

VOLUME 25
1998



**The Nature of Tragedy
in the Postmodern Age:
An Exploration of A.R. Gurney's
Another Antigone**

**Ernest Gellner's
"Modular Man"
In the Modern Theatre**

**Trisha Yearwood:
Subtleties and Survival
of an American Girl**

...Prejudices...

**The Status of Speech
Communication Instruction
in Minnesota's
Technical Colleges**

COMMUNICATION & THEATER ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA
FORN

COMMUNICATION AND THEATER ASSOCIATION
OF MINNESOTA JOURNAL

Volume 25

Summer 1998

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Nature of Tragedy in the Postmodern Age: An Exploration of A.R. Gurney's <u>Another Antigone</u> <i>Rose Bielman</i>	5
Ernest Gellner's "Modular Man" in the Modern Theatre <i>James Brandon</i>	13
Trisha Yearwood: Subtleties and Survival of an American Girl <i>Thomas Endres</i>	27
... Prejudices ... <i>Jon Keune</i>	45
The Status of Speech Communication Instruction in Minnesota's Technical Colleges <i>Mary L. Swart, Hazel Rozema, and Daniel Cronn-Mills</i>	71

TEACHER'S WORKBOOK

Vocal Orchestration in the Literature Classroom <i>Gerald Lee Ratliff</i>	84
When Harry Met Sally: A Gender Communication Analysis Assignment <i>Suzanne Stangl-Erkens</i>	90

COMMUNICATION AND THEATER ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA JOURNAL

Volume 25

Summer 1998

Editor

Warren Sandmann
Mankato State University

Associate Editors

Verna Corgan, Hamline University
Michael Dreher, Bethel College
Helen Fisk, Mounds Park Academy
David Lapakko, Augsburg College
Gwen Sullivan, Mankato State University

CTAM Officers

President: Thomas Endres, St. Thomas University
President-Elect: Joni Anker, Eagan High School
Past-President: Pamela Cady, Apple Valley High School
Secretary: Susan Collie, Winona State University
Treasurer: Larry Schnoor, 107 Agency Road, Mankato, MN
Newsletter Editor: Dan Cronn-Mills, Mankato State University
Historian: Cynthia Carver, Concordia College

The *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal* is published annually, usually during the summer, by the COMMUNICATION AND THEATER ASSOCIATION OF MINNESOTA. Regular Membership in CTAM includes the journal subscription. CTAM membership information can be obtained from any of the officers. Single issues of the journal can be purchased by contacting the treasurer or editor. Departments may place advertisements in the Journal by contacting the editor.

The Menu-Driven System of Instruction and Evaluation:
Empowering College and High School Students in a
Decentered Learning Environment

Brooks A. Aylor

92

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Call for manuscripts goes out in the fall of the year and the deadline for submissions is in February of the following year. Details of how to submit are given in the Call which is sent to all members and all departments, and is announced in SPECTRA and the CTAM Newsletter. Book review ideas should be queried with the editor in advance of the submission date. Book reviews are generally published if accepted and on a space available basis. All articles are read anonymously by two Associate Editors. All author identification markings are removed from the articles, and no editor reads the work of a colleague. Associate Editors may submit articles to the journal, but their work must go through the process of blind review, just as any other submitter. The Journal Editor facilitates the process and makes final decisions based on the Associate Editors' recommendations and comments. If there are any questions about the process, please direct them to the Journal Editor.

Permissions Statement:

CTAM encourages scholars to use and make reference to work published in our journal. Scholars may quote, without permission, in order to document their own work. It is assumed that it is each scholar's responsibility to acknowledge and properly document such uses. Teachers may reproduce and distribute portions of this journal solely for educational purposes.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

This volume contains a number of excellent essays, covering the range of communication studies and theater, and representing the work of established scholars and student authors as well. We have three teaching resources in addition to the other scholarship represented here. There are two articles focusing on the interpretation of theatrical works, an article offering an interpretation of the rhetorical appeal of a particular country music singer, a look at how we are teaching communication in the Minnesota Technical Colleges, and an essay from one of the student panelists at the 1997 CTAM convention. This last essay proved both captivating and a challenge. The style is not one which we generally associate with academic writing, but the message is engaging. Besides, academic conventions need to be stretched from time to time. On behalf of the editorial staff, I want to thank all who have helped make this possible, and wish you both enjoyable reading and scholarly fulfillment in these pages.

CTAM JOURNAL MISSION STATEMENT

The *Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota Journal* is the scholarly journal of the Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota. It is also an outlet for innovative teaching methods as well as issues of discipline-related importance. All theoretical and methodological approaches are welcome. The CTAMJ encourages contributions from scholars and practitioners who comprise all segments of the journal's readership, including K-12 educators, graduate school, community college, and college and university groups. The journal welcomes theoretical and applied articles and teaching suggestions from both the theater and communication disciplines. All general articles will be blindly reviewed by capable scholars in the appropriate field.

No work will be accepted or rejected purely on the basis of its methodology and/or subject and/or the geographic location of the author(s) and/or the work affiliation (secondary/college level, department, etc.) of the author(s). Author sex, race, ethnic background, etc., are never considered in making editorial judgments. The demands of the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater are key factors in the editorial judgments made. But, when making editorial decisions, all attempts are made to balance these demands with the needs and interests of the journal's readers.

The Journal is guided by three key principles:

To provide an outlet for the expression of diverse ideas.

To publish high quality scholarship in the disciplines of Speech Communication and Theater.

To meet the journal-related needs of CTAM and its members.

The Nature of Tragedy in the Postmodern Age: An Exploration of A.R. Gurney's Another Antigone

Rose M. Beilman, Pratt Community College

In the Golden Age of Greece, when Sophocles was writing his play, *Antigone*, the average audience expected from a tragedy an episodic structure; a commenting, community-minded, and corrective chorus; a reversal or irony within the structure; a hero or heroine with some human flaw that brought about the character's disproportionate downfall; and most of all a discussion of how man or woman operated within an often unfair universe. In other words, the parameters were set for the Greek audience, and those parameters correlated to a largely homogenous society with largely homogenous values and norms. In contrast, a U. S. playwright operating in today's society encounters a multitude of expectations about the theatrical experience and a hodgepodge of disparate backgrounds and values in a single audience. What playwright A.R. Gurney does in his 1988 play, *Another Antigone*, to engage that disparate audience is to question the nature of tragedy in today's America and to enquire whether or not we are capable of understanding tragedy in our society. In doing this, not only does Gurney model structure, character, tone, and theme along the lines of Sophocles' *Antigone*, but more importantly, he gives them a postmodern spin, a dialectical question mark with a P.C. twist—P.C. as in "politically correct." While this latter term has been full of controversy in recent political dialogue, it is germane to Gurney's examination of the current milieu surrounding standards and multiculturalism within the academy. Since he questions that the divisions between groups and a lack of standards to unify us may lead to tragedy in postmodern times, the term is not intended to inflame but merely to inform a discussion of theme within Gurney's play.

Gurney's take on Sophocles' *Antigone* is particularly significant since it both draws on the original play and comments on our society. Produced by Playwrights Horizons in New York City in 1988, *Another Antigone* focuses on the struggles between an authority figure (the Creon-like professor, Henry) and a youth figure (the Antigone-like student, Judy.) In choosing the Antigone myth, Gurney places the themes of the original—authority versus individual, age versus youth, public conscience versus private conscience—as highly relevant themes in today's world. As Steiner has related, "In Greek tragedy, the dimension of transcendence is of the essence In myth there is always an 'awaiting' of meaning . . . it is myth and its commitment to transcendence which generate, which compel, the dynamics of recursion, of repetition (that 'asking again') across time" (303).

Using the myth, Gurney asks again about authority, age, and conscience — like many other playwrights through the centuries who have drawn on the original myth; yet Gurney also transcends time through the myth to ask a particularly difficult question about our own era — specifically, is tragedy possible in a postmodern world where our divisions pull us apart, despite increased interaction between those with differing backgrounds? The answer to this question lies in a discussion of how Gurney has formed structure, character, tone, and theme both as a recursion of Sophocles' play and as a reflection of contemporary life.

To begin, Gurney arranges his structure along the lines of the original *Antigone*, with episodes examining the conflict of the two main characters, Henry and Judy, seen in increasing antagonism as the college professor, Henry, and his student, Judy, battle scholastically over her current adaptation of Sophocles' original tragedy. As Elwood remarks, "The Antigone story, timeless in its impact and relevance, has been used by many twentieth century playwrights in an attempt to set an ancient theme in a viable contemporary form" (48). Gurney, like other writers of this century, has attempted to remark on our own times through the use of the story, and the framework has remained fairly similar to the original. The structure is episodic with scenes holding two characters or monologues building to the climactic scene. In this climactic scene, Henry and Judy meet and appear to come to an agreement that she will accept a "B" from him for her production of her *Antigone*. However, when Henry discovers that the Provost would allow Judy to take the course under another professor as "Special Topics" and receive an "A," his academic and professional pride takes over. He issues a genuinely anti-Semitic remark (an ironic moment since this is the first genuinely racist remark he has spoken,) "...the Chosen People always choose to intrude", and she storms out, "I wouldn't recommend this course to a Nazi! And I'll take a good, solid Jewish A from Birnbaum!" (100).

The structure is made more contemporary and thus more immediate to today's audiences through several different means. First of all, the chorus has been deleted, although the two other characters in the play—the dean, Diana, and Judy's lover, Dave—function as foils to the excessive primary characters. Diana and Dave both advocate a middle course of action. Diana, when speaking to Henry, argues for more accommodation to the student; he thinks accepting Judy's project would render his standards worthless. Dave, when speaking to Judy, argues for doing a regular paper or accepting a lower grade; Judy thinks taking either of these actions would invalidate the effort and ideas behind her project. As in the original *Antigone*, the primary characters remain intractable despite advice from others. Still, Diana and Dave substitute for the chorus and for other characters from the original, and thus, Gurney is able to both

streamline his play for a modern audience and to accommodate soaring production costs by reducing the cast to four.

In addition to changes in character, the emphasis of the plot has changed considerably, and although Gurney wrote the play in pre-P.C. 1988, political correctness in the academy is largely what the play deals with. The basic plot revolves around Judy's attempts to create a new *Antigone* and Henry's resolve to stay true to his academic standards. The plot is rendered complex in that Judy's adaptation is poorly written, pretentious, and a nod to liberal guilt. Judy begins her adaptation by focusing on the nuclear arms race, but when Diana accidentally plants an idea that other students have complained of Henry's anti-Semitism, Judy makes Antigone Jewish, and Gurney's play explores what happens when academic standards are forced to pay homage to multiculturalism. Also, Judy shows little understanding of the nature of tragedy when, after Dave reminds her that "Antigone dies in the end, remember", she remarks, "That's the old version. Mine ends happily ever after" (88). In addition, the play is complex in that Henry remains emotionally distant from those around him, so wrapped up in knowledge of the classics that he becomes the victim of personal and political isolation. Like Reinhardt remarked about the original, this play becomes a tragedy as, "the centres of two human beings, both equally remote, may move around the same invisible central point, each equally thrown off balance and off course....tragedies dealing with a double fate" (74). As the audience sees Judy and Henry become further entrenched in their own points of view and thus further isolated, the audience questions both the viewpoint that ALL opinions should be given voice and that ALL ideas should be held to academically rigorous standards. Through the plot and structure of his play, then, Gurney involves his audience in questioning these viewpoints.

Character, too, involves Gurney's audience as Judy and Henry become a modern-day Antigone and Creon. Hamburger has remarked about the original characters, "Both are destroyed.... But they are destroyed only as individuals. Their ideas do not perish, but only the individuals who represent them, and they perish because they both represent only one side of the idea of eternal justice. Both of them are right and both of them are wrong, because both of them are right only one-sidedly" (253). So too are Judy and Henry right only one-sidedly.

Judy asserts her right to voice her opinions. When told by Henry that she has written a "juvenile polemic on current events" she counters with cultural relativism, "Of course that's your opinion" (6). Soon after this encounter, she states, "I'm going to put this play *on*. I wrote it, and I like it, and I'm committed to what it says." (8). She remains firm in her right to voice her opinions, to the point where she will admit no censure for her failure to follow directions of the instructor. As Henry says, "At the

beginning of the semester, I handed out a list of assigned topics. I stated specifically that any departures from these topics should be cleared through me. Now suddenly, long before the term is over, I discover this odd effort, stuffed under my door, with no previous permission whatsoever." (5). She has flouted the law of the academy that she should follow the instructor's directions. Instead, Judy's conscience dictates that she fight to express her individuality, which for her means writing her own version of *Antigone* reflecting her cultural and political opinions. Similarly, *Antigone* flouted current law to follow the dictates of her own conscience.

Henry, meanwhile, holds onto his right to academic freedom, which for him means stressing the classics above all other studies. He lectures to his class, "For the next session, read *The Trojan Women* by Euripides. Feminists will appreciate his sympathetic portrayal of women. Pacifists will admire his bitter attack on war. Classicists, however, prefer to reach beyond such limited responses" (46). In addition, even in the face of low enrollment of humanities classes, he persists in advocating high standards, "We live in an age where a book—a good book—is as obsolete as an Aeolian harp. All the more reason to keep standards up" (79). Like Creon, who held up the law of the polis, Henry holds up standards of the academy—which for him means that an "A" is truly exceptional.

To keep the characters believable and to keep the audience interested, Gurney makes both Judy and Henry likable in several ways, yet both are excessive. Winnington-Ingram remarks about *Antigone* and Creon, "The heroes [of Sophocles' tragedies] have a dimension of greatness beyond the measure of normal humanity: they go on where ordinary men would stop. It is a kind of excess, and excess is dangerous" (4). Like *Antigone* and Creon, both Judy and Henry have a greatness about them, yet they are also excessive. Judy is hard-working, persevering. Again and again, when she doesn't think her play is working, she rewrites with the intention that, "I'll make it better" (17). Her perseverance and her willingness to better her creation shows a measure of greatness. Yet she is brash, and once she rewrites her play to reflect the anti-Semitism she perceives, she becomes more and more extreme. When awarded the Peabody Prize for academic excellence and extracurricular commitment, she turns it down, saying:

Lately I've been doing some thinking, and as someone once told me, that's always a good sign. I've been thinking about this prize, for example. I guess it stands for everything I used to believe in: personal ambition...success...And sure, why not?...money...I mean, these are the things they tell us make our country great...Trouble is, I'm beginning to think these

things aren't so important. Maybe my play hasn't influenced anyone else, but it sure has influenced me. I don't feel good about my life anymore. I don't feel good about my country. I can't accept all this *stuff* that's going on these days. I can't accept it (108-109).

She can't accept anything about the society she lives in at the end of the play, and like Antigone, she has alienated herself from those around her. Winnington-Ingram says that "when her sister, who had failed to share her heroism, seeks out of mere affection to share her death, [Antigone] cast[s] her out into the ranks of the enemy" (3). Judy does the same thing with Dave. When he won't skip Henry's class to rehearse Judy's play, Judy throws this line at Dave, "Then it's true, what my grandmother said! You people always turn your backs when the chips are down!" (105). Judy has become what she reviles and it is ironic that when she feels betrayed and defenseless here by Dave's attendance of Henry's last class, she acts in the same manner as Henry earlier when he felt betrayed and defenseless by the provost's decision to let Judy receive an "A" for the project under Birnbaum's tutelage.

Henry, like Judy, is a study in greatness and extremes. The professor is an intellectual, a teacher who knows his subject, and who expects his students to know that subject in some in depth way. Given the opportunity of a sabbatical to calm the troubled waters of his current academic storm, Henry opts for teaching, "I am a classical scholar. I trained at Harvard. I have written three good books. I know a great deal, and I have to teach what I know, and I'm only good when I'm teaching it!" (83-84). As a teacher, Henry holds high standards for students' work, as he remarks on page 21, "I am not so far lost in the current inflation of grades as to litter the campus with disposable B's." Also, unfortunately, he cannot relax those standards until it is too late. Unfortunately, he also cannot rid himself of an obsession with Greek versus Hebraic themes in western culture or as he puts it, "Odysseus versus Abraham. Public honor versus private conscience" (31), "the age-old clash between Athens and Jerusalem" (60). Interestingly, as much as Henry paints himself as Athens, in this struggle of the academy over Judy's *Antigone*, it is actually Henry who is holding to his private conscience or to Jerusalem, for Judy represents the current societal trend towards cultural relativism, and Henry represents the individual standing against the societal forces of political correctness. Because of this turnabout or irony in characterization, Gurney keeps his audience wondering about the nature of the individual in a society such as ours and about the upholding of standards against a tide of relativism.

Unlike the seriousness of Sophocles' play, Gurney's play keeps the audience interested through tone. Gurney uses witty, playful, and almost satiric language to entertain a modern audience. The dry humor and the

irony of the play help to mold the audience's perception of the play. As an example of the humor, both Henry and Judy ask Diana not to smoke in front of them. As an example of the borderline satire, Judy's writing does indeed seem sophomoric or juvenile, and it almost reads as a "Saturday Night Live" skit:

Well, what's a jail these days? Maybe this is a jail right here. This so-called ivory tower. This labyrinth of curricular obligations. This festering nest of overpaid administrators. This rotten pit of dry and exhausted pedants. This winter camp which capitalism creates to keep its children off the job market (85).

Judy has created a jumble of mixed metaphors here, and Gurney thus comments that not all effort at work or to create should be rewarded scholastically. As an instance of Gurney's use of irony, throughout the play, Henry maintains that Judy's work "is not a tragedy by Sophocles...It is a comedy by Aristophanes at best. I am not Creon, and that little Jewish princess is not Antigone, Princess of Thebes" (34). He reiterates this time and again. However, the audience understands that Gurney is setting Henry up as a postmodern Creon and Judy as his multicultural Antigone. Thus Gurney comments ironically on the play, and by making both Henry and Judy unaware of their own natures, he implies that tragedy in any age, including the postmodern, is possible. This implication is furthered by the awareness that both Henry and Judy come to at the end of the play. She comes to the realization that she has a tendency to generalize as much as Henry—"Oh, Lord. I'm as bad as Harper." (105)—and that there are more important things in living than making a fast buck and earning a six-figure income, which had been earlier goals of the young woman—"I'm beginning to think it's a con deal. All us women now killing ourselves to do those things that a lot of men decided not to do twenty years ago." (66). Henry comes to realize that he has held himself distant from people:

But I've just discovered something else about tragedy, or at least about Sophoclean tragedy. Something I thought I knew, but didn't understand till now. And that is what the tragic heroes do after the net has closed around them. What they do, even in the teeth of disaster, is accept responsibility...this is what Creon does...He had lost his wife, his children, all he holds dear. And he realizes why: that in his commitment to abstract and dehumanizing laws, he had neglected the very heart of life (107).

At the heart of this play are themes that are both age-old and essentially postmodern. Dibble writes that the original *Antigone* has "inspired writers and audiences throughout the centuries and across

cultural differences. Each version of *Antigone* concerns itself in some way with the play's intrinsic controversies of the young generation against the old, tradition against new law, and individual engagement against power of state" (1). Like the original, *Another Antigone* does concern itself with these dichotomies. Judy is young, strident, and enthusiastic in her efforts; Henry is older, pompous, and decisive about his actions. She represents the new order; he represents the old. She represents the push for cultural relativism; he represents the desire for cultural standards. Of course, in today's milieu, her emphasis is the politically correct choice, yet this play engages and asks of its audience, "Without standards where would our society be?" As Iannone mentions in her discussion of Gurney's play, "Gurney is pitching Henry's straightforwardly authoritarian, pre-sixties professionalism versus the (albeit sometimes inconsistent) egalitarianism of today, in which students have grown accustomed to being pleased and catered to, their creativity encouraged and applauded" (1). In another review of the play in *The New Yorker*, Oliver focuses on the anti-Semitism of the play as a major theme, and it is interesting to note that two different scholars choose to focus on these different elements of the theme—one on academic standards, one on anti-Semitism. Such different viewpoints acknowledge the complexity of Gurney's work, but they also illustrate some of what Gurney is questioning about our society. With such different standards and with such different backgrounds in the United States, how can we ever hope to identify with one another?

Gurney intimates that it is precisely this disparity that can lead to tragedy in the United States. Henry states that, "I don't think anyone in this happy-ending country really does [know what tragedy is]. Tragedy means the universe is unjust and unfair, Diana. It means we are hedged about by darkness, doom, and death. It means the good, the just, the well-intentioned don't always win, Diana. That's what tragedy means" (25). Despite Henry's constant reiteration of the inability of Americans to truly know what tragedy is, Gurney implies through the disappearance of Judy and Henry at the end of the play that our tragedies lie in our inability to bridge the gaps between the multitude of cultures in the U.S. Both Judy and Henry are good, just, and well-intentioned, but they both lose. Henry has lost his profession, his calling, his students, and Judy has lost her self-respect and her belief in the American Dream. By creating these characters in such a way, Gurney not only mirrors Sophocles' classic, but he also gives American audiences a chance to question some of the conundrums that relativism and an emphasis on freedom have given our society.

References

- Dibble, Gisela V. *ANTIGONE: From Sophocles to Holderlin and Brecht*. Ed. Karelisa V. Hartigan. *Legacy of Thespis*. Lanham, MD: Uni-

versity Press of America, 1984.

Elwood, William T. "Hasenclaver and Brecht: A Critical Comparison of Two Antigones." *Educational Theatre Journal* 24 #1+ (Mar 1972): 8-68.

Gurney, A. R. Jr. *Another Antigone*. Garden City: Fireside Theatre, 1988.

Hamburger, Kate. "From Sophocles to Sartre." Ed. R.D. Dawe. *Sophocles: The Classical Heritage*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996.

Iannone, Carol. "PC on Stage." *Academic Questions* 6 #4 (Fall 1993) 72-86.

Oliver, Edith. "The Theatre: The Professor's Dilemma." *The New Yorker* 63 (Jan 25, 1988) 85.

Reinhardt, Karl. *Sophocles*. Trans. Hazel Harvey and David Harvey. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Trans. Hugh Lloyd Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Steiner, George. *Antigones*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Winnington-Ingram, R.P. *Sophocles: An Interpretation*. Cambridge University Press, 1980. On CD-ROM. Authors on Disk, Gale Research, 1993.

Ernest Gellner's "Modular Man" in the Modern Theatre

James Brandon, Bowling Green State University

WILLY: I'm talking about your father! There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit! (Miller 1972, 82)

Willy Loman's frantic pleas to his employer evoke the tragic picture of a man who is suffering from, as Brooks Atkinson put it, "fatal misconceptions about his place in the scheme of things" (Beckerman 298). Arthur Miller's protagonist from *Death of a Salesman* has lost touch with his world, and he can no longer exist as a viable economic entity. Loman's situation, and his inability to adapt to it, has existed for nearly fifty years as perhaps the definitive example of American tragedy.

Death of a Salesman has resonated for audiences worldwide throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. Its success would seem to indicate that Miller's play has some basis in everyday life that audiences have been able to consistently identify with. Miller's art is imitating life in some manner, but how? Did Miller, through his character, touch upon some problem that is central to American (and perhaps even industrialized) society?

After Shakespeare, German playwright Bertolt Brecht is the most produced dramatist in the world. He is arguably the most important theatre theorist of this century, and a number of his plays have become an accepted part of the theatrical canon. Foremost among these is *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Brecht's parable of the conflict between capitalism and communism. The protagonist Shen Te's relationship with the Gods reads curiously like the one between Willy Loman and his boss. In both cases, the characters are expected to cheerfully accept a sort of "social contract," a contract that they are unable to fulfill. Miller and Brecht paint chilling pictures of societies where the individual who is unable to conform to the new standards is left to poverty, or even worse, suicide.

Perhaps the popularity of *Death of a Salesman* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, particularly in modern and industrialized societies, can be best understood from within the context of social theory. In particular, Willy Loman's and Shen Te's dilemmas can be understood by relating them to Ernest Gellner's theory of the "modular man." Indeed, Gellner's concept of modular man, first articulated in his 1994 book, *Conditions of Liberty*, has

been foreshadowed within a number of dramatic texts.

