

Sponsored by The Writing Colleagues Program and the CTL Writing Fellows Program

2015 First Year Writing Prize



Hobart and William Smith Colleges

2015 First Year Writing Prize Finalists

Table of Contents

2015 First Year Writing Prize Finalists	3
2015 First Year Writing Prize Jurors	4
2015 First Year Writing Prize Winners	5
Introduction	6
<i>A Moment Frozen In Time</i> by Joseph Harris	8
<i>Independence and Schizophrenia</i> by Charles Moore-Gillon	14
<i>Striving for High Parisian Society – The Effects of Social Milieu</i> by Julia Sipos	22

Finalist

Matthew Benton
Dan Bristol
Teianna Chenkovich
Rebecca Czajkowski
Eleanor Ginder
Tzipora Glaser
Joseph Harris
Abby Janik
Amelia Johnson
Ryan McManus
Charles Moore-Gillon
Emily O'Brien
Haley Okun
Alexia Sereti
Julia Sipos
Tamsin Smith
Lindsay Wells

Professor

Renee Monson
Tara Curtin
Eric Klaus
Ron Gerrard
Ron Gerrard
Khuram Hussain
Ben Ristow
Christine DeDenus
Steven Lee
James Capreedy
Helen McCabe
Khuram Hussain
Eric Klaus
James Capreedy
Margueritte Murphy
Renee Monson
Kevin Dunn

2015 First Year Writing Prize Jurors

Jurors

Prof. Brien Ashdown
Prof. Walter Bowyer
Prof. Matthew Crow
Prof. Hannah Dickinson
Annabelle Everett, WS '15
Prof. Leslie Hebb
Prof. Susan Hess

Ingrid Keenan

Prof. Peter Mayshle
Prof. Mark Olivieri
Prof. Lisa Patti
Nellie Smith, WS '15

Department

Department of Psychology
Department of Chemistry
Department of History
Department of Writing & Rhetoric
Writing Fellow
Department of Physics
Assistant Director of the First Year Seminar Program
Program Coordinator, Center for Teaching and Learning
Department of Writing and Rhetoric
Department of Music
Department of Media and Society
Writing Fellow

The 2015 First Year Writing Prize Winners

Joseph Harris

"A Moment Frozen in Time"

Nominated by Ben Ristow
FSEM 82 — Artists Making Art: Craft Tradition

Charles Moore-Gillon

"Independence & Schizophrenia"

Nominated by Helen McCabe
FSEM 162 — Personal Narratives on Disability

Julia Sipos

"Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu"

Nominated by Margueritte Murphy
FSEM 173 -- The Experience of Place: Writing the City

Introduction

by
Hannah Dickinson
Director, Writing Colleagues Program
&
Ingrid Keenan
Program Coordinator, Center for Teaching and Learning

Introduction

There's a story about young people, and especially college-age students, circulating widely today. This story depicts a generation of tweeters and texters, who can't write anything longer than 140 characters. Pundits bemoan a future full of lol's, emoticons, and "bad grammar." As people who work with college writers everyday, and as sponsors of the First-Year Writing Prize, we have a much more optimistic take on the future of writing.

A national study comparing the writing of college students today with college writing 25 years ago shows that the length of student writing has increased nearly three-fold in the last 25 years. This study further shows that undergraduates are keenly aware of those to whom they are writing and adjust their writing styles to suit the occasion and the audience. Most importantly, the students in this study wanted their writing to count for something; as they said over and over, good writing to them was the kind of writing that "made something happen in the world."

This year's entries for the First-Year Writing Prize confirm this picture of student writing, for they vary widely in terms of audience, genre, and discipline. Entries included a blog about the impact of the Erie Canal on the historical development of Geneva, a profile of an artist, lyrical analyses of country songs, and a creative piece that builds a fictional character out of course texts. Nominated essays draw on a wide range of disciplinary knowledges including sociology, philosophy, geoscience, education, literary studies, rhetoric, and classical studies. To write well in these genres and disciplines, students had to master new citation styles, new research techniques, new sentence and paragraph structures, and most importantly, identify new audiences and exigencies for their writing.

Indeed, in their cover letters and essays, the first-year writers being honored today acknowledged their commitment to writing that "makes something happen in the world."

Some students took on important social issues through the topics they tackled: charter schools, schizophrenia, the nature of democracy, and improvements to the Geneva school system. Other students described the ways in which writing their essays actually changed their minds about key social issues such as the relationship between science and sport or their position on Teach for America. Still other students used writing to explore their own identities. This was perhaps most powerfully done by Matthew Benton and Tamsin Smith, who both wrote essays in response to Professor Monson's innovative writing assignment: At the beginning of the semester, students were asked to describe a day in their life in 2029. In the last weeks of the semester, students returned to these descriptions and analyzed the particular forms of social organization that their "perfect future" incorporates and ignores. In these essays, students use sociological theory to revise – or re-see—themselves, their worlds, and their futures.

It's comments like these that prove that Google is not, in fact, making us stupid. As nominees for the First-Year Writing Prize, you all already understand that to communicate in the 21st Century you will need to be risk takers, revisers, change makers, and inquisitive thinkers who use writing to see the world and yourselves in new ways.

And you all recognize that this sort of transformative writing cannot be done alone. Each cover letter submitted by a nominated student acknowledged the support he or she received from peers, Writing Colleagues, Writing Fellows, and professors in developing as writers. Indeed, this prize celebrates not only the accomplishments of individual writers, but also the community of writers who support, challenge, and learn from them. It celebrates professors who ask students to write about things that matter; peers who help one another brainstorm, revise, and edit late into the night; and the Writing Fellows and Writing Colleagues, who, through patience, perseverance, and skill, demonstrate the value of collaboration and revision. Together, these constituencies help shape a vibrant, collaborative, intellectually rigorous, and politically engaged culture of writing at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Many writers were involved in the process of discussing and selecting the prize-winning essays. Brien Ashdown, Walter Bowyer, Matt Crow, Annabelle Everett, Leslie Hebb, Susan Hess, Peter Mayshle, Mark Olivieri, Lisa Patti, and Nellie Smith were careful and insightful readers of the nominated essays. Additional thanks go to the Writing and Rhetoric Program, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the First Year Seminar Program, and the Provost's Office for their support of this event and commitment to creating a vibrant culture of writing at HWS. We'd especially like to thank Will Hochman '74 whose commitment to student writing has made this prize possible.

