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Experience V.S Abstraction in Terms of Ethnic, Social and Racial Discrimination

Introduction/Abstract

This paper explores the problem of racism and other in the United States, its history and current Forms, and it does so through literature. Through literature we can see experience and gain exposure to the addressed problems. Through Novels such as Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, we see the impact of experience on racist beliefs and social values. We need to provide more voice to provide cultural awareness and we can do so through Literature. That said it is very difficult to write such a personal narrative. I will discuss the difficulties of writing such a narrative and where the difficulties come from. To conclude I will attempt to write a part of my own narrative.

History And Current Forms of Racism And Othering

Although the American immigrant narrative has existed for centuries, it has only made its way into the spotlight in the United States recently. I cannot stress enough the importance of immigrant narratives in the educational system. There are many critical reasons why such narratives should be discussed/taught in schools. One of the reasons is to provide children with the knowledge of places outside of their own communities and awareness of other communities that are unlike their own. Introducing other cultures to children from a young age then helps in stopping possible future discrimination. It is not mandatory to teach immigrant narrative literature to children in grade school. Thus, children are not really educated on how the incoming “aliens” are really people just like us, and when not educated rightly people may to discriminate. The lack of

this knowledge leads to stereotypes which interestingly authors like Mary Antin try to prove wrong.

When looking at America's history, social progress and human rights laws, we, Americans, we, the people, think that we are at the best state we can ever be at. However as seen in our 2016 presidential election, we are very divided. On the one hand there is talk of "progress" and "moving forward," bettering ourselves and on the other hand there is talk of "building a wall" and "making America great again" and purifying ourselves once again into being a fully white/Caucasian country. What are the issues? What are our priorities? Why is the country so divided? And how do we fix it? Who are we?

Central to these questions is the issue of Immigration. Immigration of certain people from certain backgrounds with certain economical status and certain ethnic groups has proven particularly threatening to American identity. Though there are many groups that would fit their description, thanks to the 2016 presidential candidate the two most talked about and be picked on are Mexicans and Muslims

The argument is what it has always been; which is that all these illegal criminal Mexicans and Muslims come into the country, use the countries resources, take people's jobs, spread crime and endanger American lives. However, this is not the case. Many of these immigrants are fleeing from war or equally dangerous lives, one example would be the civil war in Syria. They are just looking for a better future for themselves and their families.

The priorities of the American government course stand with the American people, putting them first and protecting them first. Another priority that the American government stand for is fighting for human rights. American life and government have always been a leading example for other countries so not accepting incoming refugees is lowering American standards. Turning away

a family of four because of a political opinion is overlooking American values and taking away from what America stand for.

The country's division for the longest time has been based off of political views/opinions and propaganda as well as racist views of those same politicians. The longing for "preserving" the white dominant America has not yet died. Due to the fear of losing the white purebred, there is a lot of racism and false accusations about other ethnic groups. These accusations are passed down from generation to generation, making each generation more of a fully hearted believers. Politicians use these views to their advantage and put out propaganda that fit these views to get themselves elected.

Although this is one fraction of the country, the opposing half thinks the total opposite and therefore we are divided. The conflicting half thinks differently of course due to upbringing, right education and looking at facts and not denying them. So how do we fix the issue? The answer that will never fail any question of sort is educating through literature.

Experience And Exposure: A Place For Literature In Addressing The Problem

The demonization of certain ethnic/racial immigrant and refugees' groups has always been exaggerated through political propaganda in America. When looking back on American history you will see that there was a time in America when the Irish were characterized as apes and alcoholics, Italians as street filth, Chinese as parasitic locusts and worst of all, black people as devils, property and rapists. Although today, these groups are key tiles in the American mosaic, their arrival was initially met with fear and opposition (Resnick, Brian), just as the arrival of Mexicans and Muslim immigrants is/was met with fear and opposition.

Although politicians had a lot to do with creating a negative image of immigrants, they were not alone. Some great and well-known thinkers and writers present these ideals. The famous

feminist and well-known author, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose works are studied till today, wrote an essay in 1923 called *Is America Too Hospitable?* Here she talks about America bringing in diverse immigrants. She begins her essay by saying: “Our swarming immigrants do not wish for a wilderness, nor for enemies. They like an established nation, with free education, free hospitals, free nursing, and more remunerative employment than they can find at home” (Gilman, 1983). Gilman is implying that the “swarming...poor and oppressed” immigrants do not really want anything to do with America. They just came for the free healthcare, free education anything that they could get their hands on really. Gilman believes that immigrants came to America not only for money but also for free resources, pointing to things like education and healthcare. The idea that people come into the country to use its resources is still a current idea that is feed to the public by people like Donald Trump and his administration. Throughout most of the 2016 election Trump spread a fear of immigrants by saying something similar to what Gilman said in her essay. “Illegal immigration hurts Americans workers, burdens American taxpayers and undermines public safety, and places enormous strains on local schools, hospitals and communities in general, taking precious resources away from the poorest Americans who need them most” (Trump, Donald), Trump, like Gilman tells his supporters that immigrants are draining “precious” government resources. Except Trump’s target, for winning the election, is the lower middle class, who are in a weak spot where they need someone as the target of blame for their hardship. Trump gives them the target when he says that the resources are taken “from the poorest Americans.”

While Donald Trump blames the democrats for all the “problems” that have come out in the country, Gilman has a different idea of how we have gotten to where we are regarding immigration and problems that surround it. “The high minded old forefathers of ours were strangely lacking in even the political knowledge of their time” (Gilman, Page 1984). In other

words, it was no one's fault that this "madness" occurred; the problem occurred simply because "the high minded forefathers" believed in equality. She continues to say that their idea, "to imagine the 'the poor and oppressed' were good stock to build up the country" (Gilman, Page 1984), is completely wrong and that "A nation largely composed of under dogs is not likely to remain on top" (Gilman, Page 1984). By saying this Gilman is implying that those of a different race and lower class, will lower American standards. She then claims that the incoming immigrants are going to bring the country to its knees and if we want our country not to fall, we need to bring in "good citizens."

Gilman concludes that an American is the "only kind of person on earth who invites all creation to crowd him out of house and home. And even he is beginning dimly to wonder if it is not time to withdraw the invitation" (Gilman, Page 1989). Gilman compares Americans to Noah, the prophet in the Old Testament. Gilman suggesting that if Americans knew what the future was like in the hand of welcomed immigrants, Americans would have acted differently, or not let the whole thing happen. So who does Gilman want coming into the country? "Any man who knows enough to recognize that the advantages of another country are better than his own; who is strong enough to break home ties, brave enough to face the unknown, and who has saved enough to pay his passage, is likely to make a good citizen in the land of his choice" (Gilman, Page 1984). What makes a "good citizen"? According to Gilman, a good citizen is anyone who is willing to leave their families and lives behind, someone who is brave enough to "face the unknown" and is able to pay for his journey or immigration.

What she is saying is not too far from what our 2016 candidate and now president had been saying ever since he hit the campaign trail and that was that: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending

people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're bringing crime. They're bringing rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Reysen and Brown). Trump, just like Gilman, is pointing out that only the "poor" or bad guys are coming into the country and by doing so they are turning our country bad; instead of letting them in, we should give the chance to young man who can fit the picture we are trying to paint. By having a famous, admired, looked up to public figure speak negatively about a immigrants, they chang people's views completely on the group spoken about, While at the same time confirming what people originally think. So, when having someone like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who is an amazing writer come out with an essay on why we need to close the door to immigration, the writing is taken seriously. So, the next time you walk by someone who does not look like you or dress like you, you might think, he is ruining Americas great image.

Gilman published the essay in 1923, yet her ideas have stood the test of time. "Those seeking to immigrate to the United States must show they can support themselves financially," said the department of homeland security (DHS) Secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen in a press release (Lowrey, Annie). Without hesitation or consideration of the immigrants situation or reason for fleeing to America, government officials and important public figures such as Gilman speak against the poor and helpless.

It is terrifying to look at the world or more specifically the United States and see that there has been no progress over the course of a hundred years. Gilman stresses that we cannot keep letting the poor and oppressed in for cheap labor; however America's image is not the only thing Gilman and others like her are worried about. The bigger and more under the rug issue is preserving the white America purebred and American blood. "It Is quite true that we ourselves are a mixed race,-as are all races today-and that we were once immigrants" (Gilman, Page 1984). What Gilman

is saying is that it's true America is diverse, but Americans are not of mixed blood and that not anyone that immigrants can be American. Again as I have stated before, much of her views are in 2019 mainstream media and most of these views are held by 2016 elected president Donald Trump. "All Americans have come from somewhere else. But all persons who come from somewhere else are not therefore Americans" (Gilman, Page 1984 -1985). Gilman is saying though Americans immigrated to the America, not all who immigrate are therefore American. Again, these views are still held a hundred years into the future; Trump, like Gilman does not believe that all those who decide to come into the United States are American. According to an article released by the New York Time on October 30th, 2018; "President Trump said he was preparing an executive order that would nullify the long-accepted constitutional guarantee of birthright citizenship in the United States... 'We're the only country in the world where a person comes in and has a baby, and the baby is essentially a citizen of the United States for 85 years, with all of those benefits...It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous. And it has to end.'" (Davis, Julie). In this Trump is acting out Gilman's definition of what an American is "only kind of person on earth who invites all creation to crowd him out of house and home. And even he is beginning dimly to wonder if it is not time to withdraw the invitation." If Trump were to actually "uninvite his guests," it would lead down a rabbit whole. He says in the quote that he wants to take away or not give, non-American children who are born in America, citizenship or call them Americans. The people stripped of their citizenship would then be unable to be deported, unable to work and the government would have no jurisdiction over them.

Trump, like Gilman, is using immigrants as a sort of criminals that is there to take away from those who are "true Americans." "The American blend is from a few closely connected races" (Gilman, Page 1985). Americans, according to Gilman are made from few "blends" which is

another way of saying anything that creates whiteness and/or the pure white bred. Gilman goes onto explaining in more detail: “These social mixers should study the art of cooking. You may take sugar, butter, eggs, milk, and flour, with dried fruits and flavoring extracts, and by rightly combining these ingredients make cake. You may take meat, bones, onions, tomatoes, with salt, pepper, and fine herbs, and rightly combining these ingredients make soup” (Gilman, Page 1989). Gilman simplifies what she means by the “American blend,” in comparing racial mixing to cooking. She exclaims that not all races should mix. She uses the cooking metaphor to say, we cannot bring every ingredient into the recipe. “. . .if you mix sugar and meat, butter and bones, eggs and onions, milk and tomatoes, fine herbs and flavoring extract, salt, pepper, and dried fruit, -you make neither soup nor cake but something we pay to have removed” (Gilman, Page 1989). Gilman explains that only some very specific ingredients go into baking a cake as does making an American and suggest that anything else we “have removed.” When reading that, it almost sounds as if. She is asking for an American version of the holocaust that includes all non-white ethnic backgrounds. Gilman did not finish there, she went on to talk about how we have justified “poor and oppressed” immigrants coming in through the idea of the “melting pot” and explains that we make ourselves feel good by calling it a melting pot instead of what it actually is “an asylum.” By calling a diverse America an asylum is Gilman demonizing immigrants in the eyes of “true Americans”?

