“Had We But World Enough and Time”:
An Exploration of Literary Movement Aesthetics
Through Creative Writing

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... 1  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................... 1  
**Romanticism** ............................................................................................. 2  
  The Only Child ............................................................................................ 7  
**Realism** .................................................................................................... 16  
  Pavlov's Children ....................................................................................... 21  
**Modernism** ............................................................................................... 38  
  The Morning After ...................................................................................... 42  
**Postmodernism** ........................................................................................ 47  
  Cassandra ..................................................................................................... 50  
Works Cited ..................................................................................................... 57
Romanticism

(1800's - 1860's)
Abstract

This study includes the examination of four literary aesthetic movements: Romanticism, Realism, Modernism, and Postmodernism. It is divided into four sections each designated for a particular movement. The first part of each section is composed of a short, general overview of the basic themes, style, form, characteristics, properties, and assumptions that typify each movement. Following the overview is a short story of my own creation written in the tradition of the movement. Between the description of each movement and its corresponding short story is a short paragraph outlining which elements of the aesthetic I focused on primarily in the development of the story.

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The development of a literary movement or aesthetic is an evolutionary process that combines previous information and systems of belief with current innovations in thought, technology, and social and political climate. It reflects the direction of the flow of human understanding as we continue to develop through history. To this end, the Romanticist movement can be seen as not only a reaction to the rigidity of the Neoclassical period before it, but also a reflection of how people chose to look at the world around them during the nineteenth century.

Where the Neoclassics prized "concentration, economy, utility, logic, restrained emotion, accuracy, correctness, good taste," and had "a reverence for order and a delight in reason and rules," the Romantics responded to life by finding value in emotional reactions to events and imaginative solutions to difficulty (Harmon 342). Thus, the Romantics emphasized the importance of individual perception. Their poems, short stories, and novels focused on individual people and their unique views almost exclusively. Instead of judging an individual's beliefs against an external system, a person's views were seen to be valid because of the inherent worth of every person. Romantics, therefore, found in "common" people and children a wealth of individualistic experiences about which to write.

The Romanticist aesthetic was also a shift from "a view of art as centered in humanity" in the Neoclassic, to a focus outward that encompassed the grandeur of the natural world outside the self (Harmon 342). For the Romantics, nature could inspire people to create beauty, which Ralph Waldo Emerson claimed was the same as the creation of art in his short book *Nature* (1: 1080). With all its freedom and wildness, nature could infect the human mind with possibilities and art could develop from "the
thought, feeling, and personality of writer, rather than shaped arbitrarily and mechanically in a preconceived mold" (Harmon 365). Nature took on an almost divine aspect for the Romantics as a physical, understandable representation of the meaning of existence. With the help of imagination, nature was viewed as the conduit through which people could understand their purpose on this earth. It could teach them the secrets of the universe and reveal to them absolute Truth, which was "a much more suitable subject for art than those aspects of the world sullied by artifice" (Harmon 453).

The growing emphasis of the worth of the individual caused writers to become increasingly focused on the places human beings occupied in their expansive natural surroundings and in their constructed societies. They became increasingly critical of organized institutions and treatment of minorities. In general, political movement was towards many and various reforms in England and more so in America. Authors often urged for social change in their works, but differed greatly among each other in their suggestions of how to elicit it. In England, William Wordsworth pursued the idea that inspiration and awareness of the hardships of others would cause individual, internal revolutions in people that, added together, would effectively bring about revolution in society as a whole (Stern).

In America, Henry David Thoreau proposed a different approach. He asserted that the individual had a right to refuse to participate in society if he or she disagreed with its doings. He concluded that each person had within him or herself a gauge of right or wrong, their conscience, which was authority enough to act on even if it directly opposed society's mandates or religious dogma. "Can there not be a government," he questioned,
“in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?.....I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward” (Thoreau 1: 1753).

Both Thoreau and Emerson emphasized reliance on the self for happiness instead of outside social structures and explored the question of whether or not an individual could fit into society at all. What would be their rights as a member of a community? If a person did choose to participate in society, should they give their allegiance to the authority of a deity, the community, their family, or themselves? Believing that happiness could most likely be found outside civilization, though, through communion with nature, Romanticists often valued rural life instead of urban. Living in a city created an unnecessary dependence on the community that was dehumanizing and anti-individual (White).

These radical perspectives, however, founded more and different concerns in other Romantics such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s view that self-reliance doesn’t necessarily lead to happiness, or Herman Melville’s contention that individuals who do not conform to society are killed off by it, or even Edgar Allen Poe’s poignant portrayal of protagonists whose extreme individualistic choices lead neither to truth nor happiness, but to self-torment to the point of insanity (Habich 1999). Authors like these realized that there were problems in the traditional, optimistic, Romantic view, and they experimented with the potential dangers inherent in the concept of self-reliance. This darker emphasis often dealt with extreme topics and ideas such as obsession, the monstrous and grotesque, human duality, and other, exotic, alien, or mystical people and places (White).

For all their democratic intentions, the Romantics as a whole founded their views on some awfully narrow assumptions about the nature of people. They tended to lean
toward a belief that all people are basically good, that we can find a common divinity inherent in every person. Thoreau’s assertion that individual conscience has the ability and right to determine right from wrong, doesn’t seem to allow for the fact that one person’s right may directly contradict with someone else’s right, or impede on someone else’s happiness. The assumptions that all people are somewhat relative to each other, that we all share a something of a common foundation of knowledge and decency, could reveal a shortsightedness on the part of most Romantics even as they claimed to be concerned with lives of the poor. Even their view that nature was sympathetic and helpful to the struggles of humans was a view that would be completely rejected by the Realists as idealistic and untrue.

The literary style of the Romantics reflected their focus on imagination over reason through freed expression of technique. Romantic literature was very melodramatic, which was in direct opposition to Neoclassic style which dictated that “the play of the mind mattered more than the play of feeling” (Harmon 343). Romantic purpose was to show the importance of the ordinary by, as Wordsworth put it, imaginative expression of life “whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (332). Unlike the Metaphysical poets and the Neoclassics, Romantics made extensive use of hyperbole and tried to capture ordinary diction, common speech, or “the real language of men” (Wordsworth 332). However, being the upper-middle class, white men they usually were, it can be debated whether they were successful or not in this particular venture.

In order to highlight the individual voice, narration often took the form of dramatic monologue. First person narrators in fictional short stories and novels also
addressed the reader directly and were sometimes used to tell the story of another character as in Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*, Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, or Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron Mills*. Extraordinary plot lines, such as Captain Ahab's adventure with his white whale, also dominated fiction as an expression of the value of imagination.

What I tried to capture in my Romantic piece was a continuation of the questions raised by writers like Poe or Melville. I wondered at the fact that traditional Romantic ideals did not account for the happiness of one person causing the unhappiness of another. I wanted to explore the idea of whether or not it was possible for a person to separate from society and if, although social laws and rules sometimes may not apply, they do not yet prevail. I made conscious use of the first person narrator who tells the story of the protagonist, the inclination to see Nature as a divine force, and the Romantic tendency to express the dire and hopeless nature of social existence by portraying the deaths of characters who rebel against it.
The Only Child

The dogs’ coarse, clipped barking punctured the still, cold air at uneven intervals throughout the night. I stood in the dark by the back door of my little cabin watching. The searchers’ flashlights swept back and forth through the misty fog like pale ghosts drifting among the waist high weeds of my swamp. They’d been looking for almost eight hours, sloshing their way through tangled reeds and ankle-deep muck. It was just before dawn, thedarkest part of the night, when someone raised a deep-throated shout that shot through my chest like a bullet as it echoed off the edge of the forest filled with aged oak and poplar trees that stood sentinel around us.

Do you know what it's like to live a life that does not belong to you? To spend every day at the mercy of someone else’s directions? Have you ever known, dear reader, the helplessness of imprisonment within your own body, that which you do not own, that you can claim no rights to, that can claim none on you, as it is made subject to the whims of another? Do you know how the extremities feel as the soul pulls itself back from the edges and gathers itself into as small a space it can, flinching from the surface of the skin.

The story of Katelynn Jessip is one of an existence like this.
I remember the night they finally took Katelynn away from her mother. Everyone on the block knew the Jessip house was “that kind” of home, the kind no one talked about but that parents kept their children away from, the kind that kept everyone awake at night with the sounds of domestic war. That night someone started breaking glass. The little girl’s screams broke through the walls of the house and were carried by the wind down the street. Someone called the police. Katelynn was eight when they put her in her first foster home. Harriet Jessip, her mother, was outraged. She fought to get the child back even as Katelynn went through three more homes.

