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## Reader, Writer, Learner, and Teacher: Portfolio Reflections

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FINAL M.A. PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

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teaching

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Dr. Lee Nickoson, First Reader

Dr. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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## Reader, Writer, Learner, and Teacher: Portfolio Reflections

As I walked across Wittenberg University's stage in 2011, I felt immense loss. I lamented that I would no longer live with the friends who had enriched the past four years of my life. I regretted that I would say goodbye to professors who had challenged my thinking, both as a student and as an individual. And, of course, I felt anxiety about entering the competitive 2011 job market.

Even more so, however, I feared that I had forever sloughed a role in my life: that of the student. I had to rid myself of this label at the most inopportune time. In the last two years of college, I had just become *excited* about learning. While I found myself motivated by the grade in high school and burdened by the work in my early college, I had begun to see the value in my coursework. I understood that I did not just have to read Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Self-Reliance*; I could be changed by it and learn to revere my own individuality. I no longer read Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* to perform well on a quiz; I read it so I could absorb Dr. Hinson's lectures and add commentary of my own. I ended college at a time when I wished I had started it — when I had matured and realized how much education could expose me to the world and build my own sense of self.

After I graduated, I navigated the initial teaching challenges and joys, but I still missed my role as a student. I longed for the ideal time in my career and for the financial stability to reassume that role. I wanted to be in a program where I could tackle and discuss complex texts with other learners who questioned, reflected, and analyzed, making astute connections between literature and the world. I could not wait to gain tools, ideas, and pedagogy that would enliven my classroom instruction. After four years of teaching, that time arrived: I enrolled in BGSU's M.A. in English, specializing in teaching. This program has helped me to become a more critical

reader, writer, learner, and teacher. For my final portfolio, I have selected four pieces that highlight how I have academically expanded while in this program. These pieces reflect my work as a writer, storyteller, researcher, analyzer, and reviser.

For the first portfolio piece, I selected my analysis from the first literature-based class I enrolled in post-undergrad. This task required me to understand the implications of a historical period and then connect these with a fictional text. I wrote “Victorian Spitfires: Female Characters Who Suffer Because of Their Deviance” for English 6800: British Women Writers, taught by Dr. Piya Lapinski. Our class read the works of Jane Austen, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Elizabeth Gaskell. After learning about Victorian England, I began to identify female characters who challenged their expected roles, and a pattern emerged: these women were unsuccessful and literally or figuratively punished. I crafted an analytical piece that worked to prove my claim and explain its significance.

After revisiting the paper, I recognized that while my analysis was coherent, my goal was too ambitious. I had tried to incorporate too many texts: Elizabeth Gaskell’s “The Grey Woman,” “The Poor Clare,” and “The Old Nurse’s Story,” and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*. I had analyzed seven female characters, two female authors, and over 600 pages of text. Because I tried to incorporate too much, parts of my paper felt too “quick,” with just over three pages of the paper devoted to Braddon’s 400-page text. My decision to focus my analysis on Gaskell’s stories was, therefore, the easiest and most logical aspect of revising the paper. After making this decision, the more challenging work followed. In fact, this paper required the most from me in terms of revision.

Next, I knew I needed to tighten my original thesis and framework for the paper. My initial thesis argued that Victorian women, unlike men, were unable to break feminine

expectations without consequences. I realized, however, that what I wanted to prove in my paper was more complex: Victorian women who felt uneasy with their roles could not win. They felt trapped when they attempted to fulfill them but suffered when they sought out more; by the end of their lives, these Victorian women were forced, one way or another, to play the parts designated for them. When I tweaked my thesis and reread my paper, I found strong evidence, but I failed to reiterate this purpose for my reader; therefore, I drafted a framework to bolster my purpose: I set up my main argument, detailed the differences between the gender roles, explained the role of motherhood in Victorian England, provided the reader with brief biographical information about Gaskell, and then analyzed each piece. Certain sections in the initial draft were shifted to cohere to this framework, and I consulted two additional pieces for necessary information. I follow a similar structure in my analysis of each piece. It should now be clear that in each of Gaskell's selected choices, her female characters: 1) do not possess traditional Victorian traits for a female, 2) attempt to break out of their "sphere," 3) suffer for their deviance, and 4) are eventually forced back into their feminine roles.

Finally, as I restructured, I noted that some sources and points no longer felt relevant to the purpose. For instance, near the end of the paper, I included sources that examined the characters' relationships (or lack thereof) with their fathers. This section felt clumsy, irrelevant, and distracting. I accepted that this section of my paper did not connect to my argument and removed it.

Writing and revising this specific selection has enabled me to both chisel my analytical abilities and to speak more comfortably about the practice of revision with my students. Before submitting the final draft of the paper, I had spent many hours researching, rereading, drafting, and revising. I turned in a paper that reflected complete effort. Nonetheless, when I returned to

the paper two years later, I discovered significant flaws. I had to cut, rearrange and, in some places, add. I spent time redefining my goals. As a teacher, I want my students to gain the same understandings: You can still revise a strong, thoughtful paper, and to successfully revise, you must be willing to let go of some pieces and reorganize others. Finally, I learned something new about revision that could be beneficial for students. I rarely give a paper time to “breathe” before revisiting it, and my students do not often have this luxury either. After two years, I brought a fresh perspective to revision and more objectively assessed my own work.

For my second portfolio selection, I chose a piece that required significant research and analysis; it is also the analytical paper for which I am the most proud. “Explorations of Alcohol Abuse: Paula Hawkins’ *Girl on the Train* and Flynn Berry’s *Under the Harrow*” was written for English 6800: *Haunted Women*, also taught by Dr. Piya Lapinski. For this course, we watched a couple of Alfred Hitchcock’s films and *The Black Swan*, and we read the novels *Girl on the Train* and *Under the Harrow*. The drinking habits of the young women in *Girl on the Train*, *Under the Harrow*, and *The Black Swan* struck me, and I wished to explore their motivations for alcohol abuse. Ultimately, I decided to focus on the two texts. Coincidentally, around the same time, I was reading Brené Brown’s *The Gifts of Imperfection*; her description of shame related to a couple of the female characters. I felt invigorated by the connection and was inspired to conduct more research.

During revision, I again worked to pinpoint my main goal and narrow my thesis. My initial thesis argued that both authors explore the motivations and stigmas surrounding alcohol abuse and misuse. However, I also focused on how the characters face challenging circumstances because they are females, so I incorporated this into the introduction, reiterating the point often throughout revision. Additionally, I examined new sources that reinforced my argument. I found

an additional Brené Brown source that allowed me to extrapolate the consequences of having a negative body image; this source bolstered my argument that Rachel suffers because of her how she feels about her body. Finally, Dr. Lapinski directed me to Kristi Coulter's article "Giving Up Alcohol Opened My Eyes to the Infuriating Truth About Why Women Drink." The author's perspective in this article revealed further motivations for Nora Lawrence's alcohol abuse; a few of Coulter's quotes actually feel like they were intended to describe Nora, though they were not.

Writing and revising this paper felt like a gift, for it reminded me of the importance of literature: literature represents aspects of people who live in the real world. While I had been reading *The Gifts of Imperfection* purely for enjoyment, the patterns that Brown describes hold true for Hawkins' and Berry's fictional characters. Unsurprisingly, my research about alcohol abuse and related stigmas were also apparent within the texts. When I analyzed and researched for this paper, my analysis felt important because I better understood a piece of the world through it. While I have always enjoyed reading, revisiting the paper has helped me to better understand *why*: reading allows us glimpses into the lives and situations of others.

My third portfolio piece is pedagogical and research-based, exploring more effective teaching practices for research. I constructed "Refreshing Alternatives: Reviving Research in the Classroom" for English 6200: Teaching Writing, taught by Dr. Lee Nickoson. I enrolled in this course after my fifth year of teaching. Up to that point, I had primarily incorporated traditional research practices into my instruction, so an extract in *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* titled "Researched Writing" compelled me. The piece discusses the traditional research paper and describes its flaws, noting that students oftentimes plagiarize and fail to understand effective research practices after completing it. After reading "Researched Writing," I decided that I wanted to further explore the issues associated with the research paper and learn how to provide

my students with more meaningful research practice. I decided on the format of the annotated bibliography, for it allowed me the opportunity to explore several sources.

When I revised the annotated bibliography, I did so for relevance. I created the piece in 2016, and my course load has slightly changed since then. The first revision was easy: I updated my introduction to the piece, describing this upcoming year's teaching circumstances. Then, I moved on to the bibliography itself. Initially, I wrote two paragraphs for each source: the first highlighted the source's main ideas and recommendations, and the second described which ideas I would be most likely to try in my own classes. I entirely revised the second section of most of the sources by focusing on the upcoming year. After removing reflections and options that would not be possible for the 2018-2019 school year, I detailed scenarios that would be viable. Finally, I discovered two additional sources with ideas that I appreciated, so I added these.

After revisiting the annotated bibliography, I know that my teaching practice has expanded in terms of research; in my revised version, I note suggestions that I have now tried with my sophomore and AP classes. However, I also revisited sources that included admirable ideas that I have not incorporated. Revising the bibliography reminds me that teachers who read, study, research, and explore will always be able to invigorate their classes.

Finally, we arrive at the last piece of my portfolio: a narrative about my literacy development. Writing and revising it has brought me the most joy of any work in the program; it has reminded me that I am a *writer*. I wrote "My Hibernating Imagination: My Journey as a Writer" for English 6040: Graduate Writing, also taught by Dr. Lee Nickoson. For the first time in many years, I infused my writing with rich, personal voice and shared anecdotes about my own life and experiences.

When I revised the narrative, I crafted a new purpose, based on a comment Dr. Nickoson provided me. In many ways, my writing life parallels my actual life; I stopped writing creatively at the same time that I stopped playing imaginatively, transitioning from childhood to adulthood. I revised the piece around this central idea, strengthening the narrative's beginning, adding details and commentary to the body, and altering the conclusion. While I originally only included several stories about my writing journey, I now also include several short anecdotes from my childhood in order to better support the overall message. Additionally, since I am now trying to reignite that creative spark through a course on writing fiction, I developed a section that more accurately reflects where I currently am in my literacy development. Being able to add this section teaches me that as a learner and a writer, it is never too late to grow or to gain what you have lost.

Writing and revising this piece reminds me of the joy of narrative and creative writing. I included this piece not only because I had fun writing it, but because I believe that narrative writing serves a purpose. In high school and college, I rarely wrote narrative or creative pieces for class; I need balance in my writing life, and so do my students.