In this essay, Gellner's concept of modular man is explored within the context of the modern theatre. The focus is on dramatic texts that look into problems that humans have in adapting to modularity. In the first section, Gellner's theory is introduced and discussed. This is followed by an examination of the two dramatic texts discussed above: Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Bertolt Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan*. These texts were chosen because the problems that are faced by Loman and Shen Te are very similar to those envisioned for the non-modular individual in Gellner's theory.

By using Gellner's concept of modular man as the lens through which these problems are discussed, it is the hope of the author that some shortcomings in Gellner's theory can be brought to light. In particular, the chosen dramatic texts seem to suggest that a primary force in opposition to modularity is Marx's (among others) concept of "alienation." This is important, as Gellner's theory of modular man, and his relationship to Civil Society, claims to fill a void which Marxist theory would have left empty (Gellner 1).

Applying Gellner's theory to a pair of well-established dramatic texts is important for number of reasons. The theatre often reflects movements from within the Civil Society that Gellner claims modular man makes possible, and the selected texts, which predate Gellner's work by nearly fifty years, contain significant elements of his theory. Gellner's theory also offers a new theoretical angle from which Brecht's and Miller's dramas can be viewed. As such, Gellner's theory can be of tremendous use in interpreting the selected plays, while the plays can illuminate some of the intricacies within the theory.

In addition to being the two plays that perhaps most clearly illustrate Gellner's ideas concerning the modular man, *Death of a Salesman* and *The Good Woman of Setzuan* were also chosen for the fact that they are roughly contemporary to one another. Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan* was published in the United States for the first time in 1948 and Miller's work appeared one year later. The plays were both received during the dynamic period directly following World War II and leading into the beginnings of Cold War hostilities. It is also important that Miller was writing for a capitalist American audience, while Brecht was writing for a communist European one. Of course Miller's communist sympathies and Brecht's capitalist habits muddle the picture some.

This study could go far beyond Brecht and Miller in its application to textual interpretation in the theatre, but it will not. There is a plethora of scripts by such diverse authors as Elmer Rice, David Mamet, Gerhardt Hauptmann and Samuel Becket that contain significant elements of Gellner's theory. These texts have not been overlooked, they merely do

not relate to the primary thesis of the study in the way that the chosen ones do.

Gellner's Theory Of The Modular Man: An Overview

In his 1994 book *Conditions of Liberty*, Ernest Gellner examines the building blocks of "Civil Society." He posits the "modular man" as the basic component for modern Civil Societies, and this concept must be understood before it can be applied to Miller and Brecht. For Gellner, modular man is the foundation upon which Civil Society is based. He draws his basic definition with an analogy to modular furniture. Gellner writes:

You can combine and recombine the bits [of modular furniture] at will. This makes modular furniture quite different from the ordinary kind: with the old kind, if you want coherence you have to buy it all at once. . .
(97)

Like the furniture, Gellner's modular man can fit into a variety of situations. This adaptability gives him the basic tools to easily mesh with various factions of Civil Society. This modular man can easily combine with other modular men to form effective, yet easily altered, associations. In Gellner's theory, this type of person is essential to modern industrialized society, and is at the core of advances in the nature of Civil Society during this century.

While "modular man" may be a useful tool in examining the rise of market capitalism during this century, there are a number of important questions which Gellner's theories bring up about the values of the very society he describes. There are also some inherent problems to the theory itself. The first problem with Gellner's theory, as he states himself, "is that in most contexts man is markedly unmodular" (98). Gellner posits non-modularity as being due mainly to man's self-interest. He believes that modularity is not a condition that can be presupposed, despite the beliefs of many Social Contract theorists. That Gellner should base his theory on a condition to which most people are not presupposed is curious, and leads to the question as to what exactly makes a person modular.

What makes a man modular? What is modularity? Gellner's theory is based upon man's ability to associate with other people in a Civil Society. A modular man's associations are very different from those of his predecessor. In the case of the non-modular man, associations are rigid, perhaps even stifling. He writes of these relationships:

Before you can trust his [the non-modular man's] promise, it has to be made with trumpets and drama, with witnesses and presentations, dancing and music,

and preferably with a sacrifice. His word is his bond only if blood flows while the word is given; and even then you had better be careful. (99)

So non-modular man is someone who cannot enter into any type of association lightly. This is quite different from today's modular man, who has an entirely different approach to association. His is, first and foremost, a world of change. The modular man is able to form limited, but effective associations. Gellner's modular man is able to leave an association when he wants, for the association is not binding. Gellner writes:

Modular man is capable of combining into effective associations and institutions, without these being total, many-stranded, underwritten by ritual and made stable through being linked to a whole inside set of relationships, all of these being tied in with each other and so immobilized. He can combine into specific-purpose, ad hoc, limited association, without binding himself by some blood ritual. (100)

The fluid nature of modular relationships opens a whole new realm of opportunities that did not exist for the non-modular man. The modular man's form of Civil Society is based upon limited associations. The Society is based upon a number of "contracts." Gellner writes:

It is this which makes Civil Society: the forging of links which are effective even though they are flexible, specific, instrumental. It does indeed depend on a move from Status to Contract: it means that men honor contracts even when they are not linked to ritualized status and group membership. (100)

So the modular man is an individual who can enter and dissolve contracts as they suit him. This is an accepted fact in the Civil Society of the modular man. Perhaps an example of the difference between this society and the previous one can be seen in choice of profession. The modular man would cringe at the oppressive "apprentice system" of a medieval Europe, but thrive in an American society where a person may change professions a dozen times in a lifetime.

A key factor in Gellner's theory for this study is that he recognizes the fact that some elements within the Society have difficulty with the entire notion of modularity. While modularity breeds adaptability and change, it also requires a level of specialization and separation. This has its own problems, one of which is a sense of alienation, as seen in the following passage:

But there is also the price of isolation of one activity from another, a kind of fragmentation which leaves each activity unsustained by the others, cold and

calculated by its own clearly formulated end, rather than part of a warm, integrated, "total" culture. Such alienation" or "disenchantment" is a price which some consider too high. (104)

This concept of alienation is important, and will be examined later within the context of the script analysis. For now though, it is important to note that the modular man's Civil Society is also one that attempts to minimize this alienation, mainly because it is not a force for positive societal change. Modular man's society has become a society that depends on cultural homogeneity. To be modular, it is important for Society to have a "standardization of the idiom," which makes inter- societal communication easy and effective (Gellner 105).

To summarize, the modular man is one who can freely form limited but effective associations. He lies in a Civil Society that allows for fluidity in the making and breaking of contracts, but also in a certain rigidity that requires a culturally homogeneous population. His fluid nature makes it essential that he pay particular attention to the nature of the various contracts which he has entered into, and this sometimes leads to a sense of alienation or disenchantment from the larger society.

Gellner attributes the rise of the modular man to a number of forces. Protestant Christianity, with its elimination of ritual (Gellner would argue, for another kind of "non-ritual" ritual) and emphasis on personal salvation seems to be the most powerful argument for modular man's rise. Yet however modular man, and the Civil Society he has created, came into being, it is clear that modular sensibilities rule the industrialized world today. Having said this, I would argue that the change to modularity has been very gradual, although the rate of change has accelerated greatly during the twentieth century. As such, it is interesting to see authors struggle with the problems of the "modular man" long before Gellner coined the term.

"Modular Man" in Miller's *Death Of A Salesman*

Of Miller's work, *Death of a Salesman* is usually considered most significant, perhaps because it dramatizes so successfully the conflict in the American consciousness between the desire for material success and for adventure and happiness. (Brockett 576)

Oscar Brockett's summary of Miller's play, found in his seminal *History of the Theatre*, highlights the central problem in both the play and Gellner's concept of modularity. As Gellner has already stated, man is a self-interested creature, who is only modular because it suits him to be so. It suits him because the political and economic consequences of non-modularity are enormous (Gellner 99).

Willy Loman finds this out the hard way. By settling into a rigid life-pattern, Loman denies himself the fruits of modularity. In a Gellnerian reading of *Death of a Salesman*, the tragedy is not only that Loman makes awful decisions (he does), but also that his concept of society is flawed. Loman lives under the "old way," the non-modular society in which promises were everything. Is it any wonder that Loman, a child of the non-modular society, is rejected by his modular boss, who feels no needs to fulfill the "blood oaths" that his father made years ago?

Miller was fully aware of the societal implications for his tragedy. In "Tragedy and the Common Man," an article he wrote for *The New York Times* to coincide with the opening of his play, he notes the importance of institutional practice in the creation of tragedy. Miller writes:

No tragedy can therefore come about when its author fears to question absolutely everything, when he regards any institution, habit or custom as being either everlasting, immutable or inevitable. In the tragic view the need of man to wholly realize himself is the only fixed star, and whatever it is that hedges his nature and lowers it is ripe for attack and examination. (Miller 1974, 896)

Miller is often referred to as a social dramatist, and his *Death of a Salesman* is a strong indictment of American Civil Society in the 1940s. Indeed, in a Gellnerian reading of the play, Miller's classic is an indictment of the modularity that makes Gellner's Civil Society possible.

If, as this essay supposes, a Civil Society based on modular man was the societal norm which Loman was reacting to, then *Death of a Salesman* must be seen as an indictment of Gellner's concept. Miller writes in "Tragedy and the Common Man:"

The tragic right is a condition of life, a condition in which the human personality is able to flower and realize itself. The wrong is the condition which suppresses man, perverts the flowing out of his love and creative instinct. Tragedy enlightens—and it must, in that it points the heroic finger at the enemy of man's freedom. The thrust for freedom is the quality in tragedy which exalts. The revolutionary questioning of the stable environment is what terrifies. In no way is the common man debarred from such thoughts or such actions. (Miller 1974, 895)

In his defense of the common man as the tragic hero, Miller hits upon the very essence of this Gellnerian reading of his script. Through Willy Loman, Miller is asking serious and disturbing questions about the nature of modularity, and more important, what is lost to society as modularity is

accepted.

This loss can be seen in Willy Loman, who perhaps stands as a representative for all industrialized, modular societies. The loss seems to be focused in a sense of "alienation." Alienation is a tricky term, and while this author's definition leans towards Marx, there is much more to it than that. Richard Schacht, whose *Alienation* is perhaps the most detailed examination of the term, writes:

While some employ the term very loosely and widely, its use in the writings of most is fairly well delimited. But it has become a fetish word, and people seem to delight in finding ever different uses for it. . . . All the excitement has called the attention of many other writers to the term, and has led them to see what they could do with it. (Schacht 246)

Despite the foggy definition for the term, it is a useful one to describe Loman's reaction to Civil Society. Hegel, Marx, Sartre and Heidegger have all added significant facets to the definition, but they are not mutually exclusive. Schacht writes:

. . . though the diversity of conceptions of alienation is undeniable, it might be thought that this diversity is due simply to the diversity of contexts in which the term is employed; and that the term might thus at least specify the same sort of relation in each case. (Schacht 246)

So alienation is, for the purpose of this essay, a general term which leans towards Marx's view. Certainly this was the primary view that Gellner had in mind when he made reference to it in *Conditions of Liberty*.

The alienation from Gellner's Civil Society, which is found in *Death of a Salesman*, is best articulated in a summary of the play, and by Loman himself. In *Stages of Drama*, the authors write:

The play can, of course, be read as an exposure of the cruelty, the cynicism, the stupidity, and the immorality that result from a blind commitment to American materialistic values, for those qualities are repeatedly displayed in Willy's behavior towards his wife, his sons, and his boss, as well as in Happy's behavior toward Willy, the boss' behavior towards Willy, and above all in the spectacle of Willy's brother Ben preaching the law of the jungle to Biff: "Never fight fair with a stranger boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way." (Klaus, Gilbert and Field 830)

This view of American society as a "jungle," where "strangers" have to be overcome in order to achieve the materialist dream, is one in which the

individual is alienated from his culture. Attempts at modularity can lead certain subjects to a sense of alienation from the very culture whose rules they are trying to succeed under. Gellner recognized this in 1994, and the authors of *Stages of Drama* demonstrate how Miller recognized it in 1949.

Miller again highlights the problem during the same conversation between Loman and his boss that was alluded to at the beginning of this essay:

In those days there was personality in it, Howard. There was respect, and comradeship, and gratitude in it. Today, it's all cut and dried, and there's no chance of bringing friendship to bear—or personality. You see what I mean? They don't know me anymore. (Miller 81)

Loman is a “stranger” to the very people he has known for thirty years. His individual personality, which would under some circumstances make him readily modular, instead is squelched by the conditions of society. Marx spoke of the worker who is alienated from the products of his labor, and nowhere would this be more alienating than in the case of a salesman, with whom personal contact is everything.

Loman's alienation can also be attributed to the “standardization of the idiom,” of which Gellner speaks. The buyers no longer “know” Loman because modularity has eliminated difference between the salesmen. His friendly style is no longer an advantage, it is the expected norm under which his profession operates. In a sense the “friendliness” has been replaced by an artificial “standardization,” where sincerity is no longer recognized or valued. Under these conditions, Loman is alienated not only from his labor, but also from himself. An undesirable, but perhaps necessary side-effect of Gellner's Civil Society.

With the death of Willy Loman at the end of the play, there is the sense that an entire way of living is also breathing its last. Loman fell victim to a society which encompassed all of the major attributes of Gellner's modularity based Civil Society. Although Miller was certainly not conscious of it, his *Death of a Salesman* was an indictment of America's move to a society centered around the modular man. Miller's play may also dispose of one of the problems in Gellner's theory. Gellner's belief that man is not modular may have once been true, and perhaps Willy Loman is not unique in failing to adapt to modular society. But now, perhaps, it can be argued that everyone is raised modular. The tragedy in *Death of a Salesman* is that Loman is unable to change into a modular man, as he was to caught up in the traditions of the unmodular past. He was “left behind” by the shift towards modularity.

Miller's critique of society, viewed through the lens of Gellner's theory, illustrates some of what is lost to a modular society. In particular,

Death of a Salesman shows the problem that some elements of society have in adapting to the new mode of thinking. This is most clearly manifested in the sense of alienation that is fostered by the inability to adjust to modularity. Unfortunately Gellner's modular man, and the Civil Society it fosters, may have an unintentional side-effect: those who cannot adapt are in danger of succumbing to Loman's final solution, [economic?] suicide.

"Modular Man" in Brecht's *Good Woman Of Setzuan*

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, viewed in the light of Gellnerian Civil Society, examined the problems in a character who could not adapt to modularity; while in stark contrast, Bertolt Brecht's *Good Woman of Setzuan* views the problems related to a character who is able to adapt to a non-modular society through decidedly modular means. While Brecht wrote the play as a parable examining the strengths and weaknesses of capitalism and communism, it can also be viewed as a parable examining the problems in modular man's Civil Society. Especially in a "non-modular" society. The protagonist, Shen Te, demonstrates how living as a modular person in a non-modular society can cause one to become a bifurcated, even schizophrenic, character.

Brecht's play is timeless, and although it is supposedly set in Setzuan, the action of the play takes place in some mystical land that serves as a microcosm for the world. Brecht had a tendency to set his plays in locales that his audience would be unfamiliar with, exotic locations that could serve as the perfect setting for his parables. *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is regarded as one of Brecht's finest plays, as evidenced by John Gassner:

Brecht, the ablest German poet, reached the peak of his dramatic powers in a remarkably provocative fable set in China, *Der Gute Mensch von Setzuan* (*The Good Woman of Setzuan*), dedicated to the theme of how the people of good will must acquire the strength to cope with impositions upon them. . . (Gassner 696)

Brecht's play, when viewed through Gellner's theory, demonstrates problems contained within. Perhaps the most pointed item can be found in Brecht's portrayal of the three gods who come to visit Setzuan, seeking out a "good" person. The gods can be viewed as representative of the old, pre-modular society which is being exploited throughout the play. When the gods come to town, they are rejected, as evidenced by the townspeople who yells: "Spare us your gods! We have other troubles!" (Brecht 5).

This rejection of the gods seems strikingly representative of the rejection of non-modular society. Throughout Brecht's play, the characters repeatedly refer to the horrible state of their society. In a Gellnerian context, the society that Brecht is portraying is one that is starting to turn away

from the gods and towards modularity as a sort of last resort. This is further illustrated by the protagonist, Shen Te.

Shen Te is somewhat typical of Brecht's later characters. She internally wages the struggle of the play so strongly that it results in a split personality. Shen Te is the benevolent prostitute, who comes into money from the gods, but is so generous that she gives most of it away to the poor (the ideal communist, perhaps). Her alter ego, Shui Ta, who she claims is her "cousin," rescues Shen Te from the excesses of her generosity while he alters existing deals and exploits cheap labor to keep Shen Te's head above the financial waters (the perfect capitalist, perhaps). Robert Brustein writes in *The Theatre of Revolt*:

Many critics. . . have commented on the omnipresent Brechtian conflict between reason and instinct as personified in split characters: Shen Te and Shui Ta in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*. . . As a Marxist, Brecht is convinced that society is based on rational self-interest, and believes that a more unselfish use of reason will bring about a more perfect man and a more benevolent world. As an existential rebel, however, he is more dubious about the power of human reason; and his own vestigial anarchism forces him to deal with the wildness of the instincts and the irrationality of life—in short, with imperfectability. (Brustein 254-255)

Brecht was out to change the world through his drama, but was consistently frustrated by the imperfectability in human society of which Brustein writes. Shen Te is perhaps the most obvious example of this situation. In the Gellnerian context, *The Good Woman of Setzuan* is frustrating for Brecht, Shen Te and the audience member because the alternatives: non-modular or modular society, are both equally flawed.

Still, Shen Te has within her the seeds of Shui Ta, and all the modular capitalism that he represents. Even in the early stages of the play, we can see the seeds of Shen Te's shift towards modularity. Here she pleads to the departing gods:

Stop illustrious ones! I'm not at all sure that I'm good. I'd like to be good of course, but how am I to pay my rent? Well I'll confess it to you: I sell myself in order to live, and even so I can't get along. There are many others who have to do the same. I'm ready to do anything but who isn't? I'd be happy to honor my father and my mother and speak the truth. It would be nice not to covet my neighbor's house. It would be pleasant to attach myself to one man and be faithful to him. I too should like not to exploit anyone, not to

rob the helpless. But how? How? Even when I break
only a few of the commandments, I can hardly survive.
(Brecht 10)

Its as if Shen Te is arguing for the limited, non rigid contracts of Gellner's Civil Society. The subtext seems to be that she is willing to fulfill her contracts, but the same one? All the time?

The final straw for Shen Te, the problem that pushes her over the edge into modularity, is a contract that she never entered into, but is still responsible for. The carpenter who built the shelves for Shen Te's tobacco store tries to collect from her the money that the previous owner did not pay. This contract, which she never entered into, is too much for Shen Te. The last thing her new business needs is debt amassed under a previous owner. Frustrated with the carpenter's non-modular insistence that she fulfill the old contract, she resorts to her alter ego Shui Ta for the first time, and shrewdly changes the very nature of the contract, paying twenty silver pieces instead of one hundred.

Here we have the shift into Gellner's modularity. Shen Te has no use for an old contract, and uses Shui Ta to negotiate the conditions into a form that will be acceptable for the current situation. The problem, however, is that Shen Te becomes modular within the context of a non-modular society. In a sense, this shift is not fair to the rest of the world. When Shui Ta is in the town, nothing can stand up to his machinations.

As the play goes on, Brecht's characters delve deeper and deeper into modularity, and Shen Te/Shui Ta is pushed further and further along. An example of this comes when Shui Ta is talking with Yang Sun (another markedly modular man in a non-modular society) about a loan:

SHUI TA: It's too little.

SUN: It's enough!

SHUI TA: I've got to have at least five hundred.

SUN: What for?

SHUI TA (to the Landlady) Allow me to talk something over with my cousin's fiance. (Aside to Sun) All the tobacco here has been pledged to two old people for the two hundred silver dollars which were given to you yesterday.

SUN: Is there a written agreement?

SHUI TA: No.

SUN: (to the Landlady) We can manage with three hundred. (Brecht 51)

It is clear here that Shen Te/Shui Ta has not entirely given herself over to modularity. She still believes in the "sacred" obligation of her oral contract with the old couple. Sun, as a modular man, has no such reverence for contracts, particularly when they have not been filled out in a manner that

is consistent with the “standardized idiom:” in this case, the contracts have been left unwritten. In Brecht’s *Setzuan*, the modular man is dangerous precisely because his approach to contract and association is far superior to that of the non-modular society, and the modular men are able to take advantage of this situation. The potential exploitation and corruption are big problems that Brecht would have had with Gellner’s modular man.

The march towards modularity in Brecht’s play is unrelenting. Witness this scene between Wang and the gods:

THE THIRD GOD: What do you propose?

WANG: Somewhat fewer rules, illustrious ones! A little relaxation of the book of rules, benevolent ones, in view of the bad times. (Brecht 81)

As stated above, in this Gellnerian reading of the text, the gods are the primary representatives of the non-modular society. Here Wang, one of the only people who has faith in the gods, is arguing for a change in the rigid set of codified standards that is keeping the society in dire straits. This is important, for Wang has already seen, and rejected, Shui Ta’s and Yang Sun’s modular approach to solving the problem. Much like Brecht, he is arguing for a middle ground between the two. Perhaps for a Civil Society that can open up with fewer, but still well respected, rules and structures.

The gods reject Wang’s plea, so Brecht turns his cries to the audience. His mouthpiece once again, is Wang, who pleads for the audience to come up with a better ending (Brecht 106). It is very uncharacteristic of Brecht not to have an answer for his audience. Brechtian theatre is meant to move the audience to some kind of action, but in Brecht’s case, there is normally a clear conclusion that the audience should reach. The absence of this conclusion within *The Good Woman of Setzuan* shows that the problems of modular man and Civil Society are quite complex indeed, especially for a playwright beholden to hopes of an idealized communist society.

Brecht’s *Good Woman of Setzuan* is just as much of an indictment of Gellnerian Civil Society as Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. In Brecht, however, the non-modular past is not idealized as it is with Willy Loman. Rather, Brecht seeks for a middle ground between two flawed systems. His only problem is that he is not sure what that middle ground is. He conveniently leaves that decision to his audience. It is still a problem fifty years later.

Summary and Conclusions

Gellner’s concept of modular man’s Civil Society provides an interesting model for examining the modern world. It also can serve as an effective lens by which to analyze dramatic texts. Certain dramatic texts also put the spotlight on possible shortcomings and problems with Gellner’s

world view. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan* are two such texts.

In Miller, the plight of a man unable to adapt to modularity is examined. The text also highlights the sense of alienation that Civil Society brings, a factor which even Gellner takes note of within his text. Willy Loman is the man who could not adapt, and the modular society all too easily pushes him aside. Loman's suicide evokes a disturbing picture of what modular man can, directly or indirectly, lead his non-modular counterparts to.

In Brecht, both modular and non-modular societies are flawed: the modular by its propensity to prey upon its more unfortunate comrades (like Loman?), and the non-modular by its rigidity. Brecht seems to be trying to find a "happy medium" between the two, but is unable to find one. So he leave the problem for his audience to solve. Shen Te/Shui Ta stands as perhaps the perfect example of where Brecht left us: a bifurcated and possibly schizophrenic culture.

Although solutions are not to be found in this essay, it is the hope of the author that the study of Gellner's ideas can be assisted by establishing relationships to the modern theatre. Brecht and Miller, arguably reflecting the world around them, clearly contain elements of Gellner's Civil Society. Each text offers somewhat disturbing questions about the nature of this Civil Society.

While authors like Francis Fukuyama, in "Social Capital and the Global Economy" argue that the future will be based on "trusting civil societies" (103), none have offered convincing solutions for the problems that these Civil Societies contain. Like Gellner writes of his nationalistic dilemma: "This is a fact, whether or not we like it" (128). Likewise it is a fact that Gellner's notion of a modular based Civil Society has deeply rooted problems that will not go away, whether or not we like it. As such, solutions must be found.