For seven years the girl was shuffled through the system, a name, a case number. She didn't make it easy on them either. No one could keep hold of Katelynn. Her psychiatrist called it an attachment disorder, but I can't blame her for wanting to get away from any of them. None of them understood, or cared to ask, what Katelynn really needed. The judge claimed to be acting in her best interest, so did each of the four sets of foster parents, her lawyer, and her caseworker. Meanwhile, Harriet Jessip raged at her lawyers about her blood, her property, while Martin Jessip, Katelynn’s father, called out to the child from the sidelines how much he still loved her. That was the kind of man he was. One who stands by, a watcher of life. But this is Katelynn's story, and I am compelled by the nature of it to tell it with as much honesty and truth as a poor old woman like me can find in her frail being.

The sun was shining down onto the tops of a forest of reddening oak and maple trees with that peculiar autumn slant one October afternoon. The rhythmic buzzing of locusts in the foliage droned like idling diesel engines, and the few gnarled evergreens
that grew among them filled the air with the scent of pine as they warmed in the sun.

Mrs. Kelly stood outside her little cabin nestled at the base of those trees pruning back the leeching, sharp-ended fingers of the wild rose bushes that grew across the little path she'd made to the well behind the place. A few rays of warm sunlight shone on her rounded back as it moved up and down through the waving shadows of the foliage. One hand grasped the spiked vines between calloused fingers, while the other sheered them off at the base with a pair of kitchen scissors. The wind tugged at the rolled-up hems of the brown trousers she wore and at the trailing sleeves of her faded, flower-print blouse. Her gray hair was pulled back into a tight bun, but tiny thorns and branches snagged on the locks as she moved down the path and pulled out little trailing tendrils around her wrinkled face.

Mrs. Kelly's cabin stood alone in the forest. She had found the place nearly twenty years ago abandoned, given back to nature. It had been broken down when she found it, the windows smashed, the wooden walls rotting, and green weeds had been growing up through the floorboards. But it had been so empty there. There were no people. No pain, no laws or rules, no power. Just light and air and the swamp behind the cabin where deer came to drink sometimes.

Mrs. Kelly stood up to stretched out the cramp that had developed in her back. She brushed the hair out of her face with the back of her hand and made her way slowly back to the front porch of the cabin where a pitcher of sun-tea waited. A spot of bright orange among the trees caught her eye. She watched it as it drew nearer. Finally, it materialized as a thin, young girl making her way through the knee-high ferns covering the ground. She wore an orange T-shirt and blue jeans, had her blond hair up in a white
bandana. She hadn't brought anything with her, but she carried her body around like it was a heavy piece of luggage. Her eyes were flat in her blank face as she passed her gaze over the fluttering of the leaves on their spindly boughs. Perhaps at thirteen years old, she had seen enough and only allowed the world to wash over her as she trekked through it.

Mrs. Kelly ran toward her as the girl came up the narrow dog trail that cut the only path through the trees from the road a half mile away. She let herself be engulfed by the old woman's open arms and rested her head on her shoulder. She laid her hands lightly on the stooped back as Mrs. Kelly rocked her and smiled a forced little smile when she pulled away.

"Hi, Grandma," she said.

"Christ, child, how did you get all the way out here?" The nearest city was ten minutes away by car. Providence, it was called. Even the nearest neighbor was at least two and a half miles up the only county road anywhere near there, a dirt thing walled in on both sides by thorn bushes, nettles, and white pines. The end of the road opened on to a great expanse of cleared farmland interspersed with clumps of trees in odd geometrical shapes that fit together with the flat plowed earth like puzzle pieces.

"Aren't you glad to see me?" the girl asked quietly, a fallen look coming over her face.

"Oh, Katelynn, honey, of course I am. I'm just a little surprised is all. Did you come all by yourself?" Mrs. Kelly looked back up the trail for the stout, surly-looking social worker that usually accompanied Katelynn on trips like these.

"I hitched a ride into Providence and walked the rest of the way," she said.
"Wouldn’t anyone drive you out here to see me?” Mrs. Kelly asked. Katelynn lowered her eyes.

“Nobody knows I’m here,” she said. Mrs. Kelly put an arm around her narrow shoulders but didn’t say anything. “Can we walk around and see the swamp?” the girl asked. Her grandmother had explained to her many times that the place was dangerous. The ground was too soft. But there was something about it that attracted Katelynn, called to her, always had. Once, on a visit not long before, Mrs. Kelly had watched her sit on the ground behind the cabin staring off into the swamp for hours.

“Sure, honey,” Mrs. Kelly said. The two of them circled the wooden shack, their footsteps crackling in the shallow layer of crisp fallen leaves. Behind the house, the land sloped downward until it breeched the water table. The dark soil was covered by a sea of ferns undulating softly in the breeze. A few skinny trees stuck up out of them here and there. At the bottom of the incline, the yellowed stalks of bulrushes with top-heavy, tufted cattails going to seed marked the edge of the soft muddy piece of earth. In the summer, the mass of green vegetation that grew out of the stagnant waters could grow to be as tall as a man, a perfect place for bullfrogs, leaches, and mosquitoes to play. But in the chill of fall it all dried out and turned brown, fell over as frost formed on the water. Across the marsh, the forest resumed, an impenetrable wall of dark boughs.

As they stood watching the sunlight guild the edges of small patches of visible water from the top of the hill, a strong gust of wind blew a deep, earthy smell through the trees. It tossed the swamp weeds about crazily and from inside them, a cloud of yellow butterflies rose as a great fluttering mass into the air. They hovered for a moment, a
quivering, yellow incarnation of breeze, then broke apart, scattered into the trees and grass disappearing from view.

Mrs. Kelly felt Katelynn sigh beside her. She allowed the older woman to lead her inside the back door, across the wooden floor of the living area, and into the small kitchen at the far end of the cabin where she sat her down at the low dinner table. Mrs. Kelly went out the front door to bring in the pitcher of sun-tea. She poured them both a cup setting Katelynn’s down in front of her. The girl took the glass in her hand, but didn’t lift it from the table. She just kind of stared at it, or through it. Mrs. Kelly thought about asking her what had happened, but figured the girl would speak when she was ready. Besides, she could almost believe she already knew.

“They’re gonna send me back to live with Mom and Dad,” Katelynn said finally, her voice small and soft.

“But how can they do that, honey? I thought that social worker of yours said your momma had to stay sober for six months before she would assess her again.”

“They got another lawyer, Gordon Bradbury, I think is his name” she said. “He’s really sneaky. Got it moved back to two months. Momma can get it cleaned up for just about that long, so Dottie couldn’t say anything about it. I was supposed to go back with them next Monday.” She had not lifted her eyes from the table.

“So you ran away from the Foresters’ again?”

“What else could I do, Grandma? Let them take me back? Just sit around at the Foresters’ and wait for them to come to get me? I can’t go back. Things would be just like they used to. The Foresters can’t do anything to help me. And Dottie can’t either. I couldn’t let them find me. I had nowhere else to go.” Katelynn finished with a slump of
her shoulders. Mrs. Kelly sat down next to her and took her smooth, young hand in her old, gnarled one.

“How did you get away from them, Grandma?” Katelynn asked softly. “How did you get away from Momma and Grandpa?”

Mrs. Kelly sighed. “Your momma was old enough to be on her own when I came up here and your grandfather had just died…”

“Momma used to think that was your fault.”

“So did a lot of people. That’s part of the reason I came up here. I did the same thing you’re doing now. I ran away, and I hid.”

“But why didn’t they come for you? How did you keep them from taking you back?” she insisted. Mrs. Kelly looked around her, her eyes seeming to see through the old log walls.

“I found shelter in these woods, somewhere to plant my feet. I was protected here. This place has always been a friend to me.”

“You won’t send me back, will you Grandma?” Katelynn said, a frown creasing her forehead.

“No,” said Mrs. Kelly. “You can always stay here with me.” She gave Katelynn a warm smile and hoped the girl could relax a bit while she started dinner.

Katelynn went to sleep in the back bedroom soon after they had eaten. Mrs. Kelly covered her small body with musty smelling quilts to keep her warm. She bent down to kiss the girl and tried not to notice her involuntary flinch. Mrs. Kelly closed the door behind her as she left the darkening room and went to kindle a fire in the fireplace. The
last orange hues faded from the sky outside as the warm scent of wood smoke filled the room. When she had finished, she sat down in the rocker in the corner keeping watch.

The night deepened. The fire slowly died down as a cadence of frogs and crickets sang beyond the windows. As she sat listening, Mrs. Kelly became aware of another sound disrupting their rhythm. Rustling feet trekked through the dry leaves outside, snapping small twigs. She hurriedly got up to light an oil lamp on the rickety table next to her. She rushed over to wake Katelynn, but met her in the doorway. Her hair was wild with sleep, but her eyes were wide and awake.

Across the room, a heavy fist banged on the front door. Katelynn glanced into the face of the older woman, then bolted for the back door, yanked it open, and ran out into the darkness. From the front of the cabin, Mrs. Kelly heard the bellowing voice of her daughter shouting her name. She shuffled into the kitchen just as the door was thrown open.