As I prepare again to walk across a stage, I feel differently than I did in 2011 at Wittenberg University. Instead of mourning what will be lost, I celebrate what was discovered. This portfolio represents not only my learning, but what I most love about the subject of English: its versatility. I can write a formal academic piece, but I can also write a narrative and infuse it with humor and joy. I can read a novel about people living in different time period and on a different continent, but I can still recognize them: they are familiar. And I can always grow: as a writer, through revision; as a teacher, through research and reflection.

As I reflect back on my program, I realize my instructors and classes have afforded me with all of these opportunities. I have read short stories, novels, and articles. I've researched best educational practices. I've written formal analytical research papers and personal narratives. Because of this program, I have grown as a reader, writer, learner, teacher, and person: I hope my portfolio reflects just that.

### Victorian Spitfires: Female Characters Who Suffer Because of Their Deviance

In Victorian England, a time that spanned from 1837 to 1901, women were tasked with the responsibility of managing the “domestic sphere” (Abrams). To properly fulfill this role, they were expected not only to successfully manage their responsibilities, but also to possess desirable traits; the ideal and virtuous woman would be “pi[ous], pur[e], submissive, and domestic” (“The Emergence of ‘Women’s Sphere’”). These peacemaking women were considered to possess strengthened morality, and they protected their integrity by not involving themselves in masculine pursuits outside of the home. Victorian writer, wife, and mother Elizabeth Gaskell, who lived from 1810 to 1865, crafted stories such as “The Grey Woman,” “The Poor Clare,” and “The Old Nurse’s Story” (Easson 2-4). These stories include characters who break traditional gender norms, exploring the possible ramifications for such transgressions. Her female characters either feel discomfort in their roles as wives and mothers or fail to remain submissive and innocent, instead flexing dominance. Though these fictional women suffer when they abide by Victorian gender expectations, they are punished when they push the boundaries and fail to conform to feminine expectations.

The term “separate spheres” was coined to describe the different roles of men and women in the Victorian era (Hughes). An increased number of men, who were associated with superior physical and intellectual strength, pursued work outside of the home (Davidoff 89). They participated in “commerce, professional life, and politics,” all endeavors which were considered to have a corrupting influence (Gorham 4). Since men were more likely to be outside of the home, “morally superior” women were left to commandeer the domestic. They completed household responsibilities, sometimes assisting the contributions of servants (Hughes). They modeled Queen Victoria, who embodied these traditional female roles, and were expected to

create homes that were welcoming “renewal[s] for men” (Abrams; Gorham 4). The ideal Victorian woman would not only perform her responsibilities successfully, but she would enjoy these obligations, be “self-sacrificing,” and actually “have a preference for a life constricted to the confines of the home” (Gorham 4). She would gladly extend herself for her husband’s comfort, working as the “Angel in the House” to offset the immoralities of the typical male’s “sphere” (Gorham 5; Hughes).

While women found “respectability” in caring for their husbands and homes, the revered Victorian duty for females was motherhood. Victorian society viewed motherhood as the ultimate means to fulfillment, and married women were expected to have children, as motherhood would provide them with “sufficient emotional fulfillment” and could serve as an “affirmation of [their identities].” Women who were single and not married were to be pitied (Abrams). The typical (and perhaps ideal) female of the time was a married woman who had birthed children and then worked to create a nurturing, supportive space in the home for her husband and offspring.

Ironically, Elizabeth Gaskell herself seemed content in the domestic sphere, for which feminists have criticized her (Davis 515). Gaskell became a married woman in 1832 and soon after, had children (Easson 4). By all accounts, Gaskell seemed to relish motherhood — the loftiest of Victorian aims for a female — and doted on her four surviving children; rather than defy Victorian expectations for females (such as Jane Austen and George Eliot, women who “created art instead of babies”), Gaskell savored her relationship with her children (Davis 514). Additionally, she made her home a “vital centre” and happily hosted visitors (Easson 4). Though Gaskell did not overtly defy the “woman’s sphere,” she did enjoy independence in her later life and made some financial decisions on her own (Weiss 285). And, though she in some ways

abided by Victorian notions, she did expand her own role as a female; unlike the average Victorian woman, Gaskell's writing circulated outside of the home — she was able to find “meaningful work” that was not solely connected with the domestic.

The ideal Victorian woman, and perhaps even Gaskell herself, was maternal, moralistic, and subservient, happily fulfilling her domestic obligations; however, many of Gaskell's characters find themselves unsatisfied with their roles and devastated by the penalty for not playing their parts. Gaskell, who was deemed “open” and “ready to meet those whose ideas and experience were very different than her own,” uses her writing to examine women who feel tortured by Victorian expectations (Easson 12-13). These fictional characters serve as examples of women who, in one way or another, are unable to fit the traditional Victorian mold. Through her fiction, Gaskell predicts how Victorian society would respond to such defiance, painting Victorian society as unforgiving towards women who are unable to assent to the “woman's sphere.” A prominent example of such a character emerges in her piece “The Grey Woman.”

Anna, the narrator and character of focus in “The Grey Woman,” resists marriage, even one deemed desirable, thus distancing herself from the ideal woman. Although the single, motherless Victorian woman would have been pitied, Anna shows no desire to rush her nuptials. While visiting her friend Sophie, she meets a Frenchman by the name of Monsieur de la Tourelle. When he, a wealthy “proprietaire” with a “large income” initially conveys interest in Anna, she becomes uncomfortable by his advances, feeling smothered by his “affected softness....and the exaggerated compliments he [pays her]” (“The Grey Woman” 295-296). She notes that she “never [feels] quite at ease with him” and is instead “frightened.... by the excess of his demonstrations of love” (“The Grey Woman” 296). While a woman would be expected to relish Monsieur de la Tourelle's advances and welcome a possible marriage, Anna experiences

discomfort by his initial interest and utter horror when she realizes she will marry him. When she learns of Monsieur de la Tourelle's intent to marry her, she "[hangs] her head" rather than celebrate ("The Grey Woman" 297). The words that she employs to describe the Frenchman may also expand to her general circumstances; Anna may feel "smothered," "never...at ease," and "frightened" by constraints placed on her as a female. She would rather live with her father or socialize with her companion Sophie than become a wife.

Those who surround Anna highlight how unique Anna's reaction is for the time, either by dismissing her or by chastising her for her reluctance. They represent society's general intolerance for Anna's deviation from the norm and its desire for women like Anna to accept the feminine mold. The first character to condemn is Madame Rupprecht. After Madame Rupprecht meets Monsieur de la Tourelle and learns of his status, Anna notes that her host, Madame Rupprecht, "never seemed to think I could refuse him after this account of his wealth" ("The Grey Woman" 296). Rather than ask Anna how she feels about the man, she celebrates, assuming that no one would dare to consider such a match less than a victory. When Madame Rupprecht informs Anna that Monsieur de la Tourelle plans to marry her, Anna describes her "astonishment" and objects to Madame Rupprecht, who in turn becomes "stern" and "offended," forcing Anna to "silently consent" ("The Grey Woman" 297). Madame Rupprecht, a cold woman who Anna hardly knows, feels unafraid to give Anna input on her relationship or express disgust when Anna expresses reservations. Like society as a whole, she is quick to judge and hold the pervasive belief that young women should quickly seek out a successful marriage. She becomes offended because she believes she has aided Anna by assisting in their union — only to then receive objections. Anna cannot depend on fellow women, for they, too, have adopted the Victorian mindset.

Even Anna's father, who clearly dislikes Monsieur de la Tourelle, will not support Anna's resistance. While women in the feminine sphere were expected to be subservient, and even childlike, Anna attempts to speak for herself, only to be deemed too incompetent to do so (Gorham 6). When Anna seeks her father's help, she can tell that he views her as a "silly girl who [does] not know her own mind" ("The Grey Woman" 298). Her father — her family — refuses to embrace a unique statement of independence made by a young woman. Instead, he feels "more than satisfied" by the "money arrangements" ("The Grey Woman" 298). After Anna marries, it becomes clear that Monsieur de la Tourelle expects for her to cease her relationship with her father. Her father witnesses her angst and offers some comfort, even feeling some sorrow for Anna's predicament. He, however, cannot save Anna from her wifely expectations and resigns himself to the fact that they are "of different kinds of life" ("The Grey Woman" 299).

Anna's resistance extends beyond just marriage. When she moves in to Monsieur de la Tourelle's residence, her role in the domestic sphere smothers her. To be an ideal wife, Anna would be expected to be submissively relish her domestic role, but she once again resists and believes her "heart [will] break with the sense of desolation" that she encounters after her marriage, living in her new home ("The Grey Woman" 297-299). Each aspect of the domestic setting works to accentuate Anna's sense of loneliness and contrasts her discontent with the luxury that surrounds her. Elements of Anna's living situation might appeal to other young women, as Monsieur de la Tourelle assures her that he will provide her with living arrangements as "luxurious as [her] heart could wish": Anna has her own apartment, with many servants to wait on her, including one that ends up specifically being hired for her ("The Grey Woman" 300). Additionally, little seems to be required of her, and she may pass each day in leisure. However, though the setting promises luxury, it also hyperbolizes Anna's solitude. Her

apartment remains separate from the rest of the building and, in some parts, she is unable to even “hear a sound from the other parts of the house” (“The Grey Woman” 301). She cannot connect with the original servants, who act in a cold manner toward her, and her husband often leaves for days at a time. Anna despises her new life — one that incarcerates her in her home — and describes her situation as “grand isolation,” one that is “very formidable” where she is “left so entirely to [herself]” (“The Grey Woman” 301). In her essay, “Gaskell’s ‘The Grey Woman’: A Feminist Palimpsest,” Maureen T. Reddy corroborates this idea. Reddy notes that the story exaggerates the typical female’s domestic situation. Anna has “literally nothing to do” (Reddy 188). Though a typical upper-class Victorian female would have had various engagements — some social in nature — Anna’s position is intentionally exaggerated to show how unsatisfied she is with her feminine sphere.

Anna’s dissatisfaction as a female only builds as the story proceeds. When she becomes pregnant, she fails to rejoice her own pregnancy and impending role as a mother, the esteemed position for the Victorian woman. Instead of celebrating her pregnancy, she describes it as a “reason for [her] lowness of spirits” and confides in Amante, sharing how her life used to be and longing for that previous time (“The Grey Woman” 305). Anna even notes how her circumstances would thrill most women, describing motherhood as a “wonderful object of interest to single women, who no longer hope to enjoy such blessedness themselves” (“The Grey Woman” 304). This pregnancy does not bring her joy, and Monsieur de la Tourelle’s vile nature is inflated to highlight Anna’s entrapment. He, as a Victorian husband, confines her to her household, unborn child, and himself; he not only murders Sieur de Poissy, but he slaughters Anna’s possibilities and independence.

