

Literature Portfolio

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Preface

Two goals of the English Literature major are that the student develops “strong writing skills that include the ability to synthesize ideas and concepts, to convey these ideas with clarity and creativity, to master techniques and conventions of literary research” and “an ability to produce detailed, sophisticated readings of literary works by studying and practicing a rich repertoire of critical strategies” (Oral Portfolio Handout). I feel that the essays Color and Eveline and I: A Subjective Reader Response Criticism of James Joyce’s “Eveline” included in this portfolio display my fulfillment of these goals.

Color is my final voiced researched paper written for American Literature: Modern Prose 1900-1945 in fall of 2001. I choose to research Jean Toomer because I read a small amount of his biography and his ideas about race were fascinating and correlated with my own ideas. Though I had done two previous creative researched papers for Dr. Bauerly, Color was my first attempt at imitating an author’s writing style; Color is an imitation of Toomer’s writing style in Cane. I always felt I was lacking in creativity, but in imitating the style of Toomer and adding a poem and strengthening research during my revision, I was able to “convey [my] ideas with clarity and creativity” as well as learning various “techniques and conventions of literary research” (Oral Portfolio Handout).

Eveline and I is a researched critical essay that was written for Literary Criticism in fall of 2002. The assignment required that an essay be written about one of the stories of James Joyce’s Dubliners using a critical approach of our choosing. I chose to complete a subjective reader response criticism of “Eveline.” To understand better subjective reader response criticism, I read various criticisms of “Eveline” as well as texts concerning the practice of reader response criticism. As a result of completing the essay,

not only was I more capable of producing a “detailed, sophisticated reading of [the] literary work by studying and practicing a...critical strategy”, but I was also more conscious of how my personality enters into my interpretation of stories (Oral Portfolio Handout).

Color and Eveline and I were chosen not only because they showed my fulfillment of two goals of the English Literature major, but also because they were essays of which I was most proud. Color displays my growth as a researcher, critical reader, and writer of poetry and prose; while Eveline and I exhibits my acknowledgement of my own emotions and experiences and their effects on my interpretations. Both essays, I feel, show the extent to which my study of English literature has been a time of both intellectual and emotional growth.

Color

By Rachael Rickertsen¹

¹ This paper is an imitation of Jean Toomer's writing style as seen in Cane. The paper specifically focuses on Jean Toomer's biography and the principles he based his life upon. The end of the paper, however, is a comparison of Toomer to the character of Joe Christmas from Faulkner's Light in August. These stylistic shifts are characteristic of Toomer's writing in Cane. In writing this paper, I was better able to understand Toomer's life, his writing, and the inevitable influence of his life on his writing.

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Jean³

His heart is quiet with yearning,
thoughts colliding with the constrictions of society.
Lost in a sea of dissatisfaction and ambition.
Can you see the fire? The burning of brilliance.⁴

Jean, always active and curious, was seeking the meaning of it all. He was a constant source of confusion not only to other people, but also to himself. They did not realize his mind was a growing thing, wind-ravaged in the midst of bloom.

Dominated by a demanding grandfather,⁵ Jean found some solace in literature,⁶ but in his late teenage years he realized that he must escape. He went to several universities⁷ studying anything from agriculture to philosophy, hoping to find the peace that evaded his thoughts and the something that would fill his emptiness.

² Baechler notes that Toomer emphasized the continuity between sections of Cane by putting two rising arcs before each of the first two sections and beginning the third with two arcs mirroring each other (Baechler 482). Turner explains in his introduction of Cane that the arcs indicate that neither North nor South (the subjects of section one and two of the novel), can singly form the perfect harmony of a circle (Turner xxii).

³Nathan Pinchback Toomer was born on December 26, 1894. He was the son of Nina Pinchback and Nathan Toomer. Three months after his parents were married, Nathan left the pregnant Nina, and in 1895 abandoned the family completely. Nina moved in with her father, P.B.S. Pinchback, who demanded that the baby's name be changed. Nina called her son Eugene Pinchback, but still referred to him as Eugene Toomer (Harris 275).

⁴ The style of Cane that I imitate is a mixture of poetry and prose that focuses on impressionistic phrasing. Toomer studied the Imagist approach of Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, and especially Sherwood Anderson. The first section of Cane focuses on people whose behavior contrasts with the expectations and demands of society (Turner xxi).

⁵P.B.S. Pinchback, Toomer's grandfather, was the first black governor of any state in the Union (Louisiana). He was the son of a white plantation owner and his mulatto former slave. P.B.S. was a very shrewd and harsh man, and Toomer was upset by his belief that P.B.S. used his black heritage for political advantage (Baechler 476).