"Where's Katelynn, mother?" Harriet Jessip shouted angrily as she stepped over the threshold. She was followed closely by her husband and two weary-looking policemen. "I know she's here, this is the only place she would be. Where is she?" Mrs. Kelly said nothing, not that she could have answered at all in the space provided, for when she did not produce the girl on the spot, the younger woman brushed her aside with an exasperated sigh and roamed the house calling Katelynn's name.

"Good evening, Mrs. Kelly," one of the policemen said to her decorously. "We're looking for your granddaughter, Katelynn. Mrs. Kelly nodded her head as Harriet came storming out of the back bedroom. She froze as she spied the still open back door swaying slightly in its hinges.
“Mother,” she breathed. “What have you done?”

“You let her go out there in the dark?” her husband said crossing the room in just a few strides. “You know how dangerous the swamp is at night.” He rushed out into the dark followed closely by the policemen. Mrs. Kelly heard him calling out to Katelynn in the cold night.

“She’s mine, mother,” Harriet hissed in her ear. “You think that since you’re out here, you can break all the rules of common decency, but you can’t. You think that living out here makes you exempt, but we’re going to find her and bring her home where she belongs.”

I walked down the dew-slicked slope as the blackness of the night softened to a light gray. The frigid chill coming off the swamp nipped at the exposed skin of my face, and I hugged my arms around myself to keep from shaking. I stopped about half way down the hill, calf deep in the shuddering ferns with pre-morning dew seeping into my pant legs. I watched the huddled group of men break apart as Harriet shouldered her way through them. Her howl of rage split the silence and frightened sleeping birds from their perches as it rose above the trees and dissipated into the night air. Martin put his arm around his wife, partly in an attempt to console her, partly to restrain her as the men lifted my granddaughter from the ground. She had already gone by the time they’d found her. My swamp had taken her in too, had given her a way to resist them as it once had for me. Even as they’d finally succeeded in catching her, she had escaped them.
Realism

(1860's - 1910's)
Henry James once wrote that, “the only reason for the existence of a novel is that it [attempts] to represent life” (James 2: 372). Essentially, this is the stance the Realist aesthetic took not only for the novel, but the short story and poetry as well. According to W. D. Howells, beauty in art is truth, for “it is only the false in art that is ugly” (Howells 2: 242). He went on to define truth as “the truth which is the only beauty,...the truth to human experience (Howells 2: 243). Subsequently, although they did deal with a number of thematic issues, the Realists tended to be primarily concerned with the technical aspects of literature, how to express rather than what was being expressed. 

Realists were obsessed with telling stories in the most detailed and complete manner they were able. Mark Twain’s critique “Fenimore Cooper’s Literary Offences,” a virtual manifesto of Realist literature, suggests eighteen “rules [that govern] literary art” (Clemens 2: 222). Of the eighteen “rules” Cooper allegedly violated, the most poignant were “that the tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere,” “that the episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of the tale, and shall help develop it,” “that the personages of a tale...shall exhibit sufficient excuse for being there,” “that when the author describes the character,...the conduct and conversation of that personage shall justify said description,” “that the personages of a tale shall confine themselves to possibilities and let miracles alone,” that the author should “not omit necessary details,” “avoid slovenliness of form,” and “employ a simple straightforward style” (Clemens 2: 222-223). But the most horrid offence catalogued by Twain is the inaccuracy of the details in Cooper’s plots, which he accounts to Cooper’s “inadequacy as an observer” (Clemens 2: 226). This is the basis upon which Realist literature rests. Beauty is
produced by truth in the form of accurate details, which require acute observations of real
life.

This view of the purpose of literature led to interesting characteristics of Realistic
prose such as the non-heroic protagonist, a refusal to place meaning on the story,
intentionally constructing unrewarding endings with little to no closure, and an avoidance
of the sensational or poetic. Also prevalent among Realist literature is use of vernacular
language in the diction of characters. In fact, a branch of Realism developed during this
time called Regionalism, or "work that was specific to a particular region in dialect,
landscape, and material and social conditions" (White). The writings of Regionalists like
Twain, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Hamlin Garland were valuable to literary studies as they
managed to "preserve images of American regions that would [have been] lost to
homogenization through increased mobility and communication" (White).

Howells declared that "it is a well ascertained fact concerning the imagination that
it can work only with the stuff of experience. It can absolutely create nothing; it can only
compose" (Howells 2: 243). This assertion gave rise to the guideline that in order to
report truly, an author had to write only about what he or she had personally experienced.
However, James had earlier asserted that "there is no impression of life, no manner of
seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place" (James
2:384). Thus, according to the Realists, though literature should be constructed from
experience, James opened the scope of what a novel or story could be about to include
anything experienced by a human being, be it action, feeling, or thought. In addition,
James was absolutely influential in the development of psychological Realism which
explored and described in detail the mind, emotions, and motivations of a character.
However, as the Realists tended to see their work as self-justifiable, the focus on accurate
description, be it of the mind of a character, the setting of the story, or actions in the plot,
made many sections of narrative seem like just a long cataloguing of information.

As shown by the assertions made by Twain, character and its relationship to plot
became a major focus of the Realists. James’s query “what is character but the
determination of incident [and] what is incident but the illustration of character” shows
how closely linked the two were in the minds of writers. Motivations behind character
action became an area of intense examination. Out of this focus emerged another vein of
Realism called Naturalism which explored the degree to which a person’s life was
influenced by deterministic forces, or forces that act outside the range of human
influence, such as evolution, genetics, economics, psychology, Social Darwinism, chance,
physical limitations, and social pressures. It also explored how people dealt with the
impact of these forces in their lives despite their seemingly random directions.

Characters could be modeled from anywhere in the social strata in Realist
literature. They were often treated in an objective, scientific-like manner, their lives
scrutinized, yet though the Realists were thorough, they tried not to appear superfluous.
Realists attempted to only include what was necessary for understanding a character’s
actions in relation to the plot. However, the factors that went into a character’s decisions
were often many. Narration opened, though, to include of first person, third person
limited, or third person omniscient to help express the complex issues behind character
motivation.

As the world became more and more industrialized during this time, literature in
America became focused on the affects of new technology on human life and what the
cost of technological progress might be. Even as the general pre-World War I populous was optimistic about its own future and saw limitless possibilities in technological and human progress, writers were concerned with issues that were becoming increasingly important to the public like the rapid urbanization, exploitation of the workforce, and political corruption that came alongside the industrialization of America. They often critiqued the capitalistic attitude of the upper classes, which facilitated the dehumanization of the workforce. New social structures were emerging and an influx of immigrants was changing the face of what it was to be an American.

British literature was also concerned with growing industrialization at this time. The Victorian era saw not only the institution of rigid social rules and gender roles, but also the portrayal of a dehumanized, faceless labor class and criminals in literature. Questions like how an individual should fit into society or if she or he could escape it, the extent to which an individual could affect social or economic systems, how social systems affected a person's ethics, and how an individual could deal with society's constraints were often addressed in these texts (Habich 2000). Buldingsroman, a novel of the development a character, also became popular as Realists strove to find out how people were responding to the changing world around them.

The Realistic piece I constructed engenders a lot of the questions associated with this time period. How can a person deal with a society that is not especially sympathetic to his or her existence? Do deterministic forces exist and if they do, to what extent can they affect the choices we make or the directions our lives take? Everyone seems to know what it is to be a good person, and many people strive for that ideal, but can the pressures of social structures and institutions actually constrain our ability to do what we
believe is right? I also tried to imitate the stylistic parameters of the Realists by writing about a subject I have experienced first-hand. I called upon the personal experiences of the not-so-far-off past in order to portray properly motivated characters with believable action in a realistic setting. I also manipulated the plot to result in an intentionally unrewarding ending because in real-life, stories do not always conclude happily, everything does not always come together and resolve itself, and people are often left to deal with the same problems long after the story has ended.
Morgan Payne stood outside the redbrick and limestone building looking up at the wide, one-story structure with clear brown eyes. She had arrived, by long-standing agreement, via her mother who had dropped her off at the front door with a compulsory, and by now habitual, “Pick you up at 3:30. Have a good day sweetheart.” Morgan hesitated pulling the strap of her green backpack higher on her shoulder. She felt reluctant to enter the building knowing she would not be allowed to leave it again for another seven hours. Yet, she was compelled forward by a much stronger impetus that caused her to mount the few shallow cement steps and pull open the heavy glass doors. She quickly crossed the matted foyer through the next set of doors and stepped onto the gold flecked off-white tiled of the floor beyond.