However, even when Anna attempts to flee her treacherous husband, she is unable to escape her domestic captivity and ends up suffering greatly, suggesting that women who wish for life outside of the domestic sphere will face consequences. Anna appears meek next to her servant, Amante, and ends up willingly adopting some of the characteristics expected for the ideal female; she cannot escape being forced into this mold. While Amante acquires “characteristics traditionally considered ‘masculine’— courage, physical strength, assertiveness, [and] a logical mind,” Anna becomes weak, receiving instructions and comfort from Amante, who eventually dresses as a man and poses as Anna’s husband (Reddy 190). When the two finally settle in Frankfort, Amante serves as the masculine figure who leaves the home and permeates the “male’s sphere”; she continues to pose as Anna’s “husband,” while Anna reassumes a “conventionally female role” (Reddy 190).

Anna’s circumstances after leaving her husband highlight how women in the Victorian era could not successfully escape feminine expectations. Anna leaves one domestic sphere to only enter another one, both of which are suffocating. While Amante ventures out of the house to work, Gaskell hyperbolizes Anna’s predicament in the home; Anna fears encountering Monsieur de la Tourelle, and this fear highlights her seclusion in the “woman’s sphere.” Anna will only “sun [herself] and [her] baby at the garret-window in the roof” and “loathe[s] the idea of ever walking again in the open daylight” (“The Grey Woman” 336). Monsieur de la Tourelle no longer lives with her, but she still remains stuck in the home, isolated, lonely, and fearful. Even after Amante’s murder, Anna does not abdicate her role as wife, for Doctor Voss “persuade[s] [her] to become his wife” (“The Grey Woman” 339). Though Anna admits that Doctor Voss serves as a kind husband, her use of the word “persuade” suggests coercion and unwillingness. She quickly ages, earning her title of “Grey Woman,” and continues to remain in the privacy of

the home (“The Grey Woman” 339). As Reddy herself notes, the “ending of ‘The Grey Woman,’ then, is extremely pessimistic, as it suggests that women cannot hope to escape the limited place assigned them by their society; the most they can hope for is a benevolent master, such as Voss” (Reddy 191). In the end, Anna chooses acceptance and resigns her fight.

Amante, too, emerges as a female character who rebels against traditional norms but, again, her character shows that women who do so will be punished. While in Frankfort, Amante actually poses as a man, entering the masculine sphere outside of the home. She describes herself as “rougher and more alert” and takes on her “father’s trade” (“The Grey Woman” 335).

Amante, of course, only lasts a short period of time in the masculine sphere, for she is stabbed to the death in the street by someone from Monsieur de la Tourelle’s clan. Amante’s punishment is obvious, for she is murdered as the “result...[of] her usurpation of a man’s place” (Reddy 191). The murderer kills Amante’s figurative desire for mobility when he ends her life.

Similarly, Gaskell creates two characters in “The Poor Clare” who, like Anna and Amante, initially reject Victorian standards. Rather than be submissive, child-like, or moralistic, Bridget and Mary Fitzgerald, mother and daughter, act “wild[ly] and passionate[ly]” and are “ruling spirits of the household” (“The Poor Clare” 53). Bridget influences Madame, who in turn influences Madame’s husband. The unrestrained women have “wild quarrels” in the “heat of passion” and even “wilder reconciliations” (“The Poor Clare” 54). The repetition of “wild,” their descriptor, contradicts the typical righteous and even-tempered Victorian woman. Bridget “could exert such despotic power” and intimidate her neighbors with her “strong character,” “passionate anger,” and “vehement force of will” (“The Poor Clare” 53, 57). Both women, especially Bridget, stand apart from their female counterparts. They do not solely tend to the household or provide morality in the home; they carry strong sentiments and aspirations and

speak freely, thus penetrating the masculine sphere. Furthermore, they do not answer to a man or “head of household,” for Bridget was “unhappy” in her marriage, and her husband died (“The Poor Clare” 53).

Bridget’s assertiveness becomes especially prominent when she confronts a man, a choice that ultimately leads to her demise. While before, Bridget wielded influence over Madam and frightened her neighbors, her ferocity becomes perilous when used directly against a male. After a hunting excursion, Squire Gisborne crosses paths with Bridget’s dog, shooting and killing the animal. Bridget’s willingness to confront — even a male outside of her own dwelling — becomes evident. Rather than acquiesce, Bridget responds with swift anger. She verbally attacks the man, telling him that she will hold power over his future, cursing “the creature [he loves] best” (“The Poor Clare” 59). Bridget even splatters a bit of the dog’s blood on Gisborne. Later, we learn that Bridget has used witchcraft against this man. Symbolically, the only way for Victorian society to rationalize a woman who asserts power over a man is to label her a “witch,” suggesting that such a woman possesses a demonic side.

Even before the consequences of this incident become clear, Bridget remains isolated, miserable, and misunderstood, an apparent outcast of society. Her deviance yields isolation. She is “never....sociable” with her neighbors and knows that her deceased dog was “the only creature that loved [her]” (“The Poor Clare” 56, 59). When the narrator first visits her, she cries that she has a “sore heart” (“The Poor Clare” 56). Additionally, she fails to not only act the part, but look it, likely being “considerably above the middle size in her prime” (“The Poor Clare” 64). Without Madame and her daughter, Bridget is ostracized from her community because of her unfamiliarity. Men like Squire Gisborne resent her physical strength and mental courage, fearing a woman who may outdo them. Conversely, women cannot recognize the feminine in Bridget

and fear the unusual. Because Bridget looks and acts differently, the most she can hope for is to be left alone, never receiving affection beyond those who claim her as kin.

Eventually, Bridget must cast off her more “masculine” traits and embrace an extreme version of the Victorian female. Instead of continuing to be assertive and opinionated, Bridget becomes meek, passive, subservient, devoted, and moral. She faces punishment for her confrontation with Squire Gisborne, as she unwittingly curses her own granddaughter — the one last possible connection she could have to her daughter, Mary. Her attempt to harm a man — Squire Gisborne — directly backfires, and the only way for her to remedy the situation is to become more “feminine.” To disembody her granddaughter’s curse, Bridget becomes a Poor Clare, assuming an exaggerated version of her position in the female’s sphere. Even Father Bernard notes that Bridget’s “former self must be buried” (“The Poor Clare” 94). Bridget transforms herself into a woman in “constant service of others,” much as a domestic Victorian woman — responsible for her family’s morality — would be for her children and husband. In the end, she sacrifices herself for the town. The narrator, who was once overwhelmed by her stature, comments on her newfound meekness, describing her as having a “gaunt figure” before death (“The Poor Clare” 102). Ironically, she dies serving Gisborne, the man who wrongly killed her daughter’s dog. The story’s end suggests that one way or another, Victorian women learn to accept their feminine positions in society, for only pain results when they do not. The ideal Victorian woman, as hyperbolized through the Poor Clares, is one who willingly sacrifices herself, sharing few of her own stances and acting on few of her own desires.

This pattern continues in Gaskell’s “The Old Nurse’s Story,” though this time with a pair of wealthy sisters. Maude and Grace Furnivall, the daughters of Lord Furnivall, have fiery opinions, act without restraint, and lack passivity. Both women are “haughty beauties,” and Miss

Maude, even after marrying and having a child, is “not a bit softened” but rather “as haughty and as passionate as ever.” Similarly, Miss Grace, who feels jealous of Miss Maude’s husband, grows “fiercer and fiercer,” and the two women are controlled by “their jealousy and their passions” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 26-27). Rather than prioritize the domestic or create a principled home, one that acts as a haven for men, the women act on their feelings of animosity, and Maude obsesses over a time when she “[will] have her revenge” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 28).

Both women, again, suffer because of their unwillingness to fit the Victorian mold. Although Maude does commit herself to motherhood and loves her daughter “to distraction,” she fails to retain her marriage, and her assertiveness and “passions” lead to her husband’s weariness and abandon (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 27). Maude’s society will not allow for her to raise a family on her own; she “fear[s]” for her father to find out about her daughter and lives on the east side of the house, hoping that “no one ever need know” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 27). Although she commits to and relishes one Victorian aim — motherhood — she suffers because she is unable to fulfill wifedom or alter her strong personality. When her father learns about his granddaughter, he forces Maude and her daughter out into the cold and “pray[s] that they might never enter heaven” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 28). Because Maude cannot fulfill all feminine expectations, she is allowed to fulfill none, and she loses her daughter. She is literally cast out and ostracized by her family and servants who not only alienate her in life but wish to ostracize her — according to her father — from heaven.

Grace, too, is punished for her haughty, jealous, and aggressive ways, for her niece’s ghost haunts her until her death. While she may not have been submissive or meek in her youth, she is forced, much like Bridget in “The Poor Clare,” into subservience and morality in

adulthood. As an elderly woman, she quietly recites prayers with Mrs. Stark and maintains a quiet presence in the home. She is “so sad,” has “heavy eyes,” and still — at the age of 80 — deals with the pain caused by her deviance (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 19). Before she dies, she pronounces, “Alas! Alas! What is done in youth can never be undone in age!” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 32). Grace did not fit the Victorian ideal before her sister was forced out, but she also declines to act in a self-sacrificing, moralistic way when her father makes this choice. Instead, she watches her sister leave with “relentless hate and triumphant scorn” (“The Old Nurse’s Story” 31). These youthful failures haunt her into submission and piety.

Elizabeth Gaskell may not have shared the same experiences or feelings as Anna, Amante, Bridget, Mary, Maude, or Grace. And, when we examine her pieces, we scrutinize them through a twenty-first-century perspective, one where the patriarchal systems that we consider to be confining today would not likely have been considered so in Victorian England (Holestein 381). However, even if Gaskell does not personally connect with these characters, Anna, Amante, Bridget, Mary, Maude, and Grace do all struggle to accept their roles in society and suffer accordingly, thus revealing the rigidity of Victorian expectations. Though it would be impossible to pinpoint Gaskell’s exact intentions, a pattern becomes apparent, one that should be recognizable and relatable. Institutions, both intentionally and unwittingly, create unspoken expectations and ideas by which they want their citizens to abide. In any society, there will be justified dissenters. Similarly, Victorian society placed tacit parameters upon its women, and Gaskell envisions women who are unable or unwilling to concede to such restrictions. Through her fictional tales, Gaskell depicts a Victorian society that, even when well meaning, is intolerant of divergence.