Alfred Schultz wrote a book called *Race or Mongrel*, in which he spoke about the crisis which America was facing, losing the white race. Gilman and Alfred Schultz share white nationalist point of view however there are significant differences between their two texts. The book, *Race or Mongrel*, was published in the year 1908. In the book Schultz gives us a 390-page long explanation of why “mixed of breeds” should not exist in America. The difference between

Gilman and Schultz text is in their views on how to go on about immigration as well as in their writing style. Gilman's essay is written in the first person and is directed/addressed towards white American authority figures as well as middle- and lower-class white Americans, this is hinted through sentences like "Our swarming immigrants ...They like an established nation, with free education, free hospitals, free nurses and more remunerative employment than they can find at home" (Gilman, Page 1983), All these free things Gilman is pointing to, healthcare, jobs and free education, were set up for the poor, those who cannot afford to pay for. Gilman could have like Schultz said, "Look, I want my white America back" but she hides this statement in the end of the essay and provides examples like this one in which she points at the lower classes and says "this isn't about me, they're taking your stuff." While Schultz's text is addressed to everyone and is written like a Scientific treatise work which stimulates a fear in white pure breed Americans. Schultz uses false statements but addresses them as facts to make his point about why we should not let mixed races produce children. Schultz's writing style is effective as well because he provides "evidence" to those who need confirmation on their racist views. Gilman's essay at her time would have been very affective because of her first-person narration where at specific moments she would address the reader and claim "if you mix" than "you make." By doing this Gilman is pointing the finger at the reader and is claiming that it is their fault if the white pure breed dies out. Although written very differently both Gilman and Schultz works serve as a cautionary text, one that warns the white pure breed while the other warns the human race.

From the beginning of Race or Mongrel, Schultz reports his understanding of biology and nature of human-being and animals while addressing his statements as fact. "Nature destroys the mongrel...Turn the domestic animals loose, leave them to nature, and in ten years no mongrel will exist." Schultz claims that the "mongrel" animal, let loose in nature would die and his/her breed

would cease to exist. That however is very untrue because the “domestic animal” has been pulled out of his natural habitat and has been used to being taken care of, they would not be able to survive. If the animal was born in their natural habitat with those of its kind, it would completely be able to survive. Schultz then goes onto comparing people to “the mongrel” by saying that if a white and black person have a child together, that is the equivalent of letting a mongrel loose. Schultz exclaims repeatedly that “Nature prevents the development of the mongrel ” (Schultz, 4). In other words, nature would end the human race if we allow “mix race” reproduction. He continues to explain that even if the “mongrel” does survive, over time nature will “stamp it out.” Schultz goes onto say that we must clear our blood before it disappears; “Probably a small amount of negro blood can be absorbed by a large white community; in fifty or a hundred generations every trace of the negro blood will have disappeared” (Schultz, Page 6). What he is saying is that, it is possible to recover and take “negro” blood out of their white communities but just “a small drop” of it takes fifty to a hundred years to erase all traces of.

Schultz goes back into talking about nature and saying that even animals do not reproduce with breeds different than their own, unless forced by humans. Relating that to humans, Schultz implies that mixed breeds are not God's work. “An inhabitant of Africa remarked to Livingstone, that God made the white man, God made the black man, but the devil made the half-castes ” (Schultz, Page 8). By explaining why there are mixed breeds of animals, Schultz sets up his argument about why there are mixed breeds of man and that is, “it's the devil's work.” By stating one of his more hateful comments, he is dehumanizing the racially mixed humans. Trying to reach his conclusion he says that, “The principle that all men are created equal is still considered the chief pillar of strength of the United States...Every man knows that the phrase is a falsehood. The truth is that all men are created unequal. Even the men of one and the same race are unequal” (Schultz,

Page 259). In this statement Schultz is saying that Latin races are inferior and need to be excluded. In saying this he is again justifying his views saying its logical that some of us are better than others. Schultz concludes by saying:

“Immigration must cease, for we cannot stand another drop of melanoid blood. There must be no further expansion; the blood injected by West Indian, Mexican, and South American mongrels is more vitiated and vicious than that of the Southern Europeans...For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his soul?” (Schultz, Page 350 - 351).

Schultz ends his book by saying we must take actions and get rid of all the unwanted others. Again, and again the irrational fear of losing the white race overtakes the rationality and truth. However, the power of his words is just as strong as what message he is trying to get across. When reading the ending, this statement stands out to the reader because he says that immigrants must cease, not black people or Muslims but all those of different blood then “true white Americans” that may interfere with white blood. Then he continues and include himself as well as his readers/audience by says we must do it. Schultz then claims one more drop of melanoid blood can lead to the end of us. Melanoid is the substance which makes skin, hair and eye color the color it is. So, when Schultz says just a drop of melanoid blood, he is claiming that not only will the offspring be of color but their melanoid spread.

Though it was not shocking for someone to say something so inhuman in Alfred Schultz time, these ideas have not died out of American societies. One hundred and eleven years later after this book was published, we still have major political figures and celebrities that express equally close minded/racist views. Tucker Carlson, a well-known republican television news host, or as I like to call him the reincarnation of Schultz is one example, if not the perfect example of a major public figure that states racist, close minded and false views of people based on their ethnicity,

racial background and social classes. He like Shultz expresses fear in losing the white America and because of this fear he dehumanizes people of other races. In a Tv show called Full Frontal with Samantha Bee, the hostess, Samantha Bee, made a collage of some of the many racist statements he Tucker Carlson has said either on radio shows or on his own show that airs on Fox News. Some were recent comments and others were older clips in which he uses offensive language to dehumanize other races and cultures. The clip first started off with Tucker Carlson speaking of his views on child marriage and how he was not for it but its not “the same thing exactly as pulling a child from a bus stop and sexually assaulting that child” (Full Frontal With Samantha Bee), then he continues to say that the “rapist” is not the same because he has made a lifelong commitment to “live and take care of the person.” Although child marriage is not the easiest subject to discuss, justify it by saying “well he isn’t going to rape her and leave, he’ll take care of her” is not acceptable either. It is a horrific thing that is happening and because of people saying what Carlson is saying it still exists. From that harsh topic the clip transitions to different statements Tucker Carlson has made about his political views on race, class and ethnicity. “If there were a Democrat to come out in the 2008 election and say, ‘you know what the problem is? ... It’s these lunatic Muslims who are behaving like animals and I’m going to kill as many of them as I can if you elect me’ ... I’d vote for you If you said that” (Full Frontal With Samantha Bee). In other words, Tucker Carlson is publicly advocating genocide, he said this on March 21, 2006. The date that he decided to advocate Muslim Genocide is the same date as their new year, Nowruz. The terrifying thing is that it is not just a random white supremacist saying this, it is a well-known man that has his own show on a well-known television channel. Statements like this one lead to terrorist attacks and mass-shootings. The problem of why the country is divided, the problem of why the world is divided is partially because of public figures like Gilman, Trump, Schultz and Tucker

Carlson, who go to extremes to set up an us V.S. Them atmosphere in which we always feel attacked by those who don't look like us. Instead of setting up an environment where they try to pull everyone together. So, when Carlson says "There is still lessons to draw from 9/11, ones that we shouldn't forget. There is this one maybe first among them, not all cultures are the same, not all cultures are equal" (Full Frontal With Samantha Bee), it is not surprising when you see ordinary people discriminating against one another.

Tucker Carlson and people like him create an atmosphere in which they make a group of people feel like they are attacked by talking about problems such as, not having a job, then use that weak point to blames a group of immigrants for it. "I am just for Americans" says Carlson "and no one cares about them, its like, 'shut up, you are dying and we are gonna replace you'" (Full Frontal With Samantha Bee). Like Schultz, Tucker Carlson's racism and discrimination strives out of the fear of losing the white race. He tells his viewers that "everybody gets a safe space except white men, they are hated and despised " (Full Frontal With Samantha Bee). If a white man felt like everything was working against him and he hears this from Tucker Carlson, the man would then have implanted in his head an enemy that has it out for white men like himself. The fear is created out of the anxiety of losing one's race and discriminating/ demonizing against another race or group is a defense mechanism and a solution to that irrational fear; but where does the irrational fear arise from?

There are many factors that contribute in creating the irrational anxiety of losing the white race; some have to do with genetics, others are created from media influencers, but the majority of the fear/anxiety derives out of the fear of becoming the minority in "their" homeland. The "instinctive" fear is really created from feeling entitled to be the superior race because of ancestral background. It all turned back to Patriarchy, a system of society or government in which the father

or eldest male is head of the family. So, if there was a major media influencer that insisted all the problems that are wrong with the country (and your life) are made by those who are not of the same patriarchal background; it would then make sense that we would see those people as the enemy. By creating hypocritical/false assumptions about immigrants and different racial groups, those looked up to public/media figures are creating a negative image of “the other.” In creating those negative imagines in our minds, we are then unable to see that “the others” as people just like us and instead look at them as monsters who are trying to take away everything we hold valuable. So, how do we resist to falling under these negative outlooks?

As I suggested earlier, one of the more if not most effective ways to stop or lessen discrimination and false accusations is to educate children from a young age on other cultures and backgrounds to help children understand that we are all the same. Another way to introduce “the other” as human and not animals or the enemy is through literature. Works like *We Need New Names* by Noviolet Bulawayo and *The Promised Land* by Mary Antin show the life of immigrants before and after their immigration to the United States. By reading works like these, children/readers will be more knowledgeable and ideally sympathetic with people of different ethnic backgrounds, races and economic status.

The Impact Of Experience, Racist Beliefs And Social Values On Children Through Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn

In Mark Twain’s novel the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, we are introduced to what happens to a young boy as he lives under the Abstraction of the ideas that his guardians and community wish for him to learn and then watch the boy slowly pull away from those ideas when he runs away and as he sees the world play out before him disproving those ideas. Twain’s novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, appears to be about a young boy named Finn that runs away from

home and joins forces with a runaway slave that “worked” for the main characters adopted family. However, by the end of the novel one comes to find that the novel is in-actuality a confrontation of slavery and racism.

