

# *English Literature Portfolio*

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## *Preface*

Every child has a list of what “they want to be when they grow up,” and I definitely had my share. In elementary school I was sure I wanted to be a marine biologist because the idea of swimming with dolphins all day long seemed like the perfect job. When I reached junior high, the notion of being a marine biologist no longer thrilled me. I wanted to be a professional dancer, an actress – fame was the way to go. In high school, I started to become more serious about academics. I soon realized the importance of going to college and working diligently in my classes in order to be accepted into college. As I thought about all the possible majors I could chose from, I knew one thing – I didn’t want to major in mathematics. Throughout high school I struggled with math; I hated all the work I put in to solving a problem, only to find out my answer was wrong. It frustrated me that there was only one right answer. And this is essentially why I became an English literature major. English literature, like life, is not about one right answer.

While I feel all of the goals of the English literature major are important in building a well-rounded knowledge of English literature, two stood out in my mind. My ability to “read literary works insightfully and apply a rich repertoire of critical reading strategies to literary works,” is demonstrated in my first portfolio essay, “A Feminist Revision: Eavan Boland Breaks Tradition in ‘Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening’ and ‘Degas’s Laundresses.’” Originally, I had written this paper for Dr. Andrew Auge’s Literary Criticism course during the fall of my junior year. Our assignment was to write a critical reading response to one of Eavan Boland’s poems in *An Origin Like Water*

using the feminist approach to literary criticism. I chose to write on Boland's "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening," and during the portfolio process, I was able to strengthen my feminist approach by applying the same technique to another one of Boland's poems. By deepening my first analysis of "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening," and utilizing the same critique on Boland's "Degas's Laundresses," I feel my feminist critique has become more detailed and sophisticated.

In my second portfolio essay, "Sarty and Miss Emily: The Human Heart in Conflict with Itself," I "display strong writing skills that synthesize ideas and concepts, convey these ideas with clarity and creativity, and demonstrate a mastery of the techniques and conventions of literary research." I wrote this voiced research paper in Dr. Donna Bauerly's American Literature: Modern Prose 1900-1945, during the fall of 2003. I wasn't an English major at the time and writing a voiced research paper scared me. Out of William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Mark Twain, I chose to write about William Faulkner because I knew nothing about him and figured it would make my research less biased and more interesting. Through my revision process, I was able to go back and use some of my skills as a creative writing major in order to strengthen the "story-like" structure of this paper. Furthermore, I feel my paper was enhanced as I incorporated recent research, mimicked Faulkner's voice, and brought more aspects of his short stories "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily" into the piece.

Although rewriting and revising both of my portfolio essays was challenging, I found it incredibly rewarding. I truly feel my portfolio essays demonstrate my mastery of the English literature major. By reading literary works insightfully, applying critical reading strategies, and writing skillfully to synthesize ideas in order to convey them

creatively, I have displayed my responsiveness to the literary world and my admiration for great writers like Eavan Boland and William Faulkner.

## *A Feminist Re-Vision: Eavan Boland Breaks Tradition in “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening” and “Degas’s Laundresses”*

*“Nothing I saw in tradition—not the poems I read on the page or the conversations I heard from male contemporaries—encouraged me to follow my body with my mind and take myself to a place where they could heal language: in new poems, in radical explorations.” ~ Eavan Boland, Object Lessons.*

In Eavan Boland’s An Origin Like Water, she follows her body with her mind in order to create poems of radical exploration. Boland recognizes the way in which male artists have depended on women as motifs in their poetry or paintings. These men have objectified the woman; they have made her passive, decorative, simple. In “When We Dead Awaken,” Adrienne Rich urges women to partake in a radical re-vision in which we, “know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us” (Rich 518). Similarly, Helene Cixous builds on Rich’s theory in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” by encouraging women to “write through their bodily experiences...to invent an impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, rhetorics, regulations and codes...”(Cixous 1461). Following Rich and Cixous’ theories, Boland has demonstrated her own ability to write from her bodily experience and break tradition in her poems, “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening” and “Degas’s Laundresses.” In both of these poems, Boland has entered the painting in order to wreck the tradition the male has captured and free the woman within.

Although Boland is revising the work of two male painters, one cannot say she is biased to this type of artistic representation. Boland’s mother was a still-life painter, and

Boland has a great admiration and respect for the painter. In Object Lessons, Boland responds to Jean-Baptiste Chardin, a genre painter of the French eighteenth century, by saying, “Chardin’s paintings were ordinary in the accepted sense of the word. They were unglamorous, workable, authentic. Yet in his work these objects were not merely described; they were revealed...Chardin had done something different. He had taken truth and revealed its beauty” (Boland 253). But as much as Boland respects painters, she is also deeply attuned to the dangers of this artistic representation, especially when it is the male representing the female.

Throughout “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening,” Boland presents to the reader the idea of beauty and danger in Jean-Batiste Chardin’s painting. Chardin was a famous still-life painter who used subdued colors and mellow light to capture the common place subject and domesticity. He felt the preservation of tradition was more important than the invention or discovery of the new. While many praised Chardin’s work, they failed to pay attention to what Boland, as an admirer, also saw – a man upholding a tradition that painted women in a simple, dull, and unchanging manner.

Upon first read, “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening,”<sup>1</sup> can be misleading. The poem leads the eye first, like the painting, in a serene sweep of the landscape. Boland uses words like, “summer light,” “the water-opal pearl,” and “lazulis of the horizon,” which give a tone of calmness and her appreciation for the painter (Boland, Origin 158). But while Boland can see the allure of Chardin’s painting, she also sees its destruction. In stanza eight, Boland repeats the words, “before your eyes,” asking the readers to shift their perception:

opaque, scumbled–

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

the lazulis of the horizon becoming  
 optical grays  
 before your eyes  
 before your eyes  
 in my ankle-length  
 summer skirt  
 (Boland, Origin 159)

By saying “in my ankle-length/summer skirt,” Boland has become the woman in the poem, engaging in the radical act of re-vision Rich has called for.

Once we realize Boland has entered her poem, we can go back over her stanzas to see how she has written this poem through her own bodily experience in order to break the tradition in Chardin’s painting. In stanzas two through four, Boland says:

All summer long  
 he has been slighting her  
 in botched blues, tints,  
 half-tones, rinsed neutrals.

What you are watching  
 is light unlearning itself,  
 an infinite unfrocking of the prism.

Before your eyes  
 the ordinary life  
 is being glazed over:  
 pigments of the bibelot,  
 the cabochon, the water-opal  
 pearl to the intimate  
 simple colors of  
 her ankle-length summer skirt.  
 (Boland, Origin 158)

Within these stanzas, Boland shows how the woman has become Chardin’s simple subject. Chardin thinks he is keeping tradition by painting the woman in a dull, domestic manner, but he is really disrespecting the woman’s ability to reflect a world of possibilities. He has reduced to her to the “ankle-length summer skirt” she wears, but she

is really much more than a skirt. Behind the simple colors he uses to paint her on canvas, the woman possesses a mesh of colors and exuberance for life.