The air was different inside, colder, drier, staler, stiller even though the long rectangular space was filled with other multitudinous bodies. The dull roaring they made while they waited echoed off the cream colored cinderblock walls. The light from the fluorescent bulbs in the ceiling covered by textured plastic sheets was shockingly duller than the sunlight outside as they were spaced in an even pattern with rectangular pieces of
gypsum board of the same size and shape. It took her eyes a few seconds to adjust to the whiter, dimmer light. A drinking fountain by a pair of restrooms, a few unpadded benches, and black and white photos of people long gone with dates in gilded letters stuck out from the walls sharply. The place would have felt barren except for the fact that it was crammed with people; transient, it would keep them as long as it could.

Morgan swept her brown hair back from her face with her free hand as she made her way through the crowd to the other side of the extended hallway where she knew she would find a small group of her friends. They stood where they had every morning for the past two academic years, where they would stand for the next two, just before the great invisible barrier between public loitering space and serious learning space no student could cross until the proper time. She addressed them with the standard greeting and listened to the useless, detailed exchange of the short life experiences that had happened in the less than seventeen hours previous. After existing for over five years in the same circle of friends, they were all experienced in appearing interested in the doldrums of each other’s lives as nothing truly exciting could happen in the short time since they had last seen each other. They’d even become accustomed to pretending to believe the untruths they told to keep each other entertained. Of course, everyone knew exciting and tragic things couldn’t happen to the same person every single day, but they listened to the stories with the appropriate reactions of mild disbelief and shock just the same. It was one of the only amusement they would be allowed for the day they spent in that place.
At 8:30 am, a loud piercing electronic tone sounded, and the whole crowd of people moved en masse into the previously forbidden places of the building. The sounds of shoes and metal lockers and gossip bled into every hallway and classroom.

Morgan made her way through the temporary, but no less aggravating, labyrinth of standing students to the four inch, gray, metal locker provided her for storage of the property she brought with her every day. They had ten minutes. Ten minutes every hour for “passing” which consisted of regularized visits to that locker between classes to swap hardback book for hardback book, notebook for notebook and hauling ass to the next hour of enforced learning. It was a schedule that left little room for variation from day to day, hour to hour. Morgan had devised a daily visit system dictating when she could go back to her locker for whatever books and materials she would need until the schedule of her classes brought her back to this end of the building where more frequent visits to her locker could be completed in the dictated span of time. The schedule depended on consistency and precision for any deviation from her system would cause her to run out of time, get caught running in the hall, scolded, and sent on her way to arrive after the bell, which would get her punished for being late.

Morgan pulled two thick books from the top of her locker and two more three-ring binders. In addition, she grabbed the standardized, school-produced time management organizer, a pencil, and a black ink pen. The five-minute warning bell sounded shortly. Fully loaded, she slammed the locker door shut and started for her first class, American literature. Three steps from the door of her classroom, she remembered that she would need her graphing calculator for pre-calculus second period. Knowing she would not have time to get from American Literature to pre-calculus if she had to stop by her locker
first, she hurried back to get it before the final bell. She walked as quickly as she could without running and tried twice to disengage the combination lock before she was able to swing the locker door open. She grabbed the calculator and slammed the door shut racing the bell back to her classroom. The halls were nearly deserted and as she chanced to break into a hurried jog, the last bell sounded. She arrived to class thirty seconds late.

"Miss Payne, please serve your tardy in the back of the classroom," her teacher said as she dumped her things on the spindly table she shared with another student.

"Yes Mr. Lofland," she mumbled grabbing her three ring binder and sliding between the desks to the back of the class where she would stand the mandatory time as her punishment.

"Today, we are going to continue our discussion of Thoreau’s “Resistance to Civil Government,” Mr. Lofland began his lecture. Morgan took a few pieces of loose-leaf paper from her folder and placed them on the hard surface of the binder as a kind of makeshift desk. This she held in one hand as she wrote her notes with the other.

"In this piece, Thoreau makes the assertion that a majority of just one person, if he is right, should be more powerful in government than the large percentage of people who are wrong. You see, Thoreau believed that any person had the ability and the right to create their own beliefs and that they would be guided in this by looking inside themselves, finding their own truths. He believed that people’s consciences would show them what was right and what was not." The hand that held on to the binder began to cramp. Morgan lifted her knee to balance the binder, which steadied it, but left her in a very precarious position.
“Now, Thoreau has established in this essay that the current way government was run was flawed, therefore, he suggested that people had three choices concerning what to do about it: obey it anyway, change it from the inside while obeying it in the meantime, or withdraw from it all together. What Thoreau was trying to do during the entire piece was to convince his readers that the best, and most effective choice was the last one. Thoreau believed in simplicity, that life was for living and if you’re trying to actively change government from the inside, you’re too busy to live. The simplest way to change government, he thought, was to not be a part of it. If enough people decided to not conform to the system, they’d have to change it.” Morgan had turned almost completely around to write on the wall behind her by the end of the lecture. She kept having to shake down her pen to get the ink flowing again and felt she was missing vital points because she had not yet written the ones that came before.

“Tomorrow, class, we will be looking at the first section of Emily Dickinson poems on pages 15 to 20. Dickinson’s work seems to be autobiographical and it is debated whether some poems really are or not, but there is little doubt that her work stems from her own personal reactions to life. For the remainder of class time, in preparation for reading her work, I would like each of you to take out a sheet of paper and write a poem about yourselves, who you are, what makes up you. I will collect them at the end of the period. Miss Payne, you have served your twenty-five minute tardy, you may take your seat.” Relieved that she could stop the difficult acrobatics in the back of the room, Morgan gathered her things into a messy pile and trekked back to her chair to sort them out later.
Her mind raced. It wasn’t the first time a teacher had asked her to do creative work and she did write poetry, but at home where she could be alone and think. She wondered what he wanted her to write about, what he wanted her to say, what she could write that would get her a good grade, if she could impress him with her poetic wit, if he would like the poem, if he would think it was good work, if he would think she was a good writer. She looked down at the notes she had written: create your own beliefs, find your own truth, simplicity, nonconformity. She took out a piece of clean paper and began to write.

A Poem About Myself

Cold, hard, strong, and courageous
Like a survivor.
Free, willing, able, and carefree
That’s how they see me.
Mysterious, closed, dark, and secretive
Behind obsidian walls.
Self-reliant, unshakable, solid, unfeeling…
This is also how I appear.

But when I am alone,
Scared, frightened, vulnerable, powerless
A child is who I am.
Wishing, yearning, seeking, searching
For truth and a guiding hand.
Sensitive, caring, hopeful, kind

Away from an unfeeling world.

Small and silent and always wishing to be loved.

I know myself, which I really am.
I know which is the one I wish to be.
The masks I wear are not solely for the benefit of others.
I hide behind them in an effort to become them,

But in that effort comes a price too high to pay

For if one becomes something she is not, one, in essence, destroys herself.

She turned her poem in at the end of class feeling that she had captured the true essence of herself and was proud of her work.

Morgan and her mother left the house for school at the usual time, 8:05 am. They raced each other to the red Taurus dodging raindrops on the way and shielding their heads with book bags and briefcases. It was a messy day. The wind and rain tore multicolored leaves from their branches and strewed them all over the glossy pavement and wet grass. It was colder than it had been in months, and the air that rushed by them was tinged with the sharpness of impending frost. They fairly fell into the car, pulling the doors shut behind them. Morgan’s mother turned the heat on high and rubbed at the windshield with her sleeve to remove the steam from the glass.
As they turned down the main highway leading to the school, they were absorbed into the long stream of headlights and taillights traversing the broken farmland. They had only traveled a few miles when the motion of the cars ahead of them ceased.

“What is it Mom?” Morgan asked trying to peer around the back end of the black Honda Passport ahead of them.

“I don’t know, sweetie,” her mother replied. “Maybe it’s a wreck.” Morgan glanced at her watch, which read ten minutes after eight.

“God, I can’t be late to Mr. Lofland’s class again,” she moaned leaning her head back onto the stiff leather of the headrest.

“When were you late before?” her mother asked in a concerned yet slightly accusatory tone of voice.

“Yesterday I tried to get back to my locker to get something before the bell and didn’t make it,” she explained.

“Really Morgan, you should have enough time to get to class without being late,” said her mother.

“You’d think so wouldn’t you,” she replied. Her mother glanced at her with a mildly disapproving frown, but Morgan only smiled weakly at her.

The cars crept forward, inch by inch it seemed, until they crested a short hill and were able to see the flashing red and blue lights of emergency vehicles.

“Oh,” her mother said. “I hope no one was hurt.” Morgan looked at her watch. It read twenty minutes after eight. She sighed again.

“I can’t move the cars, Morgan,” said her mother.
"I know," she said realizing that it didn’t matter if she knew it or not, Mr. Lofland would make her stand her twenty-five minute tardy regardless of the excuse, and if she was more than ten minutes late, her attendance would be recorded as an absence, an unexcused absence, even if she was there for the majority of the class. It was school policy.