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Explorations of Alcohol Abuse: Paula Hawkins' *Girl on the Train* and Flynn Berry's *Under the Harrow*

Female drinkers, who at one time lagged considerably behind their male counterparts, have caught up to men with their drinking habits. While men used to be twice as likely to drink alcohol and three times as likely to drink alcohol problematically, women now have matched males in both categories. In fact, some young women even outdrink young males (Boseley). This phenomenon has impacted both English and American societies and has not gone unnoticed by writers. Within one year of each other, Paula Hawkins and Flynn Berry crafted compelling thrillers. Hawkins' narrator in *Girl on the Train* works to identify a local woman's murderer, while Berry's narrator in *Under the Harrow* attempts to discover her sister's killer. The events, settings, and conclusions of the texts differ, but in both texts, the alcohol flows, much as it does in reality. Alcohol shapes and impacts the characters' decisions, relationships, and self-worth. Both authors examine the motivations, implications, and effects of alcohol use and abuse, particularly among women. In their explorations, Hawkins and Berry key in on how shame, disconnection, boredom, and rejection connect with alcohol misuse, and they explore society's stigmas surrounding alcoholism. Their female characters suggest that women, in particular, face unique societal pressures and lack support.

In *Girl on the Train*, Paula Hawkins constructs a unique heroine: Rachel Watson. Rachel is neither beautiful nor put together. She lacks composure, grace, and traditional femininity and has no husband, no children, and no job. As a depressed divorcée, Rachel consumes abundant amounts of alcohol and experiences frequent blackouts. Rachel's drinking strikes the reader, and Hawkins pairs Rachel's drinking with an unmistakable and driving force: shame. Variations of the word shame weave through much of Rachel's narration. She feels shame over her body,

personality, infertility, and lack of accomplishment. Rachel's abuse of alcohol directly connects with this shame and with her inability to share shame-related feelings.

The first source of shame that Rachel has pertains to her appearance, an area where women are scrutinized more than men. When she feels discomfort about her image, rather than share her shame, she drinks to placate her emotions. In our first glimpse of Rachel on the train, she says that she "no longer" feels "desirable," has "put on weight," and has a "puffy" face. As a woman, Rachel believes she should be ashamed for not being desirable and resorts to a "little bottle of wine." She condemns her own appearance and wonders if the man next to her looks away because he finds her "distasteful" (Hawkins 11). These self-loathing feelings can only be overcome — or endured — with alcohol, with the "little bottle[s] of wine" that comfort her on the train in a manner which people do not. Other characters who interact with Rachel only reinforce Rachel's bodily contempt. After discovering that Rachel lied about being friends with his murdered wife, Scott Hipwell lashes out at Rachel and aims for what he knows might hurt her the most: her appearance. While yelling, he suggests that Rachel is unseemly and feeds her most hateful demon, the one that tells her that she is less than others. Scott bitterly laughs after he exclaims, "A relationship with you! Jesus. I asked [the detective], 'Have you seen what my wife looked like? Standards haven't fallen that fast'" (Hawkins 248). He not only implies that he finds Rachel unattractive, but he reveals that he finds her considerably less attractive than other women. These inadequate feelings of ugliness are a part of Rachel's drive to consume "a bottle and a half of wine" the same night (Hawkins 252).

According to Brené Brown, a researcher of shame, Rachel is not alone in the way she perceives her body, as many women (and over 90 percent of women in a study she conducted) feel similarly embarrassed by their appearances. Brown notes that when women feel "disgust and

feelings of worthlessness” over their bodies, they “approach the world” in different ways. Body-related shame extends into “who and how [women] love, work, parent, communicate, and build relationships” (Brown, “Shame and Body Image”). And, while body-image is not Rachel’s only source of shame, it does profoundly contribute to feelings of inadequacy, altering the way that she lives her life, oftentimes encouraging her to seek out alcohol as a means to cope.

Furthermore, Rachel feels extensive shame for her infertility. Rachel reflects on her marriage to Tom and her inability to get pregnant, despite the fact that she was “not drinking heavily” at the time and tried various methods to increase her fertility. Though Rachel cannot control her infertility, she allows it (and society’s views of infertility) to define her worth. Rachel recalls many who bombarded her with questions about children, and she notes how it “was always seen as [her] fault, that [she] was the one letting the side down.” She, again, compares herself to another woman — Anna — and notes how quickly Anna becomes pregnant with Tom’s child. Rachel feels deficient. She fails to find a support system who shares her shame (perhaps even a woman who has similarly struggled) and notes that around this time, she “drank a bit, and then a bit more” until she “drank and...drank” and “lost” (Hawkins 79).

While Rachel distorts her thinking to exacerbate her own worthlessness, she also distorts her thinking to exaggerate others’ happiness. Though the reader knows that Tom and Anna’s marriage embodies many imperfections, Rachel envisions their marriage as perfect, only furthering her own beliefs of inadequacy and deepening her shame and addiction. At one point, she “imagine[s] [Tom] putting down the phone, picking up his little girl, giving her a kiss, [and] embracing his wife” (Hawkins 151). These distortions clearly conflict with reality. Shortly after Rachel narrates this thought, the reader finds out that Anna cries over missing work and her old life; she drinks by herself and “snoop[s]” on Tom (Hawkins 242). Similarly, while on the train,

Rachel peeks into Scott and Megan's life and marriage (though she calls them Jess and Jason). She, again, envisions them as having an ideal marriage, even calling them the "perfect, golden couple" (Hawkins 4). She believes Scott to be a "strong, protective, [and] kind" husband and speculates about their sex life. We, of course, later find out that they had an imperfect marriage that included infidelity, distance, and verbal abuse. Because Rachel exaggerates the perfection of others' lives, she more deeply feels shame for her failed marriage and family. She feels inadequate for not being able to manage what she believes other women — specifically Anna and Megan — can.

Emily Blunt, who plays the on-screen Rachel Watkins, taps into these same sources of shame when she analyzes her role in the film. In particular, Blunt notes the lack of support that sometimes exists between women and how much fertility and motherhood are connected to a woman's worth. Blunt laments that "women are made to feel like failures for not having children" and declares it as "incredibly wrong" that Rachel is made to feel "less-than" because she is not a mother (Biedenharn). The research backs up Blunt's assertion. In a study examining psychological impacts of infertility, researchers discovered that infertile patients tend to experience greater shame and perceive themselves as "inadequate, different, unlovable, and unworthy." Infertile patients who were receiving medical treatments and were not working towards adoption tended to immerse themselves in their pain, feel "inferior," and remain "separated and isolated from others" (Galhardo). Rachel, much like these patients, feels overwhelmed by her depression and unworthy compared to women around her. Blunt notes how many women, including the on-screen Rachel, "covet not just other women's possessions but the happiness or fullness of their lives" (Biedenharn). After studying addiction and spending time playing Rachel, Blunt, too, is struck by her shame. Society shames Rachel for her infertility, and

this shame drowns Rachel. Rachel feels additionally disappointed in the “fullness” of her own life compared to the “fullness” of Anna’s and Megan’s lives; this comparison, again, leads to shame, and the shame leads to drinking.

Ironically, though unsurprisingly, Rachel’s drinking only enlarges her shame, creating a cycle of alcohol abuse. When she drinks, she acts in a way she otherwise would not and forgets what she has done. The next day, she feels mortified and desperate to piece together her evening. Rachel’s initial shame about who she is propels her into drinking, but her shame about drinking only leads her to consume more alcohol. Daniel Randles and Jessica Tracy conducted a study that measured shame in recovering alcoholics and then took note of any relapses. Randles and Tracy reached the conclusion that rather than creating a “positive change,” shame about drinking “motivates hiding, escape, and general avoidance of the problem.” They then go on to note that it promotes “dysfunctional dispositions” such as depression and anxiety. Addicts are “dispositionally prone to shame” (Randles). When Randles and Tracy interviewed recovering alcoholics and measured non-verbal shame-related behavior, those who exhibited the most shame were also the most likely to relapse. Rachel fits in with their observations. She, like other addicts, is inclined to feel excessive shame. She hides this shame, which in turn segues into her drinking. In turn, she feels shameful about her drinking experiences, which only leads to further alcohol abuse.

When discussing her drinking, Rachel sometimes uses the word “shame” itself or descriptions close to it. When she wakes up the morning after the murder and cannot remember the previous night, she immediately attempts secrecy. She regrets that she “[doesn’t] know what [she’s] done” and “pull[s] the duvet over [her] head, [closing her] eyes tightly” (Hawkins 41). She feels too abashed and unworthy to even expose her face to the empty room. Instead, she tries

her best to hide; she avoids Tom's calls and wishes to hide her mess from Cathy. Throughout each drinking experience, Rachel carries her mortification alone. After another drunken evening, Rachel feels "embarrassed" when Cathy picks up a bottle besides her bed and cannot find the courage to explain that she was "sacked months ago for turning up blind drunk" to work (Hawkins 145). In cases like this, Rachel uses variations of the word shame — such as "embarrassed" — but she later goes on to use the word itself. When Tom finds out that she has lost her job because of her alcoholism, Rachel says that she is "on the back foot already, embarrassed, ashamed" (Hawkins 149). She repeats the word when admitting to Cathy that she rode the train every day to appear employed. She tells Cathy that she is "ashamed" and goes on to think that she "hate[s] [herself] more than [she] ever [has]" (Hawkins 157). She even narrates how common this feeling is for her when Scott later confronts her about who she is. When Rachel confesses to Scott that she was drinking the night of Megan's murder, she describes her "face reddening with a *familiar* shame" and notes that she feels "foolish, ridiculous,....[and] ashamed" (Hawkins 182). Rachel's feelings of shame over drinking do not solve her issues with alcohol. In fact, she finds only one tool to deal with these feelings: continued drinking.

While Rachel's self-image propels her drinking, her inability to deal with her emotions in a healthy and effective way is, perhaps, more important. Brené Brown notes that the only way to overcome shame is to share it. She believes that shame "loves secrecy" and that it is "dangerous...to hide or bury our story" for when we do, "shame metastasizes" (Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection* 10). To triumph over shame, Rachel needs a support system to develop "shame resilience." When people struggle with "worthiness" and deal with shame, they "feel the need to take the edge off of feelings that cause vulnerability, fear, despair, disappointment, and sadness," even though what they really is a trusted outlet (Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection* 69). Each time

Rachel feels unworthy, she finds herself unable to locate or create a support system, so she instead “takes the edge off.” Justin Theroux, the actor who plays Tom Watkins on screen, pinpoints Rachel’s issue with shame and addiction: “The more shame you feel, the more you drink, the more you drink, the more shame you feel” (Berman).