In stanzas six through eight, the reader begins to feel Boland writing out of her bodily experience as she says:

Can't you feel it?  
Aren't you chilled by it?  
The way the late afternoon  
is reduced to detail—

the sky that odd shape of apron—

opaque, scumbled—  
the lazulis of the horizon becoming  
optical grays  
before your eyes  
before your eyes  
in my ankle-length  
summer skirt  
(Boland, Origin 158-159)

As the sun begins to set, the afternoon light has become opaque, less brilliant, and gray.

Boland implies that when the final light is reflecting down, before still darkness sets in, Chardin captures the essence of the woman. Boland is chilled by the notion that she, the woman, has been reduced to detail and captured during a time when light has almost vanished from the sky. She can feel the woman's pain; it gives her chills to think she has been reduced to detail when she is truly vibrant.

“Before our eyes,” Boland has become the woman in the ankle-length skirt; she is writing out of her own bodily experience. And in the final three stanzas, Boland powerfully established why this tradition must be broken:

crossing between  
the garden and the house,  
under the whitebeam trees,  
keeping an eye on

the length of the grass,  
 the height of the hedge,  
 the distance of the children

I am Chardin's woman

edged in reflected light,  
 hardened by  
 the need to be ordinary.  
 (Boland, Origin 159)

Boland has been able to internalize the woman's feelings as Chardin paints her in a domestic place. He paints her by the garden, under the whitebeam tree, watching the children, and by doing this he has reduced her to an object – as if she was no more exciting than a fruit bowl on the kitchen table. By becoming the woman in Chardin's painting, Boland illustrates to the reader that she is more than a woman in a skirt watching the children – she is a bright and powerful woman who will no longer be reduced, hardened, or ordinary.

Indeed, Boland has broken the traditional view of Jean-Baptiste Chardin's paintings. She has radically revised his painting by revealing the facts: women are much more than simple and domestic, they possess a prism of power and complexity. When Boland entered the poem, she became Chardin's subject; she was able watch her life be reduced to domesticity and darkness, until it was painfully hardened in an ordinary and false painting of her life. "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening" speaks to the world as Boland urges women to break the tradition of domesticity while showing painters, like Chardin, that in order to capture the true beauty of the woman, they must paint her with the vibrancy of life she so readily possesses.

Beyond breaking the tradition in Jean-Baptiste Chardin's still-life painting, Boland also does so in her poem "Degas's Laundresses."<sup>2</sup> In her poem, Boland is responding to "The Laundresses," a painting by the late nineteenth century French impressionist painter, Edgar Degas. As a painter, Degas is known for his objectivity in attempting to depict milliners, laundresses, and ballerinas, in natural poses. However, in "Degas's Laundresses," Boland writes from her bodily experience in order to break Degas's tradition and free the woman.

Even though one could read and interpret "Degas's Laundresses" without ever seeing Degas's painting, "The Laundresses,"<sup>3</sup> I found it helpful to look at his painting. The laundresses in his painting are portrayed almost as if they are poor, isolated, and masculine women. Degas's painting seems to suggest that this is all these women are, or ever will be. After reading "Degas's Laundresses," I found it refreshing how Boland wrecks the hold Degas has over these women. In the second and third stanza Boland gives her insight into what life for these women is really like:

You seam dreams in the folds  
of wash from which freshes  
the whiff and reach of fields  
where it bleached and stiffened.  
Your chat's sabbatical:  
brides, wedding outfits,  
  
a pleasure of leisured women  
are sweated into the folds,  
the neat heaps of linen.  
Now the drag of the clasp.  
Your wrists basket your waist.  
You round to the square weight.  
(Boland, Origin 115)

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix C.

Compared to Degas's painting where the laundresses have been rendered static, Boland shows how the laundresses are truly dynamic. The verbs "sweated and drag" in the third stanza show the harshness of their work, but the laundresses are paid to work, not look beautiful. These women are not, and cannot, be defined solely by their work; they aren't a blank slate, they have dreams and aspirations.

The reader knows that Boland has entered the poem in the fourth stanza when she says:

Wait. There behind you.  
 A man. There behind you.  
 Whatever you do don't turn.  
 Why is he watching you?  
 Whatever you do don't turn.  
 Whatever you do don't turn.  
 (Boland, Origin 115)

Boland's use of punctuation and repetition is imperative in this stanza. She is warning the laundresses of Degas's presence in their work place; he is hovering in the background ready to produce improper sketches of their lives. Boland repeats to the laundresses, "whatever you do don't turn," giving a sense that this man has the power to destroy them if they turn around.

By entering the poem, Boland is breaking tradition. In the final three stanzas, Boland shows the laundresses how Degas's mind really works:

So he takes his ease  
 staking his easel so,  
 slowly sharpening charcoal,  
 closing his eyes just so,  
 slowly smiling as if  
 so slowly he is

unbandaging his mind.  
 Surely a good laundress  
 would understand its twists,

its white turns,  
its blind designs—

it's your winding sheet.  
(Boland, Origin 115-116)

The lines: “slowly smiling as if/so slowly he is/unbandaging his mind,” provokes a disheartening realization. Degas seems to be enjoying what he is doing and “unbandaging his mind” suggests that this has become a healing process for him. Both the laundresses and Degas work with cloth; the laundresses wash and iron it, while Degas paints on cloth (canvas). But the “its” in the final two stanzas is the most striking image of cloth. The “its” refers to Degas’ mind, which is being described as cloth, and eventually, a “winding sheet.” In this poem, the words “winding sheet” refer to a shroud (a cloth used to wrap a body for burial). By comparing Degas’ mind to a winding sheet, Boland shows how painting is healing for Degas, but an entrapment, a killing for the laundresses.

When Boland enters the poem to warn the laundresses “what ever you do don’t turn,” she has written from her bodily experience and broken tradition. Boland acknowledges that Degas has objectified the laundresses in terms of physical form; what he has left out is their interior – their dreams. And in her final stanza, Boland lets the laundresses know what their futures hold if they allow Degas paint them – it will be entrapment, tradition will stay in place, and women will still be objects, not creators of art.

In “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening” and “Degas’s Laundresses,” Eavan Boland has entered the poem to break the barriers of tradition. But her poems break more

than tradition. They have broken the silence of the woman falsely depicted in the painting.

*“Artistic forms are not static. Nor are they radicalized by aesthetes and intellectuals. They are changed, shifted, detonated into deeper patterns only by the sufferings and self-deceptions of those who use them. By this equation, women should break down barriers in poetry in the same way that poetry will break the silence in women.” ~ Eavan Boland, Object Lessons.*

## Appendix A

### Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening

Jean-Baptiste Chardin  
is painting a woman  
in the last summer light.