We are equally grateful to the many students who submitted essays for the First Year Writing Prize. It was a pleasure to read such stunning examples of first year writing and learn from the challenging questions, intellectual energy, creativity, and dedication that our students bring to the page. We hope that you will gain as much pleasure as we have from reading the writing of these exceptional first year students.

Hannah Dickinson, Director, Writing Colleagues Program

Ingrid Keenan, Program Coordinator, Center for Teaching and Learning

Fishman, Jenn, Lunsford, Andrea, McGregor, Beth, & Otuteye, Mark. "Performing writing, performing literacy." *College Composition and Communication* 57.2 (2005): 224-252.

A Moment Frozen in Time

Joseph Harris
Nominated by Ben Ristow
FSEM 82 — *Artists Making Art: Craft Tradition*

“A Moment Frozen in Time” by Joseph Harris

Prompt

Artist Narrative

Format: MLA Style, 1-inch margins, double spaced, etc.

Length: about 4-5 pages

Your midsemester portfolio included a personal reflection on the ways that craft relates to your life. The longer narrative you will write for the next section of the course will involve gathering information on the relationship another artist has to their craft and artistic practice.

You may investigate an artist within the arts field you did for your micro-analysis essay on or you may contact one of the professors we have spoken with in class or you may go in search of an artist you have always wanted to investigate. Your task is to find out about the artist’s relationship to craft—how have they defined (or redefined) craft within their art form.

Do they resist definitions of craft? Do they ascribe technical features to craft? Does identity or artistic medium play a role in defining the term for them? Get curious about the questions you might ask and the ways that you might be able to find information out about the artist.

Step One: GATHERING MATERIALS

In order to get the material you need (the artist speaking or writing about their art), you may interview an artist, find an oral history online or in archives, and/or you may find written materials (such as journals, essays, etc.) that help you to better understand the ways craft has shaped the artist’s life. You may even encounter resistance to the term or challenges to questions around “craft.” In these cases, you may need to modify your questions or goals.

Step Two: SIFTING THROUGH MATERIALS / DRAFTING

After gathering info, you will need to begin drafting and offering some context to the reader about who the artist is, where they work, how they work, etc. In this step, you will likely need to narrow down your focus and begin to isolate the ways that artist defines or practices craft.

Step Three: DRAWING OUT THE THREADS

What threads or commonalities do you find in your materials and information about the artist? What fits together and how has the artist evolved or changed over time? Artists are often adept at changing forms and mediums or moving across arts fields. How do you see the artist’s development as taking shape over time? Why did their craft change or stay the same?

Step Four: SYNTHESIZING ARTIST AND THEIR CRAFT

Perhaps your most difficult task is to make conclusions about an artist’s craft, but you should in the end be able to situate the artist’s narrative with their vision or beliefs around craft.

Cover Letter

My narrative, “A Moment Frozen in Time,” was the culmination of my First Year Seminar research into the definition of craft and investigation into artist Terri Moore, my former high-school art teacher. In my seminar class, we focused on the idea of craft and craftsmanship, multifaceted terms that have elusive definitions at times. We were given the ambitious assignment of analyzing how an artist defines and relates to craft through the form of a narrative, and it proved to be more difficult than I expected. Challenges arose in gathering the necessary information, interpreting the information, and structuring Moore’s story in a way that was cohesive and comprehensible. I worked on many versions over roughly a month and a half until I felt that “A Moment Frozen in Time” was finalized.

The first challenging step of crafting this essay was collecting the necessary information.

“A Moment Frozen in Time” by Joseph Harris

As a former student and fan of Terri Moore, I was already familiar with her work, and I was excited to reconnect with someone who had and continues to inspire me as an artist. With this interview opportunity, I was able to engage with her from a new perspective and listen differently to her conversations about craft. I began my interview with Moore by giving her a brief overview of the assignment and my understanding of craft. Initially, she was hesitant to relate her work to craft but as she began to explain her process of working and her thoughts on craft, she delved deeper into her own perceptions and definitions. Moore reflected on her childhood and learning from her architect father. Like most inspiring conversations, our dialogue was organic, following many paths as new concepts and questions arose. After speaking with Moore for about an hour and a half, I had pages of notes and countless ideas but I felt that maybe I had not gotten the concrete information I initially sought and needed. Uncertain, I questioned what the essay needed to include. What was I supposed to convey about her childhood? Should I include her teaching ethos? How did this all relate to craft, a definition for which even I was personally struggling.

The more I reviewed my notes, the clearer her story arch became to me—how they related, fell back on each other, departed. And I gained a sense of how “craft” played a role in each area and how Moore herself was relating those experiences to her work. Early on, Moore had given me a generic definition of craft centered around the dichotomy between handmade and mass produced items. But she hadn’t specified it to her own art. And I knew that the concept still felt too broad to be meaningful. I took the time to reread, step away, return to, and sort out her stories of her father, origins of the Swarm series, her creative process, and her teaching ideology. With each revision of my essay, I better understood my own perception of her connections to craft and felt more confident in how the narration built to codify a strong craft definition.

Maintaining the integrity of a narrative while providing clear analysis proved to be my most difficult task. During the drafting process, I paid close attention to the structure and organization of the essay. The main goal of this assignment was to tell Moore’s story and how it relates to craft. The difficulty was synthesizing the stories she told me and deciding what to include and exclude from the narrative. I decided to begin the essay by retelling the origins of her Swarm series. I knew it would be a more dynamic way to introduce Moore because her definition of craft is embedded in the almost fantasized and fantastical experience of her encounter with the birds. By retelling her story of the intense visual experience with the birds and storm, I use “Origins of the Swarm Series” as a spring board to highlight her process and trace its roots from her own father’s process. I knew it was important to include how her father’s early influence manifests in her work and her own teaching. Over the course of writing “A Moment Frozen in Time,” I experimented with the organization of the essay and its relation to Moore’s personal timeline, finally determining that this submitted version best conveys my intention.

Writing and finalizing an essay presents myriad challenges for any author, and there were many others I could highlight. However, I have tried to convey three distinct moments of doubt for me. What I learned from this process (and continue to re-learn and be reminded of) is that writing is a process of multiple drafts that continually raise questions. I must remember to be mindful of the overarching narrative, clear in my intent, and comfortable with stepping back and questioning the results.

I am honored and humbled to be nominated for this award. I would like to thank my FSEM professor and the committee for taking the time to review my work and consider me for this award.

