

OUR PERCEPTION OF TIME IN RELATION TO THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

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ABSTRACT

Title: **Our Perception of Time in Relation to the Independent Spirit**

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The characters and people explored in this thesis perceive time, which has always played an integral role in all art forms, including literature, in a way that contributes to their overall independence. This thesis strives to build a deeper understanding of these perceptions and to discover the ways time contributes to our independence. The narrator, Biagio in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino creates time through storytelling. The characters and people in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Walden* by Henry D. Thoreau, *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom, and *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne display the importance of making the most of time in order to reach their full potential and genius. Death motivates the characters and people in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Old Man and Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, and *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid to live fully. The characters and people in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, and *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller learn how to control their own time and claim their independence. Finally, the characters and people in *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac and *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama learn how to experience time fully through life's adventures. These interactions with moments and perceptions of time illuminate both the meaning of life and the conception of true independence.

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Time Begins: An Introduction to this Thesis

This thesis examines how time functions in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Walden* by Henry D. Thoreau, *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Old Man and Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, and *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama. This thesis examines how the authors of these books utilize time in order to move their stories forward, but on a deeper level, it examines how each character and person in these stories becomes an independent spirit through their perceptions of time, so that we, as readers, can begin to understand the implications of these perceptions. The focus can then shift to how these perceptions contribute to independence. Do these independent spirits have something in common in regards to their interactions with time? How does this common trait contribute to their independence?

The answers to these questions serve as a culmination of a year's worth of reading and research. Each book embraced as an individual moment contains its own independent revelations into time. When we as readers begin to group these revelations together, specific themes arise, which flow into their own map of time with a beginning leading to creation, to self discovery, to grappling with death, to independence, and finally to adventure and revelation. The stories explored in this thesis reveal the importance of creation and structure, time and potential, death and life, and control and adventure. These revelations culminate into guidelines for how to live fully and independently in

time. We must constantly grapple with the short amount of time that we have to live; therefore, this culmination of meaning offers the writer of this thesis an illuminated map of time and the hope that her own map will reach into the map of others.

Giving Life to a Story: Time Creation in *The Baron in the Trees*

The Baron in the Trees by Italo Calvino displays the importance of creating time through storytelling, and it teaches us the importance of framing stories in time, so that they can offer us additional insights. Creation becomes the second stage in the map of time outlined in this thesis. *The Baron in the Trees* ends with the narrator, Biagio, reflecting on the story of his brother. He says, “Ombrosa no longer exists. Looking at the empty sky, I ask myself if it ever did really exist” (Calvino 217). He questions his own memory of the place—his own ability to remember events in time. This in turn, leaves the reader to question the story of Cossimo’s life, which Biagio has told.

Certainly, however, Ombrosa exists in the story that Biagio has written displaying the importance of storytelling. Not only does Cossimo’s world, Ombrosa, exist, but it also exists infinitely into the time of every reader who picks up the book and breathes new life into the story, which shows that telling a story creates its own line of time—a map of time reaching into our own offering us meaning only a story can provide. The story Biagio tells contrasts one of the books that Cossimo started. He invited the citizens of Ombrosa to write down their hopes and dreams, but he left the book hanging outside and so it faded, and they all lose their written thoughts. The map fades away. However, Biagio renews the life of the “lost book” by mentioning it in the story he tells, and therefore extends its lifespan. When Biagio looks up at the empty sky, it resembles an empty page that he can fill with Cossimo’s story—a clean slate of potential, onto which he can pour Ombrosa’s existence.

Biagio goes on to outline his brother’s life in great depth saying, “That mesh of leaves and twigs of fork and froth, minute and endless, with the sky glimpsed only in

sudden specks and splinters, perhaps it was only there so that my brother could pass through it with his tomtit's tread..." (Calvino 217). He describes the leaves that create the scenery of Cossimo's time (he runs away to live in the trees) and life, as both minute and endless leaving the reader to grapple with the contradiction. Biagio cleverly notes that the leaves have a very small, and yet, vast existence in the scenery of Cossimo's life and story. This creates an interesting parallel and contrast to the sky, which many usually view as endless. However, in Cossimo's life, the sky only presents itself as sudden specks, until the moment when he is about to die and from his spot in the tree he grabs onto a hot air balloon and disappears into the sky. Biagio eternalizes the sudden specks of the blue sky and the fleeting moment of his brother's disappearance by writing them down. Biagio's unique perspective of time reveals itself with his belief that perhaps the leaves, twigs, and sky, only existed so that Cossimo could move through time, and Biagio could tell his story. He thinks deeply about the leaves, twigs, and sky, and he sees beyond the commonplace conception of simple things and embraces them fully in time bringing more meaning and structure into his own life and Cossimo's.

Biagio continues on to explain that the mesh of leaves, "...was embroidered on nothing, like this thread of ink which I have let run on for page after page, swarming with cancellations, corrections, doodles, blots and gaps, bursting at times into piles of clear big berries, coagulating at others into piles of tiny starry seeds..." (Calvino 217). Cossimo's life clearly merges with Biagio's story of Cossimo's life at this moment. The trees, which support Cossimo's life, parallel the ink that makes up the words, which create the foundation for the story that Biagio writes about Cossimo's life. Biagio builds the story on nothing as if Ombrosa does not exist. He reaches into the past and allows the story to

run forward through time, producing fruit and more seeds, which may result in more fruit—more life—more time!

He “ends” the story saying, “...then twisting away, forking off, surrounding buds of phrases with frameworks of leaves and clouds, then interweaving again, and so running on and on and on until it splutters and bursts into a last senseless cluster of words, ideas, dreams, and so ends” (Calvino 217). The world of the storyteller, Biagio, explodes as if it has become a part of the big bang, the ultimate end, and yet the beginning of an entirely new universe. In the same way that Cossimo leaves the world on the ground for the world in the trees, his story leaves the world of the page, and enters the world of its readers. The story ends, but continues.

Biagio sometimes mentions his admiration of his brother’s life and even considers imitating it. At one point he says, “Cossimo would spend happy hours too, amid the undulating leaves of the ilex...and he loved its peeling bark from which, when preoccupied, he would pick off a piece with his fingers, not from any desire to do harm, but to help the tree in its long travail of rebirth” (Calvino 69). Cossimo participates in the cycle of time belonging to the tree’s life in the same way that Biagio participates in the cycle of time belonging to Cossimo’s life and story. Biagio has chosen which events in Cossimo’s life to share, and which events to pick away. He participates in the rebirth of Cossimo’s life as a story.