All summer long  
he has been slighting her  
in botched blues, tints,  
half-tones, rinsed neutrals.

What you are watching  
is light unlearning itself,  
an infinite unfrocking of the prism.

Before your eyes  
the ordinary life  
is being glazed over:  
pigments of the bibelot,  
the cabochon, the water-opal  
pearl to the intimate  
simple colors of  
her ankle-length summer skirt.

Truth makes shift:  
The triptych shrinks  
to the cabinet picture.

Can't you feel it?  
Aren't you chilled by it?  
The way the late afternoon  
is reduced to detail—

the sky that odd shape of apron—

opaque, scumbled—  
the lazulis of the horizon becoming  
optical grays  
before your eyes  
before your eyes  
in my ankle-length  
summer skirt

crossing between  
the garden and the house,  
under the whitebeam trees,  
keeping an eye on  
the length of the grass,  
the height of the hedge,  
the distance of the children

I am Chardin's woman

edged in reflected light,  
hardened by  
the need to be ordinary.

## Appendix B

### Degas's Laundresses

You rise, you dawn  
roll-sleeved Aphrodites,  
out of a camisole brine,  
a linen pit of stitches,  
silking the fitted sheets  
away from you like waves.

You seam dreams in the folds  
of wash from which freshes  
the whiff and reach of fields  
where it bleached and stiffened.  
Your chat's sabbatical:  
brides, wedding outfits,

a pleasure of leisured women  
are sweated into the folds,  
the neat heaps of linen.  
Now the drag of the clasp.  
Your wrists basket your waist.  
You round to the square weight.

Wait. There behind you.  
A man. There behind you.  
Whatever you do don't turn.  
Why is he watching you?  
Whatever you do don't turn.  
Whatever you do don't turn.

So he takes his ease  
staking his easel so,  
slowly sharpening charcoal,  
closing his eyes just so,  
slowly smiling as if  
so slowly he is

unbandaging his mind.  
Surely a good laundress  
would understand its twists,  
its white turns,  
its blind designs—

it's your winding sheet.

## Appendix C



Edgar Degas: The Laundresses

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## *Sarty and Miss Emily: The Human Heart in Conflict with Itself*

The brisk wind swirled about the air while leaves quietly left their posts and crumbled on to the soft September ground. A mesh of crimson, tangerine, and gold leaves covered the trails of the Shenandoah Riding Center in Galena, IL., making the center look more exquisite than usual. I had finished my riding lessons and today would be the first day I would tackle the rugged trails by myself. Trixie, a sassy palomino with a thick blond mane, had become my favorite riding partner and would be accompanying me on my trip. Once Trixie was saddled-up, I double checked my essentials – water canteen, horse treats, map...check – and headed to the Shenandoah South Trail.

Together, Trixie and I trotted our way along the trail. The soft pitter-patter of gravel beneath Trixie's hooves reassured me our trip would be a relaxing adventure. Sitting on top of my horse, I felt in charge – I knew I could ride this trail by myself and nothing was going to stop me. After we rode for a mile on the curvy South Trail, I realized we had traveled into extremely unfamiliar territory. Even Trixie was worried because she started to slow her trot, turning her blond head back towards me for comfort. I pulled out my wrinkled map, but no dotted lines or figures pointed to where we were.

Despite my confusion, I wanted to keep going South – the trail had mesmerized me. The further we rode, the more the scenery changed. My body became overheated and sweat beads trickled from my forehead. There was no longer a brisk breeze or a whirlwind of autumn leaves. The air was stale. Trixie's hooves were now pressing into a land covered with green moss. I was surrounded by immense trees with long dangling vines and pesky insects were buzzing all around me.

In the midst of swatting a blood-sucking mosquito, I saw the first sign of human life. Relieved, I patted Trixie's head...we hadn't seen a sign for miles. An old, cracked wooden sign read: Yoknapatawpha County.<sup>4</sup> While trying to pronounce the name of this odd place, I saw someone riding towards me in the distance. As the minute figure came closer to me, I could tell that it seemed to be an older man smoking a pipe.<sup>5</sup> Once this man came into a clear view, I noticed that he seemed to be short, with a full mustache, dark hair peppered with streaks of gray, having the appearance of a gentle but intriguing face.<sup>6</sup>

When the man reached me, he kindly stopped his horse to greet me. "Good afternoon, Miss," the man said.

"Good afternoon," I nervously replied.

"Pretty hot day in Mississippi, isn't it, Miss?"

His comment surprised me and I said, "Did you just say Mississippi?"

"Well, sure I did. You're in Jefferson, Mississippi,<sup>7</sup> now."

"Jefferson, Mississippi! That can't be. I was just in Illinois. How did I get here? Who are you?"

He looked at me with a calm expression on his face and said, "Well, it looks as though you have ridden into the fictional past I created during my career as an author."

I was even more confused now, and then he added, "Oh, by the way, I'm William Faulkner. This is my horse, Tempy.<sup>8</sup> We're glad to meet you."

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<sup>4</sup> William Faulkner's fictional county. Carothers 4.

<sup>5</sup> William Faulkner liked to smoke his pipe and ride horses for personal enjoyment. Millgate 3.

<sup>6</sup> It is the ghost of William Faulkner in human form. (b. 1897-1962).

<sup>7</sup> Jefferson MI., is the fictional name for the real town of Oxford, MI., which Faulkner created and used for most of his literary works.

I was so shocked by his words I had to grab the brown leather reins to keep myself from falling off Trixie. One of the most prominent American literary figures of the twentieth century<sup>9</sup> was on his horse next to me. I was face to face with William Faulkner and in Jefferson, Mississippi, too! As weird as this was, Faulkner was a research subject of mine back home and I couldn't pass up the opportunity to chat with him. I needed to take full advantage of my sudden arrival into the town of his fictional past.

As Faulkner sat on his horse, I studied his appearance. His face showed little emotion and he had a calming aura about him. The critics were right – he seemed very private and hard to figure out. If he wasn't going to initiate a conversation, I was, so I said, "I've been researching your literary works and I know you're a private author." He nodded his head as I spoke, "And I'm wondering if you would share some of your literary secrets with me?"

At first he seemed to be analyzing my motive, but then he looked at me with a sly smirk and said, "Yes, I never revealed much about my literary works while I was alive." He sat quiet for a moment. Then, he leaned over and quietly whispered, "But, I suppose I can let an aspiring scholar of literature like you in on my secrets."

History was in the making. I would be able to hear, first-hand, the truth about Faulkner's life and literary works. Once my excitement settled, I began to converse on an intellectual level with Faulkner as we cantered along the Jefferson countryside. One thing that had always interested me about Faulkner was his level of education. He never

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<sup>8</sup> I decided to call Faulkner's horse, Tempy based on a picture I saw in James Blotner's biography of Faulkner. The black and white photo shows Faulkner, in full riding gear, standing next to a stallion. Next to the picture, the caption reads: In the paddock with Tempy. Blotner, following p. 684.