Anton Checkov wrote in his preface to *The Cherry Orchard* that it is not the function of art to answer the questions, merely to present them clearly (Checkov xiii). In this case, the dramas of Miller and Brecht have indirectly, but clearly, stated a number of questions regarding Gellner's theory of modular man's Civil Society. While it lies for future scholars to find the answers to these questions, it is the author's hope that the serious questions raised by the artists will not go unnoticed. Future work on Gellner's theory should be rich indeed.

References

Beckerman, Bernard and Siegman, Howard. *On Stage: Selected Theatre Reviews From the New York Times 1920-1970*. New York: Arno Press,

- Inc., 1973.
- Brecht, Bertolt. *Parables For the Theatre*. Trans. Bently, Eric, and Apelman, Maja. New York: Grover Press Inc., 1957.
- Brockett, Oscar G. *History of the Theatre*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991.
- Brustein, Robert. *The Theatre of Revolt*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964.
- Checkov, Anton. *The Cherry Orchard*. Trans. Frayn, Michael. London: Eyre Methuen, 1978.
- Fukuyama, Francis. "Social Capital and Global Economy." *Foreign Affairs*. September/October 1995: 89-103.
- Gassner, John. *Masters of the Drama*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1954.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*. New York: The Penguin Press, 1994.
- Klaus, Carl H.; Gilbert, Miriam and Field, Bradford S. Eds. *Stages of Drama*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991.
- Miller, Arthur. "Tragedy and the Common Man." Dukore, Bernard F. Ed. *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*, Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1974.
- . *Death of a Salesman*. New York: The Viking Press, 1972. Schacht, Richard. *Alienation*. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1971.

Trisha Yearwood:
Subtleties and Survival of an American Girl

Thomas G. Endres, University of St. Thomas

AUTHOR NOTE: An earlier version of this essay was presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association November, 1996, San Diego, CA. Thanks to Dr. Christopher Kachian, University of St. Thomas Music Department, for helping me to articulate what I heard but could not express, and to Cindy Hart at FORCE Public Relations, for setting up the interview with Ms. Yearwood. Special thanks to Trisha Yearwood herself, for the interview, and for the music.

The lead paragraph in a July 30, 1996 article in *Country Weekly* proclaimed the following: "A killer singing voice is no longer enough - Nashville record companies are going after artists who offer the total package of a great face, a buffed bod, cutting-edge fashion sense, a marketable image...and that magical element called sex appeal" (Honick, p. 18). The article goes on to dub midriff-baring artist Shania Twain as the "undisputed queen of country music's sex-and-imaging revolution (p. 18)," and lists both male and female artists who represent that trend, including: Faith Hill, Billy Dean, Martina McBride, Vince Gill, Lorrie Morgan, Randy Travis, Mindy McCready, Alan Jackson, Linda Davis, and Michelle Wright. Video director Thom Oliphant draws the following conclusion about country music; "(A)s country artists get younger, it just naturally gets sexier. It's something we've always pushed for, then all of a sudden we've started seeing it. The new generation of country artists comes to the table looking great" (p. 24).

One premise of the *Country Weekly* article can be viewed as undeniably correct: country music is not the same thing that it was a generation ago. Despite historical connectedness, to equate country music in the 1990's to earlier time periods displays an inadequate sensitivity to its unique differences. As the article implies, today's artists are indeed cut from a different cloth than early artists such as Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, Tammy Wynette, Waylon Jennings, and Dolly Parton. Where the *Country Weekly* article goes awry is to identify the difference solely in the area of sex appeal and glamorous imagery. As Endres (1993) notes:

The new artists are 30-and 40-something former rockers who have college degrees and IRAs, and who show up at the annual Country Music Awards wearing Clinton/Gore buttons, and red and green lapel ribbons

promoting awareness of environmental issues and AIDS. (p. 30)

Yes, country today is more buff than beer-belly, but such an overgeneralization does not account for the artists who forego glamour and overt sexuality, and attain immense popularity by virtue of their "killer singing voice" and other attributes. In other words, it does not account for Trisha Yearwood.

This is not meant to imply that Trisha Yearwood is not a young and attractive artist. The argument herein is that Yearwood's popularity is based upon a stylistic package that does not rely upon, and is often in contrast to, the slick and sexy images now associated with country music. It will be argued that Yearwood, through sight and sound, creates an "American Girl" persona that is subtle in its presentation, and survival-oriented at its core. The significance of this investigation is underscored by Yearwood's success, despite not fitting into the expected norms of contemporary country. Her self-titled debut album sold over one million copies in its first year. The song "She's In Love With The Boy" marked the first time a female artist hit number one with a debut single. At the time of this writing, Yearwood's first four albums have gone platinum or double platinum, with her fifth release closing fast (Trisha Yearwood). She was named the Country Music Association's 1997 Female Vocalist of the Year, and her recent collection of hits, *Songbook*, went immediately to number one on the country charts. Yearwood's unparalleled success as a female country artist, coupled with her unique and stylistically atypical combination of lyrics, musical sound, and public/personal presence, make her worthy of closer inspection.

Following a brief overview of newly emergent trends in the works of female country artists, Sellnow's *Illusion of Life* methodology will be used to help critique the sounds, symbols, and visual images which create the Trisha Yearwood American girl persona. From this, conclusions are drawn regarding musical analysis as it influences both theory and the listening audience.

Female Country Artists: Emerging Trends

What little scholarly literature exists in this area seems to draw one central conclusion; that country music tends to be patriarchal and gender-biased, but things are getting better. Snow (1996) indicts country music as hegemonic, but notes "a significant shift toward female-centered themes and strong female characters in country music within the past five years" (p. 1). Daniel (1996) echoes this, pointing to the "increase in female vocalists, and with them, a greater number of songs that feature women's perspectives" (p. 28). Though generally discouraged about the portrayal of women in country music, Saucier (1993) notes that when it comes to the

loss of a love, female characters do not exhibit disappointment with the same intensity as male characters. At best, these conclusions are understatements. The female personae of country music, both the artist and the lyrical protagonist, are often strong to the point of being superhuman. A quick perusal of best sellers in the country bins reveals that women are often portrayed as fiercely independent, invulnerable, and teflon-hearted.¹

Terri Clark presents a female character who has better things to do than waste her time worrying about a lost love, such as washing her car in the rain or watching Donahue ("Better Things To Do," Terri Clark, 1995). The protagonist in Faith Hill's "Wild One" (*Take Me As I Am*, 1993), knows from the age of three that she can be anything she wants, and when "they tell her life is hard she says that's all right." On the same album, Hill presents a twenty-seven year old woman who decides to "make her life her own" before she turns twenty-eight ("Someone Else's Dream"). Wynonna Judd growls the tune "Girls With Guitars," detailing a story of "daddy's little angel" bypassing law school or medicine to play rock and roll guitar (*Tell Me Why*, 1993). Patty Loveless, in her 1995 CMA Album of the Year, *The Trouble With the Truth*, tells a former lover that, if it makes him feel better, he can picture her broken hearted - walking around in his old sweaters and reading love letters - though it obviously is not what's taking place ("You Can Feel Bad," 1996). Mindy McCready's female lead stays out all night drinking with the girls and snitching money from her significant other's pockets, since "Guys Do It All The Time" (*Ten Thousand Angels*, 1996). Kathy Mattea gets away from a "losing game" in the title song from her *Walking Away A Winner* release (1994). Similarly, Lorrie Morgan invites a lover, who doesn't even know that he's lost her, to watch her walk away ("Watch Me," *Watch Me*, 1992). On the same release, Morgan chastises a potential suitor in a tavern with the query, "What Part of No" don't you understand? Pam Tillis (*Sweetheart's Dance*, 1994) advises a friend suffering the aftereffect of a one-night stand to skip crying over "Spilled Perfume," and later informs the audience that you can't tame a wild rose as she invites them into her crazy life ("Mi Vida Loca [My Crazy Life]"). Contrasting strengths are portrayed in Martina McBride's (1993) *The Way That I Am*, ranging from the effervescent persona who is loved regardless of her attire ("high heels or sneakers, he don't give a damn") or attitude ("My Baby Loves Me"), to a tragic protagonist who sets fire to her home, killing her alcoholic and abusive husband ("Independence Day").

Perhaps the most overtly powerful female characters in country music can be found in the releases of Shania Twain and Mary- Chapin Carpenter. Twain's 1995 album *The Woman In Me*, earned one Grammy and four nominations, sold over seven million copies, and sported six hit singles (Buchalter, 1996). Among these are "Any Man of Mine," which

chronicles the characteristics that a woman wants from a significant other. These include always being on time (even if she isn't), accepting anything she says on a bad hair day, voicing approval for meals burned black, and disagreeing if she thinks another woman looks more attractive. In short, she needs a man who "knows how the story goes" and will "walk the line." In another cut, the female protagonist makes it clear that she sees through the "lyin' eyes" and "pretty please" promises of male suitors, as she informs them, "(If You're Not In It For Love) I'm Outta Here!"

Mary-Chapin Carpenter puts forth powerful female characters in three hit singles from her *Come On Come On* album (1992). In "I Take My Chances," the narrator refuses to be bullied by the world around her, including the media and organized religion. She takes it a step farther in "I Feel Lucky." Not only does the female lead refuse to be intimidated by the fates, such as astrological or weather predictions, she goes on to win 11 million in the lottery. Interestingly, the characters in both songs smoke cigarettes. Obviously, they are immune to health risks as well.

A third release from the album, "He Thinks He'll Keep Her," parodies a line from the old Geritol commercials, in which a husband made a reference to his wife indicating he viewed her as chattel. Carpenter begins with very traditional images - three children, car pools, PTA, and annual Christmas cards showing a happy family. The twist comes later, as the wife meets the husband at the door, announcing that she no longer loves him. Snow (1996) labels the song "an amalgamation of women's stories, articulating women's subjugation into socially-prescribed gender roles and the subsequent dissatisfaction that results as a function of this oppressed condition" (p. 1). While perhaps overstated, the end result is clear - the husband thinks he'll keep his wife, but he is wrong.

Beyond the lyrics, one can examine the public image of the female artists listed above. With the exception of the robust Wynonna, all of the women are slender and muscular. Using Sheldon's body type descriptions, they fall between the ectomorphic (fragile, bony) and mesomorphic (hard, firm) physiques (see Malandro et al., 1989). Though Sheldon's research has received much criticism, his proposed connections between body type and psychological temperament provide a commonly accepted vocabulary for discussing actual or stereotypical characteristics of particular physiques. The ecto/mesomorph combination would presumably exhibit characteristics of the cerebrotonic style (e.g. meticulous, detached), and the somatotonic style (e.g. confident, dominant). Such terms easily describe the images of women found in much country music of the '90's.

Analysis

Sellnow's "Illusion of Life" methodology provides the rhetorical framework for this analysis (see Sellnow, 1996; Sellnow and Sellnow, 1991; Sellnow and Sellnow, 1993). Based on Langer's theory of Aesthetic Symbolism, the illusion of life perspective argues that music is a non-discursive communicative system which is felt rather than reasoned. Music can be analyzed in terms of its three underlying dimensions: lyrical content (virtual experience), musical score (virtual time), and performer image (virtual present). The term "virtual" is used to express the difference between actual, real-world experiences, and the interpretive perspective of music, which "presents a distorted view of reality based on the artist's perception" (Sellnow and Sellnow, 1993, p. 91). It is argued here that the combination of these virtual signals combine to create the classic persona of the American girl persona. That is, the protagonist is like "the girl next door." The style is most akin to what Goldhaber (1990) would label the anti-hero, whose charisma stems from the fact that the individual "looks and sounds like us and does what we do" (p. 101). Granted, some readers may find this a somewhat outdated and perhaps pejorative term.² Still, it operationally captures the essence of the Yearwood sound and symbols. In the most complementary usage of the phrase, the American girl does not deviate in any noteworthy way. Unlike so many female artists, who accentuate overt sexuality, dress in radical or outlandish garb, or gain reputations for being on the fringe, the American girl's appeal comes from the fact that she is most like us. She represents, perhaps idyllically, that which is safe, traditional, comfortable, and familiar. The Yearwood package - her words, sounds, and style - exemplify that image. In the interest of parsimony, lyrics (virtual experience) and music (virtual time) will be addressed together, followed by a discussion of public image (virtual present).

Lyrics and Musical Score

To put it simply, there are two types of Trisha Yearwood songs. One set consists of a small body of work which constitutes Yearwood's shorter-lived hit singles. While secondary in nature, they are intriguing due to their differences from her primary hits. The virtual experience, or lyrics, represent what Sellnow calls the dramatic illusion, i.e. they tend to be forward looking in nature. They also follow a comic rhythm, which accentuates themes that are opportunistic and optimistic. All the lyrics are first person, with heavy emphasis on the narrator. The wording is quick, truncated, filled with parallel images, and include a chorus where the first and last lines mirror each other. These are intrapersonal shopping lists; there is no real story told:

I like a man who will lay down beside me Stand up to me/
Cry on my shoulder Crazy about me/ Can live without me to too/
That's what I like about you. ("That's What I Like About You," Hadley, Welch, and Wilson, 1990, track 3)

I wanna go too far, I wanna go too fast Somebody draw the line so I can blow right past/
I wanna spend too much, I wanna stay too late/ I wanna roar too loud, I'm gonna be that way/
I wanna play too hard, I wanna go too far. ("I Wanna Go Too Far," Martine, Jr., and Robbins, 1995, track 1)

I want to live again/ I want to laugh/ I want to love/
I want to roll those dice Gonna run the risk/ Do the dance/
Take a chance, and let the heartache ride/ I want to live again. ("I Want To Live Again," Shapiro and Teren, 1996, track 1)

The songs are also very similar musically, and consistent with what one would expect with dramatic illusion and comic rhythm. They exemplify intensity patterns which, according to Sellnow, would include fast-driving, short held tones, with staccato articulation and a loud, full, rock style. Such intrinsic redundancy, or borrowing from oneself, is an effective strategy (see Gonzalez and Makay, 1983). The familiarity of sound is appealing to the audience, and the positive meanings associated with one release can be transactionally related to another. However, these hits by themselves would relegate Yearwood to the ranks of her female cohorts; they are upbeat ditties about strong women. The virtual experience never comes across quite as strong as the Twain and Carpenter crowd, for the demands stay at the level of "I want" instead of "I will," but it is close.

It is Yearwood's primary hits that distinguish her from the pack, and serve as the foundation for the American girl persona. Yearwood's first hit, "She's in Love With The Boy," (Ims, J., 1989, track 1), begins the trend. There is an overt story in the lyrics; a third person recitation about a young girl, Katie, whose life centers around her boyfriend Tommy. At first listen, Katie seems destined to become one of the independent superwomen of country mythology. Despite the disapproval Katie's dad feels for Tommy, Katie keeps the relationship going: "and even if they have to run away, she's gonna marry that boy someday." Thus far, the story implies a dramatic illusion and a comic rhythm. This feeling is accentuated by the intensity pattern of the music; the song has a strong backbeat, and a crescendo-like build to the chorus. The point of maximal suspense, earmarked by a texture

change in the music as it becomes thin and severe, is reached when Katie's dad sends her upstairs so he and the boy can "have a talk."

At this point, the nature of the virtual experience and the virtual time changes. Katie's mother intervenes, admonishing the father not to lose his temper. She takes the lyrics to a level of poetic illusion, which looks backward into the past, and seeks resolve. She reminds the dad that her own father did not like him when they first met, and concludes, "But he was wrong and honey you are too. Katie looks at Tommy like I still look at you." The virtual time returns to its intensity pattern, actually building to a peak, thus serving as a musical contradiction which underscores and draws attention to the morals of the story. Rather than erupting into conflict, traditional values are upheld: boy loves girl, girl loves boy, and there is a happy ending. The American girl loves her dad but, throughout the generations, she leaves him to join her mate in matrimony, and the family unit survives.

Yearwood's next major hit, "Walkaway Joe" appeared on her 1992 *Hearts In Armor* album. The song is rooted firmly in poetic illusion, or the search for resolution in the virtual past. The protagonist is an unnamed seventeen year-old girl who, despite her mother's warnings, leaves town with her boyfriend. Tragedy seems inevitable from the lyrics:

Thus are the dreams of an average Jane / Ninety miles
an hour down a lovers lane On a tank of dreams / Oh
if she could've only seen / But fate's got cards that it
don't want to show / And that boy's just a Walkaway
Joe (Melamed and Barnhill, 1990, track 4)

The storyline goes on to detail their trip, including the boyfriend's robbery of a gas station. Finally, one morning, the American girl finds herself deserted in a hotel room. It is at this point that a unique and powerful characteristic of Yearwood's music emerges. In contrast to the optimistic comic rhythm, Sellnow points to the tragic rhythm that characterizes those songs which are pessimistic, and seem to move toward a predetermined fate. This song comes extremely close to entering that arena. But rather than turning into a drama of despair, a resolution is found that, while not comic in nature, is very real. Throughout the song, the chorus forewarns that "she's gonna know it in a matter of time." At the end, when the girl does learn the truth, that line is changed to, "But it was just another lesson in life." The American girl survives. She is not teflon-hearted, but she does heal, and life eventually goes on.

Much of the impact of the song comes from its musical score. The virtual time is characterized by release patterns, which include slow, constant, and long-held tones, along with soft, transparent instrumentation and a folk style. The instrumentation is very simple, with most support coming from piano and acoustic guitar, and Don Henley, of Eagles fame,

providing warmth in the background vocals. It is standard, derivative country balladeering, with the only memorable tonal change coming on the pronouncement of the boy as the "wrong kind of paradise." To do more would detract from that musical punch line, and the lyrical imagery.

A similar theme is found in one of Yearwood's biggest hits, "The Song Remembers When," from the 1993 album of the same name (Prestwood, H., 1993, track 1). This is a first person ballad characterized by poetic illusion. The female protagonist begins by standing at a checkout counter in a store, when the radio in the background plays a song that evokes memories of a long lost love. The impact on her is enormous: "It was like a lighted match had been tossed into my soul. It was like a dam had broken in my heart." The lyrics look back and describe the scene where she and her former loved one last heard the song, and how perfect life seemed to be at that time. In the interim, she had forgotten all about the relationship and the heartache, but the song brought everything back.

Once again, the potential for falling purely into a melancholy tragic rhythm exists, but the survival skills of the American girl once again show through. Rather than be devastated by the memories, she pauses long enough to quasi- enjoy them in a moment of nostalgic recollection:

Well, for all the miles between us / And for all the time
that's passed / You would think I haven't gotten very
far / And I hope my hasty heart / Will forgive me just
this once / If I stop to wonder how on earth you are /
But that's just a lot of water / Underneath a bridge I
burned / And there's no use in backtracking / Around
corners I have turned / Still I guess some things we
bury / Are just bound to rise again / For even if the
whole world has forgotten / The song remembers
when.

The release patterns associated with ballads are all present in the song, and the transparency of the traditional, acoustic instruments are effectively enhanced by a solemn steel guitar. Very familiar sounds, reminiscent of 1970's James Taylor and Jim Croce, are employed. Together, the lyrics and sound continue to reify the image of the American girl who, like many of us, remembers a lover from the past. The emotional experience is heightened because the intense memories were triggered by a long-forgotten song. Once again, most audience members should be able to identify the message similarity between the lyrics and their own experiences. In fact, the self-reflective nature of the lyrics, and the familiar quality of the sound, exemplifies the fact that music is indeed provocative and provides emotional catharsis for many people.

Two singles from Yearwood's 1995 *Thinkin' About You* release are particularly worthy of analysis. The first, "XXX's And OOO's (An American

Girl)" (Berg, M., and Randall, A., 1994, track 2) relies heavily on intensity patterns for its impact. The song, originally written as a theme for a television-sitcom, is fast and upbeat. Like a sitcom, the sound is superficial, uncomplicated, and epideictic. The chorus has a particularly strong and staccato beat, and a hard-driving steel guitar, organ, and fiddle add instrumental embellishment.

Lyrically, every word in the song, right down to the "American Girl" subtitle, provides an overt reference to the message similarity between the main character of the song and the listening audience. The lyrics are a litany of our lives: "Phone rings/ Baby cries/ TV diet guru lies/ Good morning honey/ Go to work/ Make up/ Try to keep the balance up/ Between love and money." Everyday hardships are portrayed, pointing out that the protagonist needs romance, a live-in maid, and some type of compensation for all the work done around the house. But the American girl is a survivor, and she has sufficient resources to get her through: "Well she's got her God and she's got good wine/ Aretha Franklin and Patsy Cline." Throughout the song, the refrain states that "She's trying to make it in her daddy's world." The last time through, the words change to "she's going to make it." The one-word change, though subtle, is critically important.

A more poignant version of the persona is presented via poetic illusion in "On a Bus to St. Cloud" (Peters, G., 1994, track 5). There is a great amount of intrinsic redundancy, both lyrically and musically, with "The Song Remembers When." In this case, the protagonist woman thinks that she sees her former loved one. In fact, she thinks that she sees him in many places - on a bus to St. Cloud, Minnesota, on a street in New York City, and on a cold L.A. freeway. Once again we are introduced to the memories and the heartache: "In a church in downtown New Orleans, I got down on my knees and prayed. And I wept in the arms of Jesus for the choice you made." In the end, however, the lover just slips out of view. Is the American girl destroyed? No. Does she bounce back immediately like other country protagonists? No. Like so many of us, she laments - and lives: "And you chase me like a shadow. And you haunt me like a ghost. And I hate you some, and I love you some. But I miss you most...."

Not surprisingly, the song is fully in the release pattern. The fiddle from "XXX's and OOO's" is present, but it is lilting and sorrowful. Added to this is a full set of strings, which provide both a classical and bitonal entrance and exit to the selection. The virtual experience and virtual time are almost not virtual, for they effectively evoke the real-world pathos brought about by conflict of emotions and nostalgic reflections we carry for a possible life unlived.

The final single to be analyzed is found on Yearwood's fifth release, *Everybody Knows* (1996). The song, "Believe Me Baby (I Lied)" (Richey, K.,

Angelo, and Gottlieb, L., 1996, track 3) is situated lyrically and musically between the first set of Yearwood songs - the fast-tempo, parallel lists - and the more powerful antihero storylines. The song has a intriguing, slightly contradictory, combination of poetic illusion lyrics coupled with comic rhythm and intensity patterns. The contradiction is purposeful, however, since the music is geared to lead you away from and set you up for the ironic word play in the lyrics. The music is fast and loud, with a 60's beat complete with a Beatle's tag. Instrumentation includes strong drums, a 12 string electric guitar, organ, and tambourine. The chorus at first implies a strong and confident protagonist. We learn that she has told her significant other that she didn't want his love, that he was no one she was thinking of, and that it would suit her if he were out of sight and out of mind. This is certainly the stuff that teflon-hearted superwomen are made of. The twist however, is revealed when the disclaimer is added, "Believe me baby, I lied." The American girl realizes she let her wounded pride interfere with her relationship, and is looking for reconciliation.

A fair question to ask at this point is the whether or not the American girl flavor of Yearwood's songs is purposeful or accidental. And, if it is purposeful, is it merely a marketing strategy, or does it reflect Yearwood's own world view? In a personal interview, Yearwood had the following to say about lyrics and storyline: "I like songs that really have something to say. I don't really like songs that are really meaningless and fluff, and just kind of repeat themselves over and over again. I like songs that tell stories." She later added, "Lyrics that can really make you see a picture in your head are good lyrics" (personal communication, October 19, 1996).

When it comes to the balance between lyrics and musical score, Yearwood places lyrics as the most important. "If a melody is not quite right, you can tailor it to be better," she explains, "but a lyric that doesn't say very much is very difficult to work with" (personal communication). When it comes to instrumentation, Yearwood prefers "real" instruments, such as piano and acoustic guitar, pointing out that she did not allow an electric piano into the studio for her first three albums. She provided the following explanation:

I think the key for what I've liked about the records I've made is that simple is better. Just because you have all these tracks doesn't mean you have to use them all. What impressed me about Garth Fundis, who's my producer...when I listened to the records he had made with other artists, was that everything was really clean. The voice was allowed to really shine, which is what the artist should be able to do, and is accented by the

... Prejudices ...