Early on, Biagio describes life at home as a constant dress rehearsal. He calls attention to the ritualized nature of their dinners at home saying, “There was an agonizingly boring dinner, with endless ceremonial, and boring and scaring” (Calvino 66). These dinners differ greatly from those of Cossimo, who spends much of his time

hunting and eating to sustain his life. Surely, if his family members were trees, the direction of their growth would remain dormant, or go backwards. This contrasts the active life of Cossimo, who meets life head on and works to survive. If time means, “The system of those sequential relations that any event has to any other, as past, present, or future; indefinite and continuous duration regarded as that in which events succeed one another,” then Cossimo’s mother and father betray this definition by living constantly within the confines of the past (Dictionary.com). The Baron Arminio, Cossimo’s father, climbs his genealogical tree down into the past. He obsesses over his ancestry without creating a real story, only playing off names, title, and inheritance. At the other end of the spectrum, the natural force of gravity pulls Cossimo down the banisters and he topples over the old statues of his ancestors—smashing them to pieces. The living breathing Cossimo cracks the cold stone of those who remain dead and gone. The statues shatter while Cossimo’s story lives on.

Cossimo originally leaves the ground to claim his independence as the Baron in the Trees because he refuses to eat snails that he had tried to free the night before. The snails moved too slowly to escape the wrath of Cossimo’s sister, which contrast Cossimo’s ability to act quickly, in an instant, and decide to emancipate himself from the ground. This emancipation creates a tension in the book because, although he has freed himself from the confines of life on the ground, he has forever sentenced himself to life in the trees. The character of Cossimo also remains trapped within the confines of the story, which he does not even get to tell, but which Biagio tells instead, on his behalf. The reader may reconcile these tensions with the “exploding book concept.” The world of the storyteller, Biagio, explodes as if it has become a part of the big bang, the ultimate

end, and yet the beginning of an entirely new universe. Again, Cossimo leaves the world on the ground for the world in the trees, in the same way that his story leaves the world of the page, and enters the world of its readers meeting ultimate freedom, or infinite possibility.

Biagio says, “So began a series of scenes, spiteful exchanges, punishments, retaliations, until the day when Cossimo refused the snails and decided to separate his fate from ours” (Calvino 5). Cossimo takes control of his fate—his time and his destiny, and he makes it his own. He exemplifies his control over his own life when he gets up from the table. Everyone asks him where he is going and he responds, “I know where I am going!” (Calvino 12). He controls his own frame of time.

From Cossimo’s spot in the trees, he views the world from a different perspective than those on the ground, a perspective that he chooses and never abandons. Biagio describes Cossimo’s unique perception of the world and time saying:

“He would sit for whole half-hours at a time, watching their work from the trees and asking questions about seeds and manure, which it had never occurred to him to do when he’d been on the ground, prevented then by shyness from ever addressing a word to villagers or servants” (Calvino 64).

Cossimo’s unique perspective opens him up to new experiences that he otherwise would never dream of encountering. One cannot help, but note, the significance of Cossimo now occupying his time with concerns over seeds and manure—the ingredients for creating new life like creating a story. Cossimo can see the family clearly, but in order for them to see him they often have to shield their eyes from the sun, or see him within the frame of their hands. Covering our eyes often impedes our vision. In order for those on the ground to see Cossimo at all, they have to give up a portion of their sight. In order for others to

understand his story, Biagio has to put the story into a context and frame the story in time, even though the reader eventually *sees* that the story reaches beyond these confines. Biagio creates time through storytelling and brings more meaning into his life and Cossimo's. He frames Cossimo's story in time, so that it offers the reader additional insights and brings meaning into their own life and time.

Discovering Genius: Time and Potential in *Animal Farm*, *Walden*, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, and *The Scarlet Letter*

Animal Farm by George Orwell, *Walden* by Henry D. Thoreau, *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom, and *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne show that wasting time will not help us to achieve our independence. Instead, in order to live fully, we must discover the origins within, and in turn, our own potential, and genius. Discovering potential becomes the next stage in the map of time that this thesis outlines. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the drunken Mr. Jones, the "leader" of the farm, locks up the hen house for the night. A ring of light from his lantern dances from side to side like the pendulum on the inside of a grandfather clock.

The moment Mr. Jones falls asleep and begins snoring, the animals stir, and get ready to hear a pig, named Old Major, recount a dream that he had. Old Major "was so highly regarded on the farm that everyone was quite ready to lose an hour's sleep in order to hear what he had to say" (Orwell 4). The other animals sacrifice an hour of inactivity willingly. They do not want to waste any time. At the meeting, "a brood of ducklings, which had lost their mother, filed into the barn, cheeping feebly and wandering from side to side," again like the light from Mr. Jones's lantern, and the pendulum in the grandfather clock (Orwell 5). The young ducklings contrast their dead mother and become a reminder of time. They embody potential.

Old Major shares his dream because he knows that his death draws near and he feels obligated to share the dream before he dies. His dream examines the quality of the life that the animals lead. He says, "We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to

the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty,” (Orwell 6-7). Mr. Jones concerns himself with the efficiency of the animals; the way they spend their time must result in as much profit for Mr. Jones as possible. However, Old Major sees the possibility for rebellion and independence. He discovers the origin within himself, and in turn, his own potential, and genius. He sees a brighter future for the other animals.

Yet, time for Old Major runs out and he dies peacefully in his sleep just three nights after revealing his dream—the result of an active mind in sleep. His dream continues in “real” time without him. “Major’s speech had given to the more intelligent animals on the farm a completely new outlook on life,” and they pick up the mantle of Old Major’s dream (Orwell 15). One pig, Squealer, “was a brilliant talker, and when he was arguing some difficult point he had a way of skipping from side to side and whisking his tail which was somehow very persuasive” (Orwell 16). Again, the side-to-side movement of Squealer parallels the movement of the young ducklings and the swaying of Mr. Jones’s lantern, which resembles the pendulum in a grandfather clock. Time ticks away, moments get lost in the simple movement of the pendulum reflected in a myriad of other movements. Time, crucial to their independence gets lost.

A raven, named Moses, makes many of the animals believe in a place called Sugarcandy Mountain, which parallels the concept of heaven. The pigs work hard to persuade the animals that no such place exists so that the animals will better understand Animalism, an ideology that the pigs develop, and focus more on the time and place at hand. The animals work and plot against Mr. Jones when he wastes time asleep. Yet, once the animals have full control over their own time, they do not really know how to

use it. They simply trot along the boundaries of the farm without embracing their potential and genius—without living fully in time.

Since the animals do not know how to take control of their lives and time, two pigs, named Snowball and Napoleon, take Mr. Jones's place as controllers of the other animals. The pigs portray themselves as more intelligent than the other animals, convincing the animals that they remain incapable of controlling of their own lives—that they lack the potential and genius to claim their independence. The pigs do not spend their time working and their comparatively lavish lifestyles become completely dependent on the work of the other animals. The other animals work hard enough to support themselves and the pigs and yet remain submissive to the pigs. The pigs have convinced the other animals that they remain incapable of supporting themselves without their guidance through time. The other animals waste their time catering to the whims of the pigs.