The minutes crept by as the cars were directed around the scene of the accident. By the time they reached it, both cars, one with a large dent in the back driver’s side door, the other with a crumpled hood and exposed engine, had been pulled off to the side of the road. An ambulance and two police cars idled nearby, but Morgan couldn’t see either driver, just policemen and a few passersby. Morgan’s mother hit the gas as they passed resuming their previous speed. Morgan’s watch read 8:25. The warning bell had just rung.

Morgan watched the flat Indiana landscape speed by, most of it rows of tall yellow corn or bare sections of freshly harvested soybeans. By the time the car had rounded the semi-circular school drive and she had kissed her mother, hearing again the time at which to expect to see her again, sweetheart, her watch read thirty-five minutes after eight.

Morgan stood at the bottom of the steps leading up to the three sets of double glass doors. Rivulets of chilly rainwater dripping from the ends of her hair ran inside the collar of her jacket and down her neck. She wasn’t afraid to enter the school so much as she was angry that she was going to be punished for something she couldn’t have controlled. If it had been up to her, she would have been there on time, but how many times had she hear teachers tell students that traffic was not an acceptable excuse for tardiness? By the time she went to her locker, got her stuff for Mr. Lofland’s and Mr.
Gilbert’s pre-calculus classes and walked to American Literature, it would already be past 8:40. She’d be counted absent anyway; she might as well not even go to class today.

There was a thought. If she was counted absent without an excuse, she’d already get Saturday school whether she was there or not. Why even go? She could walk across the street, get a cup of coffee at the small coffee shop at the end of the strip mall, finish the homework she hadn’t gotten to the night before, and still be on time to Mr. Gilbert’s class. She laughed at herself. She’d never skipped a class in her life. She’d been excused for dentist appointments and such, but she’d never skipped on purpose. She wasn’t a troublemaker. She hadn’t even had detention since the fourth grade when she’d put gum in Nicole Fergison’s hair because she’d called her a cone-head. It was a stupid system anyway. Why did they make it so hard to be good and follow all their rules? And wasn’t it stuff like this that Thoreau was talking about anyway?

Morgan felt a little twinge of rebellion rise in her. Thoreau went to jail just because he felt paying taxes was wrong, why couldn’t she skip one class in protest of the tardy policy? It wouldn’t change anything, but at least they’d know she wasn’t going to play their game. She turned on her heel and walked deliberately, slowly in case anyone was watching, across the street and into the coffee shop. But once she was there and sitting beside a large window that looked out over the school grounds, her mind had time and space to doubt her decision.

Her thoughts raced through myriad possible excuses she could use to defend herself without a clear idea of who she would be excusing herself to. She was sick and couldn’t make it to class, she got stuck in traffic, she twisted her ankle badly and had to go to the doctor, she had an eye doctor or dentist appointment. She could, perhaps,
convince Mr. Lofland to erase the unexcused absence, or maybe she could forge an excuse note. Maybe if she told her mother she got counted absent for being ten minutes late, she would write her a note. That would be the most successful route, but as she thought about it, feeling the fear eat away at her stomach and threaten to throw her into a complete and uncontrollable panic, Morgan remembered the poem she had written the day before. She remembered what she had said about masks and the destruction of self. It wasn’t about them anymore, it was about her and proving to herself that she was as strong as she thought she was, strong enough to stand up for what she thought was right, or not right, in this case.

Thirty-five minutes later, she infiltrated the school, getting to her locker and over to Mr. Gilbert’s class during passing period with time to spare. She faced the rest of the day with a defiant little grin and walked leisurely down the halls between classes, daring the bell to ring before she got there.

Second period was always the time they handed out Saturday school slips for unexcused absences during classes. Hall runners usually interrupted class sometime during the hour between 9:30 and 10:20, usually in the last five to ten minutes when daily announcements were dictated over the loudspeaker. Morgan sat in pre-calculus a week later waiting the entire period for the hall runner to appear with dread in her stomach. She had experienced the same feeling the past two days waiting for him to deliver her a Saturday school. When he did come, he marched himself up to her teacher importantly, handed him the stack of white slips and marched himself back out, with a whispered, “hey” to someone he knew in the class. Mr. Gilbert placed the slips on his podium to
distribute during announcements and continued with his explanation of logarithms.

Announcements came and went without him calling her to his desk. She started to think maybe they had overlooked the absence in American literature, or that someone had missed it accidentally. She felt a rush from the idea of having cheated the system.

She could hardly have been surprised, though, when she spied Mr. Gilbert, a short, round, balding man with icy eyes, seeking someone out at lunch. She immediately broke out in a rush of heat, all thoughts of escaping punishment gone from her mind. As he approached the table where she always ate with her friends, she averted her eyes pretending she hadn’t noticed him looking for her. He looked surly as ever. She could hardly face him as he gave her the small slip of white paper. Nonetheless, a part of her cried out to know how severely she was in trouble. She lifted her head just enough to peer at him from the very tops of her eyes, but his perpetual frown was impenetrable and she jerked her gaze back down. He walked away importantly as she opened the paper, knowing what it would say, yet silently willing it not to. **Morgan Payne has an unexcused absence for Wednesday, September 24 and has been assigned Saturday school Saturday, September 27 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am in the Study Hall, Room 102.**

Even the tiniest craters in the gray asphalt painfully vibrated the taunt sinews below Morgan’s ribcage as the car drove over them. The sun colored the sky a deep rich blue that morning and glowed from the surface of each yellow and orange leaf that fluttered in the breeze. Had the windows of the car been open, she might have detected the light, sun-warmed smell of overripe plant life coming in off the countryside. She might have heard the rushing tidal sound of the wind in the trees, or the light chirping of
the crickets, or the raw throated cawing of the crows. But she didn’t. The windows were shut tight, the air was on, and there was nothing to distract her from the growing mixture of nervous energy and nausea that was developing in her stomach. With each landmark they passed, stabs of panic kicked her savagely under her ribs. The first stop light, the second, the big gray barn on the Bontraeger’s farm, the truck stop café on top of Stutzman’s hill, the left turn. Finally, it was there, in front of them, resting quietly in the contours of a small hill, the building that embodied the institution that unapologetically took her life away.

The car pulled onto the blacktop parking lot with its freshly painted yellow lines, and her mother drove up to the rising concrete steps like she did every other morning.

“Be back at eleven,” she said. “Have a good day sweetheart.” Morgan leaned over to let her mother kiss her cheek before she got out of the car.

The building looked amiable set against the homey sky, but the place was silent as she entered it, empty, deathly, and nonfunctional without the students to animate it. She crossed the long rectangle entry and traversed the little hallways towards the study hall room without seeing a soul. She glanced at her watch. Ten minutes to nine. Half of her was afraid she’d gotten the time or date wrong and no one would be in the room when she got there. The other half was terrified of the people she knew would be there.

She listened for sounds from inside the room as she neared it, but the place was practically silent. Her own footsteps felt incredibly loud and squeaky on the linoleum squares as she walked. She tried to pace herself so that she wouldn’t sound rushed to anyone inside. There was a short carpeted entry between the hallway and the bright yellow of the study hall room. She paused at its mouth, but only for a split second so that
no one inside would know her entrance wasn’t natural. She moved into the room and instantly felt the eyes of everyone sitting there glance up at her as she walked to the end of the row of folding tables to the beige metal desk and the frowning Saturday school monitor sitting behind it. Morgan had the slip of paper in her pocket that proved she was supposed to be there, just in case, but the woman didn’t ask for it. She didn’t say anything as Morgan stood there waiting for her to initiate information exchange. Finally, she blurted her name, assuming that’s what she was supposed to do, and not wanting to appear stupid.

“Take a seat over there,” the woman said pointing. Morgan felt heat creep into her cheeks as she turned and maneuvered around haphazard chairs to the general area indicated. She sat in a low-backed chair, the type provided in every classroom in the school feeling the air around her growing warmer and brighter. She felt completely exposed to it.

She dared to look up for a moment taking in the people in the room. Sparse, separate, most looked bored. Some were looking in her direction; others sat with their backs to her. She lowered her eyes feeling she was wrong in staring. Even though she knew it probably wasn’t true, she couldn’t help but feel she was being scrutinized as she sat there, her head down. The bell rang. The woman behind the desk began to call roll. When she got to her name, Morgan answered, “Here,” but the sound got caught in the back of her throat and she coughed afterwards to cover her nervousness and embarrassment. The monitor continued without pausing. Morgan bent her head looking at the wood grain surface of the table. The monitor finished roll. Morgan was surprised to hear the name of her next door neighbor at the end of the list and hear his resonant,
“here.” She was tempted to look up to see where he was, but didn’t dare. She didn’t want him to look at her, to see into her eyes, so she fiddled with the edges of the straps on her book bag, unraveling the tightly woven nylon. She knew the direction his voice had come, though. With her heart pounding in her ears, she could feel him looking at her, and was as open and exposed in that room as if she were naked.

