning. Secondly, the social aspect of the zoo trips has a substantial effect on the learning that takes place. Unlike the Valley Primary kids, the Ascension High students remembered the bus ride more than the time spent at the zoo because the bus ride was when they were with their friends. Having been with friends during the trip, the Valley Primary kids spoke more with each other, exchanging ideas about their animals and having fun at the same time. Thirdly, when zoos collaborate with teachers to deliver curriculum-related material, students pay more attention and learn more from the zoo educators (Davidson, Passmore, and Anderson 135). More positively aligned with the three biggest impacts on learning, Mrs. Valentina's trip to the zoo fostered greater learning than Mrs. Antoinette's.

Another study from Bernburg, Germany, provokes some additional ideas in reaching the full potential of zoo visits. Unlike the New Zealand study, however, the Bernburg one is centered more on the zoo trip than the classroom preparation and review. In the study, a zoo used three different vertebrate animals (a Vervet monkey, chameleon, and Mallard duck) to test the learning of sixth grade classes visiting a zoo. Researchers analyzed four different types of visits. To create a control group, one class wandered the zoo without instruction or a guide. Independent learning was the task of this group. The second group toured the zoo with the guidance of a zoo employee, who discussed each of the three animals. Groups three and four were each split into three smaller quartets. Each of these two groups sent one quartet to each animal. After the third group learned about the three species by themselves, they spoke of their discoveries with a zoo employee driving the discussion. Unlike the third group, group four had no help from a mediator during their discussion. Pre-tests, post-tests, and retention tests were administered to respectively record knowledge prior to, immediately after, and six weeks after the zoo visit. Additionally, groups three

and four took group tests before discussing their findings to test for the accuracy of their information before sharing with the others (Randler, Kummer, and Wilhelm 386).

Similar to the New Zealand study, the results of the Bernburg study highlighted some common themes. First, members of group two, who took the guided tour, scored highest on the post-test, and second, group three, whose discussion was lead by a zoo employee, scored highest on the retention test. The researchers also noted that learning was exceptionally higher when zoos and schools collaborated and when kids excelled at cooperating with each other (Randler, Kummer, and Wilhelm 388). These results coincide well with the results of the New Zealand study. Well-rehearsed for classroom discussions, Mrs. Valentina's students excelled on the retention test, just as the Bernburg study suggests they would. Also, since Mrs. Valentina reviewed the zoo visit for several days after (similar to group three of Bernburg), her students were easily able to recall the information three months later. Partially as a result of not preparing with the zoo prior to their visit, the Ascension High students did not apprehend much from their trip.

School field trips to zoos must be well managed in order to capitalize on the learning potential for students. However, do zoos still hold educational value for adults as well? To analyze adult learning in zoos, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) conducted a study. The lead researcher, John Falk, designed the study using the results of three previous research efforts conducted by him. Thus, his study largely represents his own well-developed opinions and interpretations. Investigating on behalf of the AZA, Falk used his formerly crafted idea called "personal context of learning." The personal context of each zoo visitor contains four subdivisions: prior knowledge, experience, interest, and motivation. Understanding the occurrence of learning in zoos only required the examination of prior knowledge and motivation. Falk believes there are five motivations for zoo-goers. First are the explorers, who, like the Ascension High kids, open up to all kinds of knowledge. The facilitators represent the more responsible leaders who guide others to

knowledge. Hobbyists, similar to Valley Primary students, see their learning environment as attached to their passion or line of work. Fourth, experience seekers wish to undergo something just to say they have done it. Lastly and less commonly, spiritual pilgrims search for tranquility in their learning (Falk et al. 7). Falk's goal was to tie zoo visitors' motivations with how much they learned. Therefore, researchers identified those motivations before visitors entered the zoo by having them fill out a comprehensive questionnaire (Falk et al. 8). After their visits, visitors performed three tasks for researchers, beginning with a tracking report. Visitors pointed out where they had explored and why they had explored there (Falk et al. 9). After filling out the tracking report, participants completed a cognitive measurement of ten questions, based on information zoos felt visitors should learn. Before leaving the zoo, visitors finished by answering three questions regarding conservation, how they can impact it, and what zoos do to promote it (Falk et al. 8). Seven to eleven months later, researchers sent out emails and made phone calls to test for knowledge retained over time (Falk et al. 9).