Instead of reclaiming his farm, Mr. Jones wastes his time at the bar complaining about his situation. Whenever the animals begin to question the authority of the pigs, Squealer skips from side to side and says, "Surely there is no one among you who want to see Jones come back?" (Orwell 36). They waste their time fearing his return. Instead of claiming their independence, the animals work to build a windmill that will do their work for them. A windmill turns like the gears in a watch. Instead of working for themselves, they work to become dependent on a machine—on "machine time." Yet, the windmill backfires, and eventually, in time, the animals see the horrendous reality of the pigs behaving unnaturally. Old Major revealed the potential for a full life to the other animals,

but because of the control of the pigs, they lose their potential for genius and a meaningful existence.

In his book *Walden*, Henry D. Thoreau searches for a meaningful existence in Walden woods. There he outlines worlds within worlds saying, “The universe is wider than our views of it” (Thoreau 30). He knows that the universe reaches beyond the frame of our conception of it, and yet still remains comprehensible. However, in order to live fully, we have to try to see beyond the obvious to our full potential and genius.

Thoreau explores the intricacies of the Walden woods, and in turn, invites his readers to explore the intricacies that make up their own lives. He urges us to become aware of the expansiveness of the frame, so that we do not become slaves to it. If we already find ourselves as slaves, he hopes that the realization will free us, so that we can claim our independence. He says, “Man thus not works for the animal within him, but, for a symbol of this, he works for the animal without him” (Thoreau 57). A man can become a slave to time unless he creates a flow of time that comes out of himself and his origin of genius like the eternal time that Biagio creates through the story he tells in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino.

When Thoreau says, “The youth may build or plant or sail, only let him not be hindered from doing that which he tells me he would like to do,” he calls his readers to embrace the morning, the entire day, and to make the most of their time—to embrace the great potential within (Thoreau 71). Thoreau says, “Most men, even in this comparatively free country, through mere ignorance and mistake, are so occupied with the factitious cares and superfluously course labors of life that its finer fruits cannot be plucked by them” (Thoreau 6). The animals in *Animal Farm* parallel these men. Most people waste

too much of their time. They do not claim their independence and take control of their time, or embrace their full potential. Their lives lack the culmination of meaning available to them.

Thoreau famously stated, “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not when I came to die, discover that I had not lived” (Thoreau 90). Thoreau understands how a day in his life is a part of a much longer span of time—a larger universe. Like the universe of a story reaching into our lives. He believes in making the most of his time and taking in everything around him. He went to live on Walden Pond in order to examine Nature and to find the Nature within—to learn everything that it could teach him about himself. He wanted to discover the true depth to everything around him, so that his life would not be, “frittered away by detail” (Thoreau 91).

Thoreau thinks about the railroad. He notices that, “We do not ride upon the railroad, it rides upon us” (Thoreau 92). The railroad symbolizes the track of time. People slaved away for the railroad, just as people slave away their time for money. We work to make railroads and windmills in order to make our lives “easier,” but really, we simply waste time crucial to our independence. Instead, we could preserve and create our own stories—participating in a time creation that comes from within our own unique selves and reaches out forever.

Thoreau also stated, “It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women” (Thoreau 109). He wants his readers to spend their time learning and to continue learning. He stated, “Follow your

genius closely enough, and it will not fail to show you a fresh prospect every hour” (Thoreau 112). With every hour of every day, we can create and unfold a universe—creating the same big bang that Biagio creates in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino. The world of the storyteller, Biagio, explodes as if it has become a part of the big bang, the ultimate end, and yet the beginning of an entirely new universe. We can connect to a moment and have it influence an intricate web of time. Thoreau notices the sound of the cockerels crow, imagining that the noise is big enough to “put nations on the alert,” noting an expansive universe and influence on time in that singular sound and moment (Thoreau 127).

Thoreau sees beyond physical space saying, “I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another” (Thoreau 133). How do we bring our own time closer to the time of others? Standing next to a person will not help a person to understand the other person’s experiences through time, but if one of them listens to the other’s stories and share their own, then the one will bring his/her self closer to the other. “The amount of it is, if a man is alive, there is always *danger* that he may die, though the danger must be allowed to be less in proportion as he is dead-and-alive to begin with” (Thoreau 153). With this sentence, Thoreau challenges our perceptions of both life and death, showing us the potential for us to control the way we live and embrace life.

Since we can observe beyond the frame as Thoreau does, a certain amount of responsibility comes with this ability. Thoreau states that, “No human being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature, which holds its life by the same tenure that he does” (Thoreau 212). To see only a creature, and not the whole

spectrum of complexity and genius that makes up that creature, or the implications of destroying that creature's role in an intricate web of time, can result in a betrayal of our own human potential. "The gross feeder is a man in the larva state; and there are whole nations in that condition, nations without fancy or imagination, whose vast abdomens betray them" (Thoreau 215). We cannot afford to devour intricate pieces of time hastily.

Thoreau sees a wealth of possibilities in each day. He says, "The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat as intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched" (Thoreau 216-217). In this quote, Thoreau directly invokes the imagery of outer space, the very contour of our universe, where he catches the dust of stars. He sees how his day remains a part of the universe and a universe in itself. He shows how "little things" (singular moments and wasted time) can destroy cultured civilizations with the prediction that, "Such apparently slight causes destroyed Greece and Rome, and will destroy England and America" (Thoreau 217).

Thoreau sees in human beings the physical and metaphysical self for, "Every man is the builder of a temple, called his body, to the god he worships, after a style purely his own, nor can he get off by hammering marble instead" (Thoreau 221). We cannot avoid the potential origins found within us just as we cannot avoid our physical place in our own bodies. "All that he could think of was to practice some new austerity, to let his mind descend into his body and redeem it, and treat himself with ever increasing respect" (Thoreau 222). As Thoreau observes everything around him, he poses an integral question; "Why do precisely these objects which we behold make a world?" (Thoreau

225). At the same time, he busies himself with creating world after world—an eternal stretch of time leading to independence.

As hunters move through Walden wood, Thoreau says, “They come rustling through the woods like autumn leaves, at least ten men to one loon” (Thoreau 233). The hunters become as small as leaves. The leaves become just as large and significant as the hunters. The hunters also form an overpowering force in time to the loon because there are ten large hunters and only one loon, but the loon has just as much significance in time as the ten hunters combined. The hunters move as quietly as the leaves and yet the discharge from their guns thunders through the woods. Isn’t the loon laughing just as loud and significant? Its laugh carries just as much potential to influence time.