⁶Bismarck Pinchback, Toomer's uncle, stimulated Toomer's interest in science, reading, history, myths, folk tales, and romances. P.B.S. viewed his son, Bismarck, as a failure and a drain on the family because he spent the majority of his time in bed, reading (Turner xii).

⁷Toomer first attended the University of Wisconsin studying agriculture. He then attended the Massachusetts School of Agriculture, but again left. Next, he enrolled at the American College of Physical Training in Chicago working on athletics and anatomy. Finally, after becoming interested in sociology, he began taking courses at New York University and a history course at City College. Toomer was then

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 Lost in a sea of dissatisfaction and ambition.
 Can you see the fire? The burning of brilliance.

Jean returned to the solace of literature and the knowledge and peace that Eastern mysticism, Buddhism, and theosophy could give him.⁸ Still, the eternal search for harmony was unfulfilled. Not until he began work⁹ in Georgia did he begin to understand, to sincerely comprehend the spirit of culture, the Southern black culture. It was a culture devoid of the industrialist plague¹⁰ infecting the lives of American people. But Jean saw the beauty of the culture dying.¹¹ His muse became known and inspiration flowed through his fingers.¹²

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 Can you see the fire? The burning of brilliance.

rejected as a volunteer for the army. This would be the end of his formal educational experiences (Baechler 479).

⁸In New York, Toomer came in contact with several literary figures, especially Waldo Frank. At this time, Toomer studied the work of Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and Tolstoy as well as Eastern literary work. “. . . it was as if a door opened and I knew without a doubt that I was inside. I knew literature! And that was my joy!” (Baechler 480).

⁹Toomer took a job as the principal of a rural, black agricultural and industrial school near Sparta, Georgia (Baechler 480).

¹⁰Toomer felt that industry had already devoured nature. He felt a great need for the creation of a “human world,” one that would challenge the authority and power of technology. In this world, problems of race, and nationality were insignificant; and the economic system was the one “mutilating” all classes of people and draining away the spiritual and psychological strength of man (McKay 183).

¹¹“The folk-spirit was walking in to die on the modern desert. That spirit was so beautiful. Its death was so tragic.” Jean intended Cane to be a song for an era that was ending, the rich Southern black culture (Baechler 481).

¹²“Pour O pour that parting soul in song.” (Toomer, Cane 12).

After Cane, Jean was struggling with fame, and struggling with the labels placed upon him: Negro, White, Mixed.¹³ Disharmony of society disrupted and overpowered the miniscule peace he obtained in the spirited culture of the South. Retreat from his “diluted” friends, critics, and family was inevitable. Retreating into the words of Gurdjieff¹⁴ and into disillusionment, the Jean of Harlem and the Jean honoring a Negro soul was gone. Passion was lost in the pursuit of higher consciousness.¹⁵ The sweet scent of cane/Cane was never to permeate his writing again.¹⁶ He did not realize his mind was a growing thing, wind-ravaged in the midst of bloom.

His heart is quiet with yearning,
thoughts colliding with the constrictions of society.
Lost in a sea of dissatisfaction and ambition.
Can you see the fire? The *ashes* of brilliance.¹⁷

¹³ Toomer protested about being labeled a Negro. He wished to be seen simply as an American, a new race, of which he was the first conscious member. Toomer even went so far as to deny completely that African blood flowed through his veins (Turner xv and xxiii).

¹⁴G.I. Gurdjieff (1866-1949) was a philosopher who studied the meaning of life. He then formulated his own theories on how to achieve inner peace. “Gurdjieff aimed to help his followers liberate themselves from the natural laws that separate human being from cosmic consciousness and circumscribe man’s place and function in the universe.” This aim could be accomplished with discipline of heart, body, and soul (McKay 192).

¹⁵Toomer removed himself from the literary circles to undertake the teaching of the tenets of Gurdjieff (McKay 193).

¹⁶Although Toomer continued to write after the publication of Cane, the writing was never as widely praised as that of Cane (Turner xxiv).

¹⁷ As early as the mid 1930’s, Toomer began experiencing pain and exhaustion. In the 1940’s he underwent surgery for a kidney ailment and his eyesight began to fail. Toomer spent the final years of his life in a nursing home, where he died of arteriosclerosis on March 30, 1967 (Baechler 487).