The story takes place before the Civil War in the American South; it is about a young boy named Huckleberry Finn. Huck Finn is between the ages of 12-14, he was brought up by a drunk father who did not want Huck Finn to be successful in life or be “better than he is.” At the beginning of the novel Huck Finn was in the process of being adopted by a woman whom he calls Widow Douglas. Huck Claims that the Widow Douglas wanted to “Sivilize” him; he was unhappy with his life and the society that he lived in because everyone whom he met wanted to put their views and beliefs on him. Just as Huck was starting to get used to civilization, his father shows up again and snatches him, holding him prisoner and giving him rags to wear again. After getting tired of his abusive, drunk father and the cabin he was kept in, Huck decides to fake his death and run away to a place where he can be all alone and no one can control him. After faking his death and running off in a boat he had found, Huck made his way to Jackson Island, a place that Huck knows “pretty well” and claims that, “nobody comes there.”

When reading through the novel one comes to find that Huck was like any other child of his time, being raised in a very racist society. In the text Huck as well as many other characters use the N word when they are describing or referring to other characters who are of color. Another major thing that makes this novel more than just a runaway story is that when Huck ran away and the town heard about Jim running away, the town immediately linked the two and concluded that it was Jim who had killed Huck. Not that it is okay but such things were typical/normal in the south before the Civil War; and young children like Huck Finn were exposed daily to such thinking. The daily normalizes of slavery and racism goes to the extent to imply that those of different color are

lessor than the white community; leading children, like Huck, to act upon and believe such claims. In the beginning of the novel when Huck was stuck in the Cabin with his father; at one point his father was rambling about the government, he then started yelling and getting angry about how the government was not for “them” but against them. “Whenever his liquor begun to work, he most always went for govment” (Twain, Page 23). This time, Pap, Huck Finn’s father said:

“Call this a govement! Why, just look at it and see what it’s like. Here’s the law a-standing ready to take a man’s son away from him...Oh yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a free nigger there... most as white as a white man...he had a gold watch and chain...And what do you think? They say said he was a p’fessor in college...and that aint the wust. They said he could vote...I was just about to go vote, myself...but when they told me there was a state in this country where they let that nigger vote, I drewed out” (Twain, Page 24).

In this short version of his long speech about government, Pap is badmouthing people of color and is offended about hearing that people of color can vote. He is saying all this around his young son and according to Huck this is not the first time that he has listened to one of these speeches. On top of being implying that the government is working against them by letting people of color vote, pap uses the derogatory term “nigger,” to describe people of color. In doing so, Huck then picks up the term as did all young people in the south therefore grew up thinking much like his father thought. The rest of what we hear from Pap before Huck interrupts is much more of his racist speech is:

“Why, they said he couldn’t be sold till he’d been in the State six months...They call that a govment that can’t sell a free nigger till he’s been in the state six months...Here’s a govment that calls itself a govment...and yet’s got set stock-still for six whole months before it can

take ahold of prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger... Pap was agoing on so...all the hottest kind of language---mostly hove at the nigger” (Twain, Page 24-25).

Throughout the end of his speech he expresses anger towards the government about the new laws that are in place for free people of color. He calls people of color “nigger constantly and ends his speech by saying that the government is letting go of stock; he is angered that the government is letting go of “prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger.” The terrifying part of the situation is that this isn’t too far from what households looked/sounded like before the civil war. Children accepted that as the reality and many grew up just as their parents and community did; just as Huck accepted it and thought it was wrong to pull away from it. From the beginning of the novel Huck too used the word “nigger” just as he did right after cutting off his fathers’ speech.

That said, Huck Finn goes through a change/growth in his runaway journey with Jim. He begins to slowly see Jim as a person through their experience together. Huck Finn does not see that the public perception of people of color is false right away. He in fact struggles because he genuinely felt that he was doing wrong by helping Jim, and he was going to go to “the bad place.” The first time Huck encounters something false in the system is when he runs off to Jackson island, the island he thought no one ever went to. It turned out that someone else who was running away from society to gain freedom was Jim, Miss Watson’s slave or as the novel puts it, her “nigger.” Jim had also gone to Jackson Island because he had overheard that he was being sold so he ran off and made his way to the north. After Huck and Jim finally ran into each other Huck told Jim about his ascape and asked for Jim to share why he ran away. At first Jim was reluctant to answer so finally he asked Huck to promise that he was not going to tell anyone.

“...You know you said you wouldn’t tell, Huck.’

‘Well, I did. I said I wouldn’t, and I’ll stick to it. Honest injun I will. People would call me a low down Ablitionist and despise me for keeping mum---but that don’t make no diffrence.

I ain’t agoing back there anyways. So now, le’s know all about it’” (Twain, Page 37).

It is critical to acknowledge that at this moment in the novel Huck recognizes that he is doing someone wrong according to civilization. He recognizes that it is against the law and that he is going to be looked down on because he helped a slave escape. However, Huck goes through with it by justifying it to himself by saying it won’t make a difference because he isn’t “agoing back anyways.” After Huck Finn learns about Jim’s escape and agrees not to tell anybody, the two-pass time together and quickly become friends. They talk about many things like what brings bad and good luck. Conversations like this happen up until a storm came and forced them off the Island and onto their raft. The two came across a floating house in the middle of the river and so they decided to take a look. They found a dead body and were curious to know more so Huck dressed in girls’ clothes and decided to go into a nearby town and find out all he can. Upon entering the town and meeting a woman who took him in, Huck learns that the towns men were running after Jim because they thought that Jim had killed Huck and ran away. When hearing this Huck rushes off to Jim and says to him “Git up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain’t no minute to lose. They’re after us!” This is another very critical moment in the novel because the “us” is really important. The person that the towns men are really after is Jim but in having Huck use the word “us,” we now know that Huck has decided to partner up with Jim. Another reason why this is such an important part of the plot moving forward is that through learning this information, Huck is then introduced to a flaw in the system. This type of information gives Huck Finn insight into the racist and wrong views of his community as well as a reason to continue rebelling and helping Jim out. Huck acknowledgment that Jim is innocent of murder and tries to help him escape, not because he

suddenly doesn't see Jim as lesser but because he sees Jim as innocent. One can argue that Huck did not want an innocent man killed because of his own selfish reasons; however, that is not fully true, because throughout their journey together Huck slowly progresses and grows to care for Jim just as he acknowledges that Jim cares for him.

After this point in the novel Huck and Jim's "adventure" really begins. They go through many noteworthy moments in the novel; some are important because they show how racist the town and towns people were towards Jim, and others are important because they were beautifully written quotes about nature, god and society. At one-point Jim and Huck had gotten separated by the fog in the middle of the night and Jim being himself was very worried about Huck. Once they found each other the next morning Huck thought it would be a funny joke if he pretended that the whole thing did not happen and was just a dream. So, after acting out his childish act he realized Jim did not fall for it but was really hurt/offended by his mean play/act. Jim explained to Huck how he had spent the night worried and looking everywhere for him before he had fallen asleep, he tells Huck how when he woke up and saw Huck he:

"... could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed'" (Twain, Page 73).

When reading about Jim's feelings on the situation, one is left heartbroken at Jim's speech, but one is at the same time left shook by Huck's response to Jim's speech. Twain uses accented dialect for Jim, one that is different from Huck Finn's accented dialect and doing so adds depth as well as historical background into Jim's character as well as his speech. As a result of this Twain's readers/audience feel more easily for Jim. In the quote Jim explains to Huck that he was so happy

that he was there when he woke up that he could get on his knees and kiss Huck's feet. I was so thankful; Jim explains but he continued and says; I was so worried that you were gone yet here you are and all you could think about when coming back was to pull a joke on "ole Jim." In short, Jim was very hurt and that is understandable considering the situation, but Huck's response was as perilous as Jim's response was heartbreaking if not more. Huck says:

"Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough. It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back. It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (Twain, Page 73).

This is a very critical and noteworthy moment in the novel because this is the moment in which Huck realizes that Jim has feelings just like he does. During this very intense moment Huck shocks readers by saying that he felt "mean" and would kiss Jim's, a runaway slave, feet if he took back what he said. Now in order to understand how shocking and significant this is, one must understand the context of the time period. The novel was set right before the civil war, in the south where people of color were considered as lowest of the lows and the worst of white men were considered better than the best of black men. So then when we have a white person feel badly for the way he treated a black runaway slave, one is left shook; on top of all of that Huck says he would "kiss his foot" to gain his forgiveness.

Going through this emotional moment/event helps us as well as Huck moving forward. In understanding that he cares about Jim and that Jim cares for him, Huck later on takes actions and

makes judgments based off the person he knows Jim to be rather than the person he is made out to be by civilization.

At the center of the novel lays the most climactic moment in the growth that is overtakes Huck Finn on his journey with Jim. It takes place near the end of the novel when Huck and Jim are separated again, and Huck finds out that Jim was taken to be a slave again. We watch as Huck battles with his two very different beliefs. On one hand he has the built-in beliefs which his father and Widow Douglas dug into his brain until they had become a part of him; and on the other hand he has his experience and relationship with Jim whom he has grown to care about and see as a person rather than an object to buy and sell. It is important to note that Huck from the very beginning tried to push away the beliefs of his community, but he clearly shows that his rejection to ideas that were given to him by Miss Watson and the Widow like the stories of Moses or talks about heaven were stuck with him. The idea of religion had been planted in his head and he genuinely felt as if he was a sinner or a bad person. Huck decided to write a letter to Jim's owner, Miss Watson in which he tells her details of Jim's whereabouts. However, this was not easy for Huck but after much thinking and internal conflict, he does write the letter and even says it is good for Jim. After the writing he felt good:

“I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking—thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell.” (Twain, Page 178-179).

Huck felt “clean of sin” just by convincing himself that the action he was taking was the morally correct way to handle the situation. Putting aside whether his choice was right or wrong, we see the great effect his upbringing has on his views on what is moral and what isn't. After getting

exposed to “the other” side, Huck experiences a crisis in which he searches for who he is and who he wants to be. Twain’s addresses the topic in such way that the reader/audience can feel the weight that Huck carries with him while he is fighting with himself because this was not the end of it, as Huck puts it, he got to thinking:

“And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, some- times storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind” (Twain, Page 179).

By having Huck resolve the issue then have it pop up in his mind again, Twain is just playing out the process of how most, if not all human being manage a moral dilemma. Twain’s writing has a life like quality to it and it is most acute at this very moment in which Huck once again is conflicted on what to do because his conscious would not let him rest. He is reminded of Jim and his memories with Jim and point out that there aren’t any flaws that he can point out in Jim. When Huck wanted to convince himself that Jim should be turned in he would use the N word to describe Jim and distance himself from him in order to hand him in where as here Huck is speaking more naturally and truthfully based off of what he has seen in Jim throughout his experience.