In the section entitled “House Warming,” Thoreau describes cranberries as, “small waxen gems,” implying significance much greater than their physical size (Thoreau 238). He describes a farmer, “...with an ugly rake, leaving the smooth meadow in a snarl” (Thoreau 238). Thoreau witnesses a battle between a red and a black ant, and sees a larger human world within the small ant world. Now the large farmer becomes the black ant, much smaller than the farmer, but larger than the tiny red ant (the cranberries) and he tears it shreds without understanding his potential to influence time. Thoreau says, “And gradually from week to week the character of each tree came out, and it admired itself reflected in the smooth mirror of the lake” (Thoreau 240). Thoreau sees the reflections of the trees in the lake and imagines that the trees themselves see this reflection, while at the same time seeing our own lives and origin reflected in Nature.

Thoreau says, “My dwelling was small, and I could hardly entertain an echo in it; but it seemed larger for being a single apartment and remote from neighbors” (Thoreau

242). His apartment seemed larger because he could see beyond the frame of the cabin into the woods—to see the creatures there and a web of time. Thoreau thought about the depths of the relatively small pond, the well, and in turn, the human mind, and its potential to influence time—to contain genius. “The very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit” (Thoreau 306). Thoreau can see a whole world of influence in a single leaf. “Is not the hand a spreading *palm* leaf with its lobes and veins?” (Thoreau 307). He goes onto say, “Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principal of all the operations of Nature. The maker of this earth but patented a leaf” (Thoreau 308).

Numerous and tiny little pieces make up the human body, which in turn lend themselves to the operation of our minds. Thoreau says, “Let everyone mind his own business, and endeavor to be what he was made” (Thoreau 326). Tiny universes of time and influence operate within and all around us. We cannot waste time. Thoreau saw this and utilized his observations to make us more aware of the complexities and potential for genius that we can find everywhere. He concludes *Walden* perfectly saying, “The sun is but a morning star” (Thoreau 333). He ends by invoking; again, the large sun—a part of our even larger universe, and he makes it a part of the morning—the beginning of our day. Clearly, “The universe is wider than our views of it” (Thoreau 320). In order to live fully, we cannot waste time and should constantly work towards our independence. We must discover the origins and fullness within, and in turn, our own potential, and genius.

Time and human potential also play an important role in *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom. At the beginning of the story, a student named Mitch feels the fleetingness and urgency of time, but does not appreciate time in the ways that Thoreau

describes. Mitch describes the events of his graduation saying, “We listen impatiently to long speeches” (Albom 3). At this moment, Mitch urgently wants to move forward with his life. He wastes the moment. Yet, surely, someone put a lot of their own time and genius into the speeches that his mind rushes through. Mitch loses the lessons and graciousness of the moment to his desire for the future. Instead of feeling satisfied, he sees the curtain falling on his childhood. In this moment, Mitch knows that he does not want to forget about his favorite teacher, Morrie. He also does not want Morrie to forget him. So Mitch promises to “take the time” to keep in touch with Morrie, but he breaks his promise and leaves the potential relationship behind him.

When Mitch describes his first class with Morrie, he talks about students fumbling with their notebooks and syllabi—a simple sheet of paper that outlines how students should spend their time over the course of a semester in order to reach their full potential and genius. Mitch thinks about dropping Morrie’s class because he realizes that he cannot skip his class. Again, his urgency and desire to keep his time for himself almost deprives him of a valuable experience. Mitch left high school a year early and by the time he starts college, he already finds himself on the fast track. However, as Thoreau said about the railroad, the fast track rides Mitch. He tries to look older in order to compensate for his “extra time” (an extra year out of high school). When Mitch begins calling Morrie coach, Morrie replies, “Alright, I’ll be your coach. And you can be my player. You can play all the lovely parts of life that I’m too old for now” (Albom 31). Morrie seems to say this to Mitch as a warning to slow down and embrace the potential within.

Morrie does not rush to chew and swallow his food before he speaks. He fully enjoys his meals and his company by talking and eating at the same time. Mitch feels

comfortable talking to Morrie, and apparently, Morrie feels comfortable making time for Mitch. Near the end of the book, Morrie, sick and dying from Lou Gehrig's disease, tells Mitch a story about a little wave. At first, the wave appreciates and enjoys its time bobbing along and having fun, but then the wave realizes that eventually it will crash against the shore. The wave panics. This little wave greatly resembles Mitch. He knows that he will eventually die—he lives his life on deadlines. Mitch constantly hoards time desperately trying to do more than he should.

Another wave comes along and asks why the little wave appears so upset. The other wave resembles Morrie. The little wave warns the big wave about crashing against the shore. This parallels Mitch's fear and sadness about Morrie's impending death. Yet the big wave, like Morrie, sees the big picture and the potential for genius. He tells the little wave that he is not just a wave, but also a part of the ocean, in the same way that Mitch's time fits into infinite time—one man as a part of humanity. Mitch watches Morrie struggle to breathe in and out and his chest moves like the tides creating waves through his body. Mitch learns to make the most of his time instead of fearing the end of it. He allows all of his moments with Morrie to fully culminate into *Tuesdays With Morrie*, sharing the meaning that Morrie helped him discover in his own life, so that it reaches into ours.

The main character of *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Hester Prynne, also learns how to live fully and make the most of her time. Another definition of time refers to, "A period in the history of the world, or contemporary with the life or activities of a notable person: *prehistoric times; in Lincoln's time*" (Dictionary.com). History often reflects a betrayal of human potential and genius. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet*

Letter, he presents the readers with a rosebush, which “has been kept alive in history” (Hawthorne 46). The narrator reaches back to the story of Hester Prynne, a woman scandalized for committing adultery in Puritan society, and brings it to the reader in the present moment. When the townspeople try to humiliate Hester, one of them says, “Let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart” (Hawthorne 49). This statement displays the Puritans’ desire for the negative consequences of one moment of passionate action to last eternally. The townspeople’s hate counters the vibrant, love, life, time, and independence that Hester embodies. Another townspeople wastes time yelling, “This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die,” displaying a desire to end Hester’s time all together, just because Hester embraced a moment in time, despite the rigid guidelines of her society (Hawthorne 49).

The townspeople do everything in their power to punish Hester, but instead of letting society keep her down, Hester embraces time with her own potential. Her scarlet letter becomes a way for Hester to show off her impressive embroidery. This infuriates the townspeople even more and one of them inquires, “Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?” (Hawthorne 51). While Hester stands on the scaffold, the narrator says, “Her mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active, and kept bringing up other scenes than this roughly hewn street of a little town, on the edge of the Western wilderness; other faces than were lowering upon her from beneath the brims of those steeple-crowned hats” (Hawthorne 54). Hester partially escapes her moment of shame on the scaffold by traveling to the other moments in her

memory. Yet, as much as she travels through her mind, she still has to face the present moment.