Jon Keune, St. Olaf College

Prologue

The three pieces that follow are my reflections on the relationship between my host-family in India and me. All three sections focus on an event that occurred in late October a few years ago. In the first part, I described the event as I understood it. In order to do so, I included information and background that I thought was necessary to understand what happened. Likewise, the second part contains other information and explains the event, but is narrated by a different participant in that event, my host-family's cook. The third part is told from my host-mother's point of view.

Is this fiction? Although I have changed names and details to protect the identities of the characters, everything that I describe actually occurred. In the first part, my own perspective is fictitious to the extent that I interpret my experiences and bring them into a coherent whole. The other parts are clearly fiction, as I projected my voice into my impression of their perspectives. Many of the details have escaped my memory, so I have had to make some things up (names of streets, where some people work, etc.) On the other hand, these projections also reflect my understanding of the event, only with an extended range of consideration. Certainly, I did not create all of this in my head, but my understanding of the whole event naturally required some assembly. To declare these writings strictly fiction or strictly nonfiction would not do justice to the whole. So it often is with our understandings of experiences.

I wrote this paper after studying Hans-Georg Gadamer's writings on philosophical hermeneutics. I immediately recognized the potential in applying hermeneutic theory to this cross-cultural context. Philosophical hermeneutics attempts to describe the process by which human understanding occurs. Gadamer argues that whenever we encounter something new (e.g. a new person, object, experience, etc.), we always understand it in terms of knowledge and experience we already possess. In the process, we do not allow the new object to exist on its own terms but rather as it fits (or does not fit) our expectations. Gadamer calls these expectations "prejudices," although he wants to redefine the term and purge it of its negative connotations. Prejudices are the orientations we have when interpreting something new (or something familiar, too, for that matter). We cannot approach the world without prejudices, or else we could not understand it. Understanding is always preceded by prejudices. Gadamer insists that over time, we will observe that our prejudice (or preconception) of the ob-

ject is inadequate to understand it fully. At this point, we will revise our prejudice. Through a series of revisions, we come to understand the object more and more on its own terms. However, in the beginning, we interpret the object only through using knowledge we already possess. Of course our prejudices influence how we deal with the world. In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, we cannot avoid prejudices. In order to understand an object truly, the best we can do is identify our prejudices and keep ourselves open to the possibility of revising them.

Gadamer almost never discusses the way hermeneutics functions in a cross-cultural context. He is more concerned with how we understand the traditions which we come from. However, I find his theory of hermeneutics extremely useful in pointing out some of the difficulties involved in living with and attempting to understand someone from a different culture. An awareness of cross-cultural hermeneutics would warn us that many background assumptions (including many of which we remain unaware) come into play in any conversation across cultural boundaries. Overall, this paper is an exercise in cross-cultural hermeneutics, encompassing several dimensions. The conflict brought together people from different cultures. It also exemplified a meeting of different socioeconomic backgrounds and prejudices. Although it does not appear so clearly in these writings, some of the ambiguity in my interpretation stems from my less than fluent ability in Hindi. In addition to these considerations, there were also issues of gender, age, and educational background. All of this contributed to a vast space for interpretation and reflection.

The form of these writings was inspired by a movie by the famous Japanese film director, Akira Kurosawa. The film's title is *Rashomon*, and it draws its plot from a story by Ryunosuke Akutagawa translated in English as "In a Grove." In this story, several characters describe a murder and its circumstances. The story begins after the action has taken place. A simple sketch is given of the scene — a samurai lies dead from a stab wound, and his wife is found running and screaming in the forest. A short distance away, a bandit lies groaning on the beach after the samurai's horse bucked him off. Each character is called before a judge to testify as to what occurred (and the dead samurai is summoned through a spiritual medium). Everyone describes a completely different story, as they each relate the event to themselves. Each tries to show how he or she is innocent and honorable. While my writing differs in several ways from Akutagawa's story, some of the same elements are at play.

In Akutagawa's story, no objective account of the action ever appears. All accounts come *through* participants and are interpreted accordingly. Thus, someone reading the story or watching the film is left feeling confused. Is objectivity, impartiality, possible at all? What does truth mean if all we can understand is only a perspective? Are certain perspectives

[CD]. Arista Records, Inc.

Tillis, P. (1994). "Spilled Perfume." On *Sweetheart's Dream* [CD]. Arista Records, Inc.

Trisha Yearwood. (1996, August). [Brochure]. Nashville: MCA Records.

Twain, S. (1995). "Any Man Of Mine." On *The Woman In Me* [CD]. PolyGram Records, Inc.

Twain, S. (1995). "(If You're Not In It For Love) I'm Outta Here!" On *The Woman In Me* [CD]. PolyGram Records, Inc.

Endnotes

¹This is not meant to imply that the female artists listed do not record songs of melancholy and heartache. They do. Nor does it imply that Yearwood does not have cuts on her albums with strong female protagonists. She does. The goal of the review is to point to representative and generalizable trends that are evident in a majority of their works.

²For a fascinating discussion of the rise and evolution of the American Girl image in literature and art, see Banta's (1987) *Imaging American Women*. Though variations of the American Girl are presented, the differences between the interior variations are not as striking as the contrast between this image and alternate mythical depictions such as the Amazon, Warrior Queen, Angel, Bitch Goddess, Madonna, Mother, or Venus. Though different artists and different eras have unique portrayals of the quintessential American prototype, common descriptors included features such as "visibly feminine," "eminently marriageable," and "with the look of someone you think you know." Banta notes that, in the early twentieth century, "foreign visitors to the United States spoke of the need to study the American Girl as the master type by which they might understand the intangibles of the American character" (p. 295).

- McBride, M. (1993). "My Baby Loves Me." On *The Way That I Am* [CD]. BMG Music.
- McCready, M. (1996). "Guys Do It All The Time." On *Ten Thousand Angels* [CD]. BMG Music.
- Melamed, V., & Barnhill, G. (1992). "Walkaway Joe" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Hearts In Armor* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1992)
- Morgan, L. (1992). "Watch Me." On *Watch Me* [CD]. BMG Music.
- Morgan, L. (1992). "What Part Of No." On *Watch Me* [CD]. BMG Music.
- Peters, G. (1994). "On A Bus To St. Cloud" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Thinkin' About You* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1995)
- Poole, M.S., Seibold, D.R., & McPhee, R.D. (1985, February). "Group decision-making as a structural process." *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 71 (1), 74-102.
- Prestwood, H. (1993). "The Song Remembers When" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *The Song Remembers When* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc.
- Richey, K., Angelo, & Gottlieb, L. (1996). "Believe Me Baby (I Lied)" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Everybody Knows* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc.
- Saucier, K.A. (1993). "Images of women and men in country music." In Lewis, G.H. (Ed.), *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Schoemer, K. (1995, March 27). "Don't cross the line." *Newsweek*, 66.
- Sellnow, D.D. (1996). "Rhetorical strategies of continuity and change in the music of popular artists over time." *Communication Studies*, 47, 46-61.
- Sellnow, D., & Sellnow, T. (1991). "The human relationship from idealism to realism: An analysis of the music of Bruce Springsteen based on Aesthetic Symbolism." *Popular Music and Society*, 14, 71-88.
- Sellnow, D., & Sellnow, T. (1993). "Music as a communicative medium for the AIDS crisis: John Corigliano's 'Symphony No. 1' as a case study." *Communication Studies*, 44, 87-101.
- Shapiro, T., & Teren, G. (1996). "I Want To Live Again" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Everybody Knows* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc.
- Snow, K.S. (1996). "'He Thinks He'll Keep Her': Giving sound to women's voice in country music." Paper presented at the First Annual Popular Music Conference, Des Moines, IA.
- Tillis, P. (1994). "Mi Vida Loca (My Crazy Life)". On *Sweetheart's Dream*

- Endres, T.G. (1990). "Contradiction and women's rhetoric: The autonomy-dependence paradox in Carly Simon's lyrics." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Detroit, MI.
- Endres, T.G. (1993, Winter). "A dramatistic analysis of family themes in the top 100 country songs of 1992." *Popular Music and Society*, 17, (4), 29-46.
- Feiler, B. (1996, July). Married...with Grammys. *Live!* [reprinted by FORCE].
- Fox, A.A. (1993). "Split subjectivity in country music and honky-tonk discourse." In Lewis, G.H. (Ed.), *All That Glitters: Country Music in America*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Goldhaber, G.M. (1990). *Organizational Communication*, 5th ed. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Publishers.
- Gonzalez, A., & Makay, J.J. (1983). "Rhetorical Ascription and the Gospel according to Dylan". *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 69 (1), 1-14.
- Hadley, J., Welch, K., & Wilson, W. (1990). "That's What I Like About You" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Trisha Yearwood* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1991)
- Hill, F. (1993). "Someone Else's Dream." On *Take Me As I Am* [CD]. Warner Brothers.
- Hill, F. (1993). "Wild One." On *Take Me As I Am* [CD]. Warner Brothers.
- Honick, B. (1996, July 30). "Why country's getting sexier." *Country Weekly*, 3, 31, 18-25.
- Ims, J. (1989). "She's In Love With the Boy" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Trisha Yearwood* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1991)
- Judd, W. (1993). "Girls With Guitars." On *Tell Me Why* [CD]. Curb Music Company/MCA Records, Inc.
- Loveless, P. (1996). "You Can Feel Bad." On *The Trouble With the Truth* [CD]. Sony Entertainment Music, Inc.
- Malandro, L.A., Barker, L., & Barker, D.A. (1989). *Nonverbal Communication* (2nd ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Martine, Jr., L. & Robbins, K. (1995). "I Wanna Go Too Far" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Thinkin' About You* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc.
- Mattea, K. (1994). "Walking Away A Winner." On *Walking Away A Winner* [CD]. PolyGram Records. MCA Records [On-line]. Available: <http://www.mca-nashville.com/ty/>
- McBride, M. (1993). "Independence Day." On *The Way That I Am* [CD]. BMG Music.

of their promises: "Myths may be invincible, but we are only strong. Strong like a memory, strong like a willow in the wind. Strong as you'll ever be, you will always need to bend" (Carothers, 1994, track 5).

To sum, there is an undeniable trend for female country artists to portray aggressive and sexual personae in their lyrics, music, and public image. Some superstars like Trisha Yearwood take a different path; the path of the American girl; the path that leads home. In the end, subtle and real-life lyrics, understated musical scores, and a reserved public presence, may be the clearest way for scholars to understand the connection between music and culture, and be the most influential strategy for empowering the audience who wants to "go home," and providing for them a model for emotional survival.

References

- Andaloro, A. (1995). "Women and country music: A Postmodern Symbolic Interactionist drama." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Indianapolis, IN.
- Banta, M. (1987). *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Berg, M., & Randall, A. (1994). "XXX's and OOO's (An American Girl)" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Thinkin' About You* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1995)
- Buchalter, G. (1996, July 21). "Now I know I can't fix everything." *Parade Magazine*, 8-9.
- Carothers, C. (1994). "Little Hercules" [Recorded by T. Yearwood]. On *Everybody Knows* [CD]. Universal City, CA: MCA Records, Inc. (1996)
- Carpenter, M. C. (1992). "He Thinks He'll Keep Her." On *Come On Come On* [CD]. Columbia Records.
- Carpenter, M. C. (1992). "I Feel Lucky." On *Come On Come On* [CD]. Columbia Records.
- Carpenter, M.C. (1992). "I Take My Chances." On *Come On Come On* [CD]. Columbia Records.
- Clark, T. (1995). "Better Things To Do." On *Terri Clark* [CD]. PolyGram Records, Inc.
- Celeste, E. (1995, October). "Trisha Triumphs." *Southwest Airlines Spirit* [reprinted by FORCE].
- Daniel, A.A. (1996). "Good whiskey, good women, and good music: A dramatistic look at the world according to country music." Paper presented at the First Annual Popular Music Conference, Des Moines, IA.

people use for interaction) and systems (the outcomes from the application of those structures). Structures either mediate and reproduce the system, or contradict and contravene the system, thereby changing it over time. In the same vein, music can serve as both a virtual, structural critique and the progenitor of that which it critiques.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the American girl dramas would be the most influential in reinventing the system, for they are the closest to the system itself. Their power comes from their very subtlety. Avant-garde perspectives of the aberrant superwoman of country mythology may be too blatant and divisive. The virtual is so far detached from the actual that its influence is diminished. This perspective assumes, of course, that subtle reinvention of the system is the anticipated outcome. If the goal of one's rhetoric, musical or otherwise, is to challenge the system or empower the audience to separate themselves from the status quo, then dramas such as Yearwood's would be less effective to that end.

The biggest implication, therefore, seems to be less for the scholar or rhetorician, and more for the mass audience who listens to the music, reads the liner notes, and watches the videos. What does the American girl persona do for them? If music does indeed both reflect and create culture, then it needs to serve as an ideal model. Andaloro (1995) conducted interviews with women at the Cadillac Ranch, a country dance club, and concluded that many of them were motivated to "make positive changes in their own lives as a result of interacting with music" (p. 26). This should not be surprising.

What might be surprising is this essay's final argument that the American Girl is a better role model than the Superwoman. There is no doubt that songs about strong, invincible women can serve to empower the listening audience, particularly female listeners. There is nothing wrong with an upbeat ditty that makes us feel good. But like the followers of demagogues, listeners are often left with nothing once the emotional fervor wears off. The heroes win the lottery and overcome heartaches in a matter of hours, which may provide for the audience temporary, but unrealistic, inspiration. What happens when, in the listener's own lives, they don't hit the numbers, or still feel hurt by a broken relationship long after it is over? The musical messages may cease to be empowering, and in fact tell them they are deficient in their coping abilities.

The "real" storylines of the American girl - of loves lost and nostalgically recalled, of betrayals that hurt but have been overcome, of moments of strength that were really unfocused pride - provide more empowering lessons. This theme is fully evident in another Yearwood song from her latest release which, at the time of this writing, has yet to become a hit. In "Little Hercules," Yearwood consoles the overwrought, overworked soul who feels downtrodden because they cannot do it all and fulfill each

rich in the bottom range without turning breathy, and always in tune. Schoemer (1995) states, "She can belt, swoon or yowl as the lyric demands, all without missing a note" (p. 66). Beyond that, the biggest difference between Trisha Yearwood and us is the fact that she is famous, and we are her fans.

Discussion

Contrary to conventional belief, it is not just sex that sells country music. While the total package may include revealing clothing, aggressive lyrics, and rock riffs, they are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for success. There is a place in the genre for the Trisha Yearwood of the profession; for the talented girl next door who cites scripture passages in her liner notes, and whose mother and father run the fan club back home. Such a conclusion opens the door for several theoretical and applied considerations.

Of theoretical note is the interplay between the music of a society and the life experiences of that society. The illusion of life perspective used here differentiates between the virtual and the actual. To what extent is that distinction artificial? Can one separate the popular media of a culture from the culture itself? And, to what extent does that difference influence or propagate changes in the culture? Fox (1993), in analyzing the portrayal of the white, rural, working-class in country music, makes some fascinating observations about the "poetic expressions" of music:

On the one hand, it functions as a potential critique of the "ordinary," a stripping away of the ideological veneer of naturalness and a probing of the concealed structure of motives and interests revealed thereby. On the other hand, artful discourse also heightens and intensifies otherwise unremarkable situations and genres of discourse, providing a pleasurable reassertion and reinforcement of ideological a prioris and fundamentally implicating the poetic function in the reproduction of ideology. Artful discourse, then, is at once a challenge to and a celebration of a particular social order. (p. 132)

In other words, music has the ability not only to examine and reflect upon the world, but to restructure and reinvent the world through audience participation. Endres (1990) proposed a similar argument in an attempt to explain apparent contradictions in Carly Simon's music, as the lyrics vacillated between dependence on another and a need for autonomy in order to survive. The analysis incorporated the communication-based adaptation of Structuration theory (see Poole, Seibold, and McPhee, 1985), which distinguishes between underlying structures (rules and resources

It is also consistent with Yearwood's image of herself. She states, "I don't have the perfect body; I'm not model thin. But I think it's cool not to be Cindy Crawford. It's okay. You don't have to weigh ninety pounds to be successful - as a person or as a performer" (Celeste, 1996, p. 5). Of course, there may be some rationalization there, as we are all prone to do. In a separate interview, Yearwood is quoted as saying she feels confident about her abilities as a performer, but insecure about many other things: "I'm insecure about my looks. I'm insecure about what other people think about me, physically and in my head" (Fieler, 1996, p. 3). These would not be the comments of the superwoman personality.

Yearwood's clothing choices are also those of the American girl. A perusal of today's cover art implies that the standard uniform of female country artists includes tight blue jeans or miniskirts, baby t's or other midriff-baring tops, and vests, chaps, boots and other "feminized" western attire. All of Yearwood's albums depict her in full-length skirts or non-denim slacks, along with baggy shirts, sweaters, and jackets. Her 1992 and 1993 releases show pictures of her in shoulder-revealing dresses and blouses, but the effect is more subtle and alluring than cheesy or cheesecake. Most recently, her garb has shifted in favor of leopard prints and grunge-rock overtones. This could be in response to her new husband's unconventional attire. Still, it is not overblown.

Apart from physical appearance, how does Yearwood view herself, her messages, and her actions? When asked in our personal interview how she would describe herself, she hesitated, commenting that the question was difficult, as she was so used to being described by other people. She then added that she believes "sincerity" describes her, stemming from her sincere love of music and her sincere belief in every word that she sings. In a similar vein, Yearwood made the following observation:

The other thing that I would hope that I would use to describe myself, because I try very hard to be this way, is real. Image wise, my image is me. I don't have a different persona on stage or on videos than I really am. Except maybe more confident. Being on stage is like acting; you get a chance to be all the things you're not in real life, and more confident is probably one thing I am on-stage more so than I am offstage. (Trisha Yearwood, personal communication)

All things considered - the lyrics, the music, and the artist (both in her own eyes and in the eyes of others) - the Trisha Yearwood persona has clearly emerged. Her life and her songs portray the experiences, both actual and virtual, of the American girl. She is successful because she looks like us, loves like us, thinks like us, acts like us, and presents herself like us. What sets her apart is her "killer singing voice," which is full, supported,

instruments, not covered up by it. (Trisha Yearwood, personal communication)

Public Image

As Sellnow points out, the illusion of life is also manifest in the virtual present, which can be analyzed in terms of the visual image and persona of the artists themselves. This makes sense, considering the nature of the American girl dramas would be completely different if they were sung by another artist or within another music genre. How would the lyrical protagonist appear if the performer were Shania Twain, Melissa Etheridge, or Madonna? At this point, the analysis turns to Yearwood herself. While many essays of this nature begin with a brief biography and description of the artist, this argument demands that such information be included as an integral part of the analysis.

Raised on a farm outside of Monticello, Georgia (population 2000), the daughter of a small town banker and a schoolteacher, Patricia Yearwood is the quintessential American girl. An Elvis fan by age five, and influenced by the music of Patsy Cline, Linda Ronstadt, and Emmylou Harris, Trisha took up the guitar at age thirteen. Following stints at a local community college and the University of Georgia, Yearwood finished her education at Belmont College in Nashville, allowing her to be closer to the music scene. Moving from— an internship at a recording studio, she began singing demos and doing background vocals. She eventually signed a contract with MCA, and the rest, as chronicled in the previous section, is history (Celeste, 1995; MCA Records [on-line]; “ Trisha Yearwood”).

Yearwood is known as an artist who portrays herself in an honest and forthright fashion, “warts and all” (Celeste, 1995), so her audience knows her real-life shortcomings as well as her public successes. For example, the fact that Yearwood’s first marriage to her college sweetheart was unsuccessful is public, though not heavily touted, information. More in the public eye is her recent marriage to country musician Robert Reynolds from the Mavericks. Feiler (1996) describes them as unlikely candidates for media stardom: “Neither has particularly silver- screen teeth. Neither has surgery-enhanced cheeks. But what each of them has - in a completely opposite way from the other - is a particularly keen sense of American music” (p. 2).

Returning to Sheldon’s body types, one could describe Yearwood as more a combination of the muscular mesomorph with the rounder, softer endomorph. Such a physique might presumably encourage both somatotonic psychological characteristics, such as confidence and dominance, but also viscerotonic tendencies such as being emotional, sociable, and forgiving. This is consistent with the American girl storylines of her most popular songs.

more true than others? How honest can people be, consciously and unconsciously? We are disturbed by questions like these and a lack of answers for them. In the following writings, I also do not pretend to present an "objective" account of what happened. The reader, hopefully, will get a taste for the ambiguity I felt while living and studying in India. This paper may offer a window to those experiences.

From Kyle's Perspective

Sonali's cousin had been visiting frequently. I had never seen him before and I wouldn't see him ever again after that week. He was helping Suhas with some accounting things, but like many things in the house, I didn't understand exactly what was happening. He was about 26, quiet, observant. He didn't possess any remarkable features, although in general I'd describe him as handsome. I'm not sure if I ever heard him speak. When I came home from class one day, he suddenly appeared in the house. No introduction. I thought maybe he was a salesman, a client for Sonali's architectural business; I had no idea. Less mundane, I wondered if he weren't really Sonali's clandestine lover, keeping her company while Suhas was at work all day. After a few days of anonymity, Sonali finally introduced him to me. I don't remember his name anymore. He didn't speak English well, and my Hindi only sufficed for basic superficial conversation. Neither of us attempted to initiate a conversation, so we never spoke. I couldn't tell if he was just doing the Pathaks a favor or if his work with Suhas would get his foot in the door for future career opportunities. To me he was just another Indian guy, one of many who would pass quickly from my memory, at least under normal circumstances.

He stands out in my mind, however, because he witnessed the most humiliating incident I experienced while in India, and perhaps in my life. We didn't know each other, had never talked, and his presence — his strangeness in this most intimate of conversations — amplified my discomfort. But where do I start? As I said, this was an intimate matter, not in a romantic sense, but in that the issue was very personal and highly contextual. In describing the context my personality will probably show through, so maybe I should start with that.

I'm an American college student, from a wholesome farming family in rural Wisconsin, fairly quiet and inclined to study. I was living with a host-family in Suryanagar, India while on a foreign-study program. My family consisted of Suhas and Sonali Pathak, a couple in their mid-thirties who were rapidly climbing the socioeconomic ladder, and their two children, Dilip (10) and Ravi (2). Suhas owned a car parts factory and spent most of his waking hours supervising it and improving its efficiency. During my six-month stay, I saw Suhas very little. He had the calm confidence of a self-made entrepreneur. I was a little surprised at how good his health

was considering the length of his working days and the stress of his work. His attitude sometimes bordered on arrogance, and he had little patience with those who contradicted him. For that matter, he had little patience, period. His voice had a machine-gun quality to it, rapid-firing pointed words at anyone who crossed paths with him. Now and then, I would be in the living room when he was on the phone with another businessman. If things started turning sour, he knew how to intimidate and bend his opponent to see things his way. He was a successful businessman, but his office followed him wherever he went. Consequently, his approach to business often carried over to his family. Some of the arguments he had with servants or his family got so loud that I became scared for their safety. As I mentioned before, I rarely saw him, and that was fine with me.

Dilip and I never quite connected. My real brother was a year younger than Dilip, but acted 10 years more mature. People say this is characteristic for Indian boys — to be horribly spoiled — but I cannot imagine that Dilip was typical. My brother, Paul, is the youngest of four, and he had all of us older siblings to look up to, fight with, emulate, and embarrass. Dilip was the Pathak's oldest son. Maybe this difference in sibling hierarchy accounts for Dilip's behavior. Maybe not. Dilip's interests included TV, toys, and professional wrestling (unfortunately, after American boys lost most of their interest in professional wrestling, it was exported to India). I sometimes took him to the park to throw around a Frisbee, but he could never concentrate on one thing very long, so that usually ended quickly. I am not especially good with kids his age, but I would like to think that I could at least get along with most of them. What annoyed me most about Dilip was his lack of respect and his expectation that I was going to do whatever he wanted. His tantrums drew instant response from his mother, but he quickly discovered that I didn't work the same way. Since I wasn't so easily manipulated, Dilip stayed away from me.