<sup>9</sup> *Urgo* 172.

had higher than a sixth grade education, and I was intrigued to find out his thoughts on this issue.

“It seems to me that Jay Parini<sup>10</sup> has written a lot about you and your works.”

“Yes,” he said. “I do keep up with modern criticism.”

“In his article, ‘William Faulkner: ‘Not an Educated Man,’” Parini explains how fascinating it is that academics have benefited from your work, yet you were phobic of universities. He says you were a self-educated man.<sup>11</sup> Do you agree?”

Faulkner started to chuckle. “I guess you could say that. In fact, that reminds me of a time when someone asked me what I thought about the relationship between literary styles and ideas. I told him I wasn’t an educated man. I said I didn’t like school and quit in the sixth grade. So, I couldn’t answer his question.”<sup>12</sup>

“How did you become so talented then?”

“Although I lacked formal training, I still took my studies seriously. I read widely and wrote constantly – even if it was at the university post office at Ole Miss,”<sup>13</sup> Faulkner said with a wink.

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<sup>10</sup> Jay Parini has written several articles on Faulkner and his works. He is also the recent author of “One Matchless Time,” his 2004 biography of Faulkner. “One matchless time” is Faulkner’s phrase for the time when the writer is “hot,” referring specifically to his own life when he wrote more than a half dozen masterpieces from 1928-1942. Parini, One 1104.

<sup>11</sup> Parini, William B6.

<sup>12</sup> While speaking on his work in Japan, a questioner asked Faulkner about the relationship between literary style and ideas. Faulkner replied that “he didn’t know much” about such things. He added: “I’m not even an educated man. I didn’t like school and I quit in the sixth grade. So I don’t know anything about rational and logical processes of thought at all. I didn’t have enough mathematics to have a disciplined mind.” Parini, William B7.

<sup>13</sup> In 1921, Faulkner got a job at the university post office at Ole Miss. He worked there for three years and during this time he expanded his knowledge of literature by reading novels and poetry. Faulkner also spent a majority of his time writing instead of sorting mail, often refusing to come to the window when a customer asked for a stamp. In 1924, Faulkner was fired for the long list of complaints the postal inspector received and the heaps of unsorted mail the inspector found when he arrived. In response, Faulkner said, “I reckon I’ll be at the beck and call of folks with money all my life. But thank God I won’t ever have to be at the beck and call of every son of a bitch who’s got two cents to buy a stamp.” Parini, William B7.

As our horses walked us through Faulkner's fictional county, I could see a rounded fixture emerging from the hilltop. When we got closer to the top of the hill, I realized it was a red wooden barn. A boy was leaning against the barn and I said, "Why is that boy by himself?"

"It looks like we've ridden into the setting of "Barn Burning."<sup>14</sup> That's Sarty<sup>15</sup> standin' there," he said.

I couldn't believe his words – was I experiencing the magical realism I had heard about?

When we reached the barn, we tied Tempy and Trixie to an old wooden fence post. Our mares needed a rest and there was plenty of tall grass along the fence post to refuel their bodies while we discussed "Barn Burning." Faulkner and I found a grassy knoll to sit on, but while we sat, I couldn't help but stare at Sarty. His little hands were scrunched into the pockets of his patched and faded jeans, making him seem timid and apprehensive of our presence. Sarty's brown hair was uncombed and his gray eyes looked worried.<sup>16</sup> He was a small boy for his age and it was clear that he lacked a good parental figure in his life – someone to teach him the values of right and wrong.<sup>17</sup> But I didn't come here to judge Sarty's appearance. I wanted to know Faulkner's analysis of "Barn Burning."

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<sup>14</sup> Carothers 18.

<sup>15</sup> Sarty is the main character in Faulkner's "Barn Burning." Faulkner presents to us a young boy who faces many crucial decisions, most of which affect Sarty's own inner conflicts with his heart.

<sup>16</sup> Faulkner 4.

<sup>17</sup> A great part of "Barn Burning" revolves around a father-son conflict between Sarty and his father Ab Snopes. Throughout the story, Sarty is treated very poorly by his father and this poor parental treatment leaves Sarty with many conflicting personal issues. Sarty's father has been accused of burning a barn in the beginning of the story and shows little respect for his family and others. Ab never teaches Sarty about morals, other than he should obey his father, so Sarty is left with learning right and wrong on his own.

“I have a copy of your Nobel Prize speech and I am very interested about your reference to the human heart in conflict with itself,”<sup>18</sup> I said.

“Yes.”

“Do you think Sarty portrays a person whose heart is in conflict with itself?”

“Definitely.”

“In ‘Barn Burning,’ the narrative presence seems to have a doubling perspective. There’s the young, traumatized Sarty and the mature Sarty whom you evoke to ponder his tormented childhood.<sup>19</sup> Why?”

“I wanted to give the reader a glimmer of hope. Somehow, despite horrendous odds, Sarty will mature into a worthy human being. Somehow, Sarty will preserve his integrity and will escape the curse his father inflicted on his family.”<sup>20</sup>

Sarty was still standing by the barn, alone, and I asked Faulkner to have him join us. The poor boy had been through so much, I didn’t want him to feel even more isolated.

Faulkner cuffed his hand around his mouth and shouted, “Sarty, come here, son!”

Sarty quickly jumped. “Yes, sir!” he said.

With his stumpy legs, Sarty hastily ran towards us. He was short of breath when he reached the knoll, but he seemed excited to be part of something. While it was nice to hear what Faulkner had to say about Sarty, I wanted Sarty’s side of the story.

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<sup>18</sup> When Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for Literature he gave a compelling speech. Faulkner stated that “The young man or woman writing today has forgotten problems of the human heart in conflict with itself which alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about, worth the agony and the sweat.” Vickery 348.

<sup>19</sup> In “Barn Burning,” Faulkner uses a narrative strategy – a doubling perspective – in which an anonymous, omniscient narrator fuses with Sarty Snopes to texture the story with a multiple narrative presence: the narrator; the young, traumatized Sarty; and the mature Sarty whom the narrator evokes to ponder his tormented childhood... Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, ‘If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again.’ Ford 527.

<sup>20</sup> Paraphrased from Ford 527.

“Sarty, why did you tell Major de Spain<sup>21</sup> about the barn? Why did you run?” I asked.

He looked at me with pensive eyes and said, “Jus’ couldn’t stand Pap no more. He always wantin’ me to follow his rules. Told me if I didn’t, wouldn’t be in the family no more.”<sup>22</sup>

“Do you know why your father burned barns?”