The townspeople want Hester to serve as “a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone” (Hawthorne 58). Her sentence seemingly devours her time on earth, but she does not let it. Hawthorne says:

“Here, she said to herself, had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul, and work out another purity than that which she had lost; more saint-like, because the result of martyrdom” (Hawthorne 73).

While this quote may seem dismal, Hester’s punishment remains an earthly one—a punishment restrained by the limits of her earthly life, a simple frame that she can reach beyond to discover her own genius. The puzzle of time reveals itself to Hester and she seems to gain hope and pride from finding a bigger and more meaningful place in it through raising Pearl—an extension of herself and her moment with the man that she had an affair with, Reverend Dimmesdale.

Hester embroiders Pearl’s clothes. Hawthorne explains, “The child’s attire, on the other hand, was distinguished by a fanciful, or, we might rather say, a fantastic ingenuity, which served, indeed, to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl, but which appeared to have also a deeper meaning,” (Hawthorne 75). Pearl’s airy nature opposes the heavy iron found throughout the novel. Time and Hester’s burden do not weigh the small child down—she acts freely and independently. Hawthorne says, “Pearl’s aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety; in this one child there were many children, comprehending the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp, in little, of an infant princess” (Hawthorne 81). The infinite variety of Pearl’s features reflects the infinite features of time.

Hawthorne says:

“The discipline of the family, in those days, was a far more rigid kind than now. The frown, the harsh rebuke, the frequent application of the rod, enjoined by Scriptural authority, were used, not merely in the way of punishment for actual offenses, but as a wholesome regimen for the growth and promotion of all childish virtues” (Hawthorne 82).

The rules and practices of Puritan society work against the growth of potential that time promotes. Hawthorne describes Pearl saying, “After putting her finger in her mouth, with many ungracious refusals to answer good Mr. Wilson’s question, the child finally announced that she had not been made at all, but had been plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses, that grew by the prison door” (Hawthorne 99). Pearl edits history. She denies having a maker and portrays her mother as simply plucking her from the very rosebush introduced to us at the beginning of the novel. She claims her origin of potential. She does not waste time, but uses it to her advantage in order to achieve her independence. In order to live fully, she discovers the origins within and projects it onto the rosebush, displaying her own potential, and genius.

Death's Reminder: Time's Value in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *The Old Man and Sea*, and *The Autobiography of My Mother*

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, *The Old Man and Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, and *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid show that death clearly awaits us, but our stories exist apart from our bodies, and can live on eternally if we work to create and move forward as a part of all of humanity. We cannot let death hold us back, if anything it should motivate us forward. Grappling with death becomes the next stage in the map of time that this thesis outlines. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, a young boy, named Huck, lives fully in the present, and he understands the significance of time. Huck views time as, "Duration regarded as belonging to the present as distinct from the life to come or from eternity; finite duration" (Dictionary.com).

He hates wasting time and seems to sense unknowingly the immediacy of life. Death plays an important role in shaping Huck's interactions with time. For example, when his gracious caretaker, the widow, whose old age serves as a constant reminder of impending death, insists on saying grace before eating, Huck gets annoyed because he understands that the real purpose of sitting down at the table is to eat, to sustain his life further, and he does not see the point of waiting. He lives in the moment and "don't take no stock in dead people" (Twain 4). Learning about Moses puts Huck into a sweat until the widow explains that Moses has died. Huck can no longer draw a connection between Moses and the present moment he lives in, so he completely disregards the story. The dead exist outside of Huck's time. Their stories remain unable to reach into his. Death cannot hold him back. Instead, it drives him forward.

Time and action move quickly through the story, as Huck encounters event after event. Suddenly, purposeful action stops, time keeps moving forward, and he wastes both time and action at Aunt Sally's house with his good friend Tom Sawyer. When Huck Finn becomes bored, he cannot help fidgeting. His natural impulses drive him to move. Another woman he lives with, Miss Watson, associates his fidgeting with misbehaving and warns Huck about hell, but the boy remains relatively unfazed, thinking, "All I wanted was to go somewhere; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular" (Twain 5).

The regard that Huck has for his own life, and for the life of a slave, named Jim, directly relates to the death that Huck encounters throughout the novel. Huckleberry also understands the importance of human relationships to the quality of life. He thinks about Tom's behavior and asks Miss Watson whether she thinks Tom will go to heaven or hell. He feels relief when she says that Tom will go hell because Huck believes that his own soul will go to hell, and if Tom goes as well, then Huck will have a friend there. Huck's determination that he will go to hell contributes to his utter desire to live. He sees a dark, dreary fate ahead of him, and so he absolutely must make the most his time. Heaven and hell relate to death and life, dark and light, and in turn, the reader can connect them to dark and light skin. Huck's ability to view hell in a way different from society connects to his ability to view Jim in a different "light" as well. Huck would rather go to hell than to remain bored and inactive. He needs to get out and live—to make the most of his time.

Later in the novel, Huck says, "If you are with the quality, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you ain't sleepy—if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upward of a thousand places" (Twain 9). At a funeral, where death appears more than imminent, we as readers see that Huck feels an

intense desire to fidget and scratch his body all over. The time to live and move weighs down on him. Tom, on the other hand, enjoys life and adventure, but does not sense the same immediacy that Huck does. When Tom goes over plans to become burglars, he discusses their victims saying, “per’aps if we keep them till they’re ransomed, it means that we keep them till they’re dead” (Twain 14). In Tom’s mind, he has all of the time in the world. They could spend the rest of their lives guarding their prisoners for all he cares. Tom would rather do things by the books than live in the moment. Huck tires of Tom’s adventures because he does not see the point. Tom’s actions lack purpose. He wastes his potential.

At school, Huck can only learn the multiplication tables up to a certain point. He says, “I don’t reckon I could ever get any further than that if I was to live forever. I don’t take no stock in mathematics, anyway” (Twain 22). Huck does not see how math practically applies to his own life, so he disregards it. He’d rather solve problems in life and time than problems on paper. While Huck “don’t take no stock in mathematics,” he does pay attention to superstition. This fits nicely in with his idea of a fate in hell. With a predestined future, the concept of warnings and symbols of good and bad luck seems natural. Huck does not root himself in the past. He lives in the future. After all, his actions prove progressive—he lives in hope!