Rachel, however, rarely finds someone with whom she can “share” these feelings, the most apparent and meaningful way for her to recover. Just as Rachel reveals her self-loathing early on in her narration, she also uncovers her profound loneliness. When she gets home from the first train ride that the reader sees, Cathy is not home, and she begins drinking. When Cathy returns home, she heads up to bed with her boyfriend, and Rachel continues her drinking. Though she does not remember the evening clearly, she believes she “wanted to talk to someone” and “the need for contact must have been overwhelming” (Hawkins 12) Rachel feels so desperate for human connection that she drinks and then calls her ex-husband. During a later episode, she says she “couldn’t stand the confinement or boredom any longer” so heads to a pub and has “three large glasses of wine” (Hawkins 37). At one point, Rachel even recognizes the connection between her loneliness, shame, and her drinking. She says that she “felt isolated in [her] misery” and “became lonely” so consumed much alcohol (Hawkins 79). Again, much later on, when she is by herself, bored, and “hear[s] nothing” from anyone else, she picks up “two bottles of white wine” (Hawkins 143). While Brené Brown recognizes that shame can be healthily managed and controlled, she would argue that Rachel’s hiding and secrecy only feeds her shame. Rachel’s loneliness creates strong feelings, feelings which she decides to “take the edge off of” through the use of alcohol. Brown would also note that without a support system, Rachel develops minimal “shame resilience.”

Additionally, though Rachel sometimes seems to lack a support system altogether, she also rejects possible support systems because she feels too embarrassed to admit that she needs them. Though she previously, briefly considers moving back home and getting help, when she goes out to lunch with her mom, she does “not admit how bad things [are]” or tell her mom that she’s unemployed and tremendously struggling “on the drinking front” (Hawkins 172). We know little about Rachel’s mom and whether or not she would provide Rachel with healthy support. Nonetheless, Rachel does not unburden her shame here and, therefore, cannot overcome it. And, though Cathy and her boyfriend’s reactions can be condescending and critical, Cathy once appears genuinely interested in supporting Rachel through recovery. She “holds” Rachel as she cries, “strokes [her] hair, [and] tells [her that she’ll] be all right” (Hawkins 157). While Cathy’s communication is imperfect, as she “tells” Rachel how to get her life together, she does seem to want to help Rachel. Rachel, however, still finds it too difficult to share all of her shame and connect with Cathy.

We see how important connection and support are for Rachel and her addiction; Rachel experiences fleeting moments of connection and purpose within the text, and these coincide with her sobriety. Soon after the police visit Rachel for information, she notes that she has “purpose” and a distraction (Hawkins 85). More importantly, she feels “part of [the] mystery” and says that she is “connected” (Hawkins 89). For the first time in a long time, Rachel doesn’t feel like she is on the outside, isolated and alone, but she feels “connected.” By no coincidence, she says this when she has been sober for three days, the longest that she can recall in a long time. Additionally, when Rachel begins to let her guard down with Kamal Abdic, the therapist that Megan saw, she scolds herself for crying and “[talking] about real things” (Hawkins 191). Nonetheless, because she allows herself to be vulnerable and begins to share her pain and shame

with someone else, she becomes hopeful, knowingly or not. She “[wants] to go back,” and she “[opens] up to him” (Hawkins 192). She momentarily forgets her initial purpose in visiting — to see if he could have murdered Megan — and the reader wonders if Rachel could overcome her addiction with connection.

In *Under the Harrow*, Flynn Berry’s narrator, Nora Lawrence, is never labeled as an alcoholic. Unlike Rachel from *Girl on the Train*, Nora manages (until her sister’s murder) to hold a job, rent an apartment, and maintain friendships. She is not a constant drunk, and most characters do not seem to view her as being disorderly, addictive, or out of control. Nevertheless, as Nora narrates the novel after finding her murdered sister, she describes a life that includes and is impacted by alcohol use (and sometimes alcohol abuse). Shame plays a role in the text and influences drinking behavior, although much less so than in *Girl on the Train*. Unlike Rachel Watkins, who primarily uses excess alcohol as a response to shame, Nora Lawrence abuses alcohol as a means of handling dark, painful emotions and for exacerbating positive feelings. Alcohol accompanies diverse scenarios in her life.

Rachel Watkins’ drinking always stems from misery, but Nora Lawrence describes some past experiences where she consumes alcohol for entertainment. In a study published by the American Psychological Association, researchers attempted to understand motivators, outside of social consumption, for drinking. They studied both adolescent and adult drinkers and found that a percentage of both sub-groups could be considered coping drinkers and/or enhancement drinkers. Much like Brené Brown’s description of people who need to “take the edge off” of powerful emotions, coping drinkers drank to decrease unpleasant feelings such as stress, anxiety, anger, or sadness. The study found that coping drinkers struggled to find, create, or utilize adaptive tools to manage difficult emotions. Enhancement drinkers, however, consumed alcohol

to exacerbate positive feelings; they drank to increase enjoyable emotions such as feelings of energy and enthusiasm. At the end of the study, researchers noted that while some participants were categorized under one category, many (who drank for reasons outside of social drinking) were both coping and enhancement drinkers (Cooper).

In *Under the Harrow*, Nora's drinking extends beyond social drinking. It does not always harm her or bring about negative consequences (as Rachel Watkins' drinking does), but both a desire to cope and enhance motivate Nora to consume alcohol. Kristi Coulter, a young American woman who decided to give up drinking, laments that the "modern, urbane" woman is a "serious drinker," one who is "super double tanked." She notes how women manage to pair alcohol with almost any activity: yoga, marathons, cooking classes; nothing is "so inherently absorbing or high-stakes or pleasurable that [women] won't try to alter [their] natural state for it" (Coulter). Coulter sees women drinking often to enhance experiences, such as through yoga and cooking classes, but she also acknowledges that the modern woman is a "24-hour woman" who faces extreme pressure and judgment. Coulter would recognize the drinking habits of Nora and her sister, as these characters embody the "modern, urbane" woman's drinking habits.

Beginning in her adolescence, Nora shows signs of drinking for enhancement rather than socially, and she particularly drinks to strengthen her female friendships. Before Nora, Rachel, and Alice head to a party in Snaith, Nora uses language that suggests that she feels content. She "link[s]" arms with her friend, Alice, as they drink vodka and Coke on the way to the party. By the time they arrive, they feel drunk, and "everyone [begins] hugging everyone else, including some of the people who had already been there together." She proceeds to describe herself consuming several additional drinks and playing games like "Nevers" while "Rachel squeeze[s] beside her" (Berry 31). While we find out that the night ends with significant violence,

enhancement proves itself as the primary motivation here. Nora, Rachel, and Alice go to the party and get drunk to enhance their enthusiasm, camaraderie, and enjoyment. Of course, Nora and Rachel's upbringing is difficult, and Nora also describes the many repossessed houses on the street in the same scene. Motivation to cope could play a role in these adolescent drinking experiences, though Nora focuses on motivation to bond in this particular scene.

In adulthood, Nora and Rachel also drink for enhancement and camaraderie. In a later chapter, Nora describes how much she and Rachel enjoyed Polperro. She remembers returning from the grocery store with "bottles of tonic [knocking] against her knees." Later that night, she and Rachel eat dinner, likely mixing those bottles of tonic with alcohol; she recalls that they had an "endless number of things to say" (Berry 64). The drinking inflates their comfort, friendship, and conversation. Another instance of enhancement drinking occurs in London before Rachel's attack. Here, Nora comments that she enjoys "salmon in pastry and a white wine" because she thought "it was decadent" (Berry 102). The white wine seems to enhance the pastry's taste for Nora, even though it is early in the afternoon. Finally, based on Nora's description, Rachel shared similar inclinations for enhancement drinking. In an attempt to better enjoy dinner with Nora's boyfriend, Liam, Rachel splits two bottles of wine and subsequently sleeps with Liam (Berry 185). Even when Nora and Rachel abuse alcohol to enhance positive feelings, consequences sometimes result: Nora throws a beer bottle at Rachel's nose in adolescence, and Rachel devastates her sister when Nora finds out about their one-night-stand. Berry suggests that alcohol, even when abused to intensify positive experiences, can yield damaging results.

As the American Psychological Association notes, many study participants that are categorized as enhancement drinkers are also coping drinkers (Cooper). Coping, too, motivates Nora to drink, particularly after the murder of her sister, though she also drinks to cope before

this incident. On the night before Rachel's funeral, Nora cannot sleep and becomes desperate to open a bottle of red wine. When she cannot find a corkscrew, she turns to a screwdriver, and the wine splashes everywhere (Berry 68). Here, Nora attempts to treat her discomfort — her insomnia, anxiety, and devastation — with the red wine. Similarly, the next day, she carries whisky around her to everyone who shows up at the town's pub after the funeral and leaves “for a cigarette three times” (Berry 71). In addition to feeling sorrow, Nora feels discomfort holding conversations at this party. She uses the whisky — and the cigarettes — to cope with this unease. Later on, Nora recalls a memory from her past that involves Rachel and Rachel's ex, Stephen. At the time, Nora's play had recently been “rejected.” Upset, Nora went out with Rachel and Stephen and got “shit-faced on beer” (Berry 76). Nora consumes excessive amounts of beer to manage the disappointment of rejection. Finally, during the heat of the investigation, Nora drinks “gin and tonics” at a bar and sleeps with a man she meets; for this time, she is “able to lose where [she is],” a statement that indicates her desire to cope by numbing her emotions (Berry 138).

Rachel, too, uses alcohol to cope. Nora narrates what Rachel would have done after meeting a possible attacker, Andrew Healy, in prison. Nora says that Rachel would have “stopped in Bristol for a drink” and would “have all her plans twisting through her head.” Because of this, she “would drink too much to drive home” (Berry 40). Sure enough, when Nora begins making calls to hotels, she finds out she was right; Rachel, understandably overcome by emotions, becomes drunk to cope. Alcohol appeases her anger and devastation over her past attack.

However, while others consistently refer to *Girl on the Train's* Rachel Watkins as an alcoholic, other than Nora's father, no character in *Under the Harrow* appears to adopt or be

given this label. Nonetheless, alcohol reappears throughout the shorter text, and characters do abuse it. Sometimes, the abuse seems harmless, while other times, significant consequences result. Nora damages Rachel's face, Nora's father destroys his relationship with his children, and Rachel has sex with Nora's boyfriend. Flynn Berry shows how drinking — drinking that extends beyond typical social drinking — even when not deemed unusual by the culture, can be destructive. Alcohol abuse, even if abused to strengthen positive feelings, comes with consequences for the novel's characters.

In *Girl on the Train* and *Under the Harrow*, Rachel Watkins' and Nora Lawrence's motivations and functionalities differ. Paula Hawkins and Flynn Berry examine diverse catalysts for drinking, but they both expose a flawed society that isolates and stigmatizes women who struggle, in any capacity, with addiction. Characters face detrimental judgment, a problem commonly described by alcoholics themselves. *The International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* notes that recovering alcoholics, no matter how many years sober, battle stereotypes from others and are often deemed "unpredictable," "a danger to others," and responsible "for their difficulties" (Hill). In a study interviewing six recovering alcoholics, all felt that alcohol dependence was viewed "negatively," even several years into sobriety. One interviewee noted his initial resistance to being labeled as an alcoholic since the "perception of an alcoholic is so vile" (Hill). The participants also shared their own views about alcoholism before accepting the label for themselves; they associated alcoholism with "men of poor socio-economic with little education and poor hygiene." Even when others did not "enact" this stigma onto them, they still "felt" the stigma, suggesting that English society has created a perception of alcoholism.