Essay

Context:

I met artist Terri Moore as a student in her Foundation Design course as a high schooler at the Hotchkiss School. Moore is a passionate visual and performance artist and professor who lives and sometimes quite literally breathes her art (Moore is a fire breather). With this assignment, I was

“A Moment Frozen in Time” by Joseph Harris

excited to reconnect with my past teacher because it gave me an opportunity to experience her in a different light, to learn more about her process of working and her identity as an artist. Moore began our interview with the tale of how she began her Swarm series, which explores gestural movement. The following is my retelling of Moore’s personal journey of creation, the development and honing of her craft and ethos as an artist, her early childhood influences, and her teaching ideology. I also quote Moore to connect my analysis to her craft.

Origin of Swarm Series:

On a warm summer day, Terri Moore ventured into the Housatonic Valley for a bike ride. Soaking in the rays of the sun and enjoying a light summer breeze, Terri Moore was fully present in the moment, pedaling along on her antique bike. As she continued on the rail trail observing the trees around her and the magnificent greenery of nature, the weather began to change. The trip had been picture perfect until the blue sky was transformed by the large, dark billows of clouds that swiftly moved across the sky. A storm beckoned, and Moore grew concerned about her safety and decided to return home, wheels turning faster and faster as she attempted to distance herself from the storm.

Eventually the tempest caught up with Moore, and a deluge of water descended upon her. Laughing and drenched, she continued vigorously pedaling home. As Moore zipped along the trail, she hit a puddle, and the succeeding moments inspired her for years. In two trees alongside the trail, countless birds had taken refuge. Moore hit the puddle at such a fast pace that the water splashed up and around her, which stopped her dead in her tracks, time seemed to slow around Moore as she watched water spray upwards, black birds flying up and around her, forming a sphere in the air, splitting their mass, and settling back into the trees. Inspired by the visual experience combined with the environmental experience, Moore was compelled to capture emotive feeling of that experience in a drawing.

Process, Material, and Craft: The Creation of the Swarm Series

Moore was initially hesitant to relate her work to craft. Due to the changing definition of craft and its perceived loss of sophistication, many artists have shied away from craft. People once associated craft with child’s play, something not deserving of their time. Today, craft is becoming more desirable because of its level of elegance and value. When objects are made from hand rather than mass produced, there is inherently a higher value associated with the handmade object. Craft is centered more around the process and elegance of the work. In this way, Moore asserts her craft is about process and having ideas that can evolve. Moore’s experience with the birds and the recreation of that experience through paintings and sculptures showcases her supreme understanding of manipulation of different mediums to create her desired piece.

Moore connected the experience with the birds to concepts and ideas that she had already been studying: the idea of motion, awareness of gestural movement, and ultimately how everything in the world is moving. Building on her existing body of knowledge and examining the swarming properties of birds, Moore created abstract oil paintings of the birds in motion. She intended that viewers of the Swarm series would not necessarily identify individual birds but instead perceive the movement and mass of swarms of birds. The Swarm series then evolved into a sculptural project. Molding squares of hand-sewn silk with black encaustic wax, Moore used her hands to manipulate the shape of the fabric into the wings and bodies of about five hundred bird sculptures.

Drawing on her personal experience of that rainy instant on the trail, Moore captures “the frozen moment in time that the viewer can tangibly experience as an interpretation” (Moore, interview). She experimented with many methods of shaping the sculptures to best recreate the birds swarming above her. This is how Moore relates craft to her work; she believes that by knowing how the medium responds to different physical manipulations the artist learns how to control the medium to achieve the desired effect. This process of discovery teaches the artist more about their

“A Moment Frozen in Time” by Joseph Harris

chosen medium. By responding to the material’s inherent traits, strengths, and limitations, the artist enters into a partnership with the material.

Moore believes craft involves a relationship between the artist and medium. “When you have the freedom and grace of playing back and forth with the material and manipulating is when you get the emotive effect that moves people” (Moore, interview). Moore recognizes the necessity of learning the medium in depth as a requisite step in developing craft, an understanding deeply rooted in the experiences of her early childhood.

Early Influence:

In her formative years, Moore’s father, an architect, taught her how to see and to connect her hands to her eyes and influenced the way she defines craft. Moore’s father taught her that the relationship of the hand and eye gives the artist ultimate control over the composition. Moore learned that she must continuously work to avoid her hands and eyes becoming unfamiliar with one another. The relationship between the hand and eye is central to how Moore defines craft: only once the two are inextricably linked can an artist enter the realm of craftsmanship and control the medium.

Ms. Moore’s father’s craft centered on the idea of fine design and line quality. As one of the few architects who still uses his hand instead of computers to create architectural plans, he stressed the importance of line quality and the process to achieve high quality. You have to use a straight edge ruler, there’s a certain way to make the line, and you always use an eraser guard. The process highlighted control and discipline to Moore. Through the reception and discipline of the process, Moore gained the first foundational experiences and knowledge on which she built. Moore finds herself coming full circle with this process of achieving high line-quality in her other projects. Moore believes that artists will orbit away from a process or an issue, but eventually it reenters their life and that is when one must grab onto it and evolve one’s understanding.

“If you attempted to draw a perfect circle without enough experience the task will be extremely difficult. If you make several lines repeatedly then you can create an almost perfect circle. But if you’ve practiced and experienced enough with making those circles you can come to a piece of paper and almost draw a perfect circle” (Moore, interview).

What an artist learns never truly goes away but reappears in different ways that require them to apply their new knowledge to their past experience. Your view of the idea is different because you have gained experience from all the time that has passed and now you are able to comprehend it in a different way. The idea or process has more history. When an idea reappears Moore is able to use her new understanding to engage with and refine the idea. As a teacher, Professor Moore stresses the importance of this same refinement and engagement to her own students.

Teaching Art:

As an art teacher, Moore stresses the importance of slowing down. Moore believes that people tend to immediately move on if they do not receive the information they need quickly. The process of sitting down and digesting has been left behind in our fast-paced society. Moore believes that “it is very seductive to keep moving but it is dangerous. If you don’t stop to engage in your process and understand and learn the language and to practice it, you cannot refine it” (Moore, interview). Moore believes that craft is about refinement. Whether you’re crafting your paper or crafting a speech, people correlate attributes of value, dedication, and refinement. As a noun, craft is not valuable to an artist. But when you are crafting something it is of value. Refinement happens through the process of practicing and closely examining one’s work, which is something Moore learned from her father. Slowing down and digesting allows for Moore’s students and even herself to engage more closely with their work. The heightened level of engagement leads the student to truly understand the discipline.