Ravi, unlike the rest of his family, couldn't speak English. He also was quite afraid of his six-foot tall, pale-skinned, incomprehensible guest. Slowly, he warmed up to me, but like Dilip, the fact that I wasn't his slave didn't sit well with him. Reinforcing the notion of the "terrible twos," he made sure that the mostly stone bungalow in which we lived resonated with his whining, crying, and screaming.

In the middle of all this was my host-mother, Sonali. Despite our disagreements and inhibited animosities, she never ceased to be a good hostess. She went out of her way to make me welcome in the house and to aid me in adjusting to life in India. During the first few months, she made a point of talking with me after dinner for at least a half hour. Conversation usually revolved around what I was doing, what I thought of different aspects of India, my perspective on America, things like that. Relatively neutral topics. She would tell me about her background, certain societal

trends in India (like the increase in love marriages over arranged marriages), and aspects of the culture I had questions about. I enjoyed some of the discussions we had, but I was often irritated by the inconsistency between what she said and what she did. Sometimes our conversations would turn toward ethical principles, like problems with the caste system. Like most educated Hindus, Sonali held that all people were equal and that many aspects of Hinduism are now obsolete and superstitious. Therefore, these aspects (like the caste system) should be dropped as India attempts to modernize. Yet, the Pathaks still maintained a separate set of cups for the servants to use. And they still called some of their servants by their last names. One man with whom I became fairly good friends was named Kotwal, or so I thought. A full three months went by before I found out that his real name was Ram. I asked him why no one called him that. He responded that he's just a worker. Shortly after that, I learned that Kotwal is a common family name among untouchables, and the habit of calling him by his last name related to the fact that he was "impure."

Last, but certainly not least, Pathaks employed a large number of servants. Ram (23 years old) watched the gate at night. Sandip (16) washed their cars in the morning. Nana (in his late 70s at least) tended the garden twice every week. Alkabai (30) washed clothes and dishes in the morning before going to her next jobs. Mangalabai (32) came in the mornings and evenings to make the meals for the Pathaks. And Kamal (15) was the maid-servant, taking care of the boys and doing general housework. She usually worked from 8 am to 6 pm every day, weekends included. I come from a family farm, and manual labor is quite familiar. We also rarely had extra money to spend. So I felt closer to the servants of the house than I did to my host family. Also, the servants had a certain humility about them and a genuine interest in me which was quite different from the interest of more privileged Indians. I never needed to feign an interest in them either. I truly wanted to know about their lives. Many of these people have been inspirational for me. Their poise and ungrudging acceptance of adversity amazed me. And in the face of such economic challenges, they maintained a sense of humor and life that I did not find elsewhere. I was eager to offer whatever I had to assist them. Such naivete, such arrogance!

Most of the major problems in India stem from poverty and its effects (e.g. lack of education, overpopulation) and the inadequacy of government resources to address these problems. Eventually, many of our conversations touched on these issues also. Sonali would acknowledge the evil of poverty and recommend ways that people might try to change things. She talked about how it is the duty of affluent people to help the poor.

I quickly tired of this theme as I began to see her contradict herself in her daily routine. For example, Pathaks employed a 15 year-old maid-

servant, Kamal. After three weeks at Pathaks, I found out that she had never gone to school. She worked at the house from 8 to 6 every day. Sonali maintained that Kamal was like a member of the family. And maybe she actually believed this, but I certainly didn't think it was true. Kamal wasn't allowed to sit on the furniture. She ate leftovers, seated on the floor in the kitchen after everyone else had eaten. She had a plate that was reserved for her; she didn't use my host-family's cups and plates. And she was, plain and simple, a servant, whom Sonali ordered around and often scolded. This wasn't odd at all to Kamal — that was her duty, which would be much the same if she were working elsewhere. She needed to work in order to make money for her family. In my eyes, Kamal was sacrificing (out of necessity) her future for the present. Without an education, she wouldn't be able to find any better job than she already had. Kamal's situation was quite common, as she belonged to that substantial percentage of the Indian population who are destined to live out their lives struggling to survive.

What bothered me most about Sonali was that she could say that Kamal was like a member of the family but still exploit Kamal's disadvantaged situation to get work done around the house. Even then, working for the Pathaks was better than most jobs available to people like Kamal. She told me about how her family worked on road crews as a child, working and living at the site in squalid conditions to earn barely enough money to live. Working for the Pathaks was safe, offered free food, regular pay, and even health-care if Kamal was sick. Comparatively in Indian standards, Pathaks may have been treating Kamal well. My standards of comparison were different, however. As Sonali prided herself on their treatment of Kamal, Pathaks were taking advantage of Kamal's inability to go to school. Kamal's family simply lacked the money for books and a uniform (all Indian schools require uniforms). By law, Kamal was supposed to be in school. Sonali kept saying that as soon as Ravi could go to school alone, as soon as things slowed down around the house, as soon as the busy holiday passed, as soon as they could find supplementary help, then she would send Kamal to school. Many families did this for their servants — gave them time off to go to classes (for basic math knowledge, a grade school diploma, practical skills like sewing, etc.) and paid their way. These families were actively involved in helping their servants develop their skills and thereby earning capacities. Pathaks didn't do this. Yet Sonali always talked about it, and bragged about how much her family was doing to improve the plight of the poor.

In conversations that Sonali and I would have, she sometimes would get on the topic of servants, poor people, or poverty in India. Her comments about the incompetence and laziness of people in these situations grated on me. I liked most of the servants around the house, and I disagreed with Sonali's analysis. While servants sometimes do not live up

to their employers' expectations, and they do make mistakes, many aspects of their lifestyle are inherited and inevitable. Food is an example: many poor people can't afford to buy good food, and therefore don't eat very well. Poor nutrition leads to poor health which leads to missed days of work which means less money. Sonali ignored the fact that people born into poverty often don't have the means to get themselves out of it. One day, Sonali was complaining the Alkabai had missed work the last couple days. "She's so irresponsible," she said, "that's part of the reason these people can't improve their lives, they're just irresponsible. She should at least call me and tell me she can't come." Now, Alkabai had been sick and needed to take care of housework at home because her children were also sick. Sonali knew this; she told me about it. I asked, "Does Alkabai have a phone?" No, she didn't and to call from a public phone would cost several rupees — rupees that in all likelihood could not be spared. On top of that, Alkabai would have needed to call *all* her employers, which would probably have cost a good day's wages. Sonali didn't want to acknowledge how difficult it would be for Alkabai to call. She preferred to not understand but rather deride her servants for their inability to afford the actions she expected. At the same time, the wage she paid the servants was average at best. One of the Indian directors of my program confirmed that many progressive Indian families pay their servants a fair amount more so the servants could send their children to school. To me, what it came down to was that Sonali wanted to ease her conscience that she really was helping fight poverty and doing her duty as a progressive Hindu. At the same time, as a wife, she tried to run an efficient household and not waste money. She was lying to herself, and in our conversations she was lying to me.

Before getting into the action itself, you need to know one more thing. Shortly after I learned that Kamal wasn't going to school, I asked Sonali if I could teach her while I was around. She reluctantly agreed, because (I think) she saw herself in a corner. If she said no, then she'd have to admit her hypocrisy. So, every weekday for four months, Kamal and I worked for an hour on basic math, science, and English. We used the textbooks for the first through third grades of an English-medium elementary school. Before working for Pathaks, Kamal's previous employer was a grade school teacher and she taught Kamal some simple English. Between Kamal's English and my Hindi, we were able to cover a fair amount of material. Sonali, conceding to my request, explicitly allowed Kamal one hour during her day to work with me. However, I doubt Sonali was ever very comfortable with the whole arrangement, and went along with it grudgingly.

For now, I think this is all the background you need to comprehend the incident. As I describe it, please keep in mind that some of the conversation is in Hindi, and I could only understand parts of what they

were saying. Also, as an American, I did (and do) not understand all the details of social relations around me. American college students don't traditionally play much of a role in Indian society, so my position there was usually awkward and unclear. What I describe is how I understand what happened. This isn't to disclaim my understanding as just *my* perspective, however. It isn't just *my* perspective, it's *my perspective* in that it couldn't be otherwise. I see the world as I see it, and I function according to my filtered perceptions. Some reflection is appropriate, but at some point I have to go on what I understand, however incomplete.

It was Thursday evening, I had just returned home from eating out with a friend. We'd been in India four months and we loved the food but were getting tired of it. It was like eating at the same restaurant for four months, eventually one simply gets tired of the food. Mangalabai, Pathak's cook, was making dinner in the kitchen. Mangalabai and I had a fun relationship. We'd talk while she was working. My Hindi ability was the best in the group of American students and this happened only because I talked in Hindi so much with the servants. When Sonali was around, we didn't say much because Sonali and she were usually chatting. Sonali and I spoke in English. She and Mangalabai spoke in fluent Hindi. I wasn't fluent enough to join in their conversations. When Sonali wasn't around, Mangalabai and I had great conversations. Sometimes she showed me how to prepare some of the dishes she made. She was easy to get along with, and we joked around a lot. That Thursday, she was just finishing up when I arrived home. Sonali's cousin was in the living room. As I said earlier, I don't know his name. He had finished work with Suhas upstairs and was relaxing a little before returning to his apartment. Kamal had already gone home for the night. Suhas was at the factory and would be for a couple more hours yet. Dilip and Ravi were in their bedroom playing.

As usual, Sonali asked me about my day: "*Oh, you've returned early. Where did you eat?*" "*The Chinese Palace on Nehru Road. You know, I think they're a little more expensive than the one on East Street. But by the time you take a rickshaw all the way over there, it's about the same.*" "*They have very good food. We eat there sometimes. You went with friends?*" "*Yes, Scott and Jessica. You remember Scott, he stopped by here once for a book. He's about my height. A little clumsy. He studies Sanskrit.*" "*Yes, yes,*" she said, *tipping her head from side to side.* When we students first arrived this motion seemed quite odd, because we have nothing like it in America, but slowly it became natural. The "head-wag" means something like nodding our head means here. Yes. I see. I understand. I hear you. "*I don't think you ever met Jessica. She lives with a family near Macaulay College.*" "*Mmmmm. I don't know. Did you and Kamal study this afternoon? I don't think she remembered her books this morning. You know, Kyle, yesterday she forgot to clean above the cupboards.. You're*

only teaching her for an hour, right?" "After she didn't wake up Ravi on time I've made sure that she gets her work done. She didn't say anything about cupboards this afternoon. I don't know. She did forget her books. We couldn't work on math, but I had her do some translating. I asked her about Divali, and she got a book from Dilip's room to explain it. It was in Hindi and I could understand most of it, but I asked her to talk about it in English. We didn't go over an hour." "Alright. Come look at this." On the small stone dinner table were a set of architectural drawings. Sonali was an architect. In fact, she had designed the bungalow that we were living in.

"You remember, Kyle, about the contest for low-income housing design sponsored by the government? Today a letter came, and it said that our design took third place in the Suryanagar district." "Wow, that's pretty good. How many designs were submitted?" "Around 13. Many of the firms that turned in designs are much bigger than my office. We did well." She beamed with pride. "Well, congratulations! That's pretty impressive. Now what happens? Are any of these (pointing at the designs) going to be built?" "No, only the first place design will be considered. There is a small cash award for the two best entries. We just missed that. But it's good for our reputation. The government will publish a report and we'll be mentioned in it."

Sonali had told me about the contest a month before, and I didn't think much of it at the time. Housing in Suryanagar is definitely a problem. While the price of food and cheap clothing is usually within the reach of most poor people, the cost of an apartment or a house far exceeds most of their means. Those who couldn't afford a place to live made themselves at home on the street or in slums. Suryanagar is the dirty home of 2 million people. In America, I'd imagine only 100,000 people living in a city the size of Suryanagar. What's more, the population of Suryanagar is exploding. One of its suburbs was the fastest growing land area in the world. The problem of good water and sanitation could not be handled by the government. From what I gathered through newspapers and other news sources, the politicians preferred to send out smoke screens to the media giving off the impression that improvements were in progress. Homelessness in Suryanagar is such a problem, I could not comprehend why the government was offering prizes to already affluent people in return for their misconceived notions of what the poor needed. But the growing belief in the spirit of capitalism reassured the wealthy that they deserved their affluence, and any steps they made toward closing the gap between rich and poor could only be explained by the extraordinarily generous nature of the "philanthropist." Of course, their philanthropy, like Sonali's, was encouraged by lures of prize money and increased reputation. Sonali would never have participated in the contest had there been no reward for her. But the illusion that she was donating to the well-being of others had a strong appeal to her.

"This is what needs to happen more, Kyle. Private companies and the government working together to make India a better country. It is our duty. Men like Mahatma Gandhi were good examples. We need to take care of each other, especially people who can't take care of themselves."

Sonali's moralizing never sat well with me. Especially when she mentioned the name of Gandhi in any kind of a positive relation to her. She wasn't the only one the abuse his name. Modern Indian politicians invoke Gandhi to support, ironically, free market economy and industrialization. Sonali must have noticed my tension. In earlier conversations, I had quietly responded with things that implied disagreement. I knew that saying what was really on my mind wouldn't do any good. So we both pretended that there wasn't any disagreement between us and kept our relationship at a comfortable level of superficiality. Whenever this happened, though, I felt like I was being dishonest to myself. And today I was going to let a little more of what I thought be known.

"When are the buildings going to be built?" I asked.

"I don't know, a few years. Now the winner's design has to go to the next level. I don't know where that is."

"But, will this make much of an impact? I mean, whenever I go to The Grounds (an area on the opposite side of Suryanagar), I see so many slums. I can't imagine a few buildings will do that much good. It doesn't seem like much of an effort to really change anything."

"Ohhh, Kyle," she said in a whiny voice, "we have to try. And remain optimistic. We can't just leave things the way they are. It's up to us to help."

"I don't see too many people who really want to help. They feel that they deserve to have their money and they don't want to share. And they think that poor people have made mistakes and that's why they're poor. In a way, it's somewhat like the caste system."

The caste system is a hot topic. Reformers want to do away with it altogether. Even conservatives hold that the caste system is wrong. Only a very few ultra-orthodox people maintain that it's part of Hinduism and must be honored. Discrimination by caste is illegal in India, and efforts are being made to change peoples' mindset toward that way of social interaction, but the caste system still lingers in various degrees of explicitness. By and large, Brahmins had and have better access to resources with which they can secure themselves socially and economically. Sonali and Suhas were both Brahmins. On the opposite side of the coin, the lower castes (especially the untouchables) are born into a poverty developed and maintained for many generations. Most have no escape. For someone to bring the word "caste" into a conversation is just asking for trouble. I didn't slip — I meant to say what I said. And the results were much as I expected them to be.

"No Kyle, we don't live by caste anymore. That's in the past. There are

still some people who think about caste, but they are usually uneducated."

Sonali seemed to equate uneducated with "poor". She implied that they are to blame for their lack of education, as if education were simply a choice.

"But you have to admit, in general the people with money and power in India are Brahmins and most of those in poverty are Shudras or untouchables. I mean, sure, it may not be talked about anymore, but today's society came from yesterday's. And the inequalities of a society based on the caste system have been inherited by everyone living today."

Implicit in all this was the knowledge of Pathaks' wealth, their lack of generosity, and their conception that they were improving society. I don't know if Sonali felt this implication, but she responded like she had been attacked.

"What?! Kyle, you've only been here for a short time. You can't think like that. You don't know what India is like. You can't talk about this, you don't know what you're saying. What you've experienced isn't enough to make the conclusions that you make. You're just a student taking classes. You're not really living here, you're just visiting. Studies are so superficial. You don't understand at all." She had some astute observations, but she seemed to be venting a lot more frustration towards me than the topic merited. She had found a way to tell me all the things she thought about me but couldn't say because I was her guest. "You don't know how poor people live. You shouldn't say anything about it. If you want to know, you have to live in a rural village for two years, and then you might learn. Right now, all you do is sit in your room and read. You don't learn about life by doing that."

At this point, I knew that saying anything more wouldn't do any good. So I just sat on the stool and watched what happened next. All this time, we were in the living room, about 20 feet long, 15 feet wide and a good 12 feet high. The floor was stone and reflected the sound. The stone amplified the sound of our voices. Sonali was sitting across from me on a futon. On the other side of the room was Sonali's cousin. Throughout this conversation, he sat silently and continued to do so, just watching and listening. It was starting to get dark, and Mangalabai had just finished cooking dinner. She came into the living room, drying a stainless steel cup with a dish-towel. Pathak's house was built (like most Indian houses) with mostly stone, so sound carried well. She had heard the entire conversation but understood none of it. Sonali and I were speaking English, and Mangalabai knew none. Sonali's cousin also must not have been able to understand everything, but I think that he caught parts of it.

Sonali was done with me. She had nothing more to say. However, the others in the room were listening and to let them in on what was happening, she now translated for them. Her translation gradually pertained less to our conversation and more to my insolence. She started to laugh —

a breathy, wheezing, squeaky laughter. Very irritating to hear, I'm glad that I had never been funny enough to provoke it before. She spoke in quick Hindi, colloquial and not following the forms we'd learned in class. The whole time I lived there, I don't think Sonali realized how much Hindi I understood. Of course, I never spoke it around her. But some of the things she said about me in front of me seemed extraordinarily bold. Her boldness went further now. While I couldn't understand everything that was said, I could pick up the gist of things and peoples' expressions don't require much translation. Instead of arguing my case, I kept quiet and concentrated on keeping my temper and trying not to cry.

She started explaining to Sonali's cousin that I didn't understand Indian culture. I came to India and haughtily assumed that I knew all about it. I had a romantic imagined relationship with poor people, but I didn't know anything about their lives. Mangalabai was also in the room. I didn't know what she'd say to all this, and I was surprised when she joined in on putting me down. All the while, Sonali's cousin remained silent, just observing. Sonali mentioned that I was teaching English at a school and this gave me the illusion that I was participating in Indian life. I wasn't really part of life here, I was just a visitor. I should be quieter and keep my misconceptions to myself. Mangalabai started to laugh too. *"He teaches Kamal for six months, and then he goes (little motion with her hand demonstrating a plane flying away) and he thinks he's made a difference. No. Nothing will change. Kamal will be the same. India will be the same. He hasn't done anything."* This hurt. I know that Sonali didn't like me much, and I understand what she said. She had good reason to say it. But Mangalabai I thought was my friend. And her response to the situation was to tear me down further.

Sonali's cousin continued to sit on the couch and watch, occasionally looking at me. Some of what was being said went over my head — I couldn't understand it. What was he thinking? They were making a fun of me and assuming that I couldn't understand them.

Gradually, the laughter died down and Mangalabai started to go. "Good-bye, Kyle," she said as if nothing had happened. "Good-bye Mangalabai," struggling to keep a blank face. I looked around at everyone, not knowing what to do next. "Well, I should get to work, I have some studying to do for my project." And I went up to my room. The only thing I could do was write in my journal. This is what I wrote:

Suryanagar, Thursday 10-12-95

Some things came out tonight. Got shot down, laughed at. Was told my impressions were hardly enough to draw any conclusions from. Hard to keep it from becoming personal. Granted, I know a lot of my impressions are false, but how can I think otherwise?

Learned that Aji will not take food from Mangalabai because she is a Maratha. Mangalabai laughed too, added in the fun making. Feel attacked - they kept repeating how little impact I was having and how I thought I was actually doing something. Was going to talk to one of the directors about this tomorrow, but now, it seems silly — what's she going to do? Give me some kind of support? . . . What did I want? What did I hope to gain? Humbling. Would like some stats. Want to talk to the Indian Sociology prof or Mrs. Varma or someone. Hurts. Want to let it turn bad - to let myself hate. Want revenge. Want to actually do something. Am living very precariously here — espousing ideals far from my actions. Maybe I should just withdraw — live a nice superficial life and not worry about questions without answers. Again feel like I'm doing something wrong. Something is still missing. Hope to visit Kamal's house in the future. Want to bravely walk forward, head held high. But feel like returning to my corner, fading away, and just watching again. So weak.

What Mangalabai Saw

I have not worked for the Pathaks long, not even a year. In the mornings, around 7:30, I arrive here, prepare whatever they want for breakfast, pack lunches for Suhas and Dilip, and get food ready for those who eat lunch here. My husband, two boys, and I live a short ways from Pathak's. It's no slum but not very nice either. My husband is unskilled, so it's mainly my income that supports our family. We are Marathas, my husband and I. My original family had a big house in a town south of Suryanagar, and life was good. Getting married was not my choice, and my husband I had never met. But that is how it goes. My husband's family was not very rich, so we ended up staying in the place we're at now. There is a tap for water just down the lane and bathrooms too. Sometimes I remember how it was before I got married and I get upset, but then I also know that things could be much worse. At least we are all healthy, and the boys are in school. And Maruti (my husband) just started working as a night watchman at Pathak's bungalow. Anyway, it's a short ride by bike in the morning and it's actually nice because the roads are still empty and the air isn't full of dust and smoke. After working for Pathak's, I go to a couple other families and cook for them. In the afternoon I cook at a school and then for another family. And then, around 5:30, I return to Pathak's house to make dinner. About that time, Kamal goes home and if Pathaks aren't home, we talk. Otherwise Sonali chats with me. But not if Suhas is there. He doesn't like it. He thinks it distracts us from working. But he's usually not home, and that makes it easier. But I'm getting away from my story.

Sometime in late April, Sonali told me that she would be hosting a student from America. She said that the extra room upstairs would be perfect for a guest and that it would be good for Dilip and Ravi too. Then,

in May, Varun came. He was Indian himself and spoke Hindi, but not very well. Many Indian people move to America to make money, but they forget their tradition and their dharma. Varun seemed to like it here; he and Sonali talked a lot, and Ravi loved him. Varun would chase him around the house and try to talk Hindi to him. He had a lot of nice clothes, and Kamal was busier than usual because of all the extra washing he created. Once in a while, Varun would mention something to me, he was funny, and we laughed. But he didn't stay very long. His program ended in June. But before he left, another American came. He wasn't Indian at all. Very pale, brown hair, skinny, and he was huge — the top of my head didn't even reach his shoulder! And big white feet, I never saw such feet. He stayed almost six months, and in that time he created so much trouble! He didn't understand Indian culture very well, and we never really knew what to think about him.

In the beginning, he didn't say anything. Completely silent. Sonali said he didn't know Hindi. So I couldn't talk with him. I asked him easy questions "Do you want some tea?" "What are you doing?" — things like that. He gave short answers. I think he was afraid of me. Whenever he came home from class, he always went up to his room. He studied a lot. I just kept doing my job. Sonali said to be friendly and don't bother him with too much Hindi. She also wanted me to make the food less spicy. She said that where he came from, food isn't spicy like here. I already didn't use much chili or cumin, because Ravi didn't like it. But now, I'm glad I didn't have to eat their food, it didn't have any taste! Kyle said he liked hot food, though. So sometimes I used more masala for him. For a while, he always said that he liked my cooking. But then, he ate here less and less. He said he liked to eat at a Chinese restaurant. I didn't know if he was telling the truth. Maybe he really didn't like the food I made. As time went on, I found out why he was avoiding this place.

Varun's parents came from India, he said New Delhi. He acted, in some ways, like a normal Indian man. He knew that servants came to work and that he shouldn't talk too much with them. Besides, what do we have that he would find interesting? He's a rich American. Went to school for 14 whole years. He was probably embarrassed to talk to us; we aren't very smart people. But Kyle, he didn't live right at all. Sonali said that in America they didn't have caste. Maybe that's why he didn't act normal. I told you that he was quiet. But he always said, "Thank you." To everything. For tea. For bread. For lunch. For giving him a cup. For answering a question. It was funny and sometimes I laughed when he said it, and then he smiled too. I don't know, America must be different. Sonali worried about Kamal, because she liked it when Kyle said, "Thank you" to her. And that wasn't good, she's too young and doesn't understand about men.

After a couple weeks, Kyle was still very quiet and never talked to

us. What were we doing wrong? Why was he afraid of us? Sonali said that he was still settling in. She said that she'd talk to him. And after that, he did start talking. We all enjoyed it, and he was fun to tease (when he understood that he was being teased), but maybe it wasn't good. But I can only say that now, after all this time. Then it didn't seem like anything was wrong.