Rachel Watkins, too, faces judgment, misunderstanding, and a lack of empathy. Much like the recovering alcoholics from the study describe, many characters judge Rachel and believe

she simply has a “lack of willpower” (Hill). Cathy, despite exhibiting some positive intent in the book, betrays this mentality when she finds that Rachel has already drunk in the morning and exclaims, “Oh for God’s sake. Already!” (Hawkins 173). Scott goes a step further with a comment that suggests that Rachel is somehow inhuman and unlike him. He scolds her and says, “You should have told me what you are....an alcoholic” (Hawkins 146-167). Rather than a woman struggling with addiction, Rachel becomes nothing more than the addiction itself in Scott’s cruel comment. Finally, Tom solidifies the perception of an alcoholic, suggesting that Rachel is pathetic and that he had to put up with her “drinking and...depression” when she was “too tired to wash [her]...hair” (Hawkins 299). These characters reveal ignorance and a lack of empathy when it comes to addiction, and they readily blame Rachel. No wonder Rachel finds it difficult to reach out to others, reveal her shame, and find a support system to gain wellness.

Though they are never labeled as alcoholics, Nora and Rachel Lawrence receive judgment and are characterized because of their alcohol use, particularly by the police. They receive inappropriate accusations and suggestions of blame that relate to alcohol. When Rachel is attacked as a teenager, the police obsess over her drinking and how much she had consumed (Berry 47). Nora asserts that the “police didn’t believe [Rachel]” and notes that they were “preoccupied with the amount [Rachel] had to drink, and that she didn’t cry” (Berry 15). The police blame and suspect the woman, the victim, because of their perceptions and judgments. Additionally, the police begin to form unfair judgments about Nora herself because of her use of alcohol and antidepressants; they nearly charge her for the murder of her sister. One officer, Moretti, bombards Nora with questions regarding Rachel’s previous attack: “How much did you have to drink then...half a liter of vodka?” (Berry 188-189). He goes on to interrogate her over her use of Wellbutrin, an anti-depressant. His questions betray a clear misunderstanding of

addiction and mental illness and highlight the stigma that surrounds both. When Nora turns to alcohol to cope with her sister's death, she likely feels weary to reach out to others and express overwhelming emotions — such as depression — because of instances such as this.

Perhaps Kristi Coulter said it best: “[T]here’s no easy way to be a woman, because, as you may have noticed, there’s no acceptable way to be a woman. And if there’s no acceptable way to be the thing you are, then maybe you drink a little. Or a lot.” When the women in society drink more, our favorite female characters will as well, sometimes to excess. Rachel Watson, Nora Lawrence, and Rachel Lawrence would all understand Coulter’s quote, for they struggle to navigate the complexity of their lives as females. Sometimes, this complexity leads to shame, while other times, it leads them to inflate their experiences. And, while these women use alcohol to get by, enjoy, and bond, it never alters their circumstances or mindsets.

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### Refreshing Alternatives: Reviving Research in the Classroom

“From the student’s perspective, researched writing is a meaningless activity, simply a hoop through which students must jump.” These words, written by Rebecca Moore Howard and Sandra Jamieson in the “Researched Writing” section of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, should stand out to any educator. Howard and Jamieson note that the research paper is plagued by multiple issues; students procrastinate and plagiarize, and they often miss the point altogether. They fail to evaluate their sources, understand bias, or even take the time to read all of their sources. The resulting product is anything but original, for many students neglect to enter the conversation. While the research process itself is a necessary and relevant skill, the research paper fails to be a productive practice. Therefore, instead of continuing to assign the lifeless, traditional research essay, we must identify alternative methods that better prepare students.

Howard and Jamieson’s chapter served as inspiration for my own research. For the 2018 to 2019 school year, I will be teaching AP Language and Composition, College Preparatory Honors English 10, and Creative Writing. This year, I hope to continue to implement more frequent, meaningful research assignments into my classes. Therefore, I consulted several different sources — written by educators of different levels — and compiled my information in an annotated bibliography. After each citation, I have included two sections. The first section highlights the article’s most useful points, and the second section details how I might work to incorporate the article’s suggestions in the upcoming school year. Additionally, when applicable, I have used this second section to reflect on practices that I’ve already used in the past seven years. Here, I comment on their level of success and what I might change this year. After completing my research, I feel armed with engaging research possibilities for students.

Borsheim, Carlin, and Petrone Robert. "Teaching the Research Paper for Local Action." *The English Journal* 95.4 (2006): 78-83. Web.

Carlin Borsheim and Robert Petrone, high school English teachers, developed a research unit that encourages student action. In their article, they note that they were inspired by figures such as Paulo Friere. Borsheim and Petrone distribute notebooks to their classes and ask students to observe their high school and community for a period of time. As students observe, they write down prevalent issues. Students then select an interesting and specific school or community issue; they interview students, teachers, and community members, as well as consult additional sources (books, articles, pamphlets, etc.) to learn more about the matter. After students complete research, Borsheim and Petrone have them compile information through a few different mediums. Students choose an authentic audience to which to write or present (newspaper, panel of teachers, principal, cafeteria workers, etc.) and work collaboratively to form an interactive panel for the class. Finally, to ensure that they did not violate their department's expectations, Borsheim and Robert also require students to write a traditional paper in response to their research.

This past year, I tried a variation of this with my honors sophomore classes. First, students considered issues that we had at our school, in our community, and in our society as a whole. In conjunction with this brainstorming, they read current events. Eventually, we came together as a class and discussed. During discussion, students did not yet form stances, but they took notes over their peers' contributions. Eventually, students formed a narrow research question based on our conversations. The research

question had to require complex thinking, allow them to conduct a(n) survey/interview, interest them so that they could provide commentary, and present a problem so that they could provide a solution. For instance, one student noted how our school dealt with a vaping epidemic; countless students received disciplinary action because of vaping. He questioned why so many students continued to vape despite the risks, noting that the school's response was ineffective. He also interviewed administration as a part of his research. This research unit felt far more authentic than what I have created in the past, and it led to increased student engagement. To end the unit, students shared their final arguments with the class. Next year, perhaps I can allow students to compile their evidence in multiple mediums and deliver these final pieces to an authentic audience (such as administration).

Broskoske, Stephen L. "Prove Your Case: A New Approach to Teaching Research Papers." *College Teaching* 55.1 (2007): 31-32. Web.

Stephen Broskoske is a professor of college freshmen. He describes common student research flaws; based on his observations, many students rely heavily on opinion and do not substantiate their claims. Therefore, he explored more effective approaches. He acknowledges that his students follow high profile court cases (among these are trials related to Michael Jackson and Saddam Hussein). He thus compares the various stages of the paper to that of a court case. Students choose a topic — often one that is too broad. He connects the topic with a court case, noting the narrow nature of cases that lawyers typically argue; students then, as necessary, amend their own arguments. When students gather information, Broskoske encourages them to examine their findings

through the lens of the courtroom. Are facts available to defend their claims? Are the sources credible? Do multiple sources support the argument? Would a jury deem the argument reliable? Finally, students consider how they need to present the evidence and close the argument in order to best convince others (such as the jury) of the argument's validity. They must synthesize and funnel their data to lead to recognition: the conclusion.

Broskoske's strategy piques student interest and would cater to the peer-reviewing process. If the final researched argument is successful, students should be able to find context, evidence, commentary, counter-arguments, and a powerful conclusion. While peer reviewing, students could think about the researched argument as a court case. If they were on the jury, would the lawyer had convinced them? Would they feel like he/she had balanced logical and emotional arguments? Where were they not convinced? Where were they bored? This would work for both my sophomore and AP courses.

Heckenlaible, Cindy. "The Research Paper: Engaging Students in Academic Writing." *National Writing Project: Improving Writing and Learning in the Nation's Schools*, March 2018, <https://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2512>. Accessed 9 July 2018.

This article, published on the National Writing Project's site, is authored by a high school freshman English teacher. This educator shares many of the same frustrations with the traditional research paper; she admits that she dreads the unit and is consistently disappointed by her students' work. She therefore decides to explore further options, one of which is The Living History. This project, the brainchild of Mike Larson, asks students

to incorporate research through a creative perspective. Students create a character: one who either would have witnessed or have been a part of an event. They then write about that historical event from the perspective of the character. In the process, they evaluate credible sources and generate citations. Nonetheless, they are able to integrate creativity; Heckenlaible noted increased enthusiasm, and she looks forward to teaching the project in upcoming years.

This activity could easily be incorporated into Creative Writing or College Preparatory Honors English 10. In Creative Writing, we talk about effective works of fiction, such as Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*. Doerr seamlessly integrates historical knowledge into his text to create a richer, more poignant piece of literature. Students could explore how writers of fiction oftentimes research historical periods, places, and people in order to create a story. Then, students would model this process. Finally, in CP Honors English 10, we study Emmett Till, read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and examine a few of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches. Perhaps students could continue to research historical events related to these readings and craft a creative work that implements their findings.

“I Was There When High School Research Papers Came Alive!” *Education World: Connecting Educators to What Works*, 1 May 2012, [https://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr368.shtml](https://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr368.shtml). Accessed 9 July 2018.

Erin Beachley teaches juniors in Kansas and has implemented an innovative research assignment into her classes. Now, her students consider a historical period of time that they are interested in and share why they want to learn more about that period of time.

She gives them a specific list of historical elements they might research for the time: transportation, cooking, fashion, social rules and customs, occupations, entertainment, major events, etc. Students spend time compiling information about this period of time. However, rather than compile their information through the traditional research paper, students write a creative piece of fiction that incorporates these details. Since they already learned about important elements of creative writing — such as plot, character, and conflict — students are prepared to intertwine their newfound historical knowledge into a short story. Her idea parallels Heickenlaible's in "The Research Paper: Engaging Students In Academic Writing," though it places more emphasis on the time period.

I would incorporate Beachley's propositions in the same manner as I would Heickenlaible's; I elucidate these ideas through the previous source.

"Information Literacy & Library Instruction: Effective Assignments." *Lebanon Valley College*. Bishop Library, 7 Dec. 2015. Web. 22 June 2016.