Her eyes started to dry out from staring at the table and she shut them, but the sick feeling that she would still be in that place when she opened them again twisted her insides. There was a pain in her right lung. A shooting kind of acidic pain that traced a path along the front wall of the muscle. She tried to breathe in, but the internal movement sharpened the ache and the air caught. She was aware that the monitor was saying something, rules of conduct or something, but she didn’t intend to do anything wrong, so she didn’t listen.

When the monitor sat down, the bell rang again and a deep silence expanded inside the cinderblock walls of the room. It crushed her. There was no rustling of clothing, no zipping or unzipping of book bags, no tapping pencils or turning pages or kids shifting in their seats. There wasn’t even the familiar hum of the air conditioner. The lack of noise only proved to her that everyone was still staring at her, and she couldn’t bear the thought of what she must look like sitting in her chair with her eyes closed. Careful not to look at anyone, Morgan opened her eyes. As softly as she could, she opened her backpack and pulled out the homework she’d brought to read while she was here. It was the collection of Emily Dickinson poetry her class was still working their way through. She opened it to a page, any page and hid her face behind it. She
didn’t read it, though. She tried to, but she couldn’t. Not with them looking at her, judging her. Not while she was on display.

The whole two hours she was there, she didn’t turn the page once, or even finish reading the poem. She just sat gripping the book with white fingers staring at the textured pages feeling her heart beat against her ribs and skin. When the bell finally rang at eleven o’clock and everyone got up to leave, she put her finger in the book, grabbed her bag, and rushed from the room trying hard not to touch people she passed. She walked as fast as she could without running down the hall to the set of double doors praying that her mother was already waiting in the parking lot for her. The sting of tears came to her eyes when she spied her mother’s car through the doors at the bottom of the stairs. She pushed her way through the resistant swinging glass, skipping as many steps as she could. She yanked open the passenger side door and threw herself inside.

“Go,” she said. Her mother didn’t ask any questions, but shifted out of park and eased out of the lot. Morgan began to breathe easier. She closed her eyes and took a few sweet deep breaths as they drove down the street feeling the relief of finally being alone, of escaping the realm their eyes could penetrate. She could finally relax.

She looked down at the book in her lap; her finger still marking the place she had stared at for the last two hours. She opened the book and read the poem.

I took my Power in my Hand-
And went against the World-
’Twas not so much as David- had-
But I- was twice as bold-
I aimed my Pebble—but Myself
Was all the one that fell—
Was it Goliath—was too large—
Or was myself—too small?

Angrily, she grasped the page and tore it out of the book with a satisfying rip. She crumpled the page between her hands, rolled down the window, and tossed it out watching it whiz by her ear. It was lost in the grass beside the road.

Monday, when they arrived at school, Morgan stepped swiftly out of the car. Her mother called out to her, “I’ll be here to pick you up at 3:30, have a good day, sweetheart.” Morgan nodded shortly and slammed the car door behind her. She entered through the doors just in time to hear the first morning bell. Gripping her book bag close on her shoulder, she raced to her locker, the weight of the impending warning bell pushing her swiftly down the hall.
Modernism
(1910's - 1960's)
The literary aesthetic that developed after World War I reflected the disillusionment of many people. The war allowed them to see not only the potential in human beings to be cruel and malicious, but the flawed nature of the entire human-constructed world. Modernist literature is characterized by a general depression that questioned the meaning of existence and the possibility of human happiness at all in life. Further, it questioned previous foundations upon which the purpose of art and literature had been founded. Was art supposed to mean something, was it supposed to represent, or was it simply supposed to be (Habich 2000)? Modernism saw the rise of surrealism and dadaism where a distorted meaning or no meaning at all was necessary to create a work of art. However, even as people's faith in the world they had created was challenged, there was still an urge to believe that art and beauty and connections to the past could help them deal with life, that art was immortal and could help them express their shaken truths and spirits (Edmonds).

The cynicism of the Modernists manifested itself in the form of apocalyptic, excessive, and paranoid themes. There was a reaction against the sexual repression of Victorianism and a suspicion of artificiality in all forms that translated into a period of intense criticism of authority figures including governments and religion. The world had become inhospitable and frightening. Modernists began to suspect that human beings had a place in it at all. They posed questions that had no answers or ones whose answers only led to more questions like whether or not there was a meaning to life (Habich 2000). They mourned what they had once thought was real, concepts like nationalism, pride, and heroism, and tried to express the instability and alienation they felt. Their sense of who they were and what they were doing had been shattered, and they no longer had any
William Butler Yeats captured these feelings in a few lines of his poem “The Second Coming:”

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. (Yeats 2312)

The Modernist loss of foundational security led them to construct certain beliefs about the world. It was no longer predictable and scientifically measurable, but rather in a constant state of change which sometimes produced catastrophic results. They no longer believed that the human race was progressing towards something better, and with the development of war weapons like machine guns, tanks, and mustard gas, they had also become cynical about the role technology was playing in human development. For them, Realism was a ludicrous concept. As they could no longer afford to take anything at face value (i.e. the promises of presidents, the stability on which their country was founded, or the goodness of humankind), therefore observations about the world could not be trusted (White). Even though they clung to the dim hope that there might be an absolute truth out there somewhere, they did not trust that conventional knowledge could lead them to it.

The Modernist period was also the time in which Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung published their theories on psychology changing the way people viewed the workings of their inner minds. Literature seized the opportunity to explore questions about people’s
unconscious motivations in the new light provided by these men and began to develop a tendency to highlight internal quests. It also explored interpersonal relationships and sources of conflicts between people. For example, in works like “The Dead,” James Joyce explored how detrimental communicational paralysis and misunderstandings can be to relationships (Stern). Modernists also focused their attention on language as a human construction and explored how symbols could have different levels of meaning. Symbolism in the Modernist period was intensely personal, yet there was also an awareness of the universal associations people had with some symbols. Authors used this awareness to play on people’s traditional connotations and, in the spirit of subverting authority, consciously tried to undo these associations.

Modernists experimented with language usage under the premise that there was no set meaning for words, they turned toward an interest in the way words sound as opposed to what they say. This focus, along with “an attempt to reflect the rapid changes in early 20th century culture,” led to a rather self-conscious style of literature (White). Innovations in narrative form like stream of consciousness writing, lack of closure to stories, and the inclusion of multiple voices with extreme points of view were only some of the literary devices that characterized the Moderns. They were purposefully ambiguous, obscure, and incoherent through unreliable narration and fragmented sentences that both intentionally disrupted narrative flow and caused a sense of continuous transition in text. They were minimalist and abstract and used allusions from many other unconnected areas of culture including song lyrics, classic literature, speeches. Imagist poetry used juxtaposition of unconnected images without explaining to the audience how they were supposed see the meaning between them as a way to force the
reader to create his or her own connections, to feel the connection instead of reacting to traditional symbolic stimuli.

All of these new directions in literary innovation caused tension in the artistic world between feelings of fidelity to past traditions and the exciting new possibilities available for expression. Even as disillusioned individuals, the Modernists still clung to the past and often expressed in their works the contradiction between feelings of nostalgia, especially for mythic themes and symbols, and questioning the relevance of a past they felt had let them down.

My Modernist piece tries to embody the chaotic world of someone whose reality has been irrevocably altered. I used some of the structural and linguistic devices of the Modernists to further express this theme including stream of consciousness narration, fragmented sentences to disrupt the linear flow of the narrative, lack of closure, and deliberate obscurity. There is also the suggestion of unconscious motivations for my protagonist, and I tried to include many "other" voices and allusions to different areas of my culture in the piece.
Has it ever been so loud you can’t think? And all you can do is ride the noise like a wave and spit out, when you can, whatever thoughts manage to stand apart in your mind from the rest of the flood. Kind of like trying to inject salt water into the ocean. Bubbles on bubbles. Maybe it’s a dream you’ve had that you didn’t star in, but played only a minor role. Just one line then exit stage left.

In related news, an emergency call was placed by neighbors from this apartment building tonight after reporting hearing a woman screaming from inside this second floor apartment.

I just want to throw my cold coffee all over these linoleum walls. Scrape that shit out.

I’ve had too many cigarettes, that’s all. I’m shaking. I’m shaking. I’m shaking. Too much noise. Were you a friend Mr.? You could say that. If they’d only stop talking, I could say something.

She stared at me between my legs. Hands folded, he stares at me from across this metal table, little pens protruding from his breast pocket. It smells like cheap antibacterial soap in here. I’m riding caffeine and asbestos like a wave. Coming down.
He's screaming. Coming at me in the dark. Screaming so loud. I feel like that. Hooker in the street with glass in her eyes. I feel like that. Alone in the fog that night. Running. I feel like... but can't. Running down the wall like the blood. I can't see my hands. You don't have to close your eyes, it's standing right before you. Running like blood, like salt water down her face. I'm playing the minor role. "I need a cigarette." My one line and the big hook comes out and yanks me off the stage. Why were you in his apartment?