After a while, he starting talking a lot. Sonali talked with him all the time. But I don't know what they talked about, because it was all in English. They never spoke Hindi together. Sometimes Sonali translated for us, but not much. On some days, Sonali didn't come home until late, or she picked up Ravi and went out. Then Kyle came down from his room and talked with me in Hindi. He wanted to know about my family, my kids, where I work — things like that. Why was he so interested? I just work for Pathaks, there are lots of people like me in India — nothing special. He came all the way here, he should see the important things in India like the Taj Mahal. But I liked talking with him. His Hindi was not very good. Always asking me to repeat myself. After four tries, I would have to use different words, because he just wouldn't understand. But then, he went to class to learn Hindi. He spoke pure Hindi. I never went to school, never learned the right way to talk. People like us don't need to know. We just do the work, no talking. Talking gets us in trouble.

American men must be different from India men. Kyle always wanted to help make dinner. Sonali didn't like him doing work. He was a guest. But he wanted to work. So I had him cut vegetables and I explained how to make chapatti. In India, men don't work in the kitchen. Wives do all the work. Even if you have money, Sonali says men still don't work at home. But why should they? They work all day outside. And they don't know how to do things. Men aren't supposed to work in the house. But Kyle wanted to. He said he wanted to learn. So I taught him how to make some Indian food.

There's so much he didn't understand. Kamal said that he was teaching her English and science and math. She always told me what they did. After a couple months, I could tell she was in love. In India, boys just don't talk to girls like Kyle did to Kamal. I think he liked her too. She said that he told her about America, he bought her schoolbooks, he treated her very nice. He was a very nice boy, but he didn't understand. If Kamal's father found out she was in love, he would get her married right away. Otherwise, she might become impure, and there isn't anything left for girls like Kamal if they can't get married. Fortunately, Kamal has a good job with Pathaks and she can save the money for her wedding. That will help her get a better husband. Why didn't Kyle think about Kamal's future? He's too young. He didn't think about those things. He shouldn't have taught her. What good would it do? Girls like Kamal don't need to

know those things anyway, it'll just get them into trouble. They shouldn't think too much.

One night, Kyle was very sad, and I asked him what was wrong. He said he didn't like living with Pathaks. He started talking about what he didn't like about them. That was a problem. I didn't want him to be sad, but if Pathaks found out that he was talking about them to me, they might think that I telling him bad things about them. They wouldn't like that and then I might have to find other work. I said, "Kyle, don't say any more. We just work here. You can't tell us this." And he didn't say anything more.

Sonali was worried about Kyle being sad all the time. She asked me if I knew why, and I had to tell her. She was surprised and said she was going to talk to the leader of Kyle's program. But after that, nothing changed. Kyle was still sad and stayed in his room whenever the family was home. He started eating at restaurants more. He must have had a lot of money to afford that. He talked a lot with Kamal and me though. And his face would cheer up a little whenever Pathaks left.

Sonali stopped being worried about Kyle, and she started talking bad about him when he wasn't around. I didn't know what to think. He was very nice, and he treated us servants very well. Very friendly. And we all liked this a lot. But with Kamal, why was he acting so friendly with her? Was he in love with her? Sonali complained that he liked us more than her family. I just couldn't disagree when she said mean things about him, because if I disagree maybe I can't find other work. There are so many women who work like me. And until Maruti finds better work, I need to make money for our family to live. Pathaks aren't that bad. Sometimes, if Suhas won't find out, Sonali gives me extra money. Suhas doesn't like it though. And Sonali never disagrees with him. Besides, Sonali tells her friends about me and how well I cook, and now I cook for another family because they took Sonali's recommendation. If I disagreed with Sonali when she talked bad about Kyle, it wouldn't be good for me. And some of what she says, about he and Kamal — he's not acting properly. When he's here, he should try to live how we live.

Sonali never argued with Kyle, and he never told her what he told us. I'm surprised that they didn't disagree very much. But Sonali is a good hostess. Maybe that's why she kept everything to herself. Except one time. It's good that Kyle doesn't understand Hindi well, because then there really would have been a fight. It was an evening after Sonali had come home from work. I was cooking in the kitchen and Kyle and she were talking in the living room. I just finished making chapattis and I was putting the dishes in the washroom for Kamal to clean the next morning. When I came out and was leaving, Sonali was talking to her cousin in Hindi. She translated for him what she and Kyle had been saying. Kyle was sit-

ting in the corner quietly on the stool just watching us. He wasn't smiling, but he usually didn't smile around Sonali anyway.

"This boy doesn't know what he's talking about!" she said and laughed. "He thinks that we all still live by caste. He thinks that we haven't changed in 3,000 years."

I know that's not true. In my village, our caste rules were much stricter. Pathaks don't observe caste very much at all. Especially this generation. "You don't keep me separate from Dilip and Ravi. And if you had a problem with my caste, you couldn't eat my food. Kyle, Aji upstairs is traditional Hindu, she can't touch the food I cook. She has to make her own. Pathaks don't do like that." I spoke to Kyle quickly because I knew that Sonali would translate for me. And, like I expected, he didn't understand so she translated. He looked surprised, and said something back to Sonali but she didn't tell me what it was.

"He is so arrogant. He goes to class for a few months, and he thinks that he knows all about India. He thinks he knows about India's problems. He teaches at a school, and teaches Kamal a little bit. But that's not going to change anything. He can't help. But he acts as if he knows everything." Sonali went on.

She was right. He did act like he was solving our problems for us. I added, *"He teaches Kamal, but in two months he'll leave and then where will she be? No different than before. Except she'll have dreams that will never come true. She'll be disappointed. Actually, it's worse for Kamal that she learns."*

Kyle must not have understood us because his face didn't change. He just sat there and looked at us as we talked. Sonali and I talked for a little while longer, and Kyle stood up to leave. "Good-bye Kyle," I said and went out the door.

After this happened, Kyle spent less and less time at Pathaks. He came home to teach Kamal, and sometimes he read upstairs in his room. But he ate out more; he said he liked Chinese food. He still visited with me when Pathaks were gone, but Kyle got busier too. Then, in December he left. I wanted to say good-bye, to come back to Pathaks early in the afternoon to see him leave, but Sonali told me not to. He wrote one letter, in Hindi, later that month. Now, life is back to normal. In December, I asked Pathaks for a raise, and Sonali refused. She doesn't pay very much. I threatened to quit, but I didn't until Kyle was gone. He made a lot of trouble, but he was a friend too. Without him at Pathaks, I realized that I didn't like to work there any more. So I quit and now work for a different family that pays better. Kamal is still there. She had a hard time when Kyle left. She kept forgetting to do work. And Sonali scolded her more often. But, she's going to stitching class now, so Kamal won't always have to be just a servant. That's good. Maybe Kyle did change things a little. Nothing huge, but a little. Maybe that's all we can do.

What Sonali Felt

Our new bungalow is so much nicer than the old one. We moved in back in January, right before summer, so it was a pleasant time for all that activity. My architectural associates and I designed the complex three years ago, and it was done in a year. So I have some personal reasons for wanting to live here. Also, it's nice for the family. Mrs. Varma lives upstairs on the fourth floor alone, now that her husband passed away a few months ago. We all worked together to help her through that. Now, she likes to come down and visit sometimes. Her husband was the director of the school for international economics over on Subhash Chandra Bose Marg. He earned his D. Litt. several years ago, and left his wife a large account in the bank. Then, across from us on the third floor, Sharmas live with their two children. Kala is a little older than Dilip (our oldest) and her brother is 7. They all like to play together in front of the building. It's good to have other kids around. Mrs. Sharma likes to visit often too, and she's interesting to chat with. Different perspective. Her husband works for Tata, India's largest auto manufacturer, something to do with engineering or design. Anyway, he must be earning a lot because their lifestyle, my God, I don't know many people who live so extravagantly. But they're quite friendly. This area of Suryanagar, Hastapur, is very quiet too. Nice buildings. Kamala Nehru Park is within walking distance. I have to drive 20 minutes to work (traffic has become so bad lately!), but it's much better than Suhas' 1-hour commute. He works so much and spends so much time commuting, we barely get to see him. But if it weren't for him, we wouldn't be living here at all.

This new bungalow has a guest room too. When my brother from the coast comes to visit, he stays up there. It's a very nice room with a terrace looking out over our garden. It has its own connecting bathroom, so whoever lives there has a lot of privacy, if he wants it. Back in March, a friend of mine at the University of Suryanagar mentioned that a group of American students was coming to Suryanagar for a month, and they were looking for host-families. He asked me if we knew anyone who could help. I mentioned our extra room, and I told him that I'd call him after I talked with Suhas. Our home would be a good place for an American guest. Suhas' brother in Chicago always talks about how nice life is in America, nice roads, big buildings, good electricity. I know that a visiting American would have a hard time adapting to how we live in India, but our family can afford to make his stay more comfortable. Suhas' brother says that the only news that people get in America about India is bad — poverty, backwardness, floods, riots — hopefully our student will find out that our country is much different. Well, Suhas agreed but said that he was going to be busy usually, so he can't offer much help to a guest.

Early in May, Varun arrived. He was on a program that had its

base in the University. There were about 20 Americans in the group, including many of Indian descent. Varun's family was originally from India, but they moved to America for a better life. His father is a doctor. Varun knew a little bit about Hindu religion, and he could speak Hindi. That was good for him, because that way he could talk to people in town and the servants too. He studied economics, and he had a project with an international bank a few blocks from here. When he lived with us, he fit in well. He said that visiting his relatives in New Delhi showed him how Indians lived, so living here wasn't something very new. He was very social too, always bringing his American friends home or going over to where they lived. We had some good talks about how moving to America has changed his family. He said that for him now, India is a nice place to visit, but he couldn't live here. His real home is over there. He still enjoyed staying with us though.

A few weeks into May, I was visiting with Dilip's teachers, just checking to see how he was doing in school. He doesn't like to do his homework, and he has been bringing home 60s and 70s on his tests lately. Suhas gets very upset, because how can Dilip get a good job without the right education? And competition is getting so bad lately, only the very best students can go to good schools. Anyway, I was talking with his teacher, and Sitateacher walked into the office. She's the principal of the school. All of the kids love her. She is a truly great woman; she has helped start many schools and has many good ideas about teaching. She also tries hard to get to know students' families, and that's how we originally met, when Dilip first entered her school. She was excited to see me, and said that she wanted to talk with me. She also is involved with a program from America and was looking for host families from students from her group. They would stay six months. She said that all the students had host-families right now, but if something went wrong or if a student didn't fit well with a host-family, would we be willing to help? I said that would be fine. Since she said that all the students already had places to live, and because Sitateacher is so good with people, I didn't plan on a student living with us. But then, two days before he would arrive, Sitateacher called and was frantically searching for a host-family for one of the boys. In a recent test, a member of his original host-family was found to have cancer, so they didn't think they'd be able to offer him a place to live. I said we'd be glad to help out. Varun was still living with us, but he would leave in two weeks, so then Kyle (our newest guest) could have the room by himself.

We met Kyle for the first time at Shivamangala Hotel, in their meeting room, where all the students and host-families were introduced. He was very tall, and very white — much more like we were expecting as an American than Varun. He didn't say much, and he didn't talk a lot with his friends either. I couldn't say much to him, because Dilip and Ravi were

misbehaving and I had to watch them. We all sat together while Sitateacher and another man officially welcomed everyone and thanked them all for coming. Then their American professor spoke. I think his name was Mark, but I don't know why he wanted everyone to call him by his first name. After all, he was a professor and we all should respect him. He was teaching the students and helping guide the program. He thanked the host families and hoped that their experiences with the Americans would be beneficial to everyone.

Kyle came home with us. He had only his backpack (it was a big pack, but only one). Varun had brought a backpack and two large suitcases. It was good that Kyle had so little luggage, because with the two boys along, more luggage would not have fit in our car. For the next couple weeks, Kyle was very quiet. I would hear him and Varun talking upstairs sometimes, but they were gone much of the time — tours and classes and orientation things. Varun left during the last week of June, and we started to get to know Kyle more. He was certainly not what we expected. His family were farmers. A few months later, his mother sent him photos of his home, and he showed them to us. I still cannot believe how much land they owned. Two hundred acres run by only his parents, brother and sisters! And big machines, nothing like farms here. We took Kyle out to a farm where we'd recently bought some land. The owner was a friend of Suhas'. We hoped that Kyle would get to see what farming was like here in India. But he didn't say much. He seemed more interested in the workers than the ones who actually ran the farm. That actually happened often with Kyle. He never seemed to enjoy himself whenever we took him somewhere with us. But then, at least one of our mischievous boys was usually along, so maybe that bothered him.

Varun played with Dilip and Ravi a lot, but Kyle was quieter and seemed to ignore them. He studied so much! He was always bringing home new books that he had bought out on M.G. Road. Very deep, difficult subjects like Shankaracarya's commentaries on the Upanishads. I don't know how much he understood, but he spent most of his time at home reading or studying in his room. He said his classes were too easy and that he'd be behind when he returned to America. He had also started learning Hindi. For only 8 months of practice, he spoke very well. And very neat handwriting. But so much of what he knew, he learned in class and from books, he never really saw what Indian life was like. He didn't talk to people, he got his knowledge from books.

I am a very busy woman, keeping track of Dilip and Ravi, running my architectural business, supervising the servants, and even doing housework myself. But I always tried to talk with Kyle for at least a half hour every day. This often worked best after dinner. I'd ask him how his day was, what he did. Sometimes he wanted to know the meaning of things he

had seen during the day: Where do the fruit-sellers get their fruit from? Why do people stop and *namaskar* at painted rocks in the street? What does it mean when a woman wears a white sari? Other times, he had general questions about society: What are the child labor laws like here? Do many Hindus have love-marriages nowadays? Are there any marriages between people of different religions? He especially wanted to know about poor people and their lives. What does the government do to assist poor children so they can go to school? Do poor people get health care? For a while, he said that he was teaching English twice a week at Shivray Vidyalaya, a nearby school for poor children. When he found out that our maidservant, Kamal, didn't go school, I wasn't surprised that he wanted to teach her. He said that he liked teaching and that he wanted to become a teacher in the future. I told him that he could help Dilip with his studies too, but he wasn't very excited about that. When Suhas heard about that, he said that Dilip was wasting Kyle's time, so Kyle shouldn't help him. Kyle was content to leave it at that.

Teaching Kamal was never a good idea. I planned on sending her to school as soon as Ravi could go to school by himself. Kyle didn't need to interfere. But Kyle seemed like he really wanted to do it. I knew it would be trouble. Soon, Kamal was forgetting to do tasks I gave her in the morning. She was never very good at remembering her duties, but it got worse with Kyle around. She works for us, but Kyle treated her like part of the family. Better than the family. I thought that his program advisers would have warned them against talking too much to Indian girls. For girls like Kamal, she has so little and she's not allowed to talk to boys at home, when Kyle paid attention to her, how could she not fall in love? How could she not mistake it for thinking that he was courting her? He brought all kinds of big dreams to her that he knew wouldn't come true. I think he enjoyed it. He liked her attention.

But I couldn't ask him about that. It wouldn't have been proper. Besides, he was our guest. And I wanted to make him feel at home. I wouldn't be a good hostess to challenge him like that. He wouldn't be with us long anyway. I had to remind Kamal sometimes that Kyle was leaving in December. She started to blush whenever she saw him. When he was in the house, she was much more attentive and wanted to do jobs which meant going upstairs. It was not good. But I didn't know what to do about it.

I tried very hard to make Kyle feel welcome. But he never fit in here. He wanted to do things for himself. He washed his own clothes. He made some of his own meals. For a week here and there, we could have almost forgotten that he lived here because he was so independent. He was always thankful for everything we did. He was always saying "Thank you." But in other ways, he rejected what we offered him. He didn't spend

time with Dilip and Ravi. And he never wanted to stay long and talk with me after dinner. I lent him a book I was reading called *Being Happy* and hoped that he might find it helpful. He was confusing — he appreciated what we gave him, but he didn't want it. He was so sad, I don't know why. We tried to make his stay as comfortable as possible, I don't know what we were doing wrong. I talked to Mangalabai about it, because she mentioned that they would talk while she made dinner sometimes. She said that he didn't like living here. "Why not?" I asked, surprised and hurt. "I don't know," she responded. I talked to Sitateacher about it because I didn't want him to feel obligated to stay with us if something was wrong. Sitateacher talked with him and asked if he wanted to move. He said that he didn't. Sitateacher didn't tell me what was upsetting him. She said that he thought his two-week break in Songan (a town about 20 miles away) would help him feel better. He was going to help one of his teachers there by teaching English to rural children. However, when he got back he wasn't any better. A couple weeks passed. Then, one evening, I overheard a conversation and discovered what was wrong.

Once in a while, he had a friend over to talk. One night, Greg and he were up in his room discussing something. I was in the kitchen after Mangalabai had gone home. His door was open and their voices carried down the stairwell to the first floor. Since the traffic had died down outside, it was silent enough that I heard their conversation. At first, I wasn't listening, but then I kept hearing "Sonali" and "Pathaks" coming from upstairs. I went over to the stairs, inevitably drawn to sit down and listen.

"What did Sita say about that?" Greg asked. I had missed the first part of the conversation, but after a while, it didn't matter. The topic was obvious.

"She said that I could stay with David's family. They're Dalits, more like the family I requested. Sita said they're really great and that David had a wonderful time. But it's a good 4 miles southwest of everyone here. It'd be a lot of traveling, and they'd be going out of their way to host me. One of the reasons they took David was because he was leaving at the end of August," Kyle explained. David was another American professor, I think, that came with them to Suryanagar. I don't know why he was here, but he didn't stay long.

"What reasons do you have to stay here? I still don't understand what's bothering you about this place. I mean, when I talk with Sonali, she does seem a little inauthentic, but there must be something more than that. I don't want to press, Kyle, I'm just tryin' to understand."

"Yeah, I know. Pathaks are nice," Kyle said, "They've treated me really well. Sonali especially, she's really gone out of her way to make me feel welcome. And Suhas isn't home much, but he's friendly when he is, too. And I couldn't possibly ask for more in a place to live. I mean, look at this room. And the terrace, and a bathroom to myself. They've even got a washing machine! I've practically got my own apartment up here."

"Yeah, I know, Jessica and Julie and Scott (other students who have visited here) were commenting on how nice your pad is. Scott said that while he was here, someone even brought tea up here for both of you. He was impressed."

"Oh, that was Mangalabai. She's the Pathak's cook. Every day when she arrives she makes tea for anyone who is around. She's great. We've had some great talks. That's how my Hindi has gotten so good. I talk to the servants a lot." That made sense. I noticed early on that Kyle talked often with our servants. I assumed that it was because he wanted to practice his Hindi. For some reason, after he and I started talking in English, it just doesn't work for us to speak Hindi to each other.

"Huh, that's interesting. My host-father told me not to talk to the servant at all. He said that she's here to work and that if I talk, then she'll be distracted. I'm surprised that your host-family hasn't laid down some restrictions like that," Greg said. I don't know, it never occurred to me to not let Kyle talk with the servants. Maybe with Kamal, but for her own good, and there are different issues there. I wonder if that would have been a good idea. We've never hosted an American before. There wasn't any problem with Varun.

"I thought they would restrict me some, but no one said anything. So I followed my heart. I guess the reason that I want to stay here is the servants. Kamal and Mangalabai and Ram are really great. They're more in the situation of people I'm used to back home. Pathaks are so wealthy, I just can't relate to their lifestyle. I don't want to relate to their lifestyle. If Pathaks were Americans in America, I would never have any reason to meet them. They're in a completely different socioeconomic arena. And, I don't want to be mean, but I wouldn't want to meet them." Kyle last sentence slashed through my heart.

We could do everything possible and Kyle still wouldn't have liked us. All because we are rich. I don't understand — he is quite rich too. His family's farm and how much he pays to go to college, even the plane ticket to fly here — he couldn't be poor to do those things. At least one thing is clear now. The reason he's unhappy isn't because of us. The problem is with him. That's comforting, I suppose. But he was using us. Taking advantage of what we could offer because of our money — the room, the food, the home; and then neglecting us but turning and loving the servants. If he had to live with them, I know he wouldn't be happy. He's too young, too naive to really understand what their lives are like. In the beginning I thought that he talked to them just to improve his Hindi. I didn't realize that they gave him something that he didn't feel we could. Listening to him talk about us like this, I started to cry. I couldn't stand to hear any more, so I went into the living room and sat down. Dilip came out to comfort me. With him in my arms, I knew that Kyle was wrong. We weren't worthless. If he didn't find anything important in us, that's because he didn't look. How ungrateful.

Ten minutes later, Greg came down and went home. I don't know

what else they said. It didn't matter. Kyle followed him. He saw that I was crying and asked, "Is anything wrong?" As if he didn't know. What was I supposed to say? I shook my head and got the food for dinner. As we ate, he didn't look at me, and Ravi was the only one that occasionally broke the silence.

After that, I didn't try to talk with Kyle as much. I knew he didn't want to. But he was still our guest. And we couldn't ask him to leave. We took on a very surface friendliness and pretended that there weren't any problems. I told Suhas about what I overheard, and all he could say was, *"It was your idea to host him. I can't help with that. He'll be leaving in a couple months. That isn't too far away."* Kyle was gone so much and studied alone in his room so often that our paths usually didn't cross. And I controlled my emotions well, except for one evening when I just had to let it out.

Kyle had come home from the Chinese Palace, his favorite restaurant. He ate there often. That bothered Mangalabai a little, because she felt he no longer liked her cooking. It's an expensive restaurant; we only eat there one or two times in a month. I asked him how his day went and he said fine. Earlier that day, I had received word from the director of the Low- Income Housing Committee regarding a contest I had entered. The contest was to design the most practical, efficient, and inexpensive building possible (within certain parameters) for poor people to live in. Our group had some time between our clients' projects, so we decided to submit an application. After several weeks of sporadic work, we finished our proposal and turned it in. I was optimistic, because we have some good people on our staff, and I think we did well. The letter we received today congratulated us on taking third place in the Suryanagar district. I had the floor plan on the table, so I could show my cousin, Apu, who was visiting. Kyle asked about those drawings, and we started talking. I can't remember exactly how it all developed, but he finally said something about how all Brahmins are rich and that they keep everyone else poor. That was too much.

I told him how wrong he was. I told him that he couldn't make those judgments based on the time he'd been here. His thinking was wrong, and his conclusions were even more wrong. He didn't respond. Apu looked at me, wondering what was going on, because I was getting upset and my voice was getting louder. I told him (in Hindi) how insolent Kyle was being. Mangalabai finished her work in the kitchen and was leaving. She thought that Kyle wasn't acting properly either. She agreed that Kyle didn't know anything that he was talking about. I thought it was ironic that the people that Kyle thought were most his friends actually thought he was wrong too. We were speaking very quickly in Hindi, so he couldn't understand. I didn't try to translate for him because I knew it wouldn't be the proper thing for a hostess to do. He didn't say anything, but just sat there,

watching. I don't know what he was thinking, but I could see that he was trying to keep calm. Mangalabai turned to leave. He said good-bye to her. She didn't even turn around as she said good-bye back.

I don't know how much of this Kyle understood. But he started spending even less time at home. He started staying out very late. He was never social with his friends before, but suddenly he spent all kinds of time with them. When he was home, he wouldn't stay and talk after dinner any more. Instead, he went outside to talk with the watchman, Kotwal. He'd stay out there for well over an hour. One night when Suhas was meeting with the other owners of the building, someone brought up their discomfort with Kyle talking with Kotwal. He's a nice young man, Kotwal is, but he's so uneducated and dirty — he works here and should not be treated like those who live here. I'm sure Kyle drew a lot of attention when he talked with Kotwal so much. And that attention reflected on us too. For various reason, Suhas told Kyle that he should stop talking with Kotwal at night. If they wanted to talk, Kyle could visit Kotwal's house and do it there. Kyle didn't argue with Suhas. Kyle started staying with us then and talking more. I don't understand why, but we actually had some good conversations again. In some ways, I think we put it all behind us for the last weeks of Kyle's stay. He received a call from home saying that a family friend was very sick and he should come home early. That was too bad, and I tried to offer some comfort, but he wanted to be alone. That's understandable.