Terri Moore teaches art courses ranging from introductory to advanced levels at the Hotch-

“A Moment Frozen in Time” by Joseph Harris

kiss School. At the introductory level, Professor Moore teaches her students the rules of composition, color theory, how to connect their eye and hand, and how to interact with the medium. Understanding these basic tenets offers her students the ability to evolve into a place of their own. “It’s like learning a language. You cannot play with the language or voice until you know and understand the language” (Moore, interview). Moore gives her students the foundation they need to manipulate different mediums, create their own art, and refine it.

Sometimes artists will encounter moments of struggles, and Moore believes that artists must learn from those moments. Crafting requires artists to look at their work critically and be willing to continue to do the work. Learning from unsuccessful work is a part of crafting. Moore believes that when something is not working our tendency to abandon or move away from it is not always the best option. The failure that you experience enhances your understanding of the medium. The knowledge gained from failure is just as important as positive experiences because it strengthens your ability to have ultimate control over your medium. Understanding what a medium lends itself to gives students the control to create their desired piece. When we encounter the idea again with new set of experiences, artists have a better understanding of the process. In order to better understand this concept, students must be engaged with the process at all stages, including the “unsuccessful” stage—which is why Moore pushes her students to be present and conscious about their work.

How Craft Influences Life:

Moore believes that the artist must be conscious and present in the world. Doing so means that the artist is experiencing the world and evolving as a person. Specifically in the Swarm series, Moore captures the tangible experience of the birds moving above and around her. On her bike ride in the rain she was present. Most people would have been frightened by the birds or so focused on getting home they would have missed the opportunity to add the experience to their visual library. Moore has coached herself to be present in the moment because it is essential for the relation to and understanding of her work. Being present gives her the ability to recreate and give form to the feelings she experiences in the world. As a teacher telling her students to slow down, Moore is encouraging their consciousness and presence. Her definition of craft is not only influencing her life but the lives of her students also.

Conclusion:

Terri Moore believes that gaining a foundation of knowledge for a medium comes before an artist is able to starting crafting. “You have to understand how to walk, and then you can run” (Moore, interview). Once you understand how to manipulate your medium, the artist can then start crafting their art. Before you can do that, you must constantly work toward refinement. Moore started this process with her father. She learned the importance of attaining a body of knowledge to create quality work; she honed her sense of the relationship between her hand and eye. Moore approached her work critically, pushing concepts and perceptions to so that she would evolve as an artist. Through this evolution, she developed a firm understanding of her medium, giving her an intimate understanding of how to best manipulate the medium to convey the emotions she experiences. Moore’s persisted in consciously seeing the world and being in the moment, allowing her to craft pieces that capture her feelings and to bring viewers into those experiences.

Works Cited

Moore, Terri. Phone Interview. October 21st, 2014.

Independence & Schizophrenia

Charles Moore-Gillon
Nominated by Helen McCabe
FSEM 162 — Personal Narratives on Disability

“Independence & Schizophrenia” by Charles Moore-Gillon

Prompt

Each student will write 4 short papers throughout the semester...Paper 1 (this paper) will be a 1200-1500 word research paper that uses library research (of articles and perhaps books) to address and answer a research question related to disability (*see below). For this paper (#1), students must turn in a partial list of sources in advance of the paper deadline. (12% of final grade)

Topic: Independence and Support

Although every person is an individual with different needs and preferences, we know from our reading so far that it is important for individuals with disabilities to be able to live “independently”. What this looks like might differ from person to person, in part depending on the level of support that is needed.

Using 5 or more academic sources (research articles or books), research this issue. In particular, consider these research questions:

*What challenges do people with disabilities face, and what factors influence the independence of adults with disabilities? (in your paper, be sure to refer to specific research studies that talk about specific people or types of disabilities. In other words, the answers to this question will vary depending on disability type, age, etc).

*What kinds of support are needed, and desired, by persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible?

Further guidelines:

**You must begin with a broad introductory paragraph that introduces your paper and the arguments or points that you will be making regarding independence, challenges and disability.

**This introduction will be followed by distinct paragraphs that make distinct points about challenges, support, independence, etc.

**Also be sure to end your paper with a concluding paragraph.

**The following library databases should be used to get appropriate academic sources (articles or books): ERIC; Proquest; Academic Search Premier; Education full-text (Wilson Web). If an article looks useful but you cannot get a full text version, use the Inter-library loan service (on the HWS library page) to request it. On Monday Sept. 22 you will have class in the library and the librarian will teach you how to use these also.

**Do not use “I” in this paper. Rather, you can use statements like, “This is an important topic because...” and “This topic is investigated in order to demonstrate that...” (Do not use “I think”, “I believe”, or anything starting with “I”)

**Use APA style of referencing. See syllabus for what this looks like for the reference/bibliography page. Within the text, for example:

Within the text, this means that you use author and date for information that is summarized (Smith, 2000), and author, date, and quotes “when you are taking the language directly from the article” (Smith, 2000, p. 6).

Cover Letter

I am honored to have been nominated for this prestigious award. It is my hope this essay embodies and captures the essence of everything this award stands for. As I was going through last year’s booklet of winners, I was enthralled by the cohesion and fluidity of the words each writer had strewn together. The words flowed eloquently and transcended the expectations normally placed upon a first year writer. Unfortunately, this essay wasn’t made to sound like a piece of writing Tho-

“Independence & Schizophrenia” by Charles Moore-Gillon

reau wrote whilst ‘living in the woods’ (Air quotes because he’s no Alexander Supertramp a.k.a Chris McCandles). Instead, it was made to underline and bring to light the problems those with not only schizophrenia face, but also anyone with mental illness faces on a daily basis.

Writing the essay was easy; in fact, it took two nights to write it. I’d say somewhere between 3-4 hours. I’ll give you a second to scoff at that fact, but hold tight because I promise it gets better. Yes, I wrote this essay in 3-4 hours; however, I researched this paper for weeks on end. I spent around 10 hours executing the research, which is why I have around 15 sources (which are in APA format). I worked on an outline for the essay, and immediately knew it would rely on a vast amount of concrete evidence. Once the right amount of research was ascertained, I was sure the essay would write itself (not actually, although that would be nice). The essay was separated into two parts. I was originally supposed to write an essay pertaining to the issue of independence and schizophrenia, and subsequently in the next essay discuss ways in which those problems could be alleviated. The consolidation of the two questions is what led to this essay. Working on the outline with Professor McCabe made a world of difference, and I have her to thank for that.