I have a TV. A little TV in a chicken wire box high up on the wall. Suspended. Like magic. Shots fired at this 7th Street home seem to have been precipitated by a disagreement between these two men over ownership of approximately half a pound of cocaine. They were both found dead at the scene when police arrived. Eyewitness Karlene Meyers was rushed to St. Vincent's Hospital where she will be treated for removal of glass from her eyes. Apparently, the twenty-seven year old prostitute jumped through a living room window in an attempt to escape the shoot out.

The men that took her away took me too. We ended up in the same place with the woman in the white gloves. Plastic bags. Remove your clothing and place them in the bags, please. Lie down. The room is white, bright, cold. Clorox bleach and musak. She gave me a pelvic exam. I am naked. Naked like she is, but she does it for money. I'll be your dream, I'll be your wish, I'll be your fantasy. Did you realize he wanted to have sex with you when you went up with him?

Isn't this too expensive for us? Here's your table, no none for me, thanks, I'm fine. Lovely placemats, though. This place is nice, wonderful ambiance. The scent of roasting

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1 All words in italics come from Savage Garden's "Truly, Madly, Deeply."
flesh. And the orchestra... I'd like mine rare, please. Bloody even, if you would. Yes
please, more coffee. I need more coffee, damn it. Why isn't there any coffee in this
goddamned place. You can't keep me here! I didn't do it on purpose! Where'd I put my
cigarettes? You know, the ones with arsenic. Oh, there they are. A statement. Make a
statement. He made up a heaven out of my misery. Do you have a light?
Shit, wet again. You know, your pocket is all wet. Soaking. Are your pens leaking? He
was leaking too. Leaking white, leaking red. Running out like sand, liquid running out
like water. There's so much water. I think I'm drowning. I want to bathe with you in the
sea. Someone turn off the TV before they take that hooker away. God only knows what
they'll do to her. Turn it off, the red and blue. Flashing red and blue and red and red. Do
you have a light?
The smoke curls round the hanging tiffany lamp. Smoky glass swings back and forth in
the choking smoky air. Back and forth, back and forth, shadows, light, shadows,
shadows. I had the ribs, he had the breast. People were dancing. I will be strong I will
be faithful 'cause I'm counting on a new beginning.
The knife is in the dumpster. See for yourself. Oh, I'm sorry. You can't. There's glass
in your eyes. Mine too. I couldn't see. Couldn't see, it was so dark. Dark like a tomb
where he lays in a puddle of stale coffee. And that song on the radio. Coffee brown and
sticky. Try to get that shit out. It stains terrible. I know, it's on my hands. Were we
having problems? Sure everyone has problems: Luke and Laura, Rhett and Scarlet, Leda
and the Swan. You know we were going to be married. When? Whenever. We had all
the time in the world. We were going to have a big wedding. A big, white wedding. No,
not white. A big, red wedding. Red dress. It was white, but he tore it, tore me. Now it's
red. Red with my blood. Stained with his blood gushing. *Tears for all the pleasure and the certainty that we're surrounded.*

Why did you run? They gape at me from across the table with those staring bulbous eyes. Stop looking at me. Don’t make a scene, everyone’s looking. Everyone keeps offering me coffee. Coffee and sodium pentathol running through my veins. What made me run. We got us a runner. Not like Logan. There is no sanctuary here. Not here, not there in the alley with the green dumpster. You should have passed it on your way in. You probably didn’t notice it, no one does. No one notices, no one helps. You’re left with only you. You and the knife in your purse. Everyone’s watching me now. Everyone is watching. Nobody sees.

Where is all this noise coming from? I do not hear voices. He is silent. Just a tape recorder running. I can hear it ticking. Tick. Tick. Tick. I shut my eyes. Still there. Tick. Tick. Tick. I’m shaking. Dear God, I can’t stop shaking. Too much anti-freeze running through my blood stream. Blood-stream. Stream of blood. He ran through me like a flood, like a wave. Drowning. I want to bathe with you in a sea of blood. A wave of noise. A wave of voices. Jumping out of the dark at me, what was he thinking? He should have known better, even if he did do it before.

Before. No one helped before either. Let me help you. God, there's so much glass. Glass in your eyes. Shattered glass under my hands. Glass between us. She’s in the box. Did she die? I hope not. They wouldn’t tell me. They wouldn’t tell me anything about him.

My hands, give them back, you bastard. Can’t you see I was using them? I want to show you where the knife is. Of course there’s a knife in there. How’d I know it was there?
That’s a stupid question. You hear me? A stupid question. Turn that goddamned tape recorder off goddamn it, it’s driving me insane! You think I’m insane? I think you’re insane, you bitch. This whole room is insane, it needs color! It’s too crowded. Do you know where you are? I can’t breathe…

Can’t breathe. And that music on the radio playing so softly. *In lonely hours his tears devour you.* The scent of evergreen from the candles burning. His hands on me, his lips and hands in the dark. I have to get up now. Please let me up.

I’m afraid to stop. I’m afraid if I stop, I’ll lose it forever. What are you doing? Please don’t. Please, that hurts. Don’t you hear me? I can’t stop. Stop it. I can’t lose it. That hurts you son-of-a-bitch. The microwave clock is flashing 12:00...12:00...12:00 in green. He came for me in the green, unbuttoning his pants.

Police discovered the body on the floor of the empty apartment, a kitchen knife protruding from the chest. We will have more for you at eight during the morning show. Where’s my coffee? A pause. The wave drops me. *I want to bathe with you in the sea.*

It is silent under the water. I could tell you. I believe you’ll find her drowning in her coffin as we speak. What is your name? Drowning in noise and blood. Who are you? Blood running down like it does on the wall when you splash it. I’d take my shoes off to keep them dry if I had my hands back. They’ve taken them again. If only they weren’t handcuffed to this chair.
POST-MODERNISM

(1960's - )
It is hard to draw clear lines between the Modernist aesthetic and Postmodernist because many concepts carry over from Modernism into Postmodernism. For example, the alienated, asocial artist, the portrayal of life through the structure and form of the work, and the fragmented narrative continue to manifest themselves becoming, if anything, more prominent in Postmodern literature. Differences arise, though, in how the Postmodernists view the existence of the foundational meaning or reality behind their work. For, Modernists, there was still a sense of meaning, a sense of some kind of stable reality. For the Postmodernists, there is neither meaning nor reality upon which to base text. All is transient, relative, and subjective. Therefore, their literature became a further extension of the play with language that began in the Modernist. The Postmodernist contention is that since all reality is chaos, arbitrary and constructed by people, what we believe to be reality is really what we have created and structured with language. We do not exist outside of language and everything we do or say or think is constructed by the language we use.

In the Postmodernist aesthetic, the tendencies "of the Modernist to construct intricate forms, to interweave symbols elaborately, to create works of art that, however much they oppose some established present order, create within themselves an ordered universe, [give] way...to a denial of order, to the presentation of highly fragmented universes" (Harmon 403). Because there is no absolute truth for the Postmodernists, there can be no faith in the world.

In addition, the concept of a nonexistent reality is a very equalizing one. Everyone’s viewpoint would end up being relative and equally valid except for the Postmodernist view that people are not coherent, that they only imagine themselves to be
And with the publication of Einstein’s theories of relativity even time and space became subjective. Even they could not be relied upon to remain constant. This idea is often reflected in the structure of Postmodernist works. For example, Jeannette Winterson’s Sexing the Cherry reflects this suspicion of constancy in reality by subverting traditional conceptions of it. The book uses a technique called magical realism in which fantasy is presented as reality that effectively displaces the reader out of any preconceived sense of place or time (Stern).

As the Postmodernists continue to maintain that art is a reflection of life, Absurdism made its way into the literary scene. Absurdism breaks down all the myths that people cling to about their existence and asserts that the greatest myth of all is the myth that there is meaning to human existence (Edmonds). It caricatures pathetic human attempts to glean meaning out of purposefully meaningless events, and shows that the only meaning we can find in life is meaning we impose on it.

Postmodern literature can be characterized by attempts to subvert the fundamental concepts people base their identities on. Authors intentionally write in ways meant to shock people out of their habitual patterns of thinking. They borrow even more voices to tell their stories, include not only recognized literary references, but references from popular culture and the media as well. Protagonists, as in Hanif Kureishi’s "My Beautiful Launderette" often deal with identity issues in worlds where traditional labels like being British or “a man” no longer mean what they did fifty years ago. Most characters in Postmodernist works find that they don't fit in anywhere.