Kyle left in early December. He didn't look too pained to leave. And I can't say that we were sad to see him go. The only one who really missed him was Kamal. And Mangalabai started demanding more money or she'd leave. I'm sure Kyle had something to do with that. He was always telling the servants that they should leave and find better work somewhere else. Right before he left for Mumbai, I asked him, "I hope you had a good time here with us?" He answered with his own question, "I hope I didn't cause too much trouble?" That summed up our whole relationship. I don't think we'll be hosting any more American students.

Epilogue

After writing the three parts and reading them again, I myself have a couple responses. First, I feel that my perspective is not comprehensive of what I was thinking and feeling. My perspective is oversimplified. Consequently, I feel I was portrayed unfairly in these writings. And I'm certain that the reason for this is exactly because I am the one who wrote all three pieces. I was surprised to note that, unlike the descriptions from "In a Grove", the descriptions here fit together and portrayed a whole rather than standing alone. Second, I'm actually a bit scared at the effects this writing will have on my memory. In portraying the event as I have, many

nuances were lost and I have forgotten many details. When I first returned from India, I shared my photo album with people to help describe what living in India six months was like. In the beginning, I always noted that the photos never came close to portraying what was truly important to me while I was there. Over time, memories have receded, and the photos are reminders. Unfortunately, the photos remind me of only particular memories. The rest lie dormant. Likewise, I anticipate these writings to have the same effect. The descriptions I have laid out will come to dominate how I remember what happened. In light of my dissatisfaction with my own representation, I wish I could offer some kind of rebuttal in my defense.

Writing these pieces was not as emotionally taxing as I had anticipated. However, I was very surprised to see how drained I was after reading what I had written for the first time. What I write about here is very close to me. I cannot imagine how other readers might understand and think about it.

Personally, writing Sonali's perspective was very helpful in my own understanding. It forced me to portray her as well as I could without the feelings and judgments I held against her. How does this capacity, to write other perspectives, relate to my capacity to deal with the situation? All of this is retrospective, and the time that has passed affords me a different kind of opportunity to comprehend what happened. As I mentioned in the prologue, these writings have been an exercise in cross-cultural hermeneutics. In order to write the different perspectives, I needed to reflect much on where each narrator was coming from and attempt to define some of the prejudices of each. Of course, the perspectives of Mangalabai and Sonali are still my understanding. However, by writing this paper, I have come to understand all three narrators in (I think) greater depth. This whole enterprise of interpreting, whether interpreting a member of another culture or my own memories, reveals the need for patience. In seeking to understand, I must be able to suspend the understanding I have already formed. Time always brings new possibilities of understanding. Awareness of this easily disappears in the heat of the action. However, it is this awareness, this humility about the transience of one's own interpretation, that is most needed in intercultural communication.

The Status of Speech Communication Instruction in Minnesota's Technical Colleges

Mary L. Swart, Mankato State University
Hazel Rozema, University of Illinois, Springfield
Daniel Cronn-Mills, Mankato State University

The purpose of this study was to investigate the status of speech communication instruction in the 34 technical colleges in Minnesota. Past surveys/reports have concluded that communication competence is necessary for successful job performance (Clark, 1987; Friedrich, 1994). Curtis, Winsor, and Stephens (1989) surveyed over 400 personnel managers and concluded that oral communication skills and listening skills were the top two skills sought by corporate recruiters when interviewing job candidates. Once hired, employees with effective interpersonal communication skills and strong verbal/nonverbal communication skills were the ones most likely to be promoted. Sadly, many individuals fail to obtain basic communication competence. Vangelisti and Daly (1989) found that 15 to 20 percent of 21-25 year olds in the U.S. were unable to complete a simple communication task, such as giving clear directions to a grocery store.

While previous studies have examined the role of speech communication in community colleges and four-year colleges (Backlund, 1989; Berko & Brooks, 1995; Hoffs, 1994; Lane, 1992; Smith and Turner, 1993; Wolvin and Engleberg, 1989), technical colleges have been neglected. This study provides a benchmark for measuring the current status of speech communication instruction in Minnesota's 34 technical colleges. These technical colleges serve approximately 100,000 students/year and focus on preparing students for specific jobs (Minnesota State Board of Technical Colleges, 1995). Since Minnesota technical colleges offer an "open enrollment" policy providing on-going training for the current labor force, they address a more diversified student population. Students tend to be older, married with children or single parents raising children. Almost one-third of the students are "repeat customers," having already graduated from a technical college program. This pattern of repeat customers seeking to upgrade their job skills demonstrates the role technical colleges play in life-long learning/training (Minnesota State Board of Technical Colleges, 1995).

The role and functioning of Minnesota's technical colleges is undergoing a process of change. Within the last decade, 11 technical colleges have begun cooperatively offering associate degrees with a community college or four year institution. These associate degrees require a range of 3-8 credits in communication (*The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum*, 1994). *The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum* recognizes that students may move from one

state college/university to another, and thus it facilitates the transfer of credits by creating a more standardized curriculum. *The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum* establishes ten standard areas of competency for all Minnesota college students. The goal in communication competency is, "to develop writers and speakers who use the English language effectively and who read, write, speak, and listen critically....Speaking and listening skills need reinforcement through multiple opportunities for interpersonal communication, public speaking and discussion" (pp. 7-8). Thus, the state recognizes the importance of communication skills in obtaining employment and maintaining successful job performance leading to advancement.

The major transition impacting the technical colleges came from a state mandated merger of all post-secondary institutions. Effective July 1, 1995, 21 community colleges, 34 technical colleges, and seven state universities in Minnesota were merged into the MnSCU system, (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities). Since then, several technical and community college campuses are in the process of being combined. It is this on-going set of mergers that raises concerns for the staff and students at the technical colleges. They wonder how the mergers will impact: 1) the mission of technical colleges, 2) the curriculum requirements and length of training programs, and 3) the required credentials of current and future faculty.

This survey provides a benchmark by describing the current status of speech communication instruction at technical colleges in Minnesota. It addresses the following questions:

1. What courses in speech communication, (if any), are offered at the technical colleges?
2. What areas of speech communication do communication instructors rank as most relevant?
3. What speech communication courses do you regularly teach? What is the average class size?
4. What are the academic qualifications of the speech communication instructors? Do they hold a secondary level teaching license?
5. How many years of full-time teaching experience do speech communication technical college instructors have?
6. Do respondents believe that speech communication courses should be taught by individuals with a BA/BS or MA/MS degree in speech communication?
7. Is a speech communication course a graduation requirement for technical college students?
8. How has the merger of public technical colleges, community colleges, and four year state colleges/

universities affected speech communication instruction at your college?

Method

A questionnaire was mailed to speech communication instructors at all 34 Minnesota technical college campuses with a self-addressed return envelope. Since several campuses had multiple instructors, a total of 67 questionnaires were mailed. Non-respondents were called three weeks after the original mailing and encouraged to complete the questionnaire. A total of 46 instructors responded resulting in a return rate of 69%. At least one response was obtained from all but three of the 34 technical college campuses.

Results

According to our survey, most Minnesota technical colleges do offer courses in Speech Communication. The vast majority, (93%), of the instructors indicated speech communication classes were offered on their campus. The remaining 7% indicated speech courses were taken at the nearest community college or identified an "applied communication course" which they did not equate to a speech communication course.

Respondents indicated a wide variety of speech communication subjects are offered at the technical colleges (see Table 1). The top three responses were: hybrid speech courses, (a combination of public speaking, interpersonal, and small group communication), public speaking, and interpersonal communication. Please note the subject areas in Table 1 may not always represent separate courses; instruction in some subject areas may be combined or included within another course. Argumentation and forensics were the only subject areas not mentioned at all.

Table 1

Speech Communication Subject Areas Offered

Subject Areas	Frequency Count	%
Hybrid Course	22	54
Public Speaking	22	54
Interpersonal Communication	21	51
Interviewing	17	41
Listening	15	37
Business/Professional Spkg.	13	32

Nonverbal Communication	12	29
Persuasion	12	29
Intercultural Communication	8	20
Small Group Communication	6	14
Oral Interpretation	3	7
Applied Communication	3	7
Advanced Public Speaking	1	2
Mass Communication	1	2
Critical Thinking	1	2
Argumentation	0	0
Forensics	0	0

N=43* *The N size will vary in each table, since some respondents skipped parts of the survey.

Subjects were then asked to rank from 1-5 in order of importance, the five subject areas most relevant for their students (1= most important). The results are presented in Table 2. The importance placed on interpersonal, business, and small group communication as well as listening skills is consistent with surveys of employers and recruiters (Curtis et al., 1989; Muchmore and Galvin, 1983).

Table 2
Rank Ordering of Subject Areas in Terms of Perceived Relevance

Subject Area	1	2	3	4	5	Total	%
Interpersonal	10	5	4	4	1	24	83
Bus/Prof. Spkg	4	4	4	3	5	20	69
Small Group	2	6	4	2	5	19	66
Listening	4	5	1	5	3	18	62
Interviewing	1	3	2	5	3	14	48
Hybrid Course	6	2	2	2	0	12	41
Public Spkg.	2	0	5	2	2	11	38
Nonverbal	0	2	2	2	3	9	31
Intercultural	0	0	2	2	2	6	21
Persuasion	0	1	1	0	2	4	14
Mass Com.	0	0	1	1	0	2	7
Oral Interp.	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Critical Thkg.	0	0	0	0	1	1	3

N = 29 The N is smaller since some subjects misinterpreted the instructions.

Respondents were also asked what courses they regularly teach and the typical class size in these courses. The results are presented in Table 3. Speech communication instructors most frequently teach oral communication and interpersonal communication. Most technical college catalogs describe oral communication as a basic public speaking class. The average class size for oral communication is 21 and for interpersonal communication is 23. The course description for applied communication combines oral and written communication skills and includes: letters of application, resumes, speeches and roleplays of job interviews.

Table 3

Courses Typically Taught and Average Class Size

Course Name	Frequency Listed	%	Average Size
Oral Communication	32	74	20.7
Interpersonal Com.	13	30	23
Applied Com.	12	28	24
Hybrid Course	2	5	-
Team Building	2	5	18.5
Critical Thinking	1	2	22
Oral Interpretation	1	2	12

N = 43

Respondents were asked to list the highest degree of education they had attained and also to list the degrees of other speech communication instructors at their college. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Qualifications of Speech Communication Instructors

Educational Level	Frequency Count	Percentage
High school diploma	2	4
AA/AS Degree	1	2
BA/BS Degree in English	12	22
BA/BS Degree in Speech	6	11
BA/BS Degree (other fields)	8	15
MA/MS Degree in Speech	8	15
MA/MS Degree in English	3	5
MA/MS Degree in Education	6	11
MA/MS Degree (other fields)	5	9
MA/MS Degree in Theatre	2	4
Ph.D. Degree in Speech Com.*	1	2

N = 54 *The Ph.D. degree reflects the status of an adjunct instructor at the technical college who was a full-time professor at a nearby state university. His educational level is atypical.

The majority of instructors teaching speech communication at Minnesota technical colleges hold degrees in disciplines other than speech communication. Only 26% of speech instructors have a degree in speech communication. The data revealed that 54% of the instructors have a bachelor's degree or less. Thus, over the years, the qualifications for teaching speech communication at a technical college appear to be rather lenient and/or ambiguous. When asked if they held a secondary teaching license or certificate, the respondents split almost evenly into two groups. Out of a total of 43 respondents to this question, 22 were licensed to teach at the high school level and 21 of the respondents were not licensed. Of the 22 respondents holding a secondary teaching license, (all but one), were licensed in Minnesota. Respondents were also asked to indicate how many years they had been teaching full-time. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Instructors' Full-Time Teaching Experience

Full-time Teaching Experience	Frequency	Percentage
1-5 years	9	20
6-10 years	11	24
11-15 years	4	9
16-20 years	11	24
20 + years	11	24

N = 46

As Table 5 shows, 48% of the survey respondents have been teaching at least 16 years. They may have been hired into the technical college system before speech communication courses were required or were seen as critical for preparing students for the workplace. They may have been asked to teach speech in addition to teaching English or Theatre. That would account for the number of instructors who held degrees outside of the speech communication field.

Respondents were asked whether they thought speech communication courses should be taught by instructors with BA/BS degrees in speech communication or if they should be taught by instructors with MA/MS degrees in speech communication. They were asked to express their opinions on a five point, Likert-type scale. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Attitudes Toward Speech Communication Instructor Qualifications

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Instructors should have a BA/BS degree.	15	3	14	6	8
	33%	7%	30%	13%	17%
Instructors should have an MA/MS degree.	8	2	15	5	16
	17%	4%	33%	11%	35%

N = 46

As Table 6 indicates, 30% of the respondents disagreed that a BA / BS degree in speech communication is required to teach communication classes. There are several possible reasons for these responses. These reasons range from believing more advanced training is needed to defending the effectiveness of current staff who are teaching without a formal academic degree in Speech Communication. Some instructors believe that more graduate training in speech communication is appropriate for teaching at the community college level (a minimum of 15 graduate semester hours in the discipline). Therefore, they believe that a bachelor's degree is inadequate preparation for teaching Speech Communication in a technical college.

Other instructors disagreed and argued that a specific degree in Speech Communication is unnecessary or that persons with such training are not available in all areas of the state. This is not too surprising since Table 4 indicates that 37% of current instructors teaching speech communication courses stated that their highest earned degree was a BA / BS in a discipline other than speech communication. These instructors may have a vested interest in defending their qualifications to teach communication courses at their current technical college. As several respondents explained in their written comments: "It is more relevant to our students that instructors have actual business/industry experience." They contend technical college teachers need to teach practical communication skills rather than theory, skills needed in applied programs ranging from truck driving to cosmetology. Another instructor felt that requiring degrees in speech communication was not feasible: "Who would come to a small [technical college] community at mid-morning to teach one class?" This instructor noted that given their remote geographical location, it would be extremely difficult for them to find an available instructor with a master's degree in speech. Another instructor agreed the teaching staff should have a BA / BS degree, but not necessarily in speech. "Technical college grads need general speaking skills focusing on customer or employer relations, not formal public speaking skills." Finally one faculty member argued that communication courses were being effectively taught by someone without a degree in the field.

The results in Table 6 indicate 40% of the faculty polled believed that a communication instructor should have a BA / BS in the field. This level of agreement indicates the changes that are occurring due to *The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum* and the merger of some community and technical colleges. As more students transfer within the system, there will be more emphasis on standardizing the curriculum and raising the educational qualifications of the teaching staff.

As Table 6 indicates, the 40% agreement level dropped to 21% when asked if speech communication instructors should have a master's degree

in communication. The results indicate 46% are opposed to requiring a specific master's degree in speech communication. This is perhaps understandable given the results in Table 4 which indicate only 15% of the current communication instructors at technical colleges in Minnesota hold a master's degree in speech communication. One instructor argued that individuals with masters' degrees need teaching "methods classes before they teach anything." This may reflect the secondary level licensure background of almost 50% of the current speech communication instructors in technical colleges. Another instructor noted that a master's degree should be required for formal public speaking classes, but is not necessary when teaching students in technical trades/certificate programs (e.g. truck drivers). We note that joint English and Speech Communication degrees are popular. Thus, an English degree with a speech communication minor or speech communication emphasis or a Speech Communication degree with an English minor may be a more viable combination for technical college staff. The college could require a minimum number of graduate hours in Speech Communication, rather than a master's degree in the field.

Next, we asked if speech communication was a graduation requirement for all students. While 35% of the respondents indicated it WAS a graduation requirement, the majority, 65%, indicated it was not required. Speech communication was most often a requirement for degree seeking students rather than non-degree or certificate/diploma students. Even when it was a required course, it was not always taught at the technical college. Rather, students took their speech communication classes from a nearby community college, four-year college or university.

Finally, we asked if the merger of state, community, and technical colleges has affected the speech communication instruction at your college. While over 78% of the respondents said, "no," 22% agreed the merger was beginning to have an effect. The general theme of their comments was that fewer students would take communication course work at the technical college, but rather would take most of these courses at community colleges and four year universities. They believed that current communication courses would become more academic and less pragmatic in focus. Faculty also believed that the requirements for hiring instructors in speech communication were getting tougher. More courses would be taught by instructors with degrees in speech communication or the courses would be moved to community colleges where the staff have degrees in the field. Courses would no longer be taught by adjuncts who lacked a degree in speech communication. One pessimistic instructor predicted "Technical students may be required to take community college communication classes and they won't make it." Most agreed the merger would lead to more changes in the future, but they were uncertain of the exact nature of the changes.

Implications

The results of this survey of speech communication instructors at Minnesota's technical colleges demonstrated that speech communication classes, (in some form), were offered at most of the state's technical colleges. Instruction in speech communication is often combined with another course for diploma/certificate seeking students, rather than a separate course requirement. Since speech communication is a graduation requirement in only 35% of the technical colleges, a substantial number of technical college students may receive little or no instruction in oral communication.

Technical colleges historically were, and still are, designed to offer education and training to prepare students for specific jobs and ongoing skill development. Numerous surveys of employers demonstrate that oral communication skills, listening, interpersonal and small group communication skills are deemed vital for successful performance in the workplace. Since employers view oral communication skills as crucial, speech communication professionals statewide should lobby for a required speech communication course for all technical college students. The instructors in this survey rated interpersonal communication skills as the subject area most relevant for their students. Consistent with this rating, an interpersonal communication course focusing on teamwork, listening and communicating with customers, co-workers and superiors should be offered at all technical colleges in Minnesota or made available through a cooperative agreement with a nearby community college or university. The instructors rated business and professional communication as the second most important topic area for their students. With the guidance of CTAM, (The Communication and Theater Association of Minnesota), a standardized set of objectives could be established for an interpersonal communication class and a business and professional communication class. These objectives should be consistent with *The Minnesota Transfer Curriculum*. Establishing clear goals and objectives for these classes would make it easy for students from technical colleges to transfer the credits to a two or four year institution in Minnesota. Given the nature of the changing workplace, more and more students are viewing education as a life-long process of retraining or upgrading skills. Moreover, given our mobile society, having clearly defined courses which are accepted throughout the MnSCU system, will make it easier for students to transfer earned credits to another college or university within Minnesota.

The members of CTAM could also generate discussion and recommendations about maximum class sizes. The communication skills desired by employers are: oral communication, listening, interpersonal, non-verbal, and small group communication. We recommend a maximum class size of 25 for an interpersonal communication course. Communication

skills are developed and improved through active learning. An effective interpersonal communication class needs to be small enough to allow individual students to roleplay conflict management scenes, to engage in listening exercises, and to practice small group problem-solving and decision-making skills. Students learn by doing, by being actively engaged in the process and receiving individualized feedback. Similarly, in a business and professional speaking class, students need time to give oral presentations, practice employment interviews, and roleplay scenes dealing with managers and customers. Thus, we again recommend a maximum class size of 25 students.

The results of this survey indicate that only 26% of current speech communication instructors at the technical colleges have a degree in speech communication. Moreover, 54% of the instructors have earned a bachelor's degree or less. This means that most of the speech communication courses are not being taught by professionals trained in the discipline. The National Communication Association, (formerly the Speech Communication Association), argues that oral communication skills are essential skills for technical employees, managers, and employees at all levels in an organization (Backlund, 1989). These oral communication courses should be taught by trained professionals with degrees in the field of speech communication. To allow the majority of communication courses to be taught by faculty from other disciplines is analogous to claiming speech communication instructors are qualified to teach English, psychology, or business classes. While current instructors may be grandfathered into the system or required to take several additional courses to upgrade their training, new hires should be required to demonstrate sufficient credentials in the discipline. One proposed standard would require a minimum of 15 graduate semester hours in speech communication. Organizations of communication professionals, such as CTAM should discuss and recommend appropriate standards to MnSCU.

Several areas for further research are indicated from this study. It would be useful to compare these results with data on the status of speech communication in other states' technical colleges. A follow-up study in two to five years could investigate the on-going impact of the MnSCU merger on speech communication instruction in the technical colleges.

This study functions as a benchmark report on the status of speech communication at Minnesota's technical colleges and will hopefully lead to a further exploration of the role of speech communication in the ever-changing curriculum of the 21st century. As dependent as we have become on technology, we cannot create, utilize, or improve our technologies without effective human communication in the workplace. We hope the results of this study will be used to highlight the necessity of speech communication and enhance the development of effective oral communication educa-

tion in Minnesota's technical colleges.

References

- Backlund, P. (1989). What should be the role of speech communication in the general education of students? In P. Cooper, and K. Galvin (Eds.), *The future of speech communication education*. (pp. 21-26). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Berko, R., & Brooks, M. (1995). *Communication as a component of the general education requirements*. Unpublished Survey. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Clark, B. (1987). *The academic life: Small worlds, different worlds*. (A Carnegie Foundation special report). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 299 902).
- Curtis, D., Winsor, J., & Stephens, R. (1989). National preferences in business and communication education. *Communication Education*, 38, 6-14.
- Friedrich, G.W. (1994). Essentials of speech communication. *Rationale kit: Information supporting the speech communication discipline and its programs*. (pp. 9-12). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association.
- Hoffs, M.J. (1994). *Building community: Integrating communication curriculum between courses in other disciplines or "speaking across the curriculum."* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, New Orleans, LA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 380 837).
- Lane, S.D. (1992). *The speech-communication professor at the community college: Reaching out to at-risk students to achieve academic success*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, IL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 355 561).
- Minnesota State Board of Technical Colleges. (1995). *A profile of Minnesota technical college students*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota State Board of Technical Colleges.
- Minnesota Transfer Curriculum. (1994). St. Paul, MN: Office of Intersystem Collaboration.
- Muchmore, J., & Galvin, K. (1983). A report on the task force on career competencies in oral communication skills for community college students seeking immediate entry into the work force. *Communication Education*, 32, 207-221.
- Smith, J. H., & Turner, P.H. (1993). A survey of communication department curriculum in four-year colleges and universities. *JACA*, 1, 34-39.

- Vangelisti, A.L., & Daly, J.A. (1989). Correlates of speaking skills in the United States: A national assessment. *Communication Education, 38*, 132- 143.
- Wolvin, D. R., & Engleberg, I.N. (1989). Community colleges and communication education. *Communication Education, 38*, 322-326.

"Vocal Orchestration" in the Literature Classroom

Gerald Lee Ratliff, SUNY Potsdam

The need for a creative approach to teaching literature has traditionally been seen in terms of instructional approaches that seek to "read aloud" literary works of merit in small groups or to engage in active "analysis" of selected literature in written position paper assignments. These standard approaches to the study of literature, however, frequently fail to consider the potential for an actual classroom performance as a meaningful exercise in text interpretation or character vocalization.

One of the primary principles of classroom performance of literature is that the student performer must be trained to visualize and to vocalize the actions and thoughts being described in the literature. Fictitious character development does not immediately leap from the printed page full-blown in its descriptive suggestion. Rather, characterization emerges in subtle and frequently disguised clues that often point the way to a particularly striking interpretation of both the character and the literature.

By voicing the subtle nuances of meaning suggested in the narrative description or dialogue of the literature, student performer's begin to cultivate an appreciation as well as an understanding of the role that "vocal orchestration" might play in revealing changing character attitudes or moods. This suggestive approach to classroom performance of literature is a challenging and exciting discipline relying upon the viewpoint that to "hear" a character's thoughts is as relevant to literary interpretation as to "read" or to "write" about a character's thoughts.

Exercise Blueprint

The following exercises developed in introduction to literature classes for non-majors should provide significant instructional opportunities to help stimulate meaningful vocal orchestration in classroom performance and also provide a substantial foundation for further exploration of 'oral' character interpretation. Each instructor should approach the selected vocal exercises in a manner that is comfortable and yet compatible with an individual style of instruction. Each instructor is encouraged to take the creative liberty of adjusting, extending, or modifying the basic classroom performance techniques suggested to meet special assignment needs in the reading of literature. The exercises are framed as participatory activities to promote awareness of the primary principles at work in using vocal orchestration to clearly delineate a character in the classroom performance of selected literature.