When I received an email informing me of my nomination for this award, I was taken aback to say the least. I had put a lot of work into it, but never realized its full potential. Without hesitation, I went to a Writing Colleague and then a Writing Fellow to have them read my essay. I tend to think of myself as an adequate writer; however, meeting with these incredibly talented individuals made me realize how much there is to learn. I was expecting to go into the meetings with my essay and then come out of these meetings with my essay intact and unchanged. I remember my meeting with the writing fellow, who pointed out three grammatical mistakes and one contextual mistake within the first page. After we finished, my essay retained the content and flow that made it my own essay. However, it was wildly different in terms of how it was constructed. It was after these meetings that I realized I am not that great of a writer; rather, I am stubborn and unaccepting of ideas that are not my own. I was lucky to get this far and to even be nominated; however, through the help of my peers, I believe this essay to be as strong as it can be.

Despite my somewhat nonchalant approach earlier in this cover letter, let me assuage any doubts about my writing and the essay you are about to read. I wrote this essay with the utmost sincerity, and intend to do nothing more than emphasize the large array of problems that are associated with schizophrenia and independence. The manner in which this cover letter was written is entirely different to how the paper will flow. The amalgamation of hard work, an interesting topic, and copious amounts of Red Bull is what helped shape this paper. I may have started this cover letter in a happy-go-lucky manner, but I wish to end it on a much more serious note.

Schizophrenia is an extremely debilitating illness, and those who fight it are unsung heroes in our society. Friedrich Nietzsche once said, “In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.” With this, Nietzsche perfectly exposes the hypocrisy towards mental illness within our society. This essay outlines the problems that people with schizophrenia face, but more importantly brings light to an issue that we, as a society, have ignored for too long.

Enclosed, you will find my essay and it is my hope that it will open your eyes to a problem that for too long has been neglected. I’d like to thank Professor McCabe for nominating me for this award, her guidance on this topic was humbling to say the least. Last of all, I’d like to thank you for considering this essay and allowing me to be placed amongst some of the best writers HWS has to offer. Again thank you very much.

Essay

Independence is freedom and freedom is the power to determine one’s own path without restraint. It is a quintessential part of being human and a basic right almost everyone is afforded. However, people with disabilities, both intellectual and physical, are sometimes barred from living independent lives. For example, people with severe intellectual disabilities often live with a care-

“Independence & Schizophrenia” by Charles Moore-Gillon

taker or parent. People living with schizophrenia, a very severe psychiatric illness, are often judged and carry a very negative notion compared to those with other illnesses. They are often cast into a shadow, hidden from the watchful eyes of society. Furthermore, they are made out to be crazy or mentally unstable, a role that seems to be driven by popular media. Too often, people with schizophrenia are not supported in ways that allow them to live independently or face challenges in a more direct manner. Countless academic journals have touched upon the lives of those with this devastating illness, particularly how people who have schizophrenia interact with the outside world and how they live. They face a wide array of challenges in our society, some of which may stem from our negative predisposition towards them. Jepsen-Mortensen et al. (2013), note that patients with schizophrenia typically experience deficiencies in attention, intelligence, memory, and overall functioning. The consolidation of these challenges is what people with schizophrenia face every day; however, these four problems listed above act as a veil, merely covering up the intricacies that each ‘deficiency’ imparts on the person. To help alleviate the challenges that people with schizophrenia face, stigmatization must be reduced by raising awareness about schizophrenia, whilst also addressing the illness in adolescence through Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

Schizophrenia is a disease in which the inner working of the brain has a slight deviation compared to a normal brain. These slight deviations cause people with schizophrenia to see, and in some cases hear, things differently than those who do not have it (Kendi, 2008). Multiple studies observe “that depressive symptoms are associated with both insight and negative appraisals of illness” (Thomas, Ribaux, and Phillips, 2014, pg. 143). In people who have not entered adulthood, symptoms include delusions, delusional ideas, hallucinations, perceptual abnormalities, and disorganized speech. These become quite ubiquitous, especially with people whose severity of the illness is higher (Pagsberg, 2013). Miyamoto, Jarskog and Fleischhacker (2014) found that twenty to thirty three percent “of patients with schizophrenia experience persistent psychotic symptoms” (pg. 1). These symptoms cause people with schizophrenia to lead irregular lives, meaning that they are consistently faced with countless challenges. Simple tasks such as maintaining a friendship are often seen as too difficult yet they deem independence as too much to handle.

More often than not, people with schizophrenia are not able to sustain friendships, or any sort of relationship for that matter, unless it is with their parents or people who have been there throughout their lives. Studies have shown that “Moving out of the parental home, starting an independent life, and getting married” (Jungbauer, Stelling, Deitrich, & Angermeyer, 2004, pg. 607), are all halted by the presence of schizophrenia. Jungbauer et al. found that some participants of their study “had never lived on their own” and that “Seven participants reported that their child refused to move out of the family home despite their parents wishes” (pg. 607). It was also found that the parents felt that their children could not go out “because they feared prejudice and a lack of understanding” (Jungbauer et al, pg. 608). This unwillingness to move is influenced by a skewed perception that society holds against people with schizophrenia. In many cases, people with schizophrenia adopt the stigma attached to their illness, and let those stereotypes influence how “they shape his/her own identity” (Saldivia-King et., al. pg. 270). In the study done by Saldivia-King et., al (2014), they find that there is a direct correlation between stigma and recovery. They find that the stigma associated with the illness complicates recovery, and that it “has a particularly severe impact on patients quality of life” (pg. 270). It is important to understand that these challenges faced by those with schizophrenia can be lessened if people change their viewpoints into a more positive perception. In turn, the severely crippled self worth of those with schizophrenia will then slowly evolve into more positive self-image.

This positive self image mentioned above is what leads to a diminished stigma that is felt by the person with schizophrenia (Yiwei, Watanabe, Yoshii, & Akazawa., 2014). In conjunction with creating a positive self-image, raising awareness is another vital step on the path towards acceptance. This is supported by the work of Razali and Ismail (2014), in which they found that awareness and contact with those who have schizophrenia “promotes familiarity with mental illness”

“Independence & Schizophrenia” by Charles Moore-Gillon

(pg. 1). This familiarity, in turn, breeds acceptance which “attributes to improvement” (pg. 1) for those with schizophrenia. Therefore, living more independently and dealing with social challenges can be changed by altering the societal predisposition towards schizophrenia, which allows those with it to alter their self-image into a more positive one.