The Postmodern aesthetic also undermines social norms by desensationalizing sexual and violent acts and, like the Modernists, breaks up the unity of narration, as nice,
neat plots do not reflect the actuality of life (Edmonds). Also like the Modernists, it challenges traditional symbolic associations, and there is frequently no closure at the end of a Postmodernist work. In fact, there is often no ending at all. These factors together create a messy mosaic of plot, theme, and voices. There can be no unity to a

Postmodernist piece, and it is purposely so.

The following Postmodernistic piece attempts to convey this movement towards relative reality by using each separate character to tell the story in their own voices, allowing them to interrupt each other as they attempt to understand their relationships to each other and to themselves. The form is, therefore, choppy, irregular, messy, and confused. I have also chosen to re-represent a classic myth, that of Cassandra, in an attempt to present her story in a different light than has been traditionally associated with it. While incorporation of the myth could unify the elements of the story into a coherent whole, I hoped there was enough additional information and confusion of inter-character relationships to obscure its effects. Besides, if the reader does not happen to be familiar with the intricacies of the myth, it would provide very little unification indeed.
The fog enfolds us and appears to us like a swarm of white ghosts trapped beneath the air. I don’t want to breathe it. I pull my coat tighter around my shoulders, the black wool brushing my cheek. My dog, Confusion, pulls at me from the end of his leash. Just a little thing, a Jack Russell Terrier, his persistence can easily be kept in short reign. The street lights above us cast the fog eerily in orange as if angels hide there on some divinely urgent mission waiting or watching. I stub my foot on a piece of uplifted cement. I hadn’t seen it. Really, I can’t see much of anything. Confusion doesn’t mind, he just follows were I lead. He trusts me. He shouldn’t, but he does.

Don’t ask me why I am walking alone in the fog tonight. I don’t know. I just am. I need to walk tonight. I need to feel it. But I’m a chicken. I don’t want people to think I’m crazy. That’s why I brought Confusion, so anyone I happen to pass by won’t question my being out so late.

The street outside our duplex has a lot of trees on it. It’s one of those refurbished neighborhoods, kind of ritzy. The only reason Confusion and I can live here is because the other side of our house is still being renovated. We probably won’t be able to stay here much longer. Once they finish the other side, our rent will probably go up and we’ll
have to move again. We’re used to that by now. Confusion likes the trees that stand sentinel along the sidewalk. He steps cautiously on the metal grating that cements them into the walkway and sniffs at each one. Our neighbor, Mrs. Barron has a cat. Confusion likes to play with him, but most of the time, he just isn’t interested. Confusion lingers beside the tree in front of their house. I think it reminds him of the cat. I pull at him to break him away from it. I am more interested in walking, in breathing in the night air, in living.

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I don’t think our neighbor has had one man in her apartment since she moved in seven months ago. She goes out every day, comes back in the evening, walks that hideous dog of hers, and never says anything to anybody. We haven’t really heard from her since we called on her the week she moved in. We got her a fruit basket and flowers, but, she barely said “thank you” and didn’t even invite us in or offer us some coffee. Imagine that, you’d almost think she was intentionally trying to avoid people. No one comes to visit her on weekends. I can’t say I’m surprised. Talking to her is like talking to a brick wall. You wonder the whole time if anything’s getting through. Mostly she stays inside or takes that scrawny little mutt out to the park by the river. I guess that’s where they go. It’s the only one within walking distance.

I had a sister like that, you know. She thought she better than the rest of us. She went to college after high school. Said she wanted to have a career before she had a family, but, honey, she was fiddle-farting around so long, she turned around one day and found out it was too late. I told her she wasn’t going to be young forever, but she didn’t believe me. She didn’t take care of herself either, no trips to the salon, no manicures, not
even night cream. She wanted to get herself a man, but by the time she got around to it, her skin was all wrinkled and her figure was completely gone. But I’m her sister and she’s never listened to me. Now I think she has a thing for my husband. What can I do?

The neighbor’s just the same. She hasn’t got her priorities straight; she just doesn’t try. Lord knows what she does in that house all the time or where she goes when she’s not there. Sometimes delivery men bring something or other to her, but she never invites them in. I even tried to set her up with my nephew, but she just kind of grimaced at me and said she was busy. And that dog of hers, always chasing after my Aggie and scaring him half to death with that screechy little bark of his. She just has no respect for common decency, but she won’t get her hands on him, not even if I have to stab her in the back to keep her off him.

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We pass through the block quickly, turning down an open street beside an undeveloped plot of land. It is deserted, quiet, peaceful. Strips of clear air drift by us through the fog. We see the moon a few times through them, pale yellow, hanging in the sky. The light it gives must be made of something extraordinary that can shine off of any surface, even the coarse hairs on Confusion’s back.

I don’t believe in omens. If fate is going to do something to you, why would she feel the need to warn you? I’ve never seen an omen in my life, and I’m more sensitive to the world than most. Confusion is more sensitive still. Maybe that’s why I have him. Maybe because Confusion can see the signs I can’t. He protects me, warns me, if he can. I believe that. If I believed in omens, I might think that moon up there a rather calming
one. Much more at ease than the ever shifting, nearly blinding fog. Much more warm. But kind of far away...

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It's not that I want to be alone, it's just my fate. I'm cursed, by the gods as it were. They gave me a gift. I can see. I notice things other people pass right over. The fine structures of pine needles and office buildings, the way a rough wind twirls poplar leaves on their stems and makes them appear like a swarm of insects in the trees, the way worms trying to escape watery graves when it rains wriggle naked and exposed, blind on the sidewalk. I am deep. Most people find that uncomfortable. It frightens them. Solitude is placed on me to balance out my power. It is my punishment.

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I scared the shit out of her, I know I did. I guess she didn't see me coming. Her funny little dog barked at me, kept pace awhile like it was going to bite me. I couldn't keep myself from laughing. It might have been rude, but she looked at me like I had tried to kill it. I was going to stop and say something, but I had to keep my heart rate up. Her dark eyes narrowed into slits as I passed. A sneer twisted her face. For all that dark hair and black coat, I swear she looked almost evil surrounded by the white fog. It was creepy. I found myself still thinking about it three blocks away.
Confusion hears him coming before I do. He emerges from the fog like an Olympian god in gym shorts. His heavy breaths crystallize in the cool air. Wispy clouds form from his lips and curl around his head. He moves in powerful strides down the street, and the muscles of his thighs ripple with every step as he comes towards me. His eyes gleam as they grate up the length of my body, stripping me of my clothes. Confusion growls at the man deep in his throat. He nips at the man’s heels as he passes me brushing against me roughly, grabbing my breast and rubbing his hardening erection against my thigh.

It’s been a while since I’ve done something like that. I ran over her dog. The thing came flying out of the fog at the cab like some kind of demon. The headlights glinting in its eyes, fangs barred. I slammed on the breaks, but the thing disappeared under my front bumper. It was so small, it could have probably made it out the other side without even being clipped by the muffler, except she came out of the fog right after it. I had to swerve to miss her, and then there was a thump from the back tire.

Okay, so I was distracted. It’d been a long night and my mind was on a fare I’d just had. This woman I picked up at the airport just before my shift ended. She was kind of pretty, wearing a skirt, carrying a backpack. She was older though, thirty maybe. Wanted a hotel across the city. Said she was there for a conference on cultural myths or something. A real chatterbox, she was. Just kept talking and talking. Got to talking about her two daughters. Honestly, she didn’t look it. I told her so. Sure, she says. One
of them's twenty-one, the other's nineteen. But you can't be more than thirty, I says. I'm forty-one, she tells me. Couldn't believe it, but she was grinning.

By the time I got her to the hotel, she'd practically told me her life story. Got married early, to real prick, got divorced about five years ago. Now, she's back in school again trying to get her degree. In the meantime, she's working for one of her teachers on a project with national connections and that's why she's in the city for a few days; basically so she can hobnob, as she put it. Told me to have a wonderful evening when I dropped her off. I wanted to go up with her, but she refused me. Gave me a twenty dollar bill then accidentally left her purse in my backseat. I didn't know it till I got back home and was cleaning out the back of the cab. Figured she was probably freaking out about it, so I took it back to her. She was. She was so happy I brought it back, she invited me up to her room. I made love to her before I set her on fire. It was almost morning before I finally started back home. That's when I hit the dog.

I jumped out of the cab, and was running around the car when I saw her all in black kneeling on the ground over the dog.

"What did you have to do that for?" she whispered.

"It was meant to be," I said, but she didn't say anything.

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I grew too powerful again, too full of myself, that's why they saw fit to take Confusion from me as well. Now I am truly alone. They will never understand the pain of that. How can they? They are cold and fickle. But I will have retribution. I will survive. I will take what they've done to me and keep it, hold it inside me until it can't
hurt me anymore. I will assimilate it, make it mine. They will never understand that whatever they do to me, I will take and add to myself. They will never best me.
Works Cited