Quiet Southern Nights¹⁸

The cool, damp, Southern night encases
 his mind in erotic thoughts¹⁹
 both primitive and unexpected
 to the parchment-colored Northerner.
 He watches the painfully-soulful dark
 full-figured women²⁰ humming hymns of glory,
 humming songs from a past
 filled with cotton and blood, wondering
 how they can stand
 the weight of oppression and poverty
 placed on their shoulders.
 Naked children run past
 glancing with curiosity, but are led away
 to sparks of light gleaming in the sky,
 far more interesting and complex than the stranger.
 The young man exhaled,
 not realizing, but always seeking
 a destination.²¹
 Nights like this render him restless.
 Moonbathed and yearning for the need
 to know, feel, and express
 to cease.
 The need will not stop tonight, not ever.
 Sweet, cane-scented air
 breathes inspiration into his fingers
 and the peaceful souls of his black companions
 watch the stranger upon their porch
 strain with emotion.
 Confusion, love, and hate
 taking turns and overlapping
 as the pen etches upon his paper
 and his parchment colored-self.

¹⁸ In *Cane*, Toomer's poems were used to link, separate, echo, and introduce the stories. The poems were often "imagistic, impressionistic and sometimes surrealistic" and filled with images of "nature, Africa, and sensuous appeals to eye and ear" (Turner xxii).

¹⁹ Toomer often enters characters' psyche to describe their thoughts and suggest their motivation (Turner xxiv).

²⁰ Most of the major characters of *Cane* are woman. Toomer, throughout several pieces of writing, has emphasized the importance of liberating women from the restrictions imposed by society (Turner xiv).

²¹ Toomer comments that his "...growing need for artistic expression has pulled... [him] deeper and deeper into the Negro group (Turner xvi)."

Karintha²²

*“Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon,
O cant you see it, O cant you see it,
Her skin is like dusk on the eastern horizon
... When the sun goes down.”²³*

Green pine needles²⁴ of the forest floor
are stained scarlet
and her eyes widen in white contrast
to the night and her dusk²⁵ colored skin.
With legs still shaking,
she looks toward the sky
and moonlight exposes
the fear of her eyes
as she strains to lift herself away from the pain.
Panic clenched fingers
reach out, but she is caught silent
by the smell of iron and burnt pine²⁶.
Seeing the smoke,
she grasps for that which was once her
and holds the new child numbly.
Following the smoke trail,
she walks away from the scarlet needles
and toward the heat of the fire.
Without noticing the red cries of her child,
she slips it quietly upon the blue flames²⁷
of the sawdust pile.
As she turns and walks home,
ashes fall like snow²⁸,
clinging to the blood
of her dress and hands.

²² Toomer, Cane: An Authoritative... 3.

²³ This stanza is repeated three times in the story “Karintha.” According to Turner, Toomer wanted to show the contrasts of coloring of the Southern African American women particularly in his first section of Cane. (Toomer, Cane: An Authoritative... 3) I particularly tried to emphasize the various colors of the night of Karintha’s labor.

²⁴ “A child fell out of her womb onto a bed of pine-needles in the forest. Pine-needles are smooth and sweet.” (Toomer, Cane: An Authoritative...4)

²⁵ In “Karintha”, Karintha’s color is compared to dusk on the *eastern* horizon and not the western horizon where the sun sets.

²⁶ Karintha has her child in the forest near a sawmill that burns pine sawdust piles. (Toomer, Cane: An Authoritative...3)

²⁷ “It takes a year before one completely burns.” (Toomer, Cane: An Authoritative... 4) I looked upon this line assuming Karintha burned her child.

²⁸ Snow often has a cold and death-like connotation and I wanted to highlight the loss of Karintha’s youth and innocence. Ashes fall like snow, but are not white, which is a color associated with purity. The ashes are black and stick to the blood of Karintha and her dead child, forever marking her.

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Joe²⁹

Dawn³⁰ is soon to be breaking across the towering white house.³¹ Joe thinks of the image as he lies on his solitary mattress, smelling of must and cold, in the small, dark cabin.³² He tries to remember the last time he has slept peacefully, unburdened by the thoughts that have pervaded his mind as of late. The restless thoughts travel slowly, snaking their way throughout the numbed body and inciting the muscles to move. He travels evenly and with purpose away from the small cabin and across the grass.

Joe approaches the still and mist-covered trees kneeling solemnly to the clear water beneath him. Slowly he reaches into his pocket and removes the razor, now encompassed by the white of his yellow hands. Distracted, Joe notices his hands, the color of used paper or rotting wood. He studies them intently and begins washing them in the stream. He frowns as the clarity of the stream becomes tainted with darkness. Scrubbing violently at every finger and knuckle, he doubts if they will ever be clean.