In addition to reducing the stigma attached to people with schizophrenia, intervention in youth with schizophrenia has proven to be valuable in regards to developing independence in later years. This type of intervention also reduces the challenges people with schizophrenia face in the long term. There is emerging evidence that early intervention in the formative years of a psychotic illness can prove to be potentially crucial at inhibiting symptoms typically seen in the later years of the illness (Morse & Proctor, 2011). Tanaka-Hashimoto et al. (2014) note that early intervention “is feasible and improves functional independence in patients with acute schizophrenia” (pg. 741). Morse and Proctor (2011) state that if the intervention does not take place, functionality and symptoms affiliated with schizophrenia will worsen over time and become more damaging to the person. Therefore, by changing certain aspects of how adolescents with schizophrenia are treated, such as providing the appropriate “psychological, psychosocial and pharmacologic treatments” (Morse and Proctor, 2011, pg. 2703) and using early intervention techniques such as CBT, diminish the possibility of future symptoms in schizophrenic patients (Morse & Proctor, 2011). Subsequently, independence becomes more attainable and the challenges that are typically seen later in life with people who have schizophrenia are greatly reduced.

In the early intervention of adolescents, it is important that there is a specific “focus on aspects that are relevant to the age-related circumstances” (Birchwood, Todd, and Jackson, 1998). Age related circumstances refer to the type of treatment that the child receives, most commonly CBT. CBTs train people to accept, and then subsequently deal, with troublesome thoughts that may occur, whilst also preventing them from forming negative perspectives about themselves (Worsfold, 2009). CBTs for youth utilize “non verbal approaches” (Tanaka-Hashimoto et al., 2014, pg. 742), in which the patients typically dictate what is done in the session, therefore reducing the amount that the therapist talks. As mentioned above, people with schizophrenia have a negative self worth based on how they think people see them; however, this viewpoint can be altered by non-verbal CBT. As well as dictating what happens in the session, the patient meditates and talks to the therapist, who then helps create a “detached perspective on problematic thinking” (Worsfold, 2009, pg. 222). This approach, over time, helps lessen the stigma they feel is directed towards them. Roe-Yanos et. al (2014) note that the effectiveness of CBT hinges on patients learning to transform their stories of hardship into stories of success. For example, if someone in CBT constantly discusses their inability to deal with the problems associated with schizophrenia, the therapist simply transforms the way in which they think about their impairments (Roe-Yanos et al., 2014). Instead of seeing the impairments as a constant struggle, they are told to see a story of personal achievement. They are encouraged to “emphasize personal strength” (Roe-Yanos et al., 2014, pg. 304) and see every day as a great personal achievement, rather than viewing their day-to-day problems as a struggle. In her study on non-verbal approaches in CBT, Worsfold (2009) notes that sensory and bodily cognizance through CBT helps facilitate the crucial change in emotional difficulties often faced by those with mental illness. As well as focusing on how they are feeling, the patients are taught “skills such as distress tolerance” (pg. 221). Along with distress tolerance, there is an emphasis that patients should accept uncomfortable “thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations” (pg. 221). Finally, to combat, and eventually alleviate, the aforementioned feelings those with schizophrenia suffer from, “the use of imagery, metaphor and poetry” (221) can be used. By using CBTs, those with schizophrenia can allay their symptoms to a degree in which independence is manageable and the challenges that they face can be approached with the techniques they have been taught.

People with schizophrenia are constantly reminded of the many challenges and debilitating problems they are faced with on a daily basis. The belief that schizophrenia is caused by

“Independence & Schizophrenia” by Charles Moore-Gillon

environmental stressors is wrong; rather, it is exacerbated by negative environmental influences. There are many of these “negative environmental influences”; however, they are all superseded by the stigma associated with schizophrenia. In a study on stigma done by Pattyn, Verhaeghe, Ser-cu, and Bracke (2013), it was found that many people see “mental illness as a life crisis, caused by environmental stressors” (pg. 1638). This misinterpreted perception is what leads to unnecessary labeling and stigmatization of others. If we continue to label schizophrenia as merely a problem in which no one can be bothered to do anything about, then nothing will be done to help those suffering from it. If we simply raise awareness about schizophrenia, then over time the negative perception of it will change. This idea is brought up earlier by Razali and Ismail (2014), in which they state that awareness of mental illness creates familiarity with it, which in turn brings about a positive improvement in psyche for those with schizophrenia. One way this awareness can be increased is by giving schools the necessary information needed to educate students on schizophrenia. This curriculum would go beyond basic facts. The aim would be to show students that those with schizophrenia are not what society makes them out to be. The term schizophrenic would no longer elicit thoughts of people being restrained on a gurney (Pattyn et al., 2004). Instead, it would provoke the thought of an uphill battle being fought by a determined individual, whose courage and bravery often goes unnoticed. By incorporating this into something such as a school health curriculum, students would be given the opportunity to grow up with a much less stigmatized view of schizophrenia.

Another idea related to raising awareness would be utilizing social media. Videos on social media, when done right, are spread like wildfire until everyone has seen them. Creating a short video that expunges negative ideas associated with schizophrenia would be a great start to raising a positive perception of the illness. The video could help raise awareness through presenting schizophrenia not as an illness, but instead as an every day struggle with challenges that not many of us would not be able to deal with. Presenting it in this manner would help dispel any negative connotations we would normally perceive as being associated with schizophrenia. These are just two ways in which we can harness the power of social media and raise awareness in order to help eliminate the stigma held against people with schizophrenia.

As previously mentioned, when used as an early intervention method for adolescents with schizophrenia, CBT has proven to be crucial in lessening the challenges those with schizophrenia face later in life. I would propose that we make CBT readily available to those who need it, therefore eliminating the cost normally associated with it. This can be done by asking the government to allocate funds directed towards the improvement of mental health in America. It seems as if many resources are currently put towards keeping those with mental illness off the street and putting them in homes that cost taxpayers a ton of money. By applying CBT to youth with schizophrenia and similar illnesses, we can eliminate the future cost of putting people in homes by simply stopping the progression of their symptoms during their youth.

Independence and the challenges people with schizophrenia face need to be tackled by eradicating the labels associated with schizophrenia, whilst also starting treatment for it at a young age. Better implementation of CBTs for youth in America along with increased awareness of schizophrenia are ideas that need to be incorporated in order to oust the negative bias we have towards those with schizophrenia. Through these actions, the well being of those with schizophrenia will take a turn for the better. The stigma attached to their illness will dissipate over time, and in turn their self-worth will greatly increase. Living independently will no longer be seen as unobtainable, especially for those who are given CBT as early as possible. If properly orchestrated, the amalgamation of these ideas will present those with schizophrenia a chance to have a better quality of life, allow them to face challenges head on, and attain independence that for so long has seemed out of sight.