Backed by 1,862 results, the AZA's study carries weighty proof that zoos have little educational value for adults (Falk et al. 8). Only ten percent of visitors showed a significant increase in immediate knowledge, and merely forty-two percent of visitors believed that zoos educate (Falk et al. 9). The long-term knowledge retention tests constructed a clearer depiction of the ineffectiveness of zoos in educating adults. Forty-two percent of participants remembered a specific characteristic of an animal or species. This group of people who remembered minute details compares well with the Ascension High students, whose knowledge was superficial. Also, Falk claims that sixty-one percent of zoo visitors retained comprehensive knowledge (Falk et al. 11). However, he furtively noted that this percent includes what visitors knew prior to the trip to the zoo, and naturally, that prior knowledge makes up for a healthy portion of the sixty-one percent, skewing the percentage of adults who actually retained knowledge from the visit.

Despite making an honest effort, zoos fail to harbor learning for children and adults. Zoos also attempt to create a homey environment for their animals, with conservation in mind. Proud of its endeavor to relate zoo exhibits to natural habitats, the Philadelphia Zoo gladly shared why animals belong in its captivity. In an essay summarizing its workings, the Philadelphia Zoo proclaims that they hold two full-time vets and one full-time nutritionist. The zoo has also organized psychology and training programs to enhance the lives of their animals (Philadelphia Zoo 18). However, the programs nearly turn the conservational efforts, which they are meant to support, into domestication. For example, gorillas are trained to open their mouths wide for tooth inspection at cues from their handlers, and penguins step on scales at simple commands (Philadelphia Zoo 22). The zoo also attempts to offer variety in the mundane lives of the animals; to do so, the zoo simply changes the toys, food, furniture, decoration, and scents in the animals' cages (Philadelphia Zoo 20). For the predators, handlers disperse food in various places. Sometimes it is in the grass; other times it is in the haystack. If the tiger is having a really lucky day, he will find his food in a cardboard box (Philadelphia Zoo 22). That kind of variety does not compare to the reality of nature, no matter how the Philadelphia Zoo embellishes its report.

Due to its location in a large metropolitan area, the Philadelphia Zoo probably receives much better funding than most of the other ten thousand zoos, worldwide, which condemn several hundreds of thousands of animals to their subpar "psychology programs" (Captive Animals' Protection Society 12). To better understand the psychological impact that zoos have on animals, Oxford University studied the sizes of zoos and behaviors of the animals within. In Great Britain, the average animal cage is one-tenth the size of the natural habitat for that animal. Lions and other big cats have, on average, one eighteen-thousandth of the range they normally roam. Locked in cages one-millionth the proper size, polar bears suffer the greatest claustrophobia (Captive Animals' Protection Society 14).

How do these restraints affect the psychological health of the animals? Eighty percent of animals in zoos show stereotypical behaviors, signs of mental instability (Captive Animals' Protection Society 15). Caused by frustration and boredom, stereotypical behaviors are excessive and redundant behaviors like swaying and pacing. Oxford University found that lions spend forty-eight percent of their time pacing their cages, and elephants exhibit stereotypical behavior forty percent of the time. Even gorillas have been seen ingesting their own vomit. Dian Fossey, a gorilla biologist claimed that she has "never seen a wild gorilla vomit" (Captive Animals' Protection Society 13). Yet, gorillas in zoos are eating their own puke, and zoo handlers, who work for the zoos that claim to support conservation and education, are drugging them with antidepressants to subdue the problem.