“I dunno. ‘Said somethin’ once ‘bout frontier justice.<sup>23</sup> I’m not sure. But I didn’t agree with hit.<sup>24</sup> He asked me if I’s fixin’ to tell the truth. If I’d said yes, he woulda hit me again.”

“What happened on the last night with your father?”

“Hit was the final straw. I’d to choose. Follow my father or do right. I ran. Not to rebel, but for self-determination.”<sup>25</sup>

“What happened to your father?”

“I dunno. I didn’t look back.”<sup>26</sup>

Sarty began to get restless and Faulkner interrupted, “Thanks, Sarty. You *have* done your heart justice. Now go. Run back to your new-found freedom.”

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<sup>21</sup> Major de Spain is a character in “Barn Burning.” Ab purposely ruins his rug and when De Spain makes Ab pay for ruining his rug, Ab takes revenge by burning De Spain’s barn.

<sup>22</sup> Jones 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ford 527.

<sup>24</sup> The use of the word “hit” here really means “it.” Faulkner has been categorized as a Southern writer of the oral tradition – one whose writing shows a keen awareness of the regional sounds of language and speech. In my version of Sarty’s voice, I am attempting to copy Faulkner’s style. In “Barn Burning,” Sarty says, “He aims for me to lie...and I will have to do hit.” The addition of an “h” before the pronoun “it” is Faulkner’s way of establishing a Southern dialect for Sarty’s character. McDonald 46.

<sup>25</sup> Throughout “Barn Burning,” Sarty has been in constant conflict with his heart. In the end of the story Sarty makes a crucial decision not to cover for his father’s wrong-doing and flees from his family. Sarty can no longer live his life according to his father, so he decides to follow his heart. By following his heart, Sarty has started a journey into self-determination, confidence, and a new way of living his life.

<sup>26</sup> The last line in “Barn Burning,” reads: “He did not look back.” Before this, Sarty has heard gunfire. The truth about the gunshot is never revealed and many criticisms disagree with what really happened to Ab. Some say Ab was shot by Major de Spain, while others claim he was never shot. Either way, Sarty does not look back to find out. Faulkner 25.

With a simple smile and the wave of a hand, Sarty scurried back to the barn. Faulkner was wiping blades of grass off his khaki pants when he made a suggestion, “Miss, how’d you like a change of scenery?”

“Sure. But where do you want to go?” I curiously asked.

“I just want to take a short ride into the village.”<sup>27</sup>

We untied our horses and made our way out of the isolated countryside. While we rode into the village, the liquid silver voices of whippoorwills<sup>28</sup> sang to us, reminding me that I was still in Jefferson. Once we were in the village, we were surrounded by the hustle and bustle of people. As our horses took long strides along the gravel street, we passed numerous Victorian houses, and women in oversized dresses gossiping on street corners.

Suddenly, I started to smell something putrid. “What’s that awful smell?” I asked Faulkner. Silently, he pointed to a big, squarish frame house across the street that had once been white and decorated with cupolas and scrolled balconies.<sup>29</sup> I noticed the house didn’t have metal numbers above the door or a mailbox.<sup>30</sup> “Whose house is it?” I asked.

“The Grierson’s,”<sup>31</sup> Faulkner said.

“The same Grierson house that Miss Emily<sup>32</sup> lived in?”

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<sup>27</sup> Along with numerous other short stories, “the village” is the setting of Faulkner’s, “A Rose for Emily.” Jones 87.

<sup>28</sup> In the final paragraph of “Barn Burning,” Sarty can tell it is almost dawn by the whippoorwills that surrounded him; their “liquid silver voices” called unceasing. Faulkner 25.

<sup>29</sup> In “A Rose for Emily,” Faulkner describes Miss Emily’s home as: a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies. Faulkner 119.

<sup>30</sup> In “A Rose for Emily,” Miss Emily seems exempt from the laws governing her fellow citizens. Toward the end of her life, she refused to let them fasten metal numbers above her door or attach a mailbox to her house. Kriewald 4.

<sup>31</sup> “Grierson” is the last name of the family in “A Rose for Emily.” During the story, the community noticed an awful smell coming from the Grierson’s home. Although the community is aware of the smell, they are embarrassed to ask Miss Emily about it to her face, so they try to sneak around to find out where the smell is coming from.

“Yes. This is Miss Emily’s home.”

“Do you think Miss Emily would come out visit with us for a bit?”

Faulkner looked at me with a disappointed expression upon his face and replied, “No, my dear, Miss Emily doesn’t leave her house and I doubt she will for me.<sup>33</sup> But I can answer any questions you have about ‘A Rose for Emily.’”

Once again, we tied our horses up and this time we took a seat upon a cold metal bench across from Miss Emily’s home. As I looked across the street it was easy to see how Miss Emily was so alone.<sup>34</sup> Everyone who walked by her house looked at it funny, never stopping to pay Miss Emily a visit.

Miss Emily’s home reminded me of something I came across in my Faulkner research. I was afraid to ask Faulkner my question, but I had to, so I said, “Have you heard what some recent research has to say about why Miss Emily killed Homer Barron?”<sup>35</sup>

“No, I haven’t. What are they saying now?”

“They say that Miss Emily killed Homer because he was a homosexual. That she poisoned him to save face.”<sup>36</sup>

“What!”

<sup>32</sup> Miss Emily is the main character in “A Rose for Emily.” While Miss Emily is what the whole story revolves around, she never has a speaking part, we must learn about her through the eyes of a person from the community in which she lives. Carothers 20.

<sup>33</sup> Miss Emily barely left her home throughout the story of “A Rose for Emily.” She had a black servant named Tobe who did all of her shopping and housework for her.

<sup>34</sup> After her father’s death, Miss Emily lived in the house alone with her servant Tobe, and even they hardly conversed.

<sup>35</sup> In “A Rose for Emily,” Miss Emily is courted by a man named Homer Barron. Homer is Yankee ‘day laborer’ and her Southern townfolk find him highly unsuitable. Homer is described as “not a marrying man” and he never does marry Miss Emily. At the end of the story, Homer’s dead body is found in an upstairs room where Miss Emily has kept his murder a secret. Kriewald 3.

<sup>36</sup> In Hal Blythe’s critique of Homer Barron’s death, he says: simply put, Faulkner hints that Miss Emily’s “beau” ideal is homosexual and that she poisons him to save face. Blythe 49.

“Yeah. They say Barron implies barren. In other words, the fruitless, barren union he has with Miss Emily. And the fact that young boys follow him around, he drinks with young men, and he isn’t a marrying man, all suggest he’s gay.”<sup>37</sup>

Faulkner began to laugh deep from his gut. “That’s funny,” he said. “Honestly, I based Homer’s character off my cousin, Mary Louise Nelson. She married a ‘Captain Jack Barron,’ a Yankee who had come into Oxford with the W.G. Lassiter Paving Co. when the streets had been paved.<sup>38</sup> ‘A Rose for Emily’ is really about Miss Emily and her internal conflict.”