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Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu

Julia Sipos

*Nominated by Margueritte Murphy
FSEM 173 — The Experience of Place: Writing the City*

“Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu”

by Julia Sipos

Prompt

The Experience of Place: Writing the City

Reading “place” and character in Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*

Erich Auerbach, in the section from *Mimesis* that we read, emphasizes the importance of historical and social setting in Balzac’s works: Balzac “not only, like Stendhal, places the human beings whose destiny he is seriously relating, in their precisely defined historical and social setting, but also conceives this connection as a necessary one: to him every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men, and at the same time the general historical situation reappears as a total atmosphere which envelops all its several milieux” (284).

Find descriptions of and/or references to Paris – neighborhoods, streets, residences, or Paris as a whole (other than the long description of Madame Vauquer’s dining room that Auerbach analyzes) – and discuss (1) how Paris is portrayed literally and symbolically in the description(s), (2) who is portraying Paris – is this description from the point of view of a particular character, or the omniscient narrator? (3) the connection between a main character and the setting described. In what ways is this character affected by this place? Can he or she escape the effects of milieu? Why or why not? If the description originates from the point of view of another character, discuss what it tells us about that individual as well. Finally, do you agree with Auerbach that milieu is the dominant determinant of character in *Le Père Goriot*, or are other forces (such as other characters, events, upbringing) equally important? Why or why not? Support with evidence from the text.

Be sure that your paper includes a close reading of the descriptive passage(s) – i.e., you note and comment on significant detail and its meaning. Once you have decided on an argument, articulate it in a thesis statement in your introduction, and use it to frame the objective of each paragraph. In a way, you are positioning your argument vis-à-vis that of Auerbach: (1) applying his analysis to another description, and developing the thesis of a necessary connection to character and character development; (2) analyzing another description, and disputing his statement because you do not find a “necessary” relationship between character and milieu; or (3) analyzing a description, and agreeing with Auerbach in part about the connection between character and milieu, but with some reservations. (You do not need to consult outside sources for this paper, other than the excerpt by Auerbach that appears in our text.)

Length: 3-4 pages, double-spaced

Cover Letter

My essay “Striving for High Parisian Society – The Effects of Social Milieu” was assigned last semester after my First Year seminar class read the French novel, *Le Père Goriot*. The novel tells a story of a young student, Eugene de Rastignac, who lives in a run-down pension house in nineteenth century Paris with various other tenants that each have their own individual experiences and stories. My paper, a text analysis essay, highlights the impact of two particular social milieux, specifically the dilapidated bedroom of Père Goriot and elegant dining room that belongs to the wealthy Madame Beausant, and how each played a major role in affecting the lives and perspectives of two characters, Rastignac and Goriot throughout the novel.

When I first approached this essay prompt, I spent much of my thinking and pre-writing process by intensely and elaborately outlining my paper. After deciding what I was going to write about, I devised a very specific, yet straightforward thesis to provide the main argument of my paper. I divided up different parts of the essay prompt into different paragraphs, assigning each paragraph a specific argument that would contribute to the over-arching thesis. I structured each

“Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu”

by Julia Sipos

paragraph, focusing on ensuring every part of the essay prompt was answered in each one, while still providing a cohesive essay overall. Once I had a clear-cut image in my head of what exactly my essay was going to say and how it would say it, I actually started writing. With my extensive outline by my side during the writing process, I ensured that my paper stayed on topic and focused while still incorporating detailed and in-depth analysis.

While revising my essay, I realized and was forced to come to terms with the fact that my intensive organizational approach became almost too present in my writing, which, as a result, was a challenge that I had to overcome. After working with a Writing Fellow, a fresh pair of eyes to look at my paper, she told me that one of my paragraphs was essentially repeating the same ideas that I had brought up in the previous paragraphs. This paragraph said nothing new and integrated no new level or perspective of analysis or explanation. I tried to think back to my outlining system, wondering how this paragraph became a replica of other paragraphs combined together.

My rigid outline became too rigid. Because I so intensely designated each idea to a specific paragraph and heavily structured my essay, I realized that I limited my ability to think creatively and innovatively. While my outline neatly structured my paper, it became something that I relied so heavily upon, that while I was analyzing pieces of the text, I almost forgot what I was analyzing and merely looked at my outline for answers.

During my revision process, I realized the importance of sometimes stepping away from your typical routine of writing, and trying something new. I realized that this paragraph was not working, thanks to the Writing Fellow who offered an objective and insightful outlook on my work. I attacked my revisions by focusing on integrating my analysis not with robotic ideas that I produced from my outline, but with innovative explanations that drew from my previous arguments in the essay. I focused on trying to find a new voice of analysis that still connected to the thesis, while also not repeating similar ideas. Although this was a challenge, it helped me better understand the need to diverge from a set regimen when something isn't working and the importance of being innovative as a writer.

I never thought it was possible to have an essay that is too structured, but I realized that the revision process is very enlightening and eye opening in showing you things that you did not notice before. While eliminating the repetitive ideas in my essay, I struggled to find a new voice without losing the cohesion and central idea of each paragraph, but in the end, my efforts in trying to overcome this obstacle allowed me to discover the strengths and weaknesses of my writing process, made me more aware of some of the challenges I face while writing, and ultimately showed me how I can overcome them as a writer going forward.

I am honored for the nomination, and I am very thankful for the consideration. I hope the committee enjoys reading my work.

Essay

In his criticism of *Le Pere Goriot*, Eric Auerbach argues that Balzac uses descriptions of different milieus in order to shape the lives of different characters throughout the novel. While other factors, including events, other characters, and upbringing can contribute to the development of a novel's character, I agree with Auerbach that the dominant force in determining character in Balzac's work is social milieu. As Auerbach describes, "to Balzac every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, the furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men..." (284). Two specific milieus in Balzac's novel, the dining room of Madame de Beauséant and Pere Goriot's bedroom, show that Eugene de Rastignac and Goriot are "impregnated" by their respective social environments. While Beauséant's elaborate dining room tempts Rastignac to strive for a life in higher Parisian society,

“Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu”

by Julia Sipos

Goriot's run-down bedroom is a representation of his broken heart as he desperately seeks love from his unwilling daughters. Although milieu has different effects on Goriot and Rastignac, it nevertheless plays a prominent role in developing their characters throughout the novel.