When Huck finds himself trapped in a cabin, parallel to Jim’s enslavement, the reader sees that his father, Pap, has a pallid complexion, which serves as a startling contrast to Jim’s dark skin. Pap appears as a living dead man married to a dead wife, Huck’s lost mother. He seals his fate when he says, “it’s the hand of a man that’s started a new life, and’ll die before he’ll go back” (Twain 31). Huck spends all of his time trying

to find a way out. Pap returns to the cabin drunk and covered with mud. He sees Huck and mistakes him for the Angel of Death. Huck's will to live serves as a constant reminder to Pap of how he wastes life. Alcohol enslaves Pap, and instead of fighting to free himself like Huck and Jim, he lets it control his life.

Huckleberry frees himself by faking his own death. A loaf of bread (nourishment to live) floats down the river to Huck and he believes that widow willed it to him; that the bread reaches him by fate. When Jim and Huck run into each other, Jim mistakes Huck for a ghost. He discovers that Huck still lives and through a fake death has found freedom, through darkness light, just as Jim escapes because of the commotion that Huck's fake death caused. Jim shares his superstitions with Huck, "He said it was death. His father laid sick once, and some of them catched a bird, and his old granny said his father would die, and he did" (Twain 62). In the story, catching a bird parallels enslaving a man, and because of this enslavement, illness entraps another man, and he dies. "And he said if a man owned a beehive and that man dies, the bees must be told about it before sun-up next morning, or else the bees would weaken and die" (Twain 62). In this story, the bees remain completely dependent on the life of another man, and yet this man owns them. Did slaveholders pass this story down among their slaves in order to keep them from disobeying their masters? The story holds the death of the owner over the heads of the bees. Their collective lives (as an ocean) depend on the life and knowledge of the farmer instead of on each other.

Jim says, "You see, maybe you's got to be po' a long time fust, en so you might git discourage' en kill yo'sef'f you didn't know by de sign dat you gwyne to be rick bymeby" (Twain 63). While Huck's drive to live stems from a belief in his future demise

in hell, Jim's willpower comes from signs of caution and hope. Jim also says, "Yes; en I's rick now, come to look at it. I owns myself, en I's wuth eight hund'd dollars. I wisht I had de money, I wouldn' want no mo'" (Twain 65). While Jim's realization of owning himself and taking control of his own destiny brings promise to the story along with the contrast of Jim's worth in relation to Pap's, it also shows the complexities of a system, that instead of abandoning, Jim plays into. This becomes more apparent later in the novel, when he expresses the desire to buy his family back. He wants to use the system to his advantage instead of breaking free from it.

Jim protects Huck from the knowledge of Pap's death, from darkness, but Huckleberry constantly uses death to his advantage, to create a new life. Whenever he gets into a tight squeeze, he claims that someone in his family has died, for he has attuned himself to the effects of death on others. Just as Jim understands the effect that Pap's death might have on Huck. By freeing himself through death, Huck sees the value of life, which he witnesses others undervalue. When they run into some men on a steamboat, Huck witnesses how brutally people treat each other. On the big raft, two men fight each other. One calls himself "corpse-maker," "Sudden Death," and "General Isolation" (Twain 121). This man also claims to eat "a bushel of rattlesnakes and a dead body when I'm ailing," and says, "the wails of the dying is music to my ear!" (Twain 121). In saying these things not only does he display a disregard for the value of life, but he also unintentionally tramples on Jim's belief that killing rattlesnakes brings bad luck, which equate to karma, or the dire consequences of an action. Later in the novel, Huck overhears men telling a story about a haunted barrel with a dead baby inside. The dead baby represents wasted life and lost opportunity. The infant, entrapped in a barrel for

eternity, parallels the system of slavery. Time does not enslave Huck because he lives in the now—he follows the river of time’s natural progression. He lives outside of the story of entrapment, but still confronts and grapples with its implications, becoming a hero.

When Huck feels the pressures of society, he loses touch with his will to live, and instead he wishes for death, as he does when feeling guilty for helping a runaway slave. He lets go of his control over his own time and hands it over to society, but only shortly. When Huck enters the home of another family, the Grangerford’s, for the first time, he notices that they have “Dr. Gunn’s *Family Medicine*, which told you all about what to do if a body was sick or dead,” which seems ironic considering that the family throws their lives away (Twain 152-153). Even losing their daughter, Emmeline, and three sons did not make them value life. Emmeline spent her short life drawing gloomy pictures with dead birds, an animal capable of flight forever earthbound, and entertaining herself with obituaries. She turns an obituary for a young boy, Stephen Dowling Bots, into a singsong riddle. The families live in wartime between each other and cannot learn from the deaths of their loved ones. After the Shepherdsons massacre the Grangerford family, Huck escapes by faking his death once again.

When Huck travels with a couple of con artists, called the king and the duke, they come to a town where the locals like to entertain themselves with dogfights. They set stray dogs on fire and then watch the poor dogs run themselves to death, much like watching a slave work his life away. In this same town, Colonel Sherburn kills a man named Boggs like nothing. Then the townspeople retaliate by trying to lynch the killer—trying to defend the value of one life by destroying another. Eventually, the king and the duke move on to take advantage of the value of a dead man. Huck returns the money to

the coffin. During the funeral a dog begins making a racket; “it was only one dog, but he made a most powerful racket, and he kept it up right along” (Twain 260). The dog sees a rat and follows his natural impulses and starts barking at it, much like how at a funeral Huck wants to fidget and itch himself. The dog’s bark serves as an unpleasant interference that no one wants to deal with except for the parson.

Mark Twain included death throughout the novel in order to reinforce the urgency of our time on earth. The reader sees that Tom Sawyer does not understand this urgency and at Aunt Sally’s, Tom wastes time. He insists that Jim work within a failed system, that he tames rattlesnakes, and make an animal submissive to himself. Tom learned this method of freeing himself through the submission of others in the books that he has read. When Tom says that, “Every animal is grateful for kindness and petting, and they wouldn’t *think* of hurting a person that pets him,” he unknowingly creates a parallel between pets, the dogs found throughout the book, and slaves. When we as readers apply Tom’s philosophy to slavery, we see that he implies that we only treat other people good enough to keep them content and submissive. He wastes everyone’s time so that he can have some entertainment. The death of old Miss Watson has already freed Jim. Why did Jim have to wait for Miss Watson to die in order to gain his freedom? Why did Tom waste so much of Jim’s time on top of that time wasted? The death throughout the novel shows us that our time on earth has its limit and we cannot afford to waste it. When we value time and life, we value others. Death can motivate us forward as integral members of humanity. Huck knows that death clearly awaits him, but his story and influential actions exists apart from his body. Despite his belief in his future demise in hell, he lives

on eternally as he moves forward as a part of all of humanity. He does not let death hold him back. Instead, it motivates him forward.