This site includes a link to a PDF that is titled "Term Paper Alternatives." This document lists and briefly describes options that may replace the traditional research paper. Many alternatives are included, though a few in particular stand out to me. For one option, students select an appealing career choice; however, rather than just research the career, the students research potential places of employment in the area they wish to reside. This not only appeals to students' interest, but the specificity of the assignment reduces plagiarism. Another assignment requires students to contrast two journal articles: one with "conservative tendencies" and another with "liberal tendencies." In addition to

providing students with research practice, this assignment lends students the opportunity to better understand relevant issues. It can also be tweaked so that students examine various sources' coverage of a current controversy. Another engaging assignment asks students to select a political cartoon and research the cartoon's historical context. Finally, for a "time travel" research activity, students choose an important issue and find sources from diverse time periods; they consider how each time period reacted to the specific issue and may culminate a response analyzing these variations.

All of these ideas would pair nicely with AP Language and Composition, particularly when we rhetorically analyze pieces. Students could choose a topic/current event of interest and then pull from a conservative source and a liberal source, noting the aims of each. They would then analyze how each writer utilizes specific rhetorical strategies to achieve his/her aim and target the intended audience. Through this practice, students would better understand bias and become more deliberate consumers of information. It would also prepare them for the rhetorical analysis essay section of the AP Language and Composition test. Additionally, we begin the year in AP Language and Composition by rhetorically analyzing visual images. Students could be tasked with finding a visual representation (or political cartoon when appropriate) that accompanied a piece from class. They could examine how the artist's choices enhance the piece's message and research the cartoon's historical context.

Jenkins, Rob. "The 'Realistic' Research Paper." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 May 2017, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/The-Realistic-Research/240057>. Accessed 9 July 2018.

Rob Jenkins teaches first-year composition courses at the collegiate level. When he teaches the research paper, he sees that students fail to recognize or understand the rhetorical situation, partially because of the inauthenticity of the topics they choose. He incorporates a couple of new elements into his research unit to remedy this problem. Students in Jenkins' classes first choose a broad arena of interest: nursing, the deer population in their state, parking issues at their school, etc. Then, after some light investigation, they narrow their research to a specific problem or issue that exists in the area. After doing so, Jenkins highlights the rhetorical situation and asks his students to take on imaginary roles. They have to pinpoint a possible audience that would care about the issue and would be in a position to learn more about it. Then, when they write, they have to write *for* this audience (though they never explicitly describe the audience, but rather develop the frame of mind).

I would be mostly likely to apply Jenkins' ideas in my AP Language and Composition classes, particularly when they write and present exposés. Using Jenkins' ideas, I could tweak the unit a bit. For instance, this past year, I had a student who was interested in becoming a doctor; when she explored this broad field, she found herself especially concerned by how doctors become less empathetic the longer they are in the field. She connected with this topic because her mom has dealt with serious medical issues. If I were to apply Jenkins' ideas, I would ask for the student to describe an audience that would be impacted by this: perhaps medical school students or veteran doctors at a conference. Then, to be fully effective, she would consider her specific audience's

perspective (and the challenges that they face) to help them understand the role of empathy in their profession.

Keim, Marybelle C. "Creative Alternatives to the Term Paper." *College Teaching* 39.3 (1991): 105-07. Web.

Marybelle Kleim, a college professor, begins her article by reflecting on her own undergraduate and graduate experiences. She recalls her professors assigning term papers to culminate each course; these essays accounted for a disproportionate amount of her grade and, because all of her courses required them, she was forced to rush through them. Nonetheless, when she became a professor, she assigned the same term papers. She was not only disappointed by students' work, but she was concerned about plagiarism and originality. Therefore, Keim decided to introduce a few alternatives to the traditional end-of-term research paper. These replacements were spread out through the progression of the class rather than collected at the term's end. Keim's students were required to read a journal or article in the library (one related to the class' focus). They then practiced documentation and summary, bringing in a typed note card to the class. Keim grouped students, requesting that they share what they learned with these groups. She additionally implemented collaborative papers, as she knows students are more likely to collaboratively write in their future careers. Finally, Keim incorporated thought/opinion papers and a take-home final.

Keim's ideas could be incorporated into both College Preparatory Honors English 10 and AP Language and Composition. Before reading and analyzing a few of Martin Luther

King Jr.'s speeches with sophomores, they could each choose an aspect of his life to research: his childhood, his family, his influences, his opposition, etc. Students would research this aspect of his life, cite and summarize a source, and come to class to share what they learned. This would be a brief research exercise that then might further their understanding of King's speeches. Similarly, in AP Language and Composition, students could choose a current issue, much like they would see on a synthesis prompt. Perhaps they would choose the issue of straws in today's society. Each student would then find a related source, cite and summarize it, and discuss it with their classmates. Students would gain valuable research practice through this task, but we would also begin our introduction to synthesis in a meaningful way.

LGH, McColley Beverly A., Kratochvil Nan, Dreyfuss Jane, Arni Sherry, Christenson Eric H., Bergh Anita W., and Stocky Rosemarie. "The Round Table: Alternatives to the Traditional Research Paper." *The English Journal* 77.6 (1988): 72-74. Web.

This article was published by the National Council of Teachers of English. It includes several accounts from middle school and high school English teachers; these teachers dispute the traditional research paper and cite its inability to inspire students and help them to develop meaningful research skills. Therefore, these educators share alternative research assignments. An eighth grade teacher asks her students, who have been exposed to historical fiction, to choose a mode of writing (drama, fiction, series of letters, etc.) to depict a historical time period. A freshman teacher requests that her students share where they would most like to travel (a historical time period or a location). They research to “write the story of what [they] found when [they] went there.” Another high school

educator, inspired by the I-Search process, has students pick an issue of interest. They then write a letter (or, if suitable, another written form) to a person or organization who may address the problem (a newspaper, member of Congress, etc.). Lastly, one high school English instructor has students write in a narrative form, perhaps about the issues of coming of age. She then identifies meaningful topics that emerge from these narratives; students use these topics to form research questions. Other alternative examples were provided in the article.

I feel most compelled by the two latter choices. If students were to select an issue of interest and write a letter, they would engage with an authentic audience and rhetorically consider this audience. This past year, sophomores chose a topic of interest, gathered research, and presented their final arguments to their classmates; their topics improved this year and oftentimes connected to the school or community, but the presentations lasted too long. This year, students could again choose a topic of interest and gather research, but maybe the final product would be sending a letter. For instance, after my one student gathered information on vaping at our school and interviewed administrators about it, instead of delivering a final speech, he could deliver a letter to the principal or to the school board. In this letter, he would share what he had learned about the vaping issue and why current disciplinary actions were not working. He might also share suggestions that he has.

Marshall, Colleen. "A System for Teaching College Freshmen to Write a Research Paper."

*College English* 40.1 (1978): 87-89. Web.

Colleen Marshall, an undergraduate composition professor, shares her own non-traditional approach to beginning a research paper. In her classroom, she initiates the paper by working on student reading skills. Her students select an article, identify the main idea, and then locate (and differentiate between) facts and speculation. Marshall then chooses a broad, relevant topic and turns this into a question. For instance, she decides on the broad topic of “family” and transforms this into a question, asking students what size of a family seems appropriate for them in the future. Students then write an opinion-based paper in response to the question; at this point, they do not use any research. Marshall reads these opinion papers and helps students to best organize and arrange their ideas. She ensures that students argue a point and have an explicit or implicit “because” statement. After appropriate revision, students continue by noting implicit questions that drive their opinion statements. Using these implicit questions, students research, supplementing their opinion statements with proper evidence. They eventually review their papers to check for appropriate use of academic voice. Marshall notes that students further understand the process through this strategy, and this method subsides plagiarism-related issues.

Marshall’s idea would allow my students to journal before doing any research. With sophomore students, I could pose one of these questions: What are the challenges of being a high school student? What problems do we have at Olentangy High School? What problem do we have in our community? What problems have you specifically faced as a high school student in Lewis Center, Ohio? Students would write on one (or more) of these questions for the entire period. I would then read their journal entries, highlighting

and commenting on some viable possibilities for research. This would not only provide with guidance at the beginning of the research process, but it would spark their interest.

Shanks, Marlene. "EJ Update: The Research Paper: Two More Alternatives." *The English Journal* 77.5 (1988): 81-82. Web.

Marlene Shanks is a high school English teacher in Huber Heights, Ohio. She employs two unique research alternatives and has found success with both. For the first assignment, Shanks distributes two names of similar authors (such as Emerson and Thoreau). Students then go to the library and conduct research over their assigned authors. After completing their research, students return to the classroom and write fictional letters between the authors. They use their research to drive the authenticity of the letters and even mimic the writer's style. Students not only learn more about the famous authors, but they also experiment with writing strategy and work to naturally embed research. Similarly, the second alternative research assignment is genuine. Shanks recognizes how busy many of her colleagues are; she seeks out teacher needs at the school and compiles these proposals for students. Students work to address the needs through research and respond with a solution. For instance, students may investigate the best equipment for a department or inquire into appropriate reads for grade levels and subject areas.

Shanks' last idea is most appealing, though I have never tried it. Before the sophomore-level research assignment, I could send out a GoogleForm to teachers. I would ask them questions such as: 1) Is there anything teaching-wise that you would like to learn more about? 2) What issues would you like to research further (and find solutions for) if you

had the time? Then, I would compile these issues for students and give them the option to further explore them for their own research. Students might enjoy researching for an actual audience — teachers that they know — and then delivering their findings to these educators. Their research would have purpose.

Strickland, James. "Just the FAQs: An Alternative to Teaching the Research Paper." *The English Journal* 94.1 (2004): 23-28. Web.

James Strickland is an undergraduate composition professor. Strickland notes how few students will ever write anything comparable to the traditional research paper in their careers. However, he acknowledges the importance of research skills and keys in on technology-related research skills. Many websites contain a page for frequently asked questions; Strickland's students model this page and, in the process, they practice skills related to synthesizing, paraphrasing, summarizing, and citing. Instead of culminating a traditional research paper, Strickland's students compile a page of frequently asked questions.

Before beginning a unit, students could compile an FAQ page in groups or individually. They might read about the circumstances surrounding King's final speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop," summarizing articles and forming a list of the most relevant questions. After researching, sophomores could compile their information through responding to the frequently asked questions: When did King give the speech? Why were the workers protesting? What threats had King received building up to the speech? This assignment could also introduce *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the class. Students could

research Alabama in the 1930's to better understand the text's setting. If students researched different elements, groups could then read other pages to learn.

Wirtz, Jason. "Creating Possibilities: Embedding Research into Creative Writing." *The English Journal* 95.4 (2006): 23-27. Web.