As we talked, men, women, and children of Miss Emily’s town kept passing us by. I knew the townspeople had played a major role in Miss Emily’s life and I wondered what Faulkner felt about them. “How do you think the townspeople react to Miss Emily?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, I don’t think they allow her to be herself. They try to make her what she is socially – a genteel Southern Christian lady.<sup>39</sup> But they ignore what goes on in her life. In a sense, they’re accomplices to her destruction.”<sup>40</sup>

Looking at the once white home of Miss Emily, I imagined what her life was like before her father and Homer’s death; before she and the house had deteriorated. “What happened to Miss Emily?” I asked.

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<sup>37</sup> Blythe 49.

<sup>38</sup> Kriewald 3.

<sup>39</sup> Dilworth 251.

<sup>40</sup> The townspeople seem to brush off the clues to Miss Emily’s destruction. When she buys the arsenic, they don’t make her sign a note for its use and they are relieved to think she may be buying it to kill herself. They don’t question her about Homer’s disappearance. Also, they ignore the putrid smell coming from her house, even though they know it can’t be from a dead animal. But, the Judge says they can’t tell a lady to her face that she smells. So, in a sense, their ignorance allows Miss Emily to continue the destruction to herself and others. Dilworth 251.

Faulkner stared at the Grierson's home as he spoke, "Miss Emily's father died a while back and until that time she was controlled by him. When he was gone she started to become manly looking, obese, and she isolated herself in her father's home."<sup>41</sup> Taking a deep breath he continued, "Miss Emily eventually met Homer Barron, and at the end of the story we find out that she killed him. While this is the end of the story, it is also the end of Miss Emily's inner conflict. Throughout her whole life Miss Emily has been the victim and now she has found peace in her heart by becoming the victimizer."<sup>42</sup>

I interrupted Faulkner, a bit confused, "So you're saying she's found peace by killing Homer?"

Faulkner looked mildly agitated as he resumed, "What I'm explaining is that Miss Emily was controlled by her father, and when he died, it sparked a freedom in her that she couldn't handle. She didn't know how to live her life without him and when she met Homer she made sure to keep him in her life forever."<sup>43</sup> By killing Homer and keeping him in her home, Miss Emily has solved her inner conflict. She is now in control of her life, and she no longer has to deal with being alone in her home or her heart."

The sun was slowly beginning to descend in the Southern horizon. As much as I wanted to stay, I needed to go home. I reached my hand out to Faulkner and said, "Thank you so much for your time. It was nice to meet Sarty and see Miss Emily's home.

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<sup>41</sup> The behavior that Miss Emily expresses here can be linked to the "anal stage" in childhood development. Miss Emily's story is one of retention – that is, giving up prized things from her house. In defiance, Miss Emily retains in her house, her father and her lover Homer. She also becomes obese and in a wish to become her father, she takes on a masculine appearance and character. Jones 108.

<sup>42</sup> Jones 132.

<sup>43</sup> Miss Emily's actions here can be looked at in a Freudian point of view as a story of a female's Oedipal fixation on her father. After Mr. Grierson's death, Homer Barron serves as a surrogate. Because of her father's oppressive watchfulness over her, Miss Emily has been prevented from forming an attachment to a person other than her father. When he dies, she denies his death and retreats from reality. Homer then becomes a murder/marriage that allows her to retain the present object of "her unresolved Oedipal desires" as she was unable to do when her father died. Jones 110.

I'm lucky to have stumbled into your presence to experience the scenes of "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily," two of your most frequently anthologized and critically discussed short stories."<sup>44</sup> Faulkner's hand encompassed mine as I continued, "It was a privilege to learn about Sarty and Miss Emily's inner conflicts with their hearts. Now, if you could just show me the way out, I can go back home and write a well-deserved and kind criticism about you."

He smiled briefly, shook my hand gently, and then pointed me in the direction I needed to go. As I rode off to the North, Faulkner softly said, "Don't worry, my dear, just stay on the path. Trust your heart and you'll be home soon."

I did not look back.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jones 27, 133.

<sup>45</sup> The final sentence of my voiced research paper echoes the final sentence of "Barn Burning," which is: he did not look back. I decided to end my piece by saying "I did not look back" because it ties the idea of "the human heart in conflict with itself" which I have been discussing throughout my paper. Despite doubting whether I would be able to go horseback riding alone or make it out of Jefferson and back to Illinois safely, I trusted my heart just like Sarty. At the end of "Barn Burning," the reader assumes that Sarty, by trusting his heart, has made the right decision and he will, someday, be okay. Much like "Barn Burning," the reader of my story assumes that I have made it back to Illinois and that I am stronger because I trusted my heart.

## Annotated Bibliography Works Cited

- Blotner, James. Faulkner: A Biography. New York: Random House, 1974.  
Until 2004, Blotner's Faulkner: A Biography, held rank as the only biography on Faulkner. While there was plenty of valuable information in regards to Faulkner's life and literary works in Blotner's biography, I found the pictures to be the most helpful to my research. As I scanned through the numerous pages of pictures depicting Faulkner's life, I came across a picture of Faulkner and one of his horses, Tempy. With the help of this picture, I was able to name Faulkner's horse, Tempy, in my voiced research paper.
- Blythe, Hal. "Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.'" Explicator 47.2 (1989): 49.  
Blythe's article was short, but extremely interesting. In his article, Blythe claims that Homer Barron, in "A Rose for Emily," was a homosexual and Miss Emily murdered him to "save face." Although I don't agree with Blythe's interpretation of Homer's "cause of death," I was able to include this information as a "conversation piece" with Faulkner in my voiced research paper.
- Carothers, James. William Faulkner's Short Stories. Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985.  
Reading this book has been helpful toward my Faulkner research. It has revealed to me the many different facts and ways of understanding Faulkner's short story masterpieces. Also, this book has given my insight into particular short story works like "A Rose for Emily" and "Barn Burning."
- Dilworth, Thomas. "A Romance to Kill for: Homicidal Complicity in Faulkner's 'A Rose for Emily.'" Studies in Short Fiction 36.3 (1999): 251.  
Dilworth's article gave a great in-depth analysis of the "murder" aspect in Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." I found this article useful because Dilworth thoroughly describes the role the "community" plays in becoming accomplices to Miss Emily's death and destruction.
- Faulkner, William. Collected Stories of William Faulkner. New York: Random House, 1948. 3-25, 119-130.  
The Collected Stories of William Faulkner is the book from which I was able to read "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily." Reading these two stories has allowed me to fully comprehend what I have researched.
- Ford, Marilyn Claire. "Narrative Legerdemain: Evoking Sarty's future in 'Barn Burning.'" Mississippi Quarterly 51.3 (1998): 527.  
Ford's "Narrative Legerdemain..." opened my mind to a "new look" on the narrative presence found in Faulkner's "Barn Burning." Through Ford I was able to realize that Faulkner uses a multiple narrative focus in "Barn Burning," which gives the reader the hope that, someday, Sarty will mature into a worthy human being.