As frustration creases his brow, Joe's eyes glaze in contemplation, fixed on the distant white house and then the small Negro cabin. The space in between seems vast

²⁹ Joe is a reference to Joe Christmas of Faulkner's Light in August. I chose Joe Christmas as my subject because of the connections I found between Christmas and Toomer. Both are of mixed racial ancestry, they feel alienated in both the white and black cultures, and both are in a constant search for an inner peace. However, while Toomer is able to express much of his frustration in writing, Christmas is in turmoil, eventually leading him to violence. Also, in the second section of Cane, Toomer tells a story of "Bona and Paul (70-78)." Bona is a white Southern woman attracted to Paul, a man of mixed racial ancestry, which is an evident subject in Light in August.

³⁰ In short fiction, Toomer often analyzed "men who can never realize themselves because they never comprehend the human experience; ...men who cannot fuse the impulsive, sensitive, artistic self with the domineering, calculating, aggressive self..." (Turner xxiv).

³¹ The "towering white house" is a reference to Joanna Burden's house. Joanna Burden is the white woman with whom Christmas had a sexual relationship. Toomer married a white woman and was highly criticized for the interracial marriage (Turner xiv).

³² Christmas lives in a former Negro cabin on Joanna Burden's property.

from where he is sitting. He wonders why he has never felt at home in either place. He wonders why her caresses have never felt real and why he still goes to her on the uncomfortable nights of isolation. He ponders his weakness.³³

Once again, Joe picks up the razor and turns it over again and again in his hands, the yellow hands that do not belong anywhere. He stands and begins to walk toward the white house, evenly and with purpose.³⁴

³³ Joe was not only alienated from both the white and black race, but also grew up in a very poor emotional environment. The couple that adopted the orphaned Joe was not affectionate and very strict, especially when dealing with religion. Obviously, emotional scars have been left on Joe, but he refuses and hates to show any type of weakness.

³⁴ Joe does, in fact, end up murdering Joanna Burden in Faulkner's Light in August. I chose to end the paper this way for two reasons. First, I wanted to show the unfortunate events to which a person can be driven when they are alienated from society and have no form of outlet. However, unlike Joe, Toomer found an outlet for his thoughts and pain through writing. Secondly, Toomer liked to enter his characters' psyche (Turner xxiv), but usually only gave glimpses of specific images or ideas (Turner xxii). The glimpse is the form of Toomer I tried to capture in this section. I wanted to leave the paper somewhat open-ended and, therefore, make the paper thought provoking for the reader.

Annotated Bibliography

Works Cited

Baechler, Lea, and A. Walton Litz, eds. "Jean Toomer." American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies. Supplement III, Part 2. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991. 475-491.

The entry for Jean Toomer in American Writers was an excellent source of biography. It basically mirrors the vast amount of information provided by the DLB, but it goes more in depth and Toomer's actual quotes are used. By reading the full piece, I feel that it was a good basis to understand Toomer's life and, at least in some part, his voice. Also, the entry pointed out several of the better books to check out in order to research Toomer.

Harris, Trudier, and Thadious M. Davis, eds. "Jean Toomer." Dictionary of Literary Biography: Afro-American Writers from the Harlem Renaissance to 1940. Vol. 51. Detroit: Gale Research, 1987. 274-288.

I was very impressed with the breadth of information provided by the DLB. It gave insight into Toomer's family and Toomer, and also pointed out events that impacted Toomer's writing. In addition to the vast amount of biography, the DLB included pictures of Toomer and pictures of several of Toomer's family members. I read the entire selection.

McKay, Nellie Y. Jean Toomer, Artist: A Study of His Literary Life and Work, 1894-1936. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

McKay's book is in her words, "...an interpretive study of Jean Toomer's published literary works and their intersection with his life..." I found this book in my very last round of research. It was a huge help in understanding the relationship of Toomer's writing and his life. McKay's analysis was insightful and extremely thorough in its examination of Cane, the piece I chose to imitate. I read various parts throughout the book, focusing on the Cane interpretations and Toomer's experience with Gurdjieff.

Toomer, Jean. Cane. New York: Liveright, 1975.

According to the DLB and American Writers, Cane is the most recognized and highly praised text of Toomer's writing. I felt it was an excellent piece to study in depth and the best representation of Toomer's writing. I read the entire first section and parts of the second and third section. The writing was fairly dense and unfamiliar because of Toomer's combination of both poetry and prose to express the story. The selections of Toomer's work found in our text are actually excerpts from Cane, which I had already read.

Toomer, Jean. Cane: An Authoritative Text Backgrounds Criticism. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988.