At the expense of children, adults, and animals, zoos fail to perform the educational and conservational functions that they claim to. Many students experience zoos through their schools via field trips. Often offered as rewards, these school field trips do not promote learning so much as entertainment. The example set by Valley Primary and Mrs. Valentina should be followed by other schools. Before and after a zoo trip, classes should spend a week covering animals and conservation. Also, priority should be put on peer learning so that students can effectively exchange information with each other. As for adults, they have more freedom and less an obligation to learn, but zoos should encourage them to take guided tours of the zoo. Touring the zoo instead of wandering it might help adults to learn about some conservational ideas. Lastly, zoos could truly promote conservation by locking in animals that can be afforded their natural range. Locking bears and lions into pens the size of a city block does not support conservation, and no conservational effort should consist of dolphins committing suicide by ramming their heads into cement walls (Winders). Until improvements are made within their walls, zoos can hardly claim to support education and conservation.

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Elizabeth Latessa

My purpose is to emphasize how significant the cultural context is while examining this story. I want readers to look beyond the infamous blood transfusion scene and see the true underlying horror and why it deeply resonated in Victorian society. The audience includes readers of “The Lifted Veil,” as well as those interested in the Victorian era and science fiction. I learned how important it is to form my own opinion but be able to find evidence to support my reasoning. I also learned how to dissect the work, identify symbols throughout, figure out what they mean, how they connect and build together, and what significance they add to the piece.

Living Vicariously Through Latimer: A Taste of the Poisonous Victorian Society

In 1859, George Eliot affected the gothic genre significantly. “The Lifted Veil” is an eloquent representation of nineteenth-century culture, and the protagonist parallels Eliot herself. The historical and cultural impact is noteworthy. The story reflects many different aspects of social and economic culture from that time, including cultural restraints and stereotypes of women, and stereotypes of men as well. Various medical and contemporary scientific beliefs and values are included in different parts of the story that were associated with controversial medical practices. Strong cultural symbolic meaning takes form as both protagonist and antagonist. Eliot cleverly manipulates contradictory cultural perceptions and anxieties to create a brilliant piece of gothic literature.

Latimer is a personification of Eliot’s position and feelings as an author and woman in the nineteenth-century. His clairvoyance is symbolic of the role of an author, meaning he has previsions and the ability to hear the thoughts of those around him, which reflects his position as an author to see yet-to-come events in the story. Although Latimer’s abilities may be considered a gift, he resents his extra-sensory perception and eventually tries to suppress it. Latimer’s choice not to share his secret, his gift, with anyone else is similar to Eliot’s decision to publish this story anonymously as well as write under a male pseudonym. The title “The Lifted Veil” is ironic, because although he

eventually tapped into Bertha's thoughts and figuratively saw behind her veil, Latimer's clairvoyance remained secret, so he did not ever lift his veil to the surrounding world. Latimer described himself as having feminine features physically and psychologically, so although Latimer is male he appears to represent more of a female character: "my fragile, nervous, intellectual self." The association with femininity and his negative perspective on having a poetic mind demonstrates constraints on women, as well as their feelings, during that time (Gilbert and Gubar 390). Both the author and protagonist's visions of the inescapable future coincide with women's feeling of entrapment in a grim lifestyle that was often forced upon them. Even if women had artistic talent, it was still difficult to become independently successful enough as a literary figure, to avoid a dull domestic life, which was the fate of most women. In this way, Latimer did not try to fight his future with Bertha, rather he accepted and continued to pursue her, despite the dreadful outcome (Gilbert and Gubar 390).

While the social perceptions of women are revealed in "The Lifted Veil," stereotypes of men in nineteenth-century culture are a part of the story as well. Latimer describes himself as fragile with a half-womanish physique (Eliot 995). Latimer also mentions several times that he has a sensitive and poetic nature, which places a stigma on him. The way he feels that these elements are shortcomings shows that sensitive qualities associated with women were not highly respectable. The ideal men presented are Latimer's brother Alfred and his father. Both men appear to be brave, confident, and masculine, which were vital traits associated with manhood. The stereotype of men only being tempted and seduced because of a woman's actions occurs as Latimer blames his infatuation with Bertha on her behavior. Latimer expresses feeling repulsed by having to hear the arrogance and ignorance of other men's egotistical thoughts. The paradoxical element of Latimer's personality is that he exhibits egotism and ignorance as well. He previews his future with Bertha and still pursues marriage with her. "Clairvoyance brings him consciousness of nothing except isolation,

distance, impotence, the egoism of his family, the pettiness of his friends, the repetition he is destined to endure” (Gilbert and Gubar 406). In the nineteenth-century, as well as throughout history, common personality characteristics associated with men include arrogance, egotism, and hypocrisy, which are a central theme in Latimer’s story, and are partially to blame for his downfall.