Jones, Diane. A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of William Faulkner. New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1994.

Through her research, Jones has gathered various criticisms from different authors and then incorporated their criticisms into her own book to further explain Faulkner's short stories. Her book has enhanced my research because she dives deep into the two short stories I am focusing on, "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily." The way in which Jones has listed a history, influences, relation to other literary works, and various interpretations and criticisms for these two stories, has furthered my research on Faulkner.

Kriewald, Gary L. "The Widow of Windsor and the Spinster of Jefferson: A Possible Source for Faulkner's Emily Grierson." Faulkner Journal 19.1 (2003): 3-10. Although Kriewald mainly focuses on comparing Miss Emily to Queen Victoria, I still found this article useful. While reading Kriewald's article, I came across details about Miss Emily's home that were essential in depicting her home correctly in my voiced research paper. Furthermore, I found out who Faulkner based Homer Barron's character on in "A Rose for Emily."

McDonald, Hal. "Faulkner's 'Barn Burning.'" Explicator 61.1 (2002): 46.

In McDonald's article, he seems to be criticizing the way in which Faulkner depicts the Southern dialect in "Barn Burning." McDonald feels Faulkner is wrong when he adds an "h" before the pronoun "it." While McDonald argues against Faulkner's form, I found Faulkner's use of the word "hit," which means "it," imperative in properly capturing Sarty's voice.

Millgate, Michael. The Achievement of William Faulkner. New York: Random House, 1964. 1-5, 185, 259-279.

Millgate's writing in this book has helped me grasp a deeper understanding of Faulkner's character. He has written about the specifics of Faulkner's career, achievements, and his short stories.

Parini, Jay. One Matchless Time: A Life of William Faulkner. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

Parini's biography does a marvelous job of integrating the life and works of Faulkner, giving great focus to that "one matchless time," Faulkner's phrase for the time when the writer is "hot." In his biography, Parini pays specific attention to the minor and major works Faulkner produced during 1928-1942, the time in which Faulkner himself was "hot."

---. "William Faulkner: 'Not an Educated Man'." Chronicle of Higher Education 51.14 (2004): B6-B8.

I found Parini's "Not an Educated Man," both informative and humorous. In this article, I feel Parini did a wonderful job of showing the talent Faulkner had despite only having a sixth grade education, as well as the humorous side Faulkner displayed when questioned about educational topics. After reading Parini's article, I was better able to incorporate facts and humor when depicting Faulkner in my voiced research paper.

Skei, Hans. "William Faulkner." Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 102, American Short-Story Writers, 1910-1945, Second Series. Ed. Bobby Kimbel. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1991. 75-102.

The DLB has helped dig into the life of Faulkner. Within reading the DLB, I have found that it reveals history, works, and achievements of Faulkner. Perhaps, the best thing about the DLB is the representation of great pictures and collections of Faulkner's life.

Urgo, Joseph R. "Faulkner." American Literary Scholarship: An Annual 2003. Ed. Gary Scharnhorst. Duke University Press, 2005. 171-199.

Even though Urgo's section on Faulkner focused mainly on his novels, I still found it relevant to my research. I liked how Urgo detailed Faulkner's "legacy," and how he described Faulkner as one of the most prominent American literary figures of the twentieth century.

Vickery, Olga, ed. Faulkner: 3 Decades of Criticism. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960.

Faulkner, William. "The Nobel Prize and After The Stockholm Address." Vickery, 347-348.

Listed within this book of criticism, is the speech that Faulkner gave when he won the Nobel Prize for Literature. I find this is very interesting because it has shown me crucial comments and issues that were true to Faulkner's heart and were essential motivations of his literary career.

## Annotated Bibliography Works Consulted

- Farnsworth, James. "William Faulkner." Contemporary Authors. Vol. 81-84. Gale Research Co.: Detroit, 1979. 157-165.  
The CA works a lot like the DLB, but lacks the pictures. While the CA gives a great overview of Faulkner's life and career, the information didn't pertain to my voiced research paper any more than any other research I came across. However, the CA listed numerous critical works on Faulkner that I was able to refer to and use for further research.
- Martin, Linda, ed. William Faulkner, Six Decades of Criticism. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2002.
- Gwin, Minrose. "(Re) Reading Faulkner as Father and Daughter of His Own Text." Martin, 153-167.  
In this book, I looked at a specific section of criticism written by Minrose C. Gwin. Gwin describes how Faulkner can be read as the father and daughter of his own text. Although I didn't incorporate this into my voiced research paper, I found many intriguing ways in which Faulkner becomes the "daughter" of his short stories like "A Rose for Emily."
- Morgan, Thais, ed. Men Writing the Feminine. New York: State of New York Press, Albany, 1994.
- Michel, Frann. "William Faulkner as a Lesbian Author." Morgan, 139-150.  
Reading Frann's passage of literary criticism was definitely an interesting experience. He explains to the reader how Faulkner's career began in an era where women were gaining power through feminist's movements. Frann goes on to explain how Faulkner presents himself not simply as a feminine author, but as a lesbian author. Although Frann means lesbian in a different context, it was still interesting to read and discover a new concept of Faulkner's writing style.
- Vickery, Olga, ed. Faulkner: 3 Decades of Criticism. Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1960.
- Beck, Warren. "William Faulkner's Style." Vickery, 142-156.  
In this section of criticism, Beck focuses on the style of Faulkner's writing. He explains how Faulkner uses a different style of writing by using different diction, dialogue, and rhythm. Beck's criticism has helped me incorporate this into my two short story focuses, so I can better understand what Faulkner was trying to achieve.

Leaver, Florence. "Faulkner: The Word as Power and Principle." Vickery, 200-209.

The particular criticism that Leaver discusses in this book pertains to the use of words in Faulkner's stories. She talks about his complex syntax, abstract words, and the use of negative ultimates. The different techniques Faulkner utilizes have helped me to understand his use of "words" in "Barn Burning" and "A Rose for Emily."

Warren, Robert. "William Faulkner." Vickery, 111-115.

In this section of criticism, Warren details Faulkner and his literary works. Although I had already gathered more in-depth information pertaining to these particular aspects of Faulkner, I still found this criticism useful in helping me to combine my knowledge of Faulkner into my voiced research paper.

## *Reflective Essay*

Despite my dislike of mathematics, I enrolled in the University of Wisconsin-Madison with the intent of majoring in forensic science. I had seen numerous crime-solving shows on television and thought this seemed like an interesting field. What I didn't realize was forensics revolved around the mastery of math, and when this became a reality, I soon dropped the major.