Jason Wirtz infuses creativity into his research unit. He recognizes the lifeless nature of the research paper and notes how students commonly plagiarize or even purchase papers. Therefore, in his class, he introduces the unit by having students read Anthony Doerr's "The Shell Collector." In this creative piece, Doerr seamlessly embeds his own research on shells in order to create an interesting piece of fiction. Wirtz informs his students that they will do the same. With his students, Wirtz discusses their perceptions of the research paper. With the understanding that their end goal will be to create a piece of informed fiction, students begin by writing a short traditional research paper. They write this in MLA format and use in-text citations. After this, students use "The Shell Collector" as inspiration. Wirtz affords them with the opportunity to write a story that seamlessly embeds their research. In the article, he shares excerpts of his students' work. One student wrote from the "first person perspective of a gangster working for Al Capone" (Wirtz 26). Another student used actual information about a popular hockey player in order to enhance a fictional piece about hockey. In the end, Wirtz found that his students not only better understood the idea of embedding, but they were more enthusiastic about research and its uses.

Wirtz's ideas parallel Heickenlaible's and Beachley's propositions, as shared above.

However, in his article, he shares that Anthony Doerr's "The Shell Collector" is a strong

initial piece to share with students, especially since it is a short story and not a novel. For Creative Writing, before beginning a unit on research and the short story, I plan to incorporate this piece so students value the role of research in the short story.

### My Hibernating Imagination: My Journey as a Writer

Remember when you would play with Barbies, creating personalities for plastic dolls for hours on end? What about that time that you dressed up as Cher and performed *Believe* at your choir's talent show? Or that other time, when you and your neighbors practiced that play, the one you were sure would be a real hit?

As a kid, I didn't require much for entertainment. On a snow day, my friends and I would build an igloo in the front yard and then weave a storyline that included characters who had to take refuge in the icehouse. Other times, one of us would pretend to be a teacher. With only paper in our hands, we'd envision the teacher's lesson and how the class would react when they found out that Johnny had a crush on Katie. Sometimes, at "real" school, when the actual educators let us out for recess, a couple of kids would get married by the second-grade officiant, and speeches would follow.

At 29-years-old, the thought of dressing up like Cher and hopping on stage makes me break into hives. And, if one of my elementary-aged cousins asked me to "play" Barbies, I would want to ask, "How?" I now have a job, a husband, a home, a dog, a college degree, and another on the way. My accounts surpass my childhood piggy bank — thank God. The truth is, as you age, a lot grows: your height, your weight, your financial status, your academic status, your job status, your family, and maybe even your house. Without question, I've expanded in most ways: I'm more empathetic, patient, intellectual, and giving. But while most of adulthood is about increasing, we shrink, too. We fear vulnerability, so we shirk goofiness and try not to be too weird. We no longer walk up on the stage to sing and dance and have fun for the fear of making ourselves into a spectacle. And instead of building with our minds, we depend on our checking

accounts for entertainment: they buy our iPhones, TVs, GoogleHomes, and movie passes. In short, we lose our ability to create and imagine for *ourselves* — for our own personal joy.

I don't think I fully appreciated what I had lost from my childhood until I was 25. I had just started teaching Creative Writing for the first time. Before teaching this class, most of my students looked forward to weekends for no homework, instead saturating their time with friends, sports, or even TV. Creative Writing students, however, look forward to their weekends for another reason altogether: weekends are filled with rare, precious hours for writing, for the creative juices to flow. Drafts that were only a page at the end of class on a Friday turn into hearty short stories by Monday. Though not yet Pulitzer Prize nominees, these students are imaginative, and they write for *themselves*. Watching them, then and now, I often wonder why my creativity has taken such a hit. My days of envisioning a story seem to be long gone. I'm frequently left dumbfounded in my own classroom. *What would I write about if I had to create this story? How would I develop characters? A situation? Writing an essay?* No problem. In most instances, I am able to draft an academic essay with relative ease, but attempting to write a short story is like climbing Everest itself. Throughout my literacy development, I have gained considerable competence in terms of analytical ability, but I have also lost a little bit as well. Perhaps most of all, I've lost the drive that these students have: to write for myself on my own time, without any requirements or stipulations.

It's no coincidence that I lost my creative spark around the same time that adulthood set in, the time when I gained inhibitions and the desire to please. Before adulthood, I remember a time when my creative skills matched those of my students, a time when I, too, wrote more freely instead of being plagued by constant writer's block. My individuality and unrestrained imagination helped to teach me to write. (I learned the letters and words first, of course, but in

reality, the drive to write - really learning the process of writing - was intimately connected with creativity.) My first kindergarten masterpiece, a book that was bound by the kind staff at Hilliard Crossing Elementary School, was about my beloved elementary dog, Snuggles. I can't remember the lines of the book itself, but *I remember that I wrote it*. It may have been littered with letter b's that looked like d's, but it was mine. Perhaps I had taken the realistic route and had written about my dog sleeping on my lap on the way home from school every day, or (more likely) I had written her character in as the flying canine. Snuggles may have been illustrated the size that resembled a bear rather than dog, but it mattered nonetheless: I was learning to *write*, and for an elementary version of me, that meant loving every minute and working my imagination into overdrive. I suspect that many people share similar stories. Thesis statements, topic sentences, and related terminology are foreign to the elementary student, so he/she relies on something else entirely: the imagination. Young students learn to write through transforming their imaginative thoughts — the same ones that enable them to play with such enthusiasm — onto paper. And, in doing so (if they resemble me), they may learn to love writing as much as they love to play.

My creative capacity extended beyond my elementary school years. In addition to writing, I devoured books. Among these, of course, was the ever-popular *Harry Potter* series. Like many other kids my age, I stood in long lines at midnight, read each new book of the series into the wee hours of the morning, and saw every movie on the day of its release. I even saw the last movie with a mouthful of cotton balls after getting my wisdom teeth pulled *that morning*. Perhaps unlike many children, though, enjoying the *Harry Potter* series was not strictly confined to reading it, for my expansive imagination wanted to be more involved; in middle school, too impatient to wait for the release of the next book, I decided to write it *myself*. (Too bad Bloomsbury did not decide to pick up my draft of the book. Student loans would be a thing of the

past.) During my summer vacation, I sat at my parents' old box-like computer and fervently typed pages. I created various conflicts and even a few new characters. When I closed out the document each night, I could not wait to begin again the next day: to add to Harry and Hermione's clear romantic tension, to expand on the effects of a new curse, and to develop Draco's morality. At the end of the summer, I had typed over 30 single-spaced pages using a typical font and size. And, through it, I was again learning to write or, at the very least, developing my writing. The experiences that are the most memorable to me when thinking of my literacy development are these moments, the ones that allowed for me to make *choices* as a writer — to decide. I chose where I wanted to write, when I wanted to write and, most importantly, *what* I wanted to write. I associated writing with freedom, a pursuit that unshackled the imagination. I wasn't afraid to be weird. And, because of this, it was more than just a part of the school day or a graduation requirement.

Power of the Pen, the middle school writing organization, inspired me to write with the same frenzy that I had when completing my own *Harry Potter* sequel. In a limited amount of time, I had to create a story based on a limited prompt. It was my duty to create something different than my fellow peers, and I was able to do just that. One prompt, in paraphrased terms, asked for the middle school population to write a story that included a *shoe*. 45 minutes! My thirteen-year-old self could have written for hours. I wrote (and subsequently later described my story to anyone who would listen) a story that focused on a horse, with the horseshoe being the last image of the writing. You will not (unfortunately) be able to find this gem in the latest subscription of *Reader's Digest*, but here, too, I was learning to write, to develop, to differentiate myself. And, once again, this learning was taking place because of my creative capacity. These imaginative pursuits were not only enjoyable for me, but they also gave me confidence,

something I believe was crucial to my literacy development. I had *fun* with my writing, and (I believed) *I was good at it*. What better way to gain writing skills than to believe that you are capable of doing so?

Age certainly was a factor of my creative peak. At the same time that I was writing the next *Harry Potter* book, my cousins and I were also performing backyard “concerts” for our family that consisted of the Backstreet Boys’ top hits. I am (somewhat) thankful that I lost the drive to belt out Nick Carter lyrics at family gatherings, and I am certain the extended family appreciates the increased peace when we get together. But, when I look back, I realize this creativity and lack of self-consciousness served as an aid in my own literacy development. As I grew into adulthood, I lost the power to play — to be fun, weird, and unembarrassed — and it affected my writing. When I stopped feeling comfortable pretending to be Lizzie McGuire in my front yard, I stopped pretending what it would be like to be a character in a story. When I stopped pretending that I could one day go to Hogwarts, I stopped valuing the gift of imagination. And, though I loved school and had wonderful teachers, my classes only validated this for me. After middle school, rubrics rarely included any sort of imaginative component. We learned to organize our writing and create cohesion, which was then validated by our end-of-year exams. While I had before associated writing with “play,” drafting a *Harry Potter* sequel for my own entertainment, I later associated writing with “work,” composing essays for everyone else: my teachers, AP readers, college admissions counselors, and my professors. And, in almost every aspect, I did improve: I communicated ideas with ease, supported propositions, organized effectively, and understood grammatical conventions.

But, even though I’m 29-years-old, I want to play more: to run around the back yard with my elementary-aged cousins as we try to escape that zombie attack. I need imagination and

goofiness and vulnerability in my adult life. And in my writing. I want to wake up on a Saturday morning, brew a pot of coffee, and sit down and develop a story that I write for myself. It's more than fitting, then, that the last class I'm enrolled in to finish my master's degree is a workshop on writing fiction. The variables are right: I can write *any* type of fiction I want, and there are no oppressive restraints pertaining to pace and length. I've started to write my first short story in over a decade. While my creativity hasn't reached its middle school peak, I'm finding that I *do* have an imagination, even if it's been hibernating for a little while. Symbolically, could there be any better way to finish my final degree? To come back to what initially sparked my love for English? And to once again bring play back to my own writing, reading, and teaching?

Literacy development for me (and I suspect many of my colleagues and fellow adults) has been an exchange. I learned through my unlimited imagination, but I put these imaginative talents on the back burner for increased professionalism. And, in all honesty, academic written skills are important and are used far more frequently in most professional fields than some of these creative skills. (For those of us who are not the next Stephen King, anyway.) That doesn't mean that there is not a place for creativity, though. So many of my English classes worked to teach me the professional skills — properly citing, setting up a paragraph, using appropriate sentence variety — that I forgot how much joy originality had brought me. As a student, I removed the personal pronouns from my academic writing assignments, but I perhaps took this too far and lost my imagination, the “me” piece, in the process. It may take some time (and for life to just slow down a bit), but I'm determined to rekindle my relationship with my former selves: the kindergartener who penned a moving tale about her favorite canine, the seventh-grader who connected with her inner-J.K. Rowling, and the eighth-grader who found joy in writing about shoes.