Aside from reflecting cultural restraints on women, overgeneralizations about women’s nature in contemporary society are present in this tale; the antagonist is analogous to Victorian perceptions of women. The antagonist Bertha is an attractive, cold, and manipulative temptress that toys with the emotions of both Latimer and his brother Alfred. She has all of the qualities of the villainous, scheming, seductress that appears in many literary pieces throughout history. Bertha at one point wears a serpent pendant, which has multiple significant symbolic meanings reflecting Victorian culture. Associating Bertha with a serpent coincides with the tale of Adam and Eve, and the serpent that was allegedly the devil in disguise. Another important symbol the serpent represents is poison, which resonates in society. Due to poison becoming inexpensive and easy to administer, poison deaths increased greatly in the nineteenth-century, and media announced a poison epidemic (Price 204). Women came to be associated with poison because it was easy obtain and maneuver, and fit with the stereotype of deceiving, secretive women. Poisoning became a popular form of domestic violence and murder, and because of its secretive nature, poison became a Victorian symbol of domestic deception (Price 203). Poison is a motif through the duration of the story, as Latimer employs it to describe the effect Bertha has on him, or situations relating to her. “The fear of poison is feeble against the sense of thirst” (Eliot 999). Although men feared women, and what they were capable of, they still engaged in relationships with them, as Latimer did with Bertha. Poison appears multiple times to hint of the impending outcome for Latimer, which the revived housekeeper foils: Bertha intended to poison him. The gruesome scene symbolizes the ultimate domestic fear in the nineteenth-century.

In addition to symbolizing Eliot, as well as common stereotypes, “The Lifted Veil” contains key aspects of contemporary medical science, which proves another way Victorian culture affected the novella. In the nineteenth-century, mesmerism was a growing medical practice, along with many the way Victorians believed that the mind and body worked inseparably with one another (Flint 457). Eliot took interest in the work of William Gregory, who wrote a book about mesmerism and clairvoyance, and continued to pursue research on those subjects (Flint 461). There are strong implications throughout the story of the interest in connections between mental and physical health that contemporary society valued. “Our impulses, our spiritual activities, no more adjust themselves to the idea of their future nullity, than the beating of our heart, or the irritability of our muscles” (Eliot 1005). Latimer’s comparison of body parts with psychological functions is an important motif in the story. From the perspective that physiological health and psychological health depend on one another, Latimer’s deteriorating health in the end results from his constant negativity and self-loathing. Rather than embracing his gift, he chooses to have a pessimistic worldview and eventually isolates himself from most of society. Latimer’s bitter despondency destroys his health and ultimately is the death of him. His inner negativity and hostility was the true poison that eradicates him.

The captivating “The Lifted Veil” is a terrifying symbolic tale of the Victorian era, in which George Eliot inserts herself into the story through the protagonist Latimer. She emphasizes her role in seeing the future and thoughts of the surrounding characters. Latimer’s life not only mirrors Eliot herself, but also emphasizes anxieties and cultural limitations for women. Contemporary culture has a huge impact on the entire story. The antagonist Bertha embodies the classic stereotype of a cold, deceiving villain that brings men pain and misfortune. Using poison as a motif affiliated with Bertha and Latimer, Eliot depicts the ultimate Victorian domestic fear. Besides symbolically representing different roles and perceptions of women, ironic stereotypes of men also have representation.

Latimer's clairvoyance not only symbolizes Eliot as the author, but also coincides with contemporary medical science practices and beliefs. Many Victorians believed the mind and body's health were intrinsically connected (Flint 457). Eliot demonstrates the mind-body dualism idea through Latimer; his ultimate downfall is his inability to empathize with others, which is ironic, as much of the story is, since he does have the ability to hear thoughts of others. Latimer's pessimism and repression are his true poison.

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