Dissatisfied with his life in the pension, Rastignac is immediately enthralled by Beauséant's elaborate dining room, a milieu that portrays the life of Paris's rich elite and consequently intrigues Rastignac and inspires him to find a way to join the upper class. The omniscient narrator describes the dining room as an elaborately arranged setting with "ornate silver," "delights," and "all the thousand elegances of a sumptuously set table" (95). The image of a room filled with beautiful, expensive, and high-quality decorations literally portrays Paris as a source of fanciness and luxury. Although the omniscient narrator does not provide an in-depth description of the room's physical appearance, he or she does provide insight into Rastignac's character, as "no such spectacle had ever struck Eugene's eyes" (95). For the first time, Rastignac experiences food being cooked without any noise and feels a strong sense of pride because the high-class dining room belongs to his very own cousin, not merely any other rich woman in Paris. Gratified and amazed, Rastignac is enticed by the luxurious milieu, which feeds his hunger and desire to live the elegant life that he desperately awaits.

Milieu not only increases Rastignac's attraction to Parisian upper class society, but also teases Rastignac, as the lifestyle of the rich elite is far out of his reach. While the "bored upper crust" (95) are familiar with the dining room's luxuries, Rastignac takes greater pleasure in the luxuries since they are new to him. Because Rastignac is young and experiencing new things, hungry for wealth and success, the depiction of such a beautiful table setting in front of his eyes functions symbolically as a tease. The omniscient narrator refers to "Tantalus" (95) to represent Rastignac in this scene. Tantalus, a god in Greek mythology, was punished for his crimes by being forced to remain under water while a tree of delicious fruits dangled over his head, though he could never eat the fruit or drink the water. Similarly, the milieu represents the fruit tree dangling over Rastignac's head, teasing him with the image of a grand, but for him, an unattainable lifestyle. Filled with the many riches and beauties that Rastignac is intrigued by, the milieu motivates Rastignac to continue striving for a life in upper Parisian society by showing him more of what he wants, which, little does he know, is out of his reach. Although Rastignac physically exits the dining room, there are similar milieus that he is exposed to, including the ball, theater, and Goriot's daughters' homes, all of which represent the upper class. These milieus evoke the same response from Rastignac, fueling his inescapable urge to find his way into high society.

Rastignac's desire to find his way into high society is in fact strengthened and becomes more inexorable after he enters Goriot's run-down, dilapidated bedroom, which reveals Goriot's miserable condition and portrays the lifestyle of the Parisian lower class. As Rastignac walks into the room, he describes a window without curtains, a wallpaper peeling off the walls that exposing the bare, murky yellow plaster, and a "wretched" (102) mattress with only one sheet and torn up pieces of cloth from Madame Vauquer's clothing. The room is dusty and damp, with a chimney corner where "there wasn't the slightest sign of a fire" (102) and furniture made of straw and wood. According to Rastignac, Goriot's room was so horrible looking that it was "like the worst room in prison... a chilly, heart-knotting sight" (102). The comparison of his bedroom to a prison indicates that Goriot is trapped, living with only the basic essentials needed to survive and nothing else. Rastignac's description of this milieu with "miserable furnishings" (102) literally shows Rastignac what life would be like at the bottom of the class structure in Paris, offering a distinct contrast from Beauséant's dining room.

After coming from Madame Beauséant's magnificent dining room to Goriot's hideous bedroom for the first time, Rastignac is rapidly exposed to extreme social class differences in Paris. The omniscient narrator describes Rastignac's attempt to disguise his shock at the wretched bedroom,

“Striving for High Parisian Society - The Effects of Social Milieu”

by Julia Sipos

which compared to his cousin’s marvelous and intriguing dining room, appears especially disheveled. Because Rastignac has a young, inexperienced perspective and lacks knowledge of social stratification in Paris, Rastignac’s encounter with these two milieux for the first time present him with a shockingly stark contrast between the rich and poor. This contrast further perpetuates his desire to join upper Parisian society, which is depicted to him as beautiful and glamorous, as opposed to joining lower Parisian society, which he sees as dull and miserable. Thus, Goriot’s bedroom not only affects Goriot’s himself, but also affects Rastignac by exposing him to a lifestyle of Parisian poverty, a lifestyle that he strives to escape as much as possible.

While Rastignac’s description of Goriot’s bedroom reflects distinct social class differences in Paris, it symbolically depicts Goriot’s miserable condition, as Goriot is a living representation of the wretched characteristics that thrive in his bedroom. It is evident through Rastignac’s description that not only is Goriot’s room entirely worn out and lacking its previous riches, but Goriot himself is worn out, after devoting all of his money and effort in an attempt to earn his daughters’ love. The peeling wallpaper represents Goriot’s riches fading as a result of his sacrifices for his daughters. After his possessions and money were stripped from him, he had nothing left to offer his daughters except himself, bare and empty-handed, like the bare plaster underneath the eroding wallpaper. The empty fireplace in the chimney corner symbolizes Goriot’s lack of vitality. Goriot was once rich, however, as shown by his rosewood chest of drawers with copper handles “twisted like vines” and “embellished with leaves and flowers” (102), his adorned and sturdy furniture. Now, his furniture is made of straw and wood, simply unembellished, basic and bare. Unless Goriot can succeed in pleasing his daughters, which requires money that he does not have, his milieu will remain dilapidated and continue to symbolize his despair.

Rastignac’s and Goriot’s relationships with their respective milieu exemplify the strong connection between place and character in Balzac’s novel. Without being exposed to his cousin’s dining room, Rastignac would not feel as eager and inspired to join the upper class. Although Vautrin encourages him to do so, he can only fantasize about the upper class lifestyle in his head. It is not until Rastignac is present in the milieux of the rich elite, where he can physically experience the luxuries that he hears about, that he can truly be motivated to become successful and wealthy. On the other hand, the portrayal of Goriot’s bedroom as dilapidated and run-down functions as a clear indicator of Goriot’s lower-class status, as well as his miserable character that is bereft of familial love. While other factors in the novel point to signs of Goriot’s poverty and misery, such as his ragged clothes and shoes, it is his milieu that ultimately reveals to Rastignac, as well as the reader, his poverty-stricken and heart-broken lifestyle. Rastignac’s exposure to this powerful milieu only reinforced his dream of escaping the lower class and entering elite Parisian society. Thus, Goriot is a representation of his milieu while Rastignac is striving to be a representation of his milieu. However, there is no doubt that milieu heavily impacts both of their characters, influencing who they are and who they want to become throughout the course of the novel.

“Writing means sharing. It’s part of the human condition to want to share things - thoughts, ideas, opinions.”
-Paulo Coelho