I purchased this book from a small bookstore in Madison, Wisconsin this past fall. I was thrilled to see that not only did it contain Toomer's Cane, but also informative footnotes throughout Cane from Darwin T. Turner. I read all of the first and second sections of Cane and some of the criticisms and letters of Toomer, which are found in the second half of the book. This was a great resource to help with the revision of Color.

Turner, Darwin T. Introduction. Cane. By Jean Toomer. New York: Liveright, 1975. ix-xxv.

Turner's introduction to Cane was very helpful in assisting me to grasp Toomer's style and background. In this section, Turner provided a small amount of his own criticisms and interpretations of Toomer and Toomer's writing, which he seems to know in great detail. Turner also cites some comments made by other critics and attempted to familiarize the reader with themes evident in Cane.

Works Consulted

Jones, Robert B. "Jean Toomer's Life and Career." Modern American Poetry. 2 Oct. 2001 http://www.english.uiuc.edu/maps/poets/s_z/toomer/life.htm

This six-page article also deals with Toomer's biography. It has several advantages over the previous biographies that I have found in that it is very specific about dates, it discusses the various influences on Toomer's writing (imagism, mysticism, idealism, psychology, religion, etc.), and the biography tells about the latter part of Toomer's life more in-depth. I read the entire article.

Reilly, John M. "Fauset, Toomer, Hurston." American Literary Scholarship: An Annual/1984. Ed. J. Albert Robbins. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1986. 410-411.

I was very surprised to find that our library contained several different books studying the relationship between Toomer's writing and his biography. I decided to see if the American Literary Scholarship could give me some help on picking out the one that would suit my purposes best. I searched in the author index for McKay and determined that McKay's book would be the most helpful. The annual explained what McKay focused on while evaluating Toomer's writing and also explained that the book focused specifically on Cane. I read the entire one and a half page section.

Rusch, Frederik L., ed. A Jean Toomer Reader: Selected Unpublished Writings. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

I grabbed this book off the stacks expecting a straight forward collection of short stories, but was pleasantly surprised to find that the book divided various kinds of Toomer's writing (letters, poems, and short stories) into chronological categories and preceding each category is an editor's note. In the editor's notes, Rusch provides background on Toomer's life at the time of the writing and, therefore, some of the motivation behind the work. However, I have was only able to skim over the book

Toomer, Jean. The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of Writings by Jean Toomer. Ed. Darwin T. Turner. Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980.

What really attracted me to this source were the numerous times I saw it cited in the bibliographies of my other sources. The book is broken down into autobiographical selections, fiction, poetry, and drama. I was particularly drawn to the autobiographical selections. I was able to read two of the autobiographical sections and I can grasp the reasons for Toomer's thirst for meaning and religious peace. I was only able to skim over the other selections.

“Eveline” and I

A Subjective Reader-Response Criticism
of James Joyce’s “Eveline”

The subjectivity evident in literary interpretation is hard to deny. Though one person may feel that James Joyce's writing proves Joyce's support of the feminist movement, another may believe that Joyce views women as inferior. What could account for such a difference in opinions? Schwarz explains that subjective reader-response critics would respond to a question such as this by answering that each reader uses the literary work to symbolize his or her own life and, therefore, each response is unique to the individual reader. He asserts that the reader will always find an identity theme in the particular text he or she is reading. Consequently, the text must be looked at in terms of the response it invokes in the reader, and what this response says about the reader's own psychological needs (129). Several of James Joyce's works are ideal for subjective reader-response analysis and, in particular, the story "Eveline" from Dubliners.

The story "Eveline" concerns a love affair between Eveline and a sailor, Frank, and Eveline's indecision about whether or not to run away with Frank to Buenos Aires. Throughout the short story, Joyce describes several images and actions that lead up to Eveline's eventual inability to leave with Frank. However, there are such a variety of images and actions that it is difficult to emphasize the specific key images and actions that lead readers to their ultimate understanding of the story. Due to the great number of images and actions in "Eveline," individual readers must designate their own important aspects of the story in order to assert meaning. "Each person has a different sense of what 'important' means" (Bleich 50). Consequently, subjective critics may argue that readers designate as significant those aspects of the story that most closely symbolize their lives and ideas. Readers respond to "literature in terms of their own lifestyles," which have "grown through time" and is also any new experience the individual brings with them, including the experience of literature (Holland 973). Therefore, when people

reread stories, they may interpret them differently from when they originally read these stories.