For numerous reasons, I decided to withdraw from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and move back home. In the fall of 2003, I began my first year at Loras College. After the forensic science idea failed, I took the "undecided" route to be safe. When I was signing up for classes at Loras, Dr. Kevin Koch asked me about my interests. Psychology interests me, I said. He asked me if I was interested in English. Yes, I said. Fate must have been working because there was only one English class that could fit into my schedule. It was an 8:30 am course with Dr. Donna Bauerly. I wasn't too thrilled about an 8:30 class, but Dr. Koch reassured me that Dr. Bauerly would keep me awake.

Dr. Bauerly's American Literature: Modern Prose 1900-1945, was the first English literature course I had ever taken in college. One day during her course, she told me I should consider being an English major. English – I had never thought of that major. Then I remembered back to what my AP English literature teacher told me in high school. She said, "You really have talent. I think you'd make a wonderful English teacher some day." Even back in high school, my teacher saw what I failed to see. And ever since, I've been an English major and I couldn't be happier with my decision.

As I work my way into my final semester at Loras College, I feel confident that I have mastered the goals of the English literature major. Overall, I have gained a greater

appreciation for the various types of literature in our world today – literature that so many people take for granted. I have learned to apply theories and criticisms to literary works, whether I am reading or writing a response to a particular work. And while these developments are important to my character, I am most proud of the improvements I have made in my skills as a writer. By reading and responding to literature, I have learned how to write clearly and creatively. In order to synthesize ideas, critiques, and concepts of literary research, one must have strong writing skills. As a whole, I feel my literature portfolio exemplifies my ability to “display strong writing skills that synthesize ideas and concepts, convey these ideas with clarity and creativity, and demonstrate a mastery of the techniques and conventions of literary research.”

Before I started working on my literature portfolio, I knew I wanted to revise my voiced research paper on William Faulkner, but I wasn't sure what paper I wanted to revise for Dr. Auge. During Dr. Auge's Literary Criticism course, I felt as though I had truly expanded my knowledge and ability to respond critically to literary works. So, I dug back through my old files and decided to revise my feminist approach paper on Eavan Boland's "Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening." I wanted to revise this paper because this was the last paper of the year and I felt as though I didn't give it the amount of time it deserved.

In order to strengthen my paper, Dr. Auge suggested two things: add another poem that conveys the same concept, and read Boland's Object Lessons. By taking a feminist approach to Boland's poetry, I had to show how she engages in the “radical act of re-vision” that Adrienne Rich calls for, and how Boland has, as Helene Cixous urges, “written out of her bodily experience as a women.”

When I first wrote my feminist approach to “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening,” I felt I could clearly see how Boland had written out of her bodily experience and broken tradition. However, after reading Object Lessons, I encountered an obstacle. In the second to last page of her book, Boland talks about Jean-Baptiste Chardin, a painter upon whose painting she has based her poem “Self-Portrait of a Summer Evening.” Boland describes how Chardin, as a painter, has taken truth and revealed its beauty. When I read that line, my mouth dropped. I thought for sure my paper was ruined and would no longer have a portfolio essay for an in-depth interpretation. But, with the help of Dr. Auge, I realized that her words didn’t weaken my essay, they strengthened it. When I read Boland’s poem again and went over her words, I realized that she appreciates all forms of art, but she is also aware of the destruction they can cause, especially when it is the male representing the female.

After almost completely redoing my paper on “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening,” I added another one of Boland’s poems, “Degas’s Laundresses,” to strengthen my argument. While reading “Degas’s Laundresses,” I came across another difficulty. In her last stanza, Boland says, “it’s your winding sheet.” That one line threw me off from formulating a feminist revision. I read the poem over and over again trying to figure what “it’s your winding sheet” meant. Once I realized “winding sheet” meant shroud, everything fell into place. I knew then that Boland had entered the poem to inform the laundresses that if they allow Degas paint them, it would be entrapment.

Although I ran into difficulties with “Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening” and “Degas’s Laundresses,” it was all worthwhile. I feel my title, “A Feminist Re-Vision: Eavan Boland Breaks Tradition in ‘Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening’ and ‘Degas’s

Laundress, ” is the perfect finishing touch because Boland clearly enters both these poems in order to break tradition and free the woman within. By reading into these works insightfully and applying a repertoire of criticisms, I have mastered the goal of the English literature major.

While I am proud of my essay, “A Feminist Re-Vision: Eavan Boland Breaks Tradition in ‘Self-Portrait on a Summer Evening’ and ‘Degas’s Laundress, ” I am most proud of “Sarty and Miss Emily: The Human Heart in Conflict with Itself.” As I mentioned before, I wrote this voiced research paper before I was an English literature major. For me, I found revising this paper rewarding because I could see first-hand exactly how I had grown as an English literature major. As I read the original version of my voiced research paper, I laughed. The dialogue between William Faulkner and me was extremely unrealistic, I repeated words and phrases, and although it was creative, I saw room for improvement. Another reason I wanted to revise this paper was because I wrote it almost three years ago, and I knew there would be more recent research to help strengthen my paper.

Although I worked from what was written in my original paper, I basically rewrote the entire prose portion. While the paper is set in the form of magical realism, I added techniques that would make it seem more realistic. I made the dialogue sound less forced, and more natural, and I even mimic Faulkner’s writing style when I have Sarty from “Barn Burning” speak. I also gave more detail to the setting and deepened the character of Sarty, and Miss Emily from “A Rose for Emily.”

While I had seen how I had grown in my ability to write clearly and creatively, I also saw how my recent literary research strengthened my paper. Through research, I

was able to include about twenty new footnotes that reflect the knowledge I had gained on Faulkner, Sarty, Miss Emily, “Barn Burning,” and “A Rose for Emily.” In the narrative portion of my paper I also added information I gained through more recent research by discussing: the level of education Faulkner had, the doubling narrative perspective in “Barn Burning,” and the question of Homer Barron’s sexuality in “A Rose for Emily.” As I synthesized my creative writing skills and research, I was able to produce a much stronger voiced research paper that not only powerfully represented the talents of William Faulkner, but my talents as well.

By revising my feminist approach and first voiced research paper, I have come to acknowledge, value, and express my appreciation for English literature, and my ability to master the goals of the English literature major. Although I am not solving mysteries through forensic work in a crime lab, I am still working with mysteries. Except, the mysteries I work with don’t have one right answer. English literature is a vast field which leads an individual’s mind in a more dynamic direction. Through literature I have learned that there is not one right answer, and that is okay. Literary works hold the key to expression. Through them we gain knowledge and understanding, we learn to look at the world in a different light and express ourselves creatively. If everything in life had one solution, we would lose the essence of being human – knowledge, communication, creativity would fade into the background. As an English literature major, I learned that the beauty of life lies in expressing one’s self through creative interpretation, not by a single right or wrong answer.