There are a number of excellent resource texts that incorporate vocal orchestration as an integral part of oral interpretation in a classroom

performance setting. The practical as well as the theoretical appeal of vocal approaches to classroom performance of literature may be found in the following selected texts: Stern and Henderson (1993), Adler (1988), Pelias (1992), Crafton (1989), Lee and Gura (1992), Lance (1991), Laughlin (1990), and Machlin (1990). These supporting texts and the exercises that follow promote a decidedly "risk-free" classroom atmosphere that encourages student performers to pursue a more individual, personal style of voicing a character in both interpretation and classroom performance.

Exercise 1: The "Found" Voice

Goals: To promote awareness of vocal variety in classroom performance of literature.

Approach: The way in which student performers use vocal variety may well mean the difference between merely "saying words" and engaging in meaningful communication of a character's subtext. There should be active wordplay in any classroom performance of literature that encourages student performers to interpret the subtle nuance of narration or dialogue and to transform sounds into recognized words or language symbols.

To explore the basic properties of sound in general and to introduce the principle of vocal special effects that students may create in classroom performance, collect a variety of random objects that are capable of conducting and amplifying the human voice. Examples might include tubes, cardboard boxes, garden hoses, vacuum cleaner attachments, plastic jugs, megaphones, mouth mufflers, scuba masks, paper bags, or soda cans. Begin the exercise by having one student use an object as a mouthpiece. Finally, encourage the student to voice a complete sentence or brief quotation with the object.

For example, the sentence or brief quotation might be Mark Twain's humorous suggestion that "Familiarity breeds contempt...and children," George Moore's sober reflection that "After all, there is but one race—humanity," or the popular nonsense rhyme "Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers." Other potential sources might include song lyrics, wise sayings, commercial slogans, familiar book titles, or well-known film lines of dialogue.

After each student in the class has demonstrated an object and voiced an appropriate sentence, phrase, or brief quotation repeat the exercise without the object. Urge the students to duplicate with a natural voice the sound produced by the object to create vocal "special effects" that give added meaning to the language. Repetition of this exercise should lessen the initial tendency of student performers to tense-up in classroom performance and should also provide an excitement of interest in any subsequent classroom performances that involve reading aloud.

The exercise may be extended to include small group

performances that cultivate a “vocal vocabulary” of subtle tones and shades of meaning producing crisp sounds in classroom performance, reading, or speaking assignments. Some examples of appropriate selections for small group exploration might include excerpts from T. S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men,” Marge Piercy’s “Women’s Laughter,” Jane Martin’s “Twirler,” Wole Soyinka’s “The Strong Breed,” Harold Courlander’s “The Do-All Axe,” James Dickey’s “The Hospital Window,” Alfred Lord Noyes’ “The Highwayman,” Gwendolyn Brooks’ “We Real Cool, and Homer’s “The Shield of Achilles.”

Exercise 2: And The “Beat” Goes On

Goals: To promote the role that “mental symbols” might play in helping to promote character development.

Approach: One of the basic ingredients of literary characterization is the student performer’s vocal ability to respond to the images suggested by the author’s words and phrases. The student performer must first, however, visualize the images as “mental symbols” before attempting to vocalize the character. This requires a perceptive analysis of the literature as well as an emphatic identification with the author’s suggestive words and phrases.

The first step in the process of visualizing literary images for classroom performance is to analyze the “beats” in a character’s dialogue. Beats is a theatrical term used to chart the course of a character’s changing attitude, mood, or point of view in the spoken text. Beats are revealed in a detailed analysis of the character’s individual lines of dialogue and help to signal significant character turns in action or thought which must then be addressed by corresponding vocal changes in a classroom performance. Using the voice to underscore a character’s changing attitude, mood, or point of view is a way of clearly defining a character’s motivation or even intention. It is also a convenient classroom performance blueprint that helps to clarify a character’s specific objectives at a defined moment in time. Being able to vocally distinguish a character’s “beats” throughout the literature may provide valuable interpretation insights and reveal meaningful subtext for interpretation and classroom performance. Please remind student performers, however, that beats do not exist in isolation. They are integral ingredients in the overall evolution of a character’s development and should be treated as part of the whole dramatic mixture, not as independent and unrelated seasoning.

Begin the preliminary exploration of beats by having the student performers analyze the following excerpt from William Shakespeare’s “Romeo and Juliet.” In this scene, Juliet has just been informed by her Nurse that Tybalt—a cousin—has been killed in a sword fight with Romeo, to whom she has secretly been married.

Dialogue	Objectives Key Words
Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband?	(Doubt)
Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name, When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?	(Self-Pity)
But, wherefore, villain, dost thou kill my cousin?	(Command)
That villain cousin would have kill'd my husband: Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring; Your tributary drops belong to woe, Which you, mistaking, offer up to joy.	(Regret)
My husband lives, that Tybalt would have slain.	(Rejoice)
And Tybalt's dead, that would have slain my husband: All this is comfort; wherefore weep I then? Some word there was, worsen than Tybalt's death, That murder'd me: I would forget it fain; But, O, it presses to my memory, Like damned guilt deeds to sinners' minds:	(Despair)
Tybalt is dead, and Romeo — banished!	(Shock)

Juliet's concerns and fears must all be voiced here in different tones as she wavers from initial disbelief to ultimate despair at the reality of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment. The action map of Juliet's objectives in each segment of the speech that follows, suggested as "key words," offers a vivid vocal interpretation for potential classroom performance.

Continue the exercise by instructing each student performer to voice the excerpt as he/she concentrates on achieving each suggested key word objective. Student performers should give themselves freely to the character mood suggested, voicing the first objective clearly and distinctly. Now instruct the student performers to voice the second objective so that it is as vivid as the first expression. Then have the student performers continue to voice each objective with an emotional precision that provides significant vocal contrast to the apparent changes in attitude and mood suggested by the character in the excerpt.

This "vocal pacing" of the character's changing attitude and mood should provide a meaningful rhythm and tempo for the character's speech. When each of the specific objectives has been voiced with some distinction, modify the emotional intensity of the vocal performances and suggest that the student performers repeat the entire selection with appropriate pauses that now underscore the noticeable changes in the character's thought and point of view.

When the instructor is confident that the student performers understand the basic role of beats in giving added dimension and distinction to a vocal interpretation of character, distribute a number of similar dramatic monologues, narrative poems, or character sketches drawn from novels or short stories. Instruct the student performers to analyze the dialogue, determine the objectives, indicate the "key words," and then unveil the mystery of the selected character in a group or solo classroom performance as the beat goes on!

Examples useful for this purpose may include the "bridal tomb" monologue from Sophocles' *"Antigone,"* the "stop thief" monologue of Harpagon from Moliere's *"The Miser,"* the "look in the mirror" monologue from Anna Deavers Smith's *"Fires in the Mirror,"* the "accusation scene" from Franz Kafka's *"The Trial,"* the "holiday theft scene" from Dr. Seuss' *"The Grinch Who Stole Christmas,"* the "dream scene" from James Thurber's *"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,"* or the "patriotic call-to-arms scene" from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *"My Kinsman, Major Molineux."*

Additional examples that are especially useful in vocalizing poetic imagery and sound in classroom performance of literature might also include Robert Frost's *"Wild Grapes,"* Philip Roth's *"The Conversion of the Jews,"* David Leavitt's *"The Lost Language of Cranes,"* Ann Beattie's *"Snow,"* Ovid's *"Metamorphoses,"* Jane Gould Tortillot's *"Women's Diaries of the Western Journey,"* or Theodore Roethke's *"Old Lady's Winter Words."*

Summary

Successful approaches to classroom performances of literature initially depend upon a student performer's critical ability to analyze literature and the creative ability to ultimately give voice to a literary character. An imaginative classroom exercise blueprint is also an essential element in promoting a student performer's ability to read literature with a critical eye and to understand the potential role that vocal orchestration might play in capturing the subtle nuance of a character's spoken language. Understanding the verbal tug-of-war between what a character "says" and what a character actually "means" in a spoken line of dialogue is the key to oral interpretation of literature. The extent to which supplementary exercises may be used to promote active vocal orchestration of literature is the

true measure of revealing student skills in analysis, interpretation, and classroom performance.

References

- Adler, S (1988) *The Technique of Acting*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Cole, D. (1992) *Acting As Reading*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Crafton, A. (1989) *Acting For Beginners*. New York: F. S. Croft.
- Lance, J. (1991) *First Literature Experiences*. O'Fallon, Missouri: Book Lures.
- Laughlin, M. (1990) *Reader's Theater For Children*. Englewood, Colorado: Teacher Ideas Press.
- Lee, C. and Gura, T. (1992) *Oral Interpretation*. Boston: Houghton- Mifflin.
- Machlin, E. (1990). *Speech For the Stage*. New York: Arts Books.
- Pelias, R. (1990) *Performance Studies*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Stern, C. and Henderson, B. (1993) *Performance Texts and Contexts*. New York: Longman

“When Harry Met Sally: A Gender Communication Analysis Assignment”

Suzanne Stangl-Erkens, St. Cloud State University

In my Interpersonal Communication class, I have developed a written analysis assignment to accompany the unit on gender communication. After lecturing on research findings regarding gender differences in verbal and nonverbal communication and having students read and discuss Deborah Tannen’s “Talk in the Intimate Relationship: His and Hers” (an excerpt from the textbook *Bridges, Not Walls*)*, I show the feature film *When Harry Met Sally+* in class. I then ask the students to write the following analysis paper:

Directions: We are going to be watching a feature film in class which deals with many of the concerns surrounding gender communication. After watching the film you are to write a 5-6 page, typed, double-spaced reaction paper. Include:

A brief introduction previewing the content of your paper (i.e. the four topic areas below),

A body which addresses the questions below, and

A brief conclusion stating your reaction to the film. What did you like/dislike and/or agree/disagree with? Provide a specific example.

1. What particular gender assumptions (i.e. ideas/beliefs) or gender stereotypes do the male and female characters hold (perceive) of the opposite sex? Identify a minimum of one the male character(s) hold of females and a minimum of one which the female character(s) hold of males. Provide specific examples of how they are communicated. Directly? Implied? Are they accurate? If so, to what degree? If not, why are they inaccurate? How do these assumptions affect the characters’ interpersonal communication in their relationships with the opposite sex?

2. Identify a minimum of two of the specific gender “hang-ups” (i.e. habits/irrational beliefs and/or behaviors) the male and female characters reveal which they hold of their own genders. How are they communicated? Directly/indirectly? Are they reinforced by society? Why or why not?

3. Are there some specific differences in how the male and female characters of the movie communicate that are representative of points made by Deborah Tannen in “Talk in the Intimate Relationship: His and Hers”? Identify a specific example.

4. What specific communicative, perceptual, and behavioral actions, changes, etc. are necessary in order for communication between the genders to improve? Offer some specific guidelines.

This paper will be evaluated in part by:

Structure (follows the above-stated guidelines)

Grammar, spelling, punctuation, style

Depth/insight of observations

Use of examples from the film to illustrate your points

Rationale for Assignment: Although there are other films which may include gender-related issues, I have never found one which addresses them as completely as *When Harry Met Sally*. The film reveals assumptions and stereotypes men and women possess not only of the opposite sex, but of their own sex. These assumptions and stereotypes influence how the characters communicate (and miscommunicate!) with each other, as well as the development of their relationships. Students respond to the assignment favorably; the most frequent comment I hear is that they gleaned so much more from the movie by perceiving it through the lens of gender.

References

*Tannen, Deborah. "Talk in the Intimate Relationship: His and Hers." *Bridges, Not Walls: A Book about Interpersonal Communication*. Ed. John Stewart. 5th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990. 377-387.

+*When Harry Met Sally* is an R-rated movie. I warn students ahead of time that adult themes and language occur throughout the film. This assignment may therefore be more suitable for a college/university rather than high school audience.

The Menu-Driven System of Instruction and Evaluation: Empowering College and High School Students in a Decentered Learning Environment

Brooks Aylor, University of Arizona

"To paraphrase Einstein, imagination is more important than knowledge. If we teach with the sole idea of imparting knowledge, then the learner is limited to our level of knowledge. If we enable imagination in the learner, then the learner can exceed our limits as a teacher. (Wollner, 1991)."

The concern that the content and structure of college classrooms is often divorced from the "real world" demands students encounter after graduating from those classrooms is not new. Educators in a variety of disciplines, as well as countless employers, have espoused the need for more specific and realistic preparation of college graduates. According to American philosopher John Dewey's (1964) conceptualization of education, an educator's task is to empower student-teachers to ultimately assume the active role of teacher-student in their professional, social, and emotional endeavors. Far too often, however, colleges and universities do not train students to be active leaders, but rather to be passive, albeit knowledgeable, receivers of information.

Lee (1996) attributes much of this problem to the structure of today's college classroom. Lee describes the typical college classroom as a "centered" experience in which "an instructor can be a static authority who is responsible for dispensing what is to be learned. The instructor's relationship with the students is dialogic, at best, and unilateral, at worst. In such an environment, students can easily be passive and reactive (p. 5)."

The solution presented here, the menu-driven system of instruction and evaluation, is one which addresses the structural deficiencies of many college classrooms, and seeks to empower college students in a decentered learning environment. It is an old idea revisited and improved to serve as a comprehensive design for the inclusion of collaborative and active learning techniques in a decentered environment. An overview of literature on learning techniques is presented, followed by description of the menu-driven system, system objectives, sample class activities, instructor insights, sample course syllabus, and description of assignment options.

Empowering Students: Decentered Instruction Via Collaborative and Active Learning

Empowerment is a common concept in leadership theory, business management theory, and organizational development and decision-making literatures (Barr & Dailey, 1996; Brunson & Vogt, 1996; Covey, 1995; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Miller & Howard, 1991; Sprague, 1992). It is rapidly gaining popularity in educational literature as more educators attempt to bridge the classroom experience and the "real world," postgraduate experiences of students.

Brunson and Vogt (1996) persuasively argue for the need to empower students through their "liberal democratic approach to the communication classroom" (p. 73). They contend that empowerment has the potential to benefit both students and teachers by providing unique learning experiences impossible in a more instructor-centered classroom. "Because empowerment occurs by enhancing individuals' ownership and control, it is a powerful tool that can transform individuals, groups, teams, and organizations. Empowerment enables people to produce their best products because it encourages personal responsibility and accountability for outcomes" (p. 73).

Educators have identified a number of vehicles for empowering high school and college students, including Lee's (1996) concept of a decentered role for educators. An integral part of the decentered college classroom is a collaborative, or cooperative, approach to learning. In the last decade, collaborative learning has assumed an important role in many high school and university courses (Dobos, 1996; Light, 1992). Manning and Wall (1995) define collaborative learning as "an emphasis on positive interdependence among students to learn course materials, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, the development of interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing of group functioning."

The Menu-Driven System of Evaluation and Instruction

The menu-driven system is based on the need to create high school and college classrooms which more accurately mirror the postgraduate challenges faced by students. At its core is an instructor-student's desire to empower student-instructors. As such, the menu-driven system encompasses under one instructional umbrella the educational advantages of active, collaborative, and decentered learning.

The instructional design system presented here is a unique approach to classroom organization in that students are empowered to determine the majority of their out-of-class assignments, as well as many of their in-class activities. Students determine the entirety of their assignments by choosing from a menu of assignment options.

The number of assignment options given to students will vary, limited only by the imagination of the instructor and students. In addition, students have the opportunity to pre-approve and complete original as-

assignments created by the student but not represented on the menu. Each assignment represents a certain point level. Each grade level (A, B, C, D) requires a certain number of points. *It is the student's responsibility* to choose assignments most appealing in terms of their educational needs and preferred learning styles that will enable them to obtain the grade they desire in the course.

Managing the System

To aid student and instructor, at the beginning of the course students are provided with a description and grading criteria for each assignment option on the menu. Instructors will wish to spend time prior to the beginning of the class establishing specific point requirements for individual assignments and to obtain specific grade levels. Students are encouraged to interact with the instructor during office hours for additional guidance. If a student is displeased with the grade they earn on any assignment, they have the option of redoing the assignment.

To encourage motivationally-challenged students to work steadily and to protect the instructor from massive grading responsibilities late in the course, a date is set after which no written work will be accepted. In addition, a list is circulated at the beginning of each class on which students may sign up for performance assignments or assignments which must be pre-approved. This gesture not only serves administrative purposes, but also provides a daily reminder for students to steadily work on assignments. Another option to motivate students is to categorize assignment options (Group A, Group B, etc.) and provide a deadline for completion of assignments within a particular group. Students are still able to choose which assignments and how many they complete from the group, but are provided additional structure and accountability.

Objectives of the Menu-Driven System

- * Increase student interest in course assignments and in-class activities.
- * Recognize individual student differences in learning and testing and ensure that such differences are not barriers to learning.
- * Facilitate a sense of student ownership and responsibility by empowering them to make specific decisions to determine their progress in the course.
- * Facilitate increased student-instructor dialogue concerning assignments and the student's overall progress in the course.
- * Bridge the gap between communication theory and practice by consistently providing active and collaborative learning experiences for students.

Menu-Driven System: Insights Into Effectiveness

Student survey responses consistently revealed positive evaluations of the menu-driven system. Students, for example, indicate increased interest in assignments, acknowledge that many assignment options are excellent preparation for future career and personal challenges, and indicate increased perceptions of fairness in grading procedures. A common comment is the realization that had a student not been given the option to create their own assignment or work on assignments with other students in the class, the level of learning would not have been accomplished.

Relative to traditional courses, in courses utilizing the menu-driven system student-initiated conferences with the instructor increased by almost 300 percent. The significant increase in student-instructor interaction has allowed me to develop closer interpersonal relationships with students. I would strongly argue that increased understanding of students provided by these interactions improved my ability as an instructor.

Average course grades were slightly higher with this system, but the average reported amount of work spent weekly in preparation for the class was significantly higher. Another indicator of student effort was the quantity of assignments completed, also significantly higher across grade levels relative to standard courses. In addition, the number of student complaints concerning the grades they earned decreased dramatically with the menu-driven system. This would seem logical since students choose their assignments, are provided with specific instructions for each assignment option, and have the opportunity to redo assignments if they are displeased with the initial grade.

The assignment option which allowed students to create their own assignment was largely successful in increasing student interest and quality of work. In fact, the majority of the options students chose could be considered significantly more difficult than assignments listed as a menu option. Examples of creative student assignments included creating a training manual for future managers in the office in which the student worked, developing a national persuasive campaign to legalize marijuana use, and a content analysis of the persuasive strategies used in college protests during the last 20 years.

Menu System in High School Classes

While much of the previous discussion has focused on results obtained from the use of the menu system in college classrooms, this system should provide similar benefits for high school teachers and students. Modification of the system, however, is recommended to compensate for varying maturity levels and academic abilities.

First, high school teachers may wish to make menu assignments only a portion of all class assignments. For example, a high school student

may choose one large project and two smaller projects from a menu of options. These assignments might account for 40 percent of a student's grade. The other 60 percent might come from examinations and projects required for all students. In addition, class time may be spent communicating with students about their assignment choices and their progress on such assignments. Small group discussions might prove valuable as students discuss the merits of each others' assignments and suggest ways to improve upon each.

While modification may be necessary in most high school classrooms, the system could be used fully in courses for advanced high school students. High school students in honors seminars or advanced placement courses, typically designed in part to introduce students to college-level material before entry into college, will be perfect environments for the implementation of the menu system. Not only will high school students reap the benefits of challenging course work, but they will also be encouraged to make decisions regarding their assignments, set deadlines for the completion of the assignments, and make the logical connections between interrelated course work and assignments.

Challenges for Educators Utilizing the Menu System

Clearly, the menu-driven system has proven an effective instructional package in select upper-level communication theory and performance courses and should also prove useful in high school courses. My experiences and the experiences of several colleagues who are currently utilizing this system in their courses (from courses in conflict management to performance of literature) reveal increased student interest in assignments, student effort, quality of student work, and satisfaction with their role in the class. It is, of course, not a perfect system. The instructor utilizing this system should be advised of several potential obstacles, all of which are easily remedied through proactive effort on the part of the instructor.

First, all students will not possess the motivation to set appropriate deadlines, make assignment choices, and complete the assignments promptly. Several measures mentioned earlier in this paper have proven effective in motivating most students and are highly recommended. Second, it is clear that this system will not work in every college or high school classroom. It is most appropriate for upper level courses and seminars because the maturity level of students in these courses is typically high. As noted earlier, the system can be modified to fit high school or lower-level college courses.

Third, the instructor must devote considerable preparation time to developing assignment options and point requirements. A teacher may view this as an opportunity to improve their understanding of course materials and their ability to apply course materials to an array of assignment

options.

Finally, the system will not be valuable for the teacher who wishes to minimize student-instructor interaction and/or assignment evaluation responsibilities. The system requires more work on the part of the instructor relative to more traditional classrooms. It is my belief, however, that the increased opportunities to interact with students and provide quality assignment evaluation is a strength, not a weakness, of this system.

References

- Brunson, D. A., and Vogt, J. F. (1996). Empowering our students and ourselves: A liberal democratic approach to the communication classroom. *Communication Education*, 45, 73-83.
- Covey, S. (1995). *First things first*. NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Dewey, J. (1964). *Dewey on education: Selections*. NY: Columbia University Press.
- Dobos, J. A. (1996). Collaborative learning: Effects of student expectations and communication apprehension on student motivation. *Communication Education*, 45, 118-34.
- Kouzes, J., and Posner, F. (1987). *The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations*. Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Lee, T. (March, 1996). Decentering the freshman composition classroom: An overview with secondary materials that illustrate student success within the classroom. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Milwaukee, WI.
- Light, R. J. (1992). The Harvard Assessment Seminars: Explorations with students and faculty about teaching, learning, and the student life. Second report. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Education and Kennedy School of Government.
- Manning, T. T., and Wall, S. N. (March, 1995). Teaching of psychology: Ideas and innovations. Paper presented at the annual Conference on Undergraduate Teaching of Psychology, Ellenville, NY.
- Miller, L., and Howard, J. (1991). *Managing quality through teams*. Miller Consulting Group, Inc.
- Sprague, J. (1992). Critical perspectives on teacher empowerment. *Communication Education*, 41, 181-203.
- Wollner, P. (October, 1991). Integrating work and learning: A development model of the learning organization. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education, Montreal, Quebec.

Mankato State University

Department of Speech Communication

Offering: Bachelor of Arts
Bachelor of Science
Bachelor of Science (Teaching)
Master of Arts
Master of Science

We offer a broad education in all areas of speech communication at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Students are welcome to take part in our nationally-recognized forensics program. We offer graduate assistantships for teaching and for forensics.

Faculty and Staff:

Daniel Cronn-Mills, Ph.D. and Director of Forensics

Sheryl Dowlin, Ph.D., Graduate Coordinator

Patricia Palm-McGillen, Ph.D., TA Director

Lisa Perry, Ph.D., J.D., Asst. Director of Forensics

Shelley Smith, Ph.D., Intercultural Communication

Warren Sandmann, Ph.D., Department Chair

Kathy Steiner, Departmental Secretary

For more information, contact Warren Sandmann or Sheryl Dowlin at 507-389-2213

<http://www.mankato.msus.edu/dept/spcomm/Communication/SpCommHP.html>

BETHEL COLLEGE

announces its new

Master of Arts in Communication

- The integration of communication theory and research with contemporary issues.
- A supportive student group progressing through the program together.
- Fully accredited in an accelerated format.
- A distinctive program integrating faith and learning in a dynamic Christian environment.
- Competitive tuition.
- A schedule designed for working adults: one evening a week for two years.
-

For information, call Andrea Sorenson
at 651-635-8000 or 800-255-8706

BETHEL COLLEGE

Center for Graduate and Continuing Studies
2900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112

www.bethel.edu ● AOL:Keyword Bethel ● cgcs@bethel.edu



CTAM Journal - Editor
Department of Speech Communication
MSU 89, Mankato State University
P.O. Box 8400
Mankato, MN 56002-8400

JOURNAL

Non-Profit Orgn.

U.S. Postage

PAID

Permit No. 202

Mankato, MN 56002