The changing interpretation that time and new experiences bring was evident to me after rereading “Eveline” a year after my original reading. In both readings, I found that because of my own desire to symbolize my life through “Eveline,” I emphasized specific images and concepts in the story that most closely correlate with my own life and feelings. However, in reading the story a year later, my original interpretation of the story was altered due to new experiences in my life. Though in both readings I found as the theme of “Eveline” my own psychological need to overcome the paralysis of fear and obligation and take a chance for a more satisfying way of life, the causes of paralysis and obligation were different.

For both readings, the first image presented by Joyce that truly caught my attention was that of Eveline leaning against the window curtains, smelling the dusty cretonne and looking out upon a quiet avenue that had once been lively. Though I first thought this initial image represented Eveline’s recognition of the progression of time and her realization that the playful and lighthearted days of her youth are long gone, I later came to see this image more as a symbol of her weariness and the staleness of her present life. Eveline is constantly trying to clean up and make the house look brighter, but even though “she had dusted once a week for so many years,” the dust remained and filled her nostrils (Joyce 27). Eveline is being “dutiful” by cleaning the home, but she gains no happiness from it. Joyce even alludes to a print of the Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque, a nun “virtually addicted to suffering” that spent many of her early years doing household chores (Joyce 209). This image closely coincides with some of my own feelings in many aspects of my life. I realize I often choose to be dutiful even if it means sacrificing

something I would like to do more. Every time I go home, I make sure to clean the house for my parents. At school, I always do my homework, prepare for tests, work out, try to eat healthy, and participate in clubs. Though I enjoy these activities, often they lead to me sacrificing my sleep and social time. Likewise, in the first paragraph of the story, the narrator notes that Eveline was “tired” and I can relate to her exhaustion in trying to do the right thing (Joyce 26).

During both readings, I felt an immediate personal connection with Eveline, but once I learned her age and family connections, I began to identify with her character to a greater extent. In the story, Eveline is “over nineteen” (Joyce 27) and despite her youth, must be the caretaker for her father and the two younger children in her family. Her older brother, Harry, is almost always away; and her other older brother, Ernest and her mother are dead. Eveline is alone and left with “nobody to protect her” (Joyce 27). Though I originally noticed the prominent caretaker role Eveline played in the family and the obligations associated with such a role, I recently noticed the obvious loneliness of Eveline. Eveline takes care of her father and two younger siblings, but there is no one with whom she can socialize. With her older siblings, mother, and friends gone, Eveline decides to share her feelings and hopes with her boyfriend, Frank, even though she is not sure she really loves him and Frank is only occasionally around. Frank becomes her escape from loneliness and duty.

Loneliness has also been a part of my life this past semester. My sister, probably my best friend, graduated last year from Loras and moved to St. Cloud, Minnesota, and my boyfriend also graduated last year and moved to Madison, Wisconsin. Though I talked to both of them almost every day throughout the semester and I tried to visit, I found that it was very difficult not to have either of them close to me and able to be with

me when I needed someone. Additionally, due to my heavy class schedule and weekend travels, I was unable to spend much time with some of my other close friends from Loras or my friends from high school. I felt like I was caught among all of them and unable to give as much time to any of them as they deserved. Even surrounded by so many people and even with many phone calls, I felt very alone.

Though loneliness plays a part in Eveline's desire to escape, the most prominent reason Eveline feels stuck in her life is her family obligation, which is manifested in her promise to her mother "to keep the home together as long as she could" (Joyce 29). Eveline's mother asks for this promise despite the fact that she herself "lived a 'life of common-place sacrifices closing in final craziness'" (Werner 38). The promise Eveline makes to her mother hangs heavy on Eveline's heart and mind. I also originally noted my promises to my family during my initial reading, which still play a major role in my feelings of obligation, but now I also note some of the expectations placed upon me by others.

My family obligations can be seen in my promise to my mother that I become well educated so I can obtain a respected career and use my potential to the fullest. I believe she put a great deal of her hopes for herself in me and my future. Not only have I realized the expectations placed upon me by my mother; but lately I have also observed the hopes that others have for me. My boss from ADM Research said to me, "Rachael, whatever you do, you should do great things." Many professors have also expressed their faith in my abilities and their hope that I choose to go on to do something great and worthwhile. Though I am honored to have so much faith placed in me, I sometimes fear that I will let down those I respect most or, in the long run, be unhappy with my

decisions. I keep dragging my feet about making a decision for my future because I am paralyzed, like Eveline, by fear of making the wrong choice.