Huck continues to reminisce on all the good that Jim has done him and all the moments in which he noticed that Jim was emotional towards him and showed that he cared for him:

“...and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was atrembling, because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

‘All right, then, I’ll go to hell’—and tore it up.

It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said; and never thought no more about reforming” (Twain, Page 179).

Hucks battle comes to an end after reminiscing on his great moments with Jim and as a result accepting hell instead of taking Jim to the gates of hell. He realizes that he has to choose and he chooses but what really is important to understand is that he is struggling to hand over Jim. Huck has grown to care for Jim and would go to hell if he had to. Huck had done perhaps the most difficult thing he could ever do, which was to completely pull away from the narratives that were pushed onto him and instead create his own narrative.

Although the ending of Twain’s novel was not as satisfying as I would have liked it to be, Twain showed us, through Huck Finn and Jim’s Journey, what happens when one goes through experiences with a different racial group than one’s own. Twain provides Huck Finn as the model of what we could be and perhaps what we should be. There are many novels/movies that try to replicate this idea and continuously fail because they fail to show what Twain shows in Huck Finn and that is the internal conflict in which you fight with yourself about what you have been getting fed all your life and the piece of new information that has toyed with your emotions but opened your eyes to reality.

What Needs To Be Done To Providing a Cultural Awareness Change

It is impossible to erase racism and/or discrimination off the face of the earth but it is possible to help each other understand once another like Huck and Jim did. If we can get different ethnic, racial and social groups to understand one another, we can therefore make a place that has lessor racism, lessor discrimination and more understanding and sympathizing with one another. It is through literature, art and music that we connect, and it is through them that we learn and understand.

Say there was three children that grew up in three very differently run homes. Children A's are taught from a young age that race matters and that they are better. Children B's are taught that they are all beautiful and are unique in their own way and that they are all the same on the inside. While children C's are taught that they are better than other races at home but someone who was different from them and very influential might have entered their life and had a great impact on them. The outcome for the children who are A's would be that they would grow up to all think that they were better and had/deserved to have privilege. The outcome to for the children in group B would most likely be that the children grown to understand and become more diverse while the children in group C would most likely come out to be children like Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer. Huck Finn for example, grew up in a racist community and circumstances lead him to experience a group that he learned most of his life were demons, but he came to find out the truth because of his experience with Jim. Although by the end of the novel Huck Finn might not think of all Black people like he does of Jim, but it planted the seed for Huck Finn. The point is that if we, those aware of the power we hold, were to fight for having teachers teach diversity to children from a young age we would be in a better more closely connected place.

There are many ways which you can teach diversity, for young children you can have events in which you ask children to bring different foods which their culture/society eats. For those who are slightly older and are considered "too young" for exploring food there are numerus novels to choose from which show "the other" as human rather than a criminal. We cannot travel to the Bardos as Lincoln did, in Lincoln in the Bardo by George Saunders, and experience how others feel, but we can surly pick up a novel that focuses on the life of someone that is different from us, in color, "blood," nationality and Understand that they are fully human like us.

Doing It Through A Personal Narrative

There are many great works of Literature in which one can explore other cultures. There are also immigrant texts, ones that I feel are the cure, or something close to the cure, to our division in the “United States.” They are the cure in my opinion because they show life before their immigration to American, life after their immigration to America and most importantly narratives like that show a person going through massive change and saying “here this is why I moved here, this is who I am, please notice me as a person.” That is probably the hardest thing for a immigrant writer, or any writer really, to do; is to write a personal text.

When an author sits down to write their personal narrative, they come to face two major questions. How do I write this? And, what do I put in it? There are many ways you can approach writing a personal narrative. Virginia Woolf for example, wrote novels that reflect certain aspects of her life. Jamaica Kincaid told the story of Lucy, in which Lucy, the main character tries to take over her the narrative. Lucy made the narrative her own, instead of falling into the immigrant narrative. NoViolet Bulawayo writes from the perspective of a child. Other authors, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau prefers to write their story as an autobiography. After establishing a way or a style to write, what is to be included in the text is perhaps the most difficult part of writing a personal narrative.

What is to be included in a personal narrative is one of the many difficulties of writing it. Often times we keep our personal lives to ourselves. Some do not think their lives are worth telling. Others find it extremely difficult to write a personal narrative, and therefore, distance themselves from it. Writing about oneself also includes writing about one’s family, close friends and personal events that somehow affected you a great deal; that said there are many authors that have written about themselves. Jean Jacques Rousseau, for example, wrote a book called *The Confessions*, in which he wrote about his life. From the very first few lines in his book he stated huge claims and

is confident in himself. “I propose to set before my fellow-mortals a man in all the truth of nature; and this man shall be myself” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques). From the very first a few lines in his book Rousseau is making a huge claim or “contract” with his readers. Rousseau is saying that he will tell the truth, the full truth. Rousseau goes on to tell the story of how he came into being and tells his readers everything, from his first childhood memories to his old age. Rousseau’s approach is not an unusual approach, however; it takes a lot of courage to publish such a work. Even Rousseau could not fully go through with the process. He wrote the book and asked for it to be published years after his death. Not only that, he asked for it to be published after all the people he had mentioned in the book had died. By doing this Rousseau is avoiding a lot of conflict and he literally gets the last word.

Writing a personal narrative is especially hard for immigrant writers mainly because there are many cultural and social boundaries set against them. For example, if I, an Immigrant, were to write a novel about Syria, I would have to keep in mind the public, mostly Syrian critics, that might have a different idea of what Syria is like. Immigrant authors have to deal with accusations of claiming a region as their own or seeming to speak for the group. As well as writing about social, economical and religious system. On top of all of that, they also might want to include their own personal issues. Immigrant writers have to overcome stereotypes that are put into place for them by dominate groups and ideologies . Further more minorities discriminate against each other. In immigrant narratives there is often “othering.” Othering is when a minority group sees themselves as better than another minority group. For the sake of fitting in better, they discriminate against each other in order to be accepted by the dominating culture or group.

When one sits down to actually write one’s personal narrative, many questions fall into perspective, such as: Do I have the right to tell the story of others while writing about my own?

How do I write this narrative? Why should I? Is it wrong to? Or the saddest, in my opinion; Why does it feel wrong to write the truth/my truth? While trying to write my own narrative I came across these terrifying questions and after a close look at several authors I realized that each author approached writing their narratives differently.

Virginia Woolf was born in 1882 and died in 1941, she lived in a time where women did not have rights that men had. As a result of limited rights, when it came to writing a personal narrative, many decided to leave their life narratives out of the spotlight, Virginia Woolf included. However, Virginia Woolf wrote fiction in which her life shadows in the background of the plot in almost everyone one of her novels. This might have made it easier for her to write and publish such an emotionally draining text without public uproar. Virginia Woolf is one of the famous and important modernists. She writes on being, non-being, social structures and she was fascinated by with the mind and our connection with other minds. After she finished writing her last novel, *Between the Acts*, she drowned herself in a river. It was not until after she took her own life that people started taking a closer look at her work and making connections. Her readers only see glimpses of her life in each novel but never really get the full story. In her novel *To The Light House* she writes about the Ramsay family and how they have gone to a vacation in their family home with their family friends. This may seem like a normal narrative but the Ramsay family, may scholars suggest, is a reflection of Woolf own family. There are also many suggestions that the novel *To the Light house* was written as a way for Woolf to move on after her mothers death. The character of Mr. Ramsay was implied to be her own father, while the angelic Mrs. Ramsay was implied to be her dead mother. Virginia Woolf's approach to writing a personal narrative is a very crafty/clever way to write and publish a personal narrative. Like Woolf, Noviolet Bulawayo, an

immigrant author, wrote about her life and her experience through a fictional character and in a fictional place.

In her novel *We Need New Names*, Noviolet Bulawayo tells the story of a young girl named Darling. Darling lived in a town called Paradise; we do not know where exactly on the map this place would be, but Paradise is a very poor town, flooded with very poor people. The novel is structured so that we watch as Darling goes through life in Paradise then the transition to American and finally ends with her new life in America.

Bulawayo tells this very personal narrative through the eyes of the main character, Darling, making it that much more of an emotional text to read. The text targets very serious issues that Darling witnesses without an opinion on it, leaving it up to the reader to do with the information as they wish. The use of a child main character is critical because in using a child's perspective the readers opinion is not framed by the author's opinion on serious issues that are then brought up. One example would be economical status, through the lens of the young children and the young main character we see that they are living in a poor community without the author addressing it directly. This is a very clever way to go on about writing a very sensitive narrative. Through Darling and her friends, Bulawayo brings up political issues, race class issues and societal issues in both Paradise and America without the characters getting backlash about their "opinions."

There are many disheartening situations in the novel but one that caught my attention right away is a page or so into the novel we find out that eleven-year-old Chipso, Darling's best friend, was raped by her grandfather and is now pregnant.

...She is not mute-mute; it's just that when her stomach started showing, she stopped talking. But she still plays with us and does everything else, and if she really, really needs to say something she'll use her hands...Where exactly does a baby come out of? The same

place it goes into the stomach. How exactly does it get into the stomach?...A man has to put it in there, my cousin Musa told me...Then who put it inside her?...Who put it in there Chipo? Tell us, we won't tell. Chipo looks at the sky. There's tears in her one eye, but it's only a small one (Bulawayo, Page 4 - 6).

Bulawayo tackles many other issues as she did this one where Darling and her group of friends will look at everything with a million questions but accept and move on. Though the quotations do not hold the full conversation through what I have provided, we see and feel how emotionally draining this text could be and why Bulawayo decided to use Darling to her advantage. Obviously the readers know "how it got there" and who "put it there." The fact that the kids do not know the seriousness of the issue is disheartening yes but that should not overshadow the bigger picture that Bulawayo's is trying to show the reader which is: Look, this is happening and paying the five dollars of charity is not going to do anything major. We know that Chipo was raped and we also know that nothing really is going to be done about it. The reader's knowledge about the issue and how Chipo feels about it is achieved because the novel is written from young Darling's perspective, if darling had been much older and she had known about what has happened to young Chipo, we the readers would have a much different opinion on the matter. The reader would be outraged that Darling took no action upon her knowledge of the rape or perhaps the book would be on silencing women. Bulawayo does a very wonderful job of keeping adult characters from taking over the narrative and showing us a world of adult actions from a child's perspective. In doing so, Bulawayo is also pulling out her own perspective and is writing not to criticize t but to make her audience aware of other cultures.