Death also plays an important role in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, where a younger fisherman/boy, named Manilon, values an older angler, named Santiago. The old man fishes alone and has his independence, yet the boy, who does not have his independence and remains obligated to his parents, looks out for Santiago. The sail of the old man's skiff "was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat" (Hemingway 9). The old man in many ways embodies this sail, and yet he continues to struggle onwards refusing to let time and death defeat him. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated" (Hemingway 10). Santiago's eyes symbolize a lasting vitality despite his old age. They reflect the same color of the expansive ocean. His eyes give him strength just as his "I," his own self and independence, make life and continued time worth the struggle that Santiago must endure.

Manilon works for a blind fisherman, and so this man, unlike Santiago with his good eyesight, has become dependent on the eyesight of the boy. Santiago, on the other hand, can see just fine. He keeps the memory of his wife alive by clinging to her old relics. Yet, he takes her photograph down. Seeing a picture of the woman that he cannot see in physical life creates a burden of loss, while seeing her things makes it seem like she might still exist—strengthening her story in his memory. Santiago has vivid memories saying to Manilon, "When I was your age I was before the mast on a square rigged ship that ran to Africa and I have seen lions on the beaches in the evenings" (Hemingway 22). The old man reflects on an image from his youth and sees lions. These

lions represent Santiago's independent spirit—the power he has to keep going even when he has found himself completely alone and near death. The evening parallels the old man's old age as the night of his life—death draws near. The beach symbolizes peace, or an end to his entire struggle.

“‘Age is my alarm clock,’ the old man said. ‘Why do old men wake so early? Is it to have one longer day?’” (Hemingway 24). Later in the book, the reader learns, “For a long time now eating had bored him and he never carried a lunch” (Hemingway 27). The old man's relationship with eating parallels Huck Finn's relationship with food. They both eat what they need to survive and get on with their lives. The old man sees a Portuguese man-of-war, which represents death. Unlike humans, the sea turtles remain immune the man-of-war's poisonous filaments. Santiago loves seeing the sea turtles eating the man-of-war. The turtles' rough exteriors and long lifespan remind him of himself—only a better self that truly triumphs over death. After all, “a turtle's heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up and butchered” (Hemingway 37). The turtle struggles to survive even when the creature gets cut and butchered, in the same way that Santiago constantly struggles against death.

When the old man's line hooks the fish, the fish pulls the skiff through the ocean, in the same way that time pulls Santiago through life. “This will kill him, the old man thought. He can't do this forever. But four hours later the fish was still swimming steadily out to sea, towing the skiff, and the old man was still braced solidly with the line across his back” (Hemingway 45). The fish's ability to keep struggling on against death parallels the struggle of the old man. The two both fight against death and the two both find themselves tied together by the fishing line. Santiago thinks:

“Perhaps he is too wise to jump. He could ruin me by jumping or by a wild rush. But perhaps he has been hooked many times before and knows that this is how he should make his fight. He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man. But what a great fish he is and what will he bring in the market if his flesh is good?” (Hemingway 49).

Both the fish and the old man have their independence and yet they somehow become tied. Santiago goes on to think, “He took the bait like a male and he pulls like a male and his fight has no panic in it. I wonder if he has any plans or if he is just as desperate as I am?” (Hemingway 49). Santiago and the fish live in the moment, and the old man’s desperate struggle to defeat the fish alludes to his struggle to overcome/defeat death. He desperately struggles against death even though it clearly awaits him. His story reaches into Manilón’s. Death does not hold Santiago back.

In *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid, the narrator, Xuela makes time her own even though death defeats her mother. She says “My mother died at the moment I was born, and so for my whole life there was nothing standing between myself and eternity; at my back was always a bleak, black wind” (Kincaid 3). This quote triggers the reader to examine the unique role time plays in this novel. Breaking down the quote reveals the complex manner that the speaker, Xuela, views time. She tunes us into a “moment”—a single moment in time, the moment she was born and her life (her own segment in time) began. She juxtaposes her “whole life” next to the single moment of her birth and her mother’s death. She introduces “nothing,” an absence of everything including time, which stands between her and eternity, or endless time. She characterizes the end that comes from her beginning as a “bleak, black wind” at her back. The moment follows behind her in the past, but the wind blows further, time keeps moving. This

moment becomes all moments of all time—universal. The moment reaches out like the story Biagio tells in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino.

Xuela goes on to say, “And this realization of loss and gain made me look backward and forward: at my beginning was this woman whose face I had never seen, but at my end was nothing, no one between me and the black room of the world” (Kincaid 3). Words such as “loss,” “backward,” “never,” “end,” “nothing,” “no one,” and “black room,” reflect the immense loss of her mother (her creator of time), while words such as, “gain,” “forward,” “beginning,” and “world,” reflect time and life (she lives despite her loss). The concept of looking forward and backward might make the reader think of physical time as it exists and then how time functions in our memory. Real time constantly marches on, but we can move forward and backwards through the time of our memory. On a similar note, even though time moves at a constant pace, we often perceive it as either dragging along, or slipping through our fingers.

When Xuela talks about her father, she says, “That I was a burden to him, I know; that his soiled clothes were a burden to him, I know; that he did not know how to take care of me himself, or how to clean his own clothes, I know” (Kincaid 4). Xuela asks the reader to think about the known versus the unknown. We base the things we know on our life and our perceptions of it, while death remains the ultimate unknown, and yet death defines Xuela’s identity—her very existence. The things that Xuela “knows,” including her perception of time, remain completely dependent on her point of view. She contrasts and defines what she knows with what her father does not know. From Xuela’s standpoint, her father does not know how to take care of himself and therefore he does not know how to live in the same way that Pap in *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn* by

Mark Twain does not know how to live meaningfully. They do not create anything on their own and their stories become void. On top of that, Xuela's father does not know how to clean his own clothes and therefore he does not know how to live independently.

Xuela describes her caretaker, Eunice, and outlines Eunice's relationship with a HEAVEN plate saying, "she thought this picture was a picture of heaven, offering as it did a secret promise of a life without worry or care or want" (Kincaid). The plate depicted a field full of flowers—life in bloom. Heaven carries the promise of extended time beyond the limited time of our individual lives, but Xuela breaks the plate, like breaking a promise, and makes Ma Eunice cry. She says, "I did not immediately feel sorry, I did not feel sorry shortly after, I felt sorry long afterward, and by then it was too late to tell her so, she had died; perhaps she went to heaven and it fulfilled the promise on that plate" (Kincaid 9). Again, Xuela plays with time and perception. She sets out a line of time with the words "immediately," "shortly after," "long afterwards," and "too late." Then she turns our perception of time slightly on its side with the possibility of Ma Eunice's existence in heaven as an extension of time gone.