Frank represents for Eveline a means of escape from her loneliness and unhappiness. Frank is “kind, manly, open-hearted” (Joyce 28), and has “tales of distant countries” (Joyce 29). I do not believe Eveline actually loves Frank, but rather Eveline wants to be rescued by someone, and Frank is her supposed hero. “She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.” (Joyce 30) Oddly enough, Eveline places all of her hopes for escape from her life of obligation in another person, Frank. Eveline does not even seem to consider the possibility of helping herself break free. I identify with Eveline’s desire to escape. I sometimes wish to be oblivious of all expectations and obligations, but even then, I think that I am unsure about what will truly make me happy. I recognize my desire to escape, but also my incapability of saving myself due to my uncertainty and fear of failure.

Though her escape is being aided by Frank, Eveline must take an active role in escaping her paralyzing life of duty and unhappiness by actually stepping aboard a boat to leave. This is Eveline’s moment of truth in which she alone must initiate her flight. Shortly before the boat leaves, Eveline has a few last moments of indecision. Eveline prays to God “to show her what her duty was” (Joyce 30), but I feel Eveline does not ask God the right question. Eveline knows her duty, but what she does not know is what will make her happy. Eveline is uncertain of her own needs and desires, similar to my own uncertainties about what will make me happy.

Frank begs for Eveline to go, but she feels as if “all the seas of the world tumbled about her heart...he would drown her” (Joyce 30). For me, this powerful image of drowning is one of the two most important images of the story necessary for a total understanding. Water, a positive image of life and rejuvenation, could be her route of escape, but instead, water holds a negative image of death. Water is, indeed, the perfect symbol for Eveline’s feelings. Almost all of us can associate with the fear of being drowned by a change in our lives. This drowning image plays a part in my life when I consider medical school. I fear medical school will be too difficult, that I will be at best a mediocre doctor, that I will never have a family if I am married to my career, that my perfectionism will become too extreme, that I do not have the heart for eight to ten more years of school and residency, that I will fail and let down all of those who I care and love so much, and that I will be unhappy in medical school or as a doctor.

Because of fear, Eveline and I avoid making life-altering decisions. Eveline’s terror is evident when she is forced to make the choice of whether to go with Frank or not. She is paralyzed and “passive, like a helpless animal” (Joyce 31). This paralyzed and helpless image of Eveline is the second of the images in the story I deem as very important. Similar to the actions of a deer in headlights, Eveline stays where she is, immobilized by terror, even though she may die. Eveline loses her chances for a happier life; and, even in the final sentence of the story, Eveline makes no acknowledgement of the consequences of her paralysis. There is no emotion in Eveline’s eyes; “Her eyes gave him no sign of love or farewell or recognition” (Joyce 31). When reading this a year ago, I saw the last image of “Eveline” as a warning, showing me the consequences of letting fear make decisions for me. In recognizing the overwhelming fears I had and the paralysis caused by them, I feel I have at least moved forward in small steps. Though I

do not know if I could board a ship to leave my life, I know that I can make small steps in the hope that I will gradually be able to take bigger steps. I decided not to take the dental admission test, I ruled out graduate school in science, and I am taking the MCAT in April in order to apply for medical school. I realize, in a sense, that I am behind in making my choices, but I also know that at least I am moving. I will not allow the paralysis Eveline experienced to make decisions for me.

My development of the theme for Joyce's "Eveline" is a result of my response to the aspects and images of the story that I deem as significant and the new experiences I have brought to my interpretation of the story. My desire to use "Eveline" to symbolize my life shows that "individual self-expression and self-awareness proceed before anything else" (Bleich 93). The particular images and aspects of "Eveline" that I focused on were those with which I truly identified, and the meaning that arose from these images is my own identity theme of overcoming the paralysis of fear and obligation to take a chance for a more satisfying way of life.

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Reflective Essay

I came to Loras College intending to major in Biochemistry and only Biochemistry. I was prepared to be very serious in my studies, focused on facts, and determined to work as hard as possible to succeed, but I realized in my first semester Critical Writing: Poetry course the importance of feeling and expression in my life. I poured over chemistry and biology books, studying, rewriting, memorizing, and reveling in science; but I can remember the release and the emotional experience poetry was able to provide for me. I recall telling Dr. Bauerly that I decided to double major in Biochemistry and English Literature because I wanted to read without feeling guilty for neglecting my other homework. English Literature studies have allowed me to bring feeling and emotion to the side of me that I sometimes recognize as a skeptical and cold scientist.

I always felt that I have been slightly different from other students majoring in English Literature. I never really considered myself to be creative, artistic, or insightful. I can remember my first few English Literature courses, in which I questioned whether I would really have anything of significance to add to group discussions. One of my strengths, however, as a major in English Literature has been my ability to be open and interested in new things. I try to be open and learn new ideas, styles of writing, various opinions, and critical strategies. I love hearing other people's opinions about symbolism and theme, and I think it is interesting to consider why they see the image in such a manner. Color and Eveline and I represent my strengths as an open minded and curious person. I was skeptical about imitating an author's style and about the significance my life experiences really have in my interpretations of texts. However, because I was

willing to try a new writing style and a new critical strategy, I was rewarded with two essays of which I am very proud.