Another critical instance in the text comes in the very last few pages of the novel. Darling is again speaking with her best friend Chipo, this time Darling is in America and Chipo still in

Paradise. They were talking on the phone, and Darling asked who was there, Chipo was alone with her daughter who she named Darling.

I'm picturing Chipo there all by herself...Feel sorry for her...I start to feel disappointed, and then angry at our leaders for making it all happen, for ruining everything.

I know its bad, Chipo, I'm sorry. It pains me to think about it, I say.

Whats so bad? Why are you feeling pain? She says.

What they have done to our country. All the suffering...last week I saw on BBC-

But you are not the one suffering. You think watching on BBC means you know what is going on? No... it's the wound that knows the texture of the pain...

Well, its my country too. It's our country too, I say. Here, Chipo laughs this crazy womanly laugh.

It's your country, Darling? Really...What are you doing not in your country right now? If it's your country, you have to love it to live in it and not leave it...do you abandon your house because it's burning, or do you find water to put out the fire? And if you leave it burning, do you expect the flames to turn into water and put themselves out? You left it Darling...you have the guts to tell me, in that stupid accent that you were not even born with, that doesn't even suit you, that this is your country? (Bulawayo, Page 287- 288).

The above quote is a short version of the long and heartbreaking conversation that the two characters have. In a lot of immigrant narratives, the issue of claiming your place of birth as a part of who you are comes up. Many, like Chipo, say "you left it" so it is no longer yours. Bulawayo is, in bringing this up, showing her own struggle of when writing the narrative. Do we have the right to say that we belong to a place that we abandoned, Chipo asks. Darling of course views this in a completely different lens than Chipo. Chipo, who is still in Paradise, has a completely different

beliefs, “you have to love it to live in it and not leave it.” It is surprising that out of all the characters with the novel, Chipo was the one to say this, considering the things Chipo went through in Paradise. This very topic is what may stop many immigrant authors from writing a personal narrative. On what basis do we claim a place or a narrative as our own? Bulawayo lessons the tension by placing these words into the mouths of children. It also gives the reader power to analyze the situation and make a judgment about it. We are pulled into very serious issue that, most if not all, immigrants and writers who want to pursue with writing a personal narrative face. What gives you the right to claim something as your own? Darling lived in Paradise for 10 years. Does that not gain her some authority? Chipo who is only a year older than Darling says, you don’t abandon your house if it is burning, you go and get water to put the fire out. The question is, is there a middle ground? What is Bulawayo’s justification for writing this narrative? The act or accusation of abandoning your burning house is a serious issue and that authors consider when thinking of writing their personal narrative.

Earlier in the novel we learn that charities or news reporters go to Paradise and take pictures of the children and people there. So, when Darling mentions BBC, she almost becomes a part of the standoffish culture that we have formed in America; pay your five dollars of charity and feel as if you’ve created a change. Seeing and hearing is not experiencing, that is something else that Chipo very bluntly tells Darling. And of course, like every other issue in the book we can relate this back to authorship. If our authors who write immigrant stories do not live in their place of birth, do they really have claim to it? Chipo says that only those who live there can speak of it. Bulawayo fails to provide us with Darlings opinion on the last words that Chipo blurted out. Like Noviolet Bulawayo, Jamaica Kincaid in her personal narrative brings up the circulating issue of claiming to be a part of a class system, race, country or ethnicity.

Jamaica Kincaid in her novel *Lucy*, writes about a young woman who has just left her hometown to pursue her dreams in America. There isn't so much of a plot in the novel to follow, it focuses mostly on Lucy's transition to America. She lives and works in the home of a white affluent family. Throughout the novel we follow Lucy as she slowly comes close to the lady of the house Mariah. Mariah being naive tries so hard to connect with Lucy, creating problems for Lucy. In an attempt to create a connection, Mariah tells Lucy that she has Indian blood in her.

How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?...All along I have been wondering how you got to be the way you are. Just how it was that you got to be the way you are (Kincaid, Page 41).

Kincaid is writing Lucy's personal narrative on terms that it is hers to write. She had lived in her country, she had suffered, she could claim being the vanquished. So, when Mariah, a wealthy woman who has never gone through a rough time in her life claims to be "the vanquished," an issue is then brought to the readers attention. Does having "some Indian blood," as Mariah had told Lucy, give you ownership? Entitlement is a big issue in personal and/or immigrant narratives, Chipso, from Noviolet Bulawayo's novel would argue that even Lucy has no right to claim to be "the vanquished." We saw the same thing happen to Darling when she moved to America. She was accused of claiming a narrative that is not her own. These conflicting ideas that comes up in the personal narrative also follow the author into reality. Authors are accused of writing about a country, place, status that "is not their own." Kincaid's approach or justification would then be, I or Lucy went through it for the first twenty years of my life, unlike Mariah who had never experienced it.

Mary Antin's Answer/ Defense to writing a personal narrative

While Kincaid and Bulawayo in their writing bring up the seemingly unanswerable question, Mary Antin gives her audience direct answers. Mary Antin, in her memoir *The Promise Land*, tells the story of her moving/escaping to America and finding freedom. Mary Antin starts with taking the time to create an introduction as an explanation for why she is writing her story. She addresses her readers on why she allows herself to write about herself as a part of a nation she is no longer in, a religion she is no following, and a culture or a social class she used to be a part of. In her introduction she defends herself for anyone that would like to say otherwise. "I could speak in the third person and not feel that I was masquerading...for she, and not I, is my real heroine." (Antin, Page X).

Unlike Kincaid, Bulawayo and Woolf, Antin, with no hesitation addresses her audience about the issues of claiming a narrative as her own. She says that she has no trouble writing the narrative because she is writing about someone who she used to be, someone she is not any longer. Mary Antin does not stop herself there, she goes on to explain in detail how she separated the person she is now from the person she once was.

Now I am the spiritual offspring of the marriage within my conscious experience of the Past and the Present. My second birth was no less a birth because there was no distinct incarnation...Nor am I disowning my father and mother of flesh, for they were also partners in generation of my second self...Did they teach me from books, and tell me what to believe? I soon chose my own books, and built me a world of my own. In these discriminations I emerged, a new being, something that had not been before...And so I can say that there has been more than one birth of myself, and I can regard myself earlier self as a separate being and make it a subject of study (Antin, Page X- XX).

Mary Antin says in the quote that she has more than one self, the self she used to be in the country of her birth and the self that emerged in America. Mary Antin claims that every self has a birth. Her re-birth or her “second birth,” was formed out of the merging of her past experience and her experience in the new world she had entered, America. The world she grew up in was so different than the world she had newly entered that a new self was bound to be birthed. In other words, our experiences form who we become and Antin took it upon herself to make herself into the person she wanted to be.

Mary Antin declares herself a separate being that emerged with the help of discrimination, family issues and self-taught morality. In becoming that new person, she claims that there are no issues in writing the narrative. The difficulty of writing the text is no longer on Antin's back because, as Mary Antin puts it “she, and not I, is my real heroine” (Antin, Page X). In other words, Antin is writing about another person instead of writing about herself. In doing this Antin is not claiming to be a part of the narrative of her past self. Antin, in a way supports Chipo on her argument against Darling, which is, when you leave your country, you are no longer a part of that country, you become someone else.

Very interestingly, Mary Antin continues to make her point by killing the self that she used to be, by writing “a proper autobiography” is a “death-bed confession.” The idea of the “first self” dying after leaving the home land is not new, Bulawayo in *We Need New Names*, through Chipo, protests that leaving your home land is becoming someone you were not. Chipo paints a very clear picture that “leaving it” is disowning it. And so Antin claims to be able to write about someone that had died or is dying in her eyes. Although Bulawayo or Chipo, in her argument goes a step further saying that only those who are still in their countries, experiencing it as it is are allowed or have the right to speak about it. Antin does not touch upon that argument because to her, the point

of focus is more about the self and the experience of the self, not the country. Instead, Antin closes up her case by stating that she is writing her personal narrative to overcome her own particularly personal needs alongside other beneficial reasons for writing the story. One of the reasons for writing the narrative really struck me, it is stated as follows: "Before we came, the new world knew not the old" (Antin, Page XXI). What Antin is trying to say is before immigration the outside world, America or in her words, "the new world," was unaware of the "old." What does Mary Antin mean by the old world? The old world refers to minority or non-modernized countries or groups of people. Antin's text is in a way an informative text that sets up the goal of teaching the "new world" about the "old." I thought this was very interesting and intelligent reasoning because it is that "unknown" knowledge of the superior worlds that leads to stereotypes and discriminations towards non-modern minority groups.

Learning to stereotype is almost like being brainwashed to think a certain way and that is a topic that Antin also tackles in the very last few lines of her short introduction. "Had I been brought to America a few years earlier, I might have written that in such and such a year my father emigrated, just as I would state what he did for a living, as a matter of family history...the emigration became of the most vital importance to my personally (Antin, Page XXII)." In this Antin claims that if she had stayed in her country only a while longer she would have fallen into the narrative of her family and would have been the unchangeable person whom is like a record that repeats its self. Although this is a very strong idea, novels like *Yekl* and *The Imported Bridegroom and Other Stories of Yiddish New York* by Abraham Cahan go against this idea and protests that there will be change to your person no matter when you enter America.

Mary Antin concludes with a very sad reason for writing, which is writing to forget. "A long past vividly remembered is like a heavy garment that clings to your limbs when you would

run...I take from the ancient mariner, who told his tale in order to be rid of it. I too, will tell my tale, for once, and never hark back any more” (Antin, Page XXII). In other words, Mary Antin decided to write her personal narrative in order to forget the past she left behind. Why is writing “it” down brings us to forgetting the event? In a way, when we write about thoughts, that we have conflicting emotions about, helps us clear our mind and find what we truly believe in. Antin suggests that in writing her narrative she is killing her old self, fulfilling personal needs, informing her audience of her history and is making the text an academics and/or informative text for “the new word.” Unlike Mary Antin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau takes a completely different approach in writing his personal narrative by being a coward instead of owning up to what he had written in his autobiography.

When speaking about “the perfect death bed confession,” Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, is at the top of the list. As I have discussed throughout the paper, there are a great deal of ways to go on about writing a personal narrative or an autobiography. Jean-Jacques Rousseau decided to take, perhaps the most tempting approach to dealing with the issues that come along with writing an autobiography, which was having his book published four years after his death. Rousseau died on July, 2 1778 and *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* was published in 1782 (Duignan, Brian, and Maurice Cranston). In having his work published four years after his death and after the death of most, if not all, people in it, he is in a way resting in peace. Putting aside personal confictions that may arise from publishing a personal narrative, a part of the reason why a personal narrative is so difficult to write is because there is always negative criticism that will come from. In publishing his work after his death, Rousseau gets the last word and no backlash that he has to deal with. The question that surfaces

however is; is it rewarding like Antins work is rewarding to her? What is the purpose of his personal narrative? Do we need a purpose to write a personal or non-personal narrative?

Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his book *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, writes a full life confession, or at least he makes it out to be like so. Rousseau work as a whole is like a basic autobiography that begins with his family history to his early childhood and the transition to adult hood. In the very first two lines however we are pulled into a contract with Rousseau in which he states the following:

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself. I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work. (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques).

Rousseau presents himself to his audience as any another human being of mankind but at the same time “like no one in existence; if not better.” He complements himself to be a truthful and an intelligent man that is unique and claims originality. Rousseau gets away with saying such things about himself because in the second sentence he shuts critics opinions down. We know that the book will be full of scandals just by reading the first two sentences, but Rousseau is shutting down any possibility of critics arguing against his works by saying that our judgment of him “can only be determined after reading this work.” So, when Rousseau is telling his audience about embarrassing moments in his childhood and adulthood, he is cleverly gaining his audience's trust. The following passage is one of his “mischievous” acts:

“I had the faults common to my age, was talkative, a glutton, and sometimes a liar, made no scruple of stealing sweetmeats, fruits, or, indeed, any kind of eatables; but never took delight in mischievous waste, in accusing others, or tormenting harmless animals. I recollect, indeed, that one day, while Madam Clot, a neighbor of ours, was gone to church, I made water in her kettle: the remembrance even now makes me smile, for Madame Clot (though, if you please, a good sort of creature) was one of the most tedious grumbling old women I ever knew. Thus have I given a brief, but faithful, history of my childish transgressions” (Rousseau, Jean-Jacques).

Rousseau started out his book with a brief family history that turned into every embarrassing thing he did as a child. By doing so, his audience refrains from judging him and his actions. In the quote above Rousseau tells the story about the time he urinated in his neighbors cooking pot. He justifies his action by saying that she was “the most tedious grumbling old women” that he ever knew. This of course this brings humor to the text because we can all relate because at one time or another, we have come across someone who we thought was annoying. Unlike the mischievous young Rousseau we did not act upon our feelings. To prepare his audience for this disturbing but humorous remanence, he angelizes his person by saying that he was all things that made up a child: a liar, food-thief and would never “tormenting harmless animals.” Just as he prepared his audience for reading his scandalous book, he is over and over again preparing his audience to sympathize with him. By doing this Rousseau avoids offering reasoning and defense for everything he writes about which were a big issue for author like Jamaica Kincaid, Noviolet Bulawayo, Virginia Woolf and Mary Antin.

Like any self-portrait, we position ourselves to show what we want the world to see, we move the brush in a certain way leaving out details that we do not feel comfortable sharing. Like

any other human being, Rousseau refrains from telling the full truth, when reading his very long confession you find that certain aspects of his narrative seem to be hidden and/or missing. The noticeable missing aspects of his narrative make his confessions a false confession. These gaps in his narrative bring up questions which remain unanswered because he is dead. If there are certain things about us we cannot bring ourselves to address after death, can we ever really fully forget like Antin suggested? Life is like a play that forces us to be characters we did not addition for by birth. I struggle to understand what is it that keeps us in character even after death.

Part 1: The Bread is Complicated

Before going into this, I have to make two things understood. One being that this thing, this paper, book, story, whatever it will come out to be, is a nightmare on a piece of paper. With each word I add, a stone falls into my throat and lies down in my chest yet, for some odd reason that stone is comforted, like a bee going into its hive after a long day of work to sleep. However, the weight seems to only gets heavier with each word. The second and more important thing to note is that, the people I chose to write into my story, in some instances may seem questionable or even “evil,” but norms differ from country to country. In other words, a person's wrong in one play maybe or is another person's right. Then again, who are we to know right from wrong?

It is sometimes said that a picture is worth a thousand words. This idea has been expanded on over time and is sometimes read a: a picture is worth a thousand words, but memories are priceless. I have never in my life been against an idea as much as this idea. It is wrong, it is completely wrong. Sometimes we need both the picture and memory to be truly satisfied. How can you have one without the other unless of course it is within your reach. I was expecting it to be within my reach. I was expecting to see it, the square which was formed by the four gray brick walls that used to lock us in. I wanted to see it, all of it. The ground which we used to stand on every morning and

were forced to pledge to what we were told that we “respected, loved and believed in.” That same ground that we stood on waiting to be ranked at graduation each year. We would watch as kids would ascend the stairs before us, those who went last were ashamed, those same stairs we ran up and down on our breaks. I wanted nothing but to see them one last time. Maybe to reassure myself it was all real. It was a bittersweet place to me. Sometimes I think back to the roof, on which a rather anorexic Santa used to stand on. Once a year he would come and give us toys. Remembering this also reminds me of the spot I was caught in once, next to the stairs. That was where a group of boys told my seven-year-old self that they would will beat and kill my brother. Although there was not much good about it, I was shattered, I am shattered that it is gone.

I write because I want there to be something, something to fill that taunting empty black square left where my history used to exist. I figure, humans do nothing as well as write their history. We paint words on a piece of paper and stab it into the equivalent of that empty square, as if it was a universally displayed bulletin board, out for those who come after us to see, only to go and repeat the cycle.

Part 2: Brick By Brick

In order to understand a person's life, you first have to know their home room by room. Houses here are as simple as they come. There are four walls that stand to create mostly rectangles or squares. Along the inside of those walls are rooms, the kitchen and a bathroom. The middle of the shape that forms the house is empty with no roof and that was what you would call a courtyard. The house was like a prison yard with cells along the wall. Everything was made of brick and concrete, there was not a single sign of nature. Then again, I don't recall nature ever existing there, of course by “nature” I am referring to anything that was green or colorful---except, in pictures it seemed full of it. This was every house unless you lived in an apartment.

My house was a rectangle house. When you entered the house, on the left there were brick stairs leading up to the roof. The roofs in Syria are flat and are used all summer long. Walk in about five more feet, on the left, past a window and a turn at the corner. There you will see a door leading to a small living room where I used to sleep but was also for guests that weren't family. In that same room there is a door that leads to my mother and father's bedroom. Exiting the rooms there and continue walking about ten feet straight there is a door to the right. When entering that room you have three choices. The room you just entered in, the room on the left or the door on the right. Whichever door or room you picked, none had a prize on the other side, that is for sure. If you chose to go straight ahead and sit in the room that you just entered, you would be in the room my grandmother used to sleep. This room was also where family guests were brought to. However, if you go to the door on the left, you will see an empty room with sponge mattresses and pillows on the floor, along the walls. That was my grandfather's room. If you choose not to go to that room, and instead take a right, that was our storage room. From there, there is a door to the right which leads to the kitchen. In the kitchen, there's a door that leads to the brick shower room. In going all the way to the kitchen, we have made three sides of a rectangle. When exiting the kitchen, we are on the parallel side of the door that exits the house. In the end of that wall there's a small sink and a door which leads to a bathroom. The last wall that is parallel to the living rooms is just a huge wall that stood to close the rectangle. What kept this house from being a tunnel that led from one room to the next was the empty central courtyard that always reminded me of gray prison yard that every house had. I said that houses were simple, they are if they have never been walked in, touched, created. No matter how long a house is left empty, say nine years, it will never lose its complexity because it holds the touch of mankind, which forces its life and everything into it.

It's like looking at a night sky flooded with stars but no two can be linked, yet they form a galaxy. That is how it felt, that is how it was trying to think of it---of the past---the first 12 years of my life. At times I think back and ask myself who was I before I was this version of myself? Was I always silent unless spoken to? Did I ever dislike greens ? Did I always hate gossip? What was I like? Is it normal to forget a huge part of your life? That said, I do remember a lot that takes over the dark spots that are left uncovered---shining. It isn't like I was unconscious for 12 years. I chose to push it to the back of mind and lock it up. Partly the reason why I kept it locked away was because when it is left uncovered, it shines sharply in the dark, like a star that desires to be stared at. I remembered the structure of the house perfectly. Maybe that's because each room holds a piece of me that I wish to throw away into the expanding universe in hopes for it to one day contract and go back into the huge empty nothingness. From the front door all the way around to the restroom, the house is flooded with one memory after the next, not one space was left untouched---Oh how we like destruction.

Part 3: Don't Look; It's Shining

It was a Tuesday, my mother had gone to something we called "soks seshemba," which sadly does not have an exact translation in English. When translated it would be "Tuesday marketplace." A "sok" is like an outside mall. It is made up of stores that are next to each other and within that there are carts with food. It isn't only outside; there are what seems like huge underground tunnels that have more stores within them. That said, you can't really call this a mall because it's structure and purpose are different. The "sok" looks more like a flea market from the outside and if you want to go get food, clothes, kitchen supplies, taxi headquarters, anything, it is all there. So "soka seshemba" or Tuesday marketplace was somewhat like a sok that came near where we lived every Tuesday. There were mostly food carts but there is also things like live baby chicks. And I was

about ten years old when one day my mom went shopping there, I was left at home to watch my three-year-old sister and grandmother. It may seem odd that a ten-year-old was left to watch over a child and a woman who needed three-legged cane to walk but not unusual. Time passed quickly after she left. All I did was watch TV with my sister. As we were watching I heard the doorbell. So, I ran up thinking it was my mother and I asked who it was, the voice called back saying “it’s me, open the door,” In Kurdish of course. The women’s voice replicated my mother’s, so I opened the metal door and saw in front of me an unfamiliar woman. She was not my mother, as soon as I laid my eyes on her I pushed the door as hard as I could trying to close it and yelled for my sister to get a chair. The woman was pushing back. She was huge. Somehow, I got the door closed, asked my sister to get a bucket of water, ran up the brick stairs and poured it on the woman, quickly enough that she could not see me. Women like her were not unusual. She was what we called “Karachi.” Not a homeless person, we didn’t really have those, but she was, in translation, a beggar. There is no clear translation really for it. They are usually in Sokes they follow people and beg for money. Sometimes they hit you, spit at you or just bother you to give them money. It seemed somewhat inhuman, it was harassment, not begging. From that day on, if anyone knocked on the door I went up the stairs to check who was at the door. I would say I have never been so scared in my life, but I would be lying to myself.

I never stopped wondering how people thought it was rational for a ten-year-old to watch over two other beings, one much older, the other much younger. Does treating a child like an adult really make the child grow up any faster? I think not. It scares them, it scared me. I never stopped questioning why I was robbed of my childhood. I laid awake for many nights, wondering, what would life be like for my family if the mistake had not been born, sadly...that is unanswerable. It

cannot be answered because who would then care for my sister for the years to come after the big move.

*I hate staying home after school, but I know I have to--- to pick up my sister, but there isn't anything to do. I am so bored. If I could, I would have stayed after school because there was basketball practice. But mom says I can only go every other day because my brother wanted to do a sport too, but he didn't get on a team! I did, but we sometimes both stayed after school and my sister would be stuck outside the house so now I don't go anymore, he goes. I was mad at first but now I write in my free time so I don't get upset much about it. But I am so bored--I can't wait for three o'clock to come so I can play with my sister. *

Those same stairs that I used to help me throw water at the women, were ones I used as a passage---a portal that took me to the one place of escape in all of Syria, the roof. If you were to go and take a look at those stairs you would still see the outline of my foot carved into the ground. Now, though, my footsteps are covered up with a thick blanket made out of the feet of those who live there now. Except the roof, no matter how many people walk over it or use it, it's unchangeable. This is because I refuse to let it go, I refuse to leave. If you look in the right direction, you can see the sun on its knees as it stands and me with it.

We would sleep on the roof every summer, all of Syria did really. There was nothing special about it, summers were just too hot to sleep inside so everyone used their roofs. I said that the roof was my place of escape, indeed it was but there was nothing special about it. If I close my eyes I can still feel the most perfect breeze that came every night and put us to our sleep; just as I remember the burning heat that woke us every morning.

At nights it was the stars that had me under their spell, if I were to forget everything that happened I would never forget the stars that stood by the millions in the dark sky. I would stare at them till I fell asleep. They never failed to take my breath away. I was gone from Syria for nine years and went back for a ten day visit and for ten nights I was up as long as I could, looking at those stars. I thought to myself as I laid staring at them, there is nothing that mankind can make that can capture this sky and every night I laid there I wished people all over the world would stop and see what I see. See the beauty, see that there are things out of our reach. Those sparks of light in the sky are the memories that have yet to disappear into the darkness, they have not yet let go of us for many reasons I would guess, some memories are just unforgettable and others we do not want to forget. So, when I look up at the sky in Syria I don't see stars, I see my life. Just as when I look up at the sky in New York and see my life, the memories I have held onto. There isn't much only because I learned to let things go.

In the daylight we all would wake around the same time. As soon as the shade left our beds we would be up. I was always the last to get up for one reason. I would lay in bed, waiting for my family to go down one by one. Every morning after they had all left I would sit up and look at the pole that stood on the right corner of the roof by the edge of the staires. I don't know why I felt like I was doing something bad by waiting so that I would be alone with that pole. It felt wrong but I needed it, I needed to see it, to examine it. It was a metal pole, most likely not hollow. It was rusty and brown, with a thousand bumps all around, in some places it looked like the metal was peeling away and in others it looked like a layer or two had fallen off. I was intrigued by it for as long as I could remember. At first I would only look at it from a far, soon I would just touch the pole as I walked past it. If I close my eyes I can still feel the texture of the pole, it was like lightly touching hot sandpaper, my hand sometimes burned from it. It was the kind of heat you feel when you would

walk barefoot on a hot day on concrete ground. I soon started holding onto it as I went down the stairs, it burned yet I didn't want to let go. After that I started to look at it from a closer distance, there was not much more that I could do. There was something about that pole that made it seem more than just an object. I would sit and look at it wondering what is it about that pole? Soon enough I realized I had gave it life, I would look at it and think if I was to scratch off the layer of rust, that I would see human flesh. Soon enough I thought of it as human flesh that had been burned under the sun. Not much later I started wondering what a human with skin like this pole would look like. After much thinking I came to the conclusion that the pole is human. It was created perfect, no bumps, no scratches, no marks; it used to be a smooth and silver colored pole, created perfectly like newborn baby. They look perfect, they feel perfect, they are perfect but the more time they spend in the world the more they change and become worn out like a fruit that is never picked.

I don't really like it here, sometimes I wish I was back home. All my friends are there and I miss them. I didn't really think about it in the summer because we were doing so much at my uncle's house but now that I have to go to school I realize it's very boring here. I tried to make friends but they're not real friends, they only sit with me because their friends don't have the same lunch period. I used to have five friends and we were so close---I miss it but I don't want to go back. I miss the roof---but now I have my pen

I remember I was always afraid of death when I was younger, I would wake up in the middle of the night and cry about not wanting to die. Sometimes I would cry myself to sleep thinking about it, other times I was so scared I could not fall asleep. I was foolish, I was not afraid of what came after death, I just could not conceptualize the idea of vanishing out of existence. I was scared of what it would be like without me, while not realizing that life was actually much

worse. I like to think, whatever it may be after death, it would be better than this, better than life. Now that I have grown, I have learned that we can not know everything, not by eating a fruit or by reading every book that has been written. I learned that it was foolish of me to waste away my life on what is out of my reach. I realized I could live---live my life and appreciate what was right there in front of me. That pole reminds me that we turn to rust as time passes and no matter how much we come to know about the world, we will never be able to stop time or death so we might as well enjoy life. We might as well live in the real world not in a screen; the pole reminds me to add sparks to the dark sky to remain there for eternity after we are all gone.

+++ My room +++ Left in the dark ++++

There was a picture that used to hang in my room that used to terrify me, it was a picture of my sister, so when my fear of my sister's picture became too great, I thought of death too much. Sometimes when I could not handle the fear I went into my parents room and told them about it. The answer was religion as it always was and I would lay down for the rest of the night praying for forgiveness but as soon as the light hit the room, I forgot about my fears. This was a cycle that continued up until I arrived at America.

* I... +++ Left in the dark +++ *

In Syria childcare and childhood are all together very different from American childhood and childcare. For most of their short childhood, children play out on the street with other kids from the neighborhood. Girls would have to start their transition from street play to helping out at

home around the age of ten years old. By age 11 to 13 they would completely have stopped playing outside and were at home, doing whatever needed to be done. Boys would stop playing on the street around age the ages of 15 to 16 either because they had to work and help pay the bills or because they had to work towards their studies and future.

I was seven, maybe eight years old when my sister had started crawling around. She was moving around being mischievous as always. This one night we had a huge family get together that only involved a small fraction of the family which was about 35-45 persons, not including the children. It was around eight o'clock when it happened--- children were all over the street; I was, as you can imagine playing with the children, and I thought my little sister was with one of the adults. Apparently, they had let her go and she had crawled out of the house and onto the street. She made her way to the middle of the street and there was a man---he was riding a motorcycle and...was heading down her way. Apparently, when the young man noticed her, he did his best to stop. I do not know if I saw it happen but I always thought that he stopped right in front of her, with her laying down on her back with the wheel inches away from her body. I do not remember how everyone noticed, but the house was under chaos and I ran to my parent's room---I hid...I hid behind a door---their door...and cried. I begged him---I begged god that he would kill me and spare her. With tears running down my face I put my hands in my hair and started pulling.... to help him with the murder. At some point one of my cousin's daughters, who was my age, noticed. She came in saying it was not my fault and that my sister is okay--- They were not yet changed, I think--- they were still their own person...but not for long.

My sister was rushed to my uncle who was a doctor, he did not live too far. She was in fact okay, but in shock. I looked at her from afar for days before getting into contact with her again.

But that night after her return from the doctor she looked like a silicon doll, she did not make any noises and she did not move unless she was moved.

* I drive her everywhere, like I am working for her---not because I have to but because I want to. I want her to have it all, I want her to stay who she is, so I take her away. Away from those cold noises. What happens is that like an apocalypse---it slowly...takes over you but you do not notice it. It is in the air you breath...in the food you eat...in the clothes you wear. It does not stop until it has gotten inside of you. I don't know how I escaped it---but I will do my best to take her away from the dark spots---away from it all.*

*At times life decides to hit us. For whatever reason---it starts to eat away at us from one side, and as human beings we do the instinctive thing and train our bodies and mind so that we can handle it. The problem occurs when there is a second sudden hit, which at times can catches us off guard. Then all of the sudden you are trying to balance on one leg---on a broken leg. It becomes more then you can handle, it becomes a war in a steep and muddy valley---with you stuck in the midst of it...trying to crawl your way out. With enemies attacking you from each side and no escape route, you give up and start to think: I've lost my land and I would do anything to get it back. That, that right there is how every great war ever started, I lost something and I want it back! Life hit me hard the first time, it took away a part of what made me, me. For some reason that was not enough...I lost the home which I grew up in, just few days ago I could have still called it my own but I have been stripped of half of my life. Just two weeks ago I could have decided I wanted to go and see it. Nine years have passed since I had last laid eyes on those bricks. I can still feel my fingertips touch the wall as I walked with it to open the front door for whoever it was that was

knocking. The wall was rough but I never got a scratch. What am I to do? When I think about it, I tear up but try to hold it back. I push my head back and let the tear float in my eyes. Through it I saw my grandmother, still standing. She never did like me, and it wasn't until she had fell and broke her leg that she started to act as if she did. Was it my fault? "Yes, Father!" I thought-- call him. I did. "You shouldn't have," she yelled. I blinked once and the tear falls, there are more coming, more came. I blink again---where were these tears when I needed them.*

My grandmother...my father's mother, she used to live with us, so did my grandfather, but he had passed away. I being the eldest female child in the house was often left to care for my grandmother, who would pick my brothers life over mine any day. I knew this of course because at a certain moment, whenever he and I argued, she would protect him. I thought to myself at times, you just saw what he did, he is wrong, why him? +++Left in the dark +++ When my younger sister was born, my grandmother adored her. What was it that I did? I always took care of her. Even if she took my side one time...it would have been enough for me.

One day my mother had to go out to get few things for the house, as usual I was left alone with my grandmother. She went on about her day...mostly sitting on her bed and I was watching Television. Time passed and she had to use the restroom, so I, as usual, helped her up and gave her the four legged cane she used to walk. She made the trip to the restroom and on her way back she called out for me. She could no longer walk. She was at the doorsteps of her room, blocking the door so I had to take the longer way and try to put the chair that was not yet in my possession under her. Teleportation couldn't have even prevented what happened next. I made it to the other side, grabbed a chair. "Stop walking" I said. She walked further, she walked into the doorway. I was trying my best to put one half in the chair in doorway so she could sit---she fell.

Death seemed more comforting to me than living through the next months to come. Out of panic I call the first person that comes to mind, my father. I wish I could remember what he said, maybe somehow they were a word of comfort because the events that followed were no comfort and those words should not be uttered to any child in any situation.

+++ Left in the dark +++

My grandmother's life got worse from there and the worse it got, the more I was blamed myself for her broken leg. She stayed on her bed day and night, as weeks and months passed, by she slowly stopped talking to us. She was there but wasn't...she reminded me of what I did to my sister that night. I made a habit of spending the ten coins I got as a child for snacks on things I thought she would like. I was with her, every day; I was at her feet unlike the day she fell. It was not until the last few months of her life that she treated me like a grandchild.