Not only is my openness in trying and learning new things one of my greatest strengths as a literature major, but my empathy while reading and listening is very important as well. In reading an author's words, I can also feel the emotions conveyed by them. I can feel Eveline's fear and paralysis, and I can feel Jean Toomer's frustration with racial categorization. Many authors' images so vividly express their situations that I often place myself in their shoes, hoping to understand a little better. I feel my skills in seeing and understanding images and opinions from various points of view has been even more greatly intensified by studying literature. Such a skill, I believe, has been one of my most prized achievements at Loras College. Though I may not remember quotations from Toni Morrison or Shakespeare, I know that learning to identify and empathize with others is invaluable for any profession I decide to pursue, and especially if I choose to become a doctor.

Color and Eveline and I further developed and display my strengths of openness and empathy as well as demonstrating my mastery of literature goals. My fulfillment of the goals of "strong writing skills that include the ability to synthesize ideas and concepts, to convey these ideas with clarity and creativity, to master techniques and conventions of literary research" and "an ability to produce detailed, sophisticated readings of literary works by studying and practicing a rich repertoire of critical strategies" are evident in the essays for several reasons. Color was truly a challenge for my creativity and a learning experience in the techniques of literary research. Due to my research of Toomer through various sources from a range of mediums, I was able to surround myself in the life of Toomer and his work and find inspiration to write in his

style. Color allowed me to “convey ideas with clarity and creativity” and to “master techniques and conventions of literary research.” Eveline and I, though very different from Color, led me to become more critical in my reading, aware of various forms of criticism, and conscious of the external aspects that may affect one’s reading. Instead of reading Joyce as I would read the front of a magazine, I learned to “produce detailed, sophisticated readings” and practice a new critical strategy.

My entire portfolio demonstrates my development and maturation as a major in English Literature and a critical reader. As a result of the literary experiences I have gained and the skills of reading critically that I have acquired, I am much less insecure about listening to my intuitions and feelings while reading. The majority of this portfolio is writing primarily based on my feelings and emotions as shown in Eveline and I or writings inspired by my feelings and emotions as shown in Color. Had I not become a critical reader, I do not feel I would have found the texts I have read to be as rewarding intellectually and emotionally. To truly feel the words of an author, I believe the author must pull the reader into the story. The reader, however, can only have the true experience if they read critically and carefully. Then, readers such as myself are able to feel the flames of the fire burning Karintha’s baby or stand with Eveline watching her chance for escape slip away.

While writing and revising the essays of my portfolio, the importance of my emotions in the revision has been one of my greatest lessons. So many times, I try to push what I want and what I feel to the margins. This portfolio, and especially the essay Eveline and I, has opened my eyes to the sad aspect that most times, I am uncertain about what I want. However, as a result of the portfolio, I have grown more secure in my wants and my truths. Color showed me the importance of finding peace within oneself, which

Toomer and his characters constantly struggled to obtain. Eveline and I, on the other hand, has taught me that though I may be scared of failing, I need to make choices and base my decisions on what is right for me.

Because both essays have taught me so much, it is difficult to designate one as being the one of which I am most proud. However, though Eveline and I was emotionally more difficult and rewarding, I feel most proud of the essay Color. Color was rewarding in that I did not think I could write an imitation of Toomer's writing style with any success. I looked at the project as overwhelming and I did not have much faith in my abilities. Despite my insecurities, I threw myself into writing the essay the first time and I tried to strengthen it and add more stylistically in my revision. Color, in my opinion, displays my creativity, my emotion, and my knowledge. Overall, I am most proud of writing Color because it was an essay that I did not think I could do, but I feel I succeeded in writing it in Toomer's style as well as developing some of my own. I learned that I should still try to accomplish overwhelming goals, even if I doubt my abilities.

Studying English Literature has been a joy and a release for me. I have learned a great deal not only about other races, cultures, ages, and people in general; but also I have learned so much about myself. Literature allowed my mind and heart time to practice working together to form decisions and opinions. This aspect, listening and learning with both my heart and mind, is one skill I feel I can bring with me anywhere. This skill would make me a better doctor, a better mother, and a better person. Therefore, never have I regretted double majoring in Biochemistry and English Literature, and I doubt sincerely if I ever will.