On the day of her death we were all sitting around her. It was lunch time and as usual I ran off to buy my grandmother a cookie, the best I could afford. She ate it, she seemed more and more like a machine. Everyone was laughing and enjoying themselves, and there she was, just sitting. An hour later she lay down. Everyone was more calm and in a sleepy mood when all of the sudden I heard a gasp. It was like when you start crying but try to stop so all of the sudden you have to gasp for air---but it sounded like she had something in her throat. The only difference is, it was a more harsh and less smooth gasp, it was her last breath. I must have been either nine or ten when she died. I remember that day like it was yesterday, I killed her they said. I broke her leg, I killed her. I believed it. I tortured myself for years to come, wondering if that cookie I gave her to eat after lunch was suck in her throat and killed her. It was like a Twix. Did it chock her? Yes, they said it was my fault she died---it was a thick cookie...with caramel---it was hard to eat but she ate a bite, I killed her---yes, I must have done it.

I never thought about my grandmother's life as a child before I broke her. Thinking back she was always machine like. She would move around the house every once in a while when she could. She talked to visitors that came to see her when they did but it seemed to have always been her alone silent by herself. The only difference was that when her leg broke her children were there more often---is that why she seemed more silent than ever? It sometimes comes to mind that I could have said something to them, something that they all knew but no one spoke of, the obvious. +++ Left in the dark +++ But that cookie that I didn't dare tell anyone about came back into perspective and pushed me back into my place.

Huge tents were put up in front of the house the next day. They blocked the road. One of the tents was for women and the other for men. For those three days that the tent staid up. To the left of the house, where the men's tent laid, there was silence but as you proceed closer one could heart the men murmur about the dead. Cigarettes were passed around, you could build a house from the little buds smoked on those three days. To the right of the house, where the women's tent stood, there was howling. There are no words to describe the sadness, fear, unease feeling it gave me. It made me want to get on my knees and pray five times a day. So I stayed on the outside, where the children plaid---far away from the cold noise.

On the first day, I waking about. It was after dark, the tents were full, the streets were full and I was hungry so I walked inside the house and looked for my mom. She was nowhere to be found so I went to the room where I dared not step in alone, but I was hungry, so I did. My grandmother's' room, her daughter was crying on her bed, her granddaughter was there. The room was full, I remember, but when these words slipped out of their mouths "you killed her." It was just the three of us. I remember my father telling me do not listen to them. Once you kill someone, you cannot bring them back to life as far as I know. I did not cry. I did get food though. At funerals

people slaughter cows or just a lot of sheep's and goats. I was fed a spoon of some type of meat and it was on the verge of getting cold. The fat of the dead animal was stuck frozen on the top of my mouth. That was the last time I ever had meat. I remember that was the only thing I had for the next three days that anyone would consider to be "real food." I liked to think of my life long meat strike as a funeral for every animal that has ever been slaughtered---except, I eat chicken---a murderer indeed.

Thinking about my grandmother's funeral always upset me, not because I loved her and she loved me. She hated me, and I despised her just as much for loving my siblings and not me. I always wished her dead when she upset me...I fed her what I always thought killed her. When it happened...when my aunts and cousins said I killed her...when I heard that gasp for air...I wished it be I and not her. I wanted to scream out to her but the scar on my throat throbbed as it did when it was a wound and silenced me. Though I was not the only one silenced, everyone in that room with me fell into silence for a split second before the house fell under unified howling, singing---with cries, mourning and chanting, all for her to return from the dead. I was just waiting for those 40 dreadful days to pass so I could turn the TV back on.

* Terry, our landlord, lost her husband. His name was Teddy. He died and we had just heard about it. They were a cute couple, every weekend they would sit outside and if one of us were out, they would tell us something about their seemingly happy relationship. He took care of her she would say...he didn't let her work. He gave her the life she wished for and more. I think a lot about their family to be honest. Her kids were always in and out of her house; they were present and happy to be. They all were married and had children, the perfect family. When he died my dad wanted to go to his funeral and asked her when it would be. She said to him she would tell him once she knows. She never did---weeks later when we saw her, she said that it had passed already.

She said she forgot to tell us and that it was “boring.” Boring---there are many words to describe a funeral...boring never came to my mind. What all their love and time together fake? Did they mean anything they said?---Teddy did always seem much more friendly and welcoming than Terry...is that how she dealt with loss? He was a sweet man.*

Day-to-day we walk on earth with flying knives everywhere. Some hit us deep, some scratch us and some miss. But if a knife flies into your shoulder, there is no easy or painless way to pull it out. When you do get it out and patch up the wound, you are left with a scar that you cover up. Our bodies are filled with these scars that come from flying knives, big or small, that we hide away with costumes. After our costumes are fully formed and attached to us, a magnetic field pulls us to become a part of a city under construction. Day by day this, city gets bigger as new pieces attach themselves to create new buildings. Every one of us is a piece that is made to hold up that city. We are the building blocks that form it, and I struggle to understand who is it that walks in the city we formed with our bodies. Who decides if a piece is not worth keeping?

Put one foot in front of the other and you will find yourself in my grandfather’s room, a room flooded with tragedy. +++ Left in the dark +++

Part 4: The Seasons

Mornings differ depending on the season. In the spring and summer people slept outside either on the ceiling or in their yard. During these two seasons, the women would put away all the sponge beds and blankets and make breakfast while the men got ready to go to work. The men

would be out of the house by 9 o'clock. In my house we would do the same thing except because my grandmother walked with a four-legged cane, we would move her whole bed. She would not sleep on the ground like the rest of us. Every night that bed was moved out and every morning moved back in. After breakfast is served, we clean it up, wash the yard, clean every room. If there is time we go shopping, if not we make lunch. By two o'clock, lunch is ready and men are back at home for lunch. The cycle continues, clean, get the beds out and prepare dinner for everyone. When the end of summer approached the women would start making olives, cheese, pickled vegetables, tomato paste and different types of jam. They would make enough of everything so it would last them for the year---oh how good those things tasted.

In the fall and winter, things were slightly lighter and easier because there is no need to move bed blankets. Things that every house would do is that every two weeks women would take out all the rugs and sheets and hand wash them. That would take over their week. My mother now at the age forty complains about her back pain, and when she does I see her washing the ground of that house everyday room by room. Her broom in one hand and water in the other. I see her making the endless supplies of tomato paste, olives, cheese, three different types of jam, baked goods. I see her working day and night. She stands straight but when I look at her all I see is her seven years into the past, on her hands and knees scrubbing the rug of each room. Was she happy? Is she happy?

+++ Left in the dark +++

Part 5: Happy Things

It was music to my ears to hear the sound of rocks crushing under the wheels of the boiled corn cart as the cart boy made his way down my street. You could hear him from four blocks down

calling out that he's still got corn. He would yell out about how much it cost and how good it was though you could never understand a word he said. I of course as always turned to my grandfather who already had money out for me before I could gather the words to ask for it. It was not always corn. Sometimes it was hard frosting covered chickpeas. Other times it was ice cream, some days it was hard candies and other days it was cotton candy. Whatever it was, my grandfather always pulled out his little silver coin before I could ask for it---oh how I loved it when he got me the chickpeas. From what I have heard about him, he was not a great man. That said, he was the only one who, I felt, gave me love---he made me feel special. However, there are endless tales of him going to women and telling them that he wanted to elope with them the next morning. They believed him.

If I close my eyes I could see it all, taste it all, smell it all---how good it all was. The shining golden containers of pumpkin jam, the screams that were filled with laughter on the streets. Oh---how sweet it all was, I never thought someone could love and hate a place so much.

* “Oh look,” I said. “Someone let up fireworks!” My cousin looked at me and started laughing a bit before she told me that it was a bullet. Not just any bullet, one that goes into the air and falls to kill whatever is under it. I remember that in the next moments I panicked and said we should go home. But none of them were phased by it---they had accepted their reality. How ugly was that reality.*

It was beautiful, it was beautiful in my eyes not because it had anything special about it---it held everything I considered special. The long nights of singing and dancing. Playing pretend although we were way too old for it. Staying up till past midnight and looking at the stars---telling

them stories and sharing secrets. Reminiscing on our younger selves and forming a future we knew we could never have---oh how I miss it...I miss them. The constant teasing and spilling water on each other. Oh how I miss it...all of it.

+++ The End +++

Final Notes

From the start of my project to the very end I read through endless articles and summaries of novels that were both supportive works of diverse groups of people as well as works that were very against them. Reading through all the positive was comforting but at the same time it was not enough compared to the opposing argument. Reading essays by authors I adored like Charlotte Perkins Gilman was heartbreaking. The first time I read her essay *Is America Too Hospitable?* I remember feeling betrayed. I knew her for other works like *The Yellow Wall Paper* but never thought someone I adored resented those that were like me. It rendered me speechless and I could do nothing but accept that Gilman was a racist person whom wanted a white America. Other works really angered me and made me feel disgusted. Alfred Schultz disgusted me because he was so hateful and irrational in all that he said. However, nothing fazed me as much as the more recent articles and released statements of looked up to famous public figures did. From minor figures like Tucker Carlson to our own president Donald Trump, false and hateful things were said that I felt very at lost about. At first, I was angry and did not conceptualize how someone could speak about another human being in such manner. As I got to thinking, I realized that there was more to it, these people who spread out hate and create division have millions of followers who come to believe what they are told.

After much consideration I decided to add another part to my project in which I explain the other said, why they are so hateful, why they support a figure that advocates genocide of innocent human beings like themselves. Listening to people like Carlson, Gilman and Trump while I watch as they are supported and cheered on, made me feel weak. I would watch crowds cheer on hateful

comments and shout that the solution is to “shoot them.” It made me feel unwanted and somewhat misplaced. How could one hate another so much on the bases of birthplace and skin color?

Sometimes as I listened or read certain articles or comments it brought me to tears, not only for myself but for the millions of innocent men, women and children who would live to go through much discrimination just as I did. I decided after a while that I wouldn't let those comments bring me down, I decided to diagnose them, I searched for the reason for their hate. I was not satisfied that all the hate came from hating because of skin and blood. I looked at the roots of the problem and placed the best solution in front. With all the electronics around us we have forgotten to love one another and be human. We have forgotten that those around us are human. The problem is that every once in a while, a man comes along and makes uproar and puts into people's heads that blood is the only solution as a result we lose many great lives. The solution is this: I propose that the next time your child is bored put a book in their hand instead of a phone. Not just any book, a book that teaches them how to be human in all the right ways while at the same time telling them humans make mistakes as long as we learn from them.

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