At the beginning of the novel, Xuela attempts to take control of the lives of three turtles, which parallel the turtles in *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. Both serve as symbols of life and death—birth and old age. Xuela says, "I wanted to speak only to them each day for the rest of my life" (Kincaid 11). The single unit of the day extends beyond to fill up the rest of her life. She places the three turtles in an enclosed area and makes them completely dependent on her for their existence. The biblical undertones of the number three and the significance of her possibly controlling representatives of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit display her deep desire for control.

Yet, Xuela cannot completely control the turtles because the turtles withdraw into their shells in the same way that Manilon cannot control Santiago. She tries to take control further by drying up the riverbed and covering them with stones. For days, she forgets about their existence, and when she returns, they have ceased to exist.

As Xuela learns about how “THE BRITISH EMPIRE” influences her own time, she says, “...at the time, each thing as it took place stood out in my mind with a sharpness that I now take for granted; it did not then have a meaning, it did not have a context, I did not know the history of events, I did not know their antecedents” (Kincaid 15). This quote speaks to Xuela’s own struggle to find her own place (origin) in time and to understand the meaning of that place—that extended moment that would become her life. Xuela helps us as readers to understand what time meant to her, by telling us what it does not have: meaning and a context. Xuela reveals the known, in other words life, through the unknown, or in other words death.

When Xuela’s father remarries and they move to a new house, she says:

“The back of my head touched his chest from time to time, I could hear the sound of his heart beating through his shirt, the uniform that, when people saw him wearing it coming toward them, made them afraid, for his presence when wearing these clothes was almost always not a good thing” (Kincaid 25).

At this moment of change in Xuela’s life, she focuses on the measured beat of her father’s heart, a natural marker of time, muffled by the uniform her father wears, a uniform that frightens others and reinforces his control. She goes on to say, “I was part of a procession of sadness, which was moving away from my old life, a life I had lived for only seven years” (Kincaid 26). Moments define Xuela’s life, and she has a very hard time putting the past behind her. She has divided her life into multiple lives. She lives, and dies daily.

Xuela sees a young boy swim out to a woman surrounded by fruit. The boy sinks beneath the water and the woman and her fruit vanish as if nothing happened. The repeated images of rot, decay, fruit, and ripeness serve as natural markers of time. Xuela explains the significance of this image saying, “Everything about us is held in doubt and we the defeated define all that is unreal, all that is not human, all that is without love, all that is without mercy” (Kincaid 37). Xuela begins to define her reality, controlling her narrative. If fruit serve as a natural marker of time, the freshest and most present time, then we can begin to see the layers of significance to the young boy swimming out to this woman. Could she represent time itself? She lures the boy to her and he drowns—time vanishes.

When Xuela reflects on her mother and father, she says, “And so my mother and father then were a mystery to me: one through death, the other through the maze of living; one I had never seen, the other I saw constantly” (Kincaid 41). Xuela has cancelled out her father’s existence, like a mathematical equation where the death of her mother becomes a negative number that always leaves a sum of zero. Her father questions her reality, her story of the boy, the woman, and the fruit, and therefore cancels Xuela out in the same way that she cancels out him. She must cling to what she “knows”—her very own history.

The tragedy of the book rests not in the death of Xuela’s mother, but in her inability to love and be loved. She can only love herself saying, “Such a love will do, but it will only do, it is not the best kind; it has the taste of something left out on a shelf too long that has turned rancid, and when eaten makes the stomach turn” (Kincaid 57). To love only herself, involves an obsession with her own past—rotting fruit and time lost.

Yet, Xuela's redemption comes in the form of her story and the telling of it. Her story reaches out of her physical body (frame) into the eternal.

When Xuela lives with a couple she calls Monsieur and Madame, she observes how Monsieur spends a great deal of time in his room counting money. He displays the wasteful notion of "time is money"—an endless cycle like Xuela's equation meaning everything and nothing at the same *time*. Madame carries the heavy burden of her lost youth and the children that she wanted to birth, but could not. She tries to impart this burden onto Xuela, but Xuela refuses to accept Madame's burden, and insists on carrying her own life, in other words time, in her own hands. Xuela defines her life with death, she claims the great unknown for herself, and it becomes her. Through claiming the infinite and sharing her story, she reaches into the eternal. Death has already taken Xuela's mother and it awaits her, but her story exists apart from her physical body in physical time, and can live on eternally in the words that she writes. She does not let death hold her back; instead, she claims death and it propels her meaningful story forward.

The Battle of the Clock: Time Control in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Catch-22*

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest by Ken Kesey, and *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller teach us as readers that as we move forward, our time should remain in our own hands, so that we can continue to live fully and independently. Claiming independence becomes the next stage in the map of time that this thesis outlines. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* written by Ken Kesey, the head nurse, Nurse Ratched, controls time for those on the ward in the same way that Xuela tried to control the time of the turtles in *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid. The narrator, Chief Bromden, says, "...I know it's the Big Nurse by the way the lockworks cleave to the key, soft and swift and familiar she been around locks so long" (Kesey 4). She turns keys and locks doors—tightens bolts and turns the hands of the clock with her rigid scheduling, like the rigid head of a ratchet and the handle turning like minute and hour hands. Bromden says, "She's got that bag full of a thousand parts she aims to use in her duties today—wheels and gears, cogs polished to a hard glitter, tiny pills that gleam like porcelain, needles, forceps, watchmakers' pliers, rolls of copper wire..." (Kesey 4). She defines their place in time—placing them in Monday morning and pointing out numerous appointments.

To Nurse Ratched, Monday means that they should use the day to get a good head start on the week. She orders the black boys who work on the ward to shave Bromden, so that they do not waste their precious Monday—acting like Tuesday will never come on time otherwise. Yet, Bromden knows that, "Shaving before you get breakfast is the worst time" (Kesey 6). Nurse Ratched chooses the worst time in order to reinforce her control of time. Bromden points out the nurses control when he says, "...But like always when I

try to place my thoughts in the past and hide there, the fear close at hand seeps in through the memory” (Kesey 6). What if Tuesday never comes? Chief Bromden has absolutely no control over his place in physical time and the Big Nurse has worked hard to make sure he has no control over his place in the time of his memory. By comparing Chief Bromden to the turtles in *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid, we see that he uses his own silence as a shell. He never speaks and allows himself to fall into a fog without daring to step out, and claim time as his own.

When Bromden does escape into his memory and the past, he thinks about a dog running around a tree unable to figure out where a bird hidden under the branches rests. Later, when a new patient, named McMurphy, arrives, one of the black boys circles around him like the dog circling the tree. The dog could not get to the bird, just as the black boy cannot get to McMurphy. The bird in the tree lives, but when McMurphy shakes hands with the Vegetables, their hands flop into his hand like dead birds. If the tree signifies then time protects McMurphy because he takes control of time, just as the bird utilizes the foliage of the tree. Natural time pits itself against Nurse Ratched’s machine time.

Nurse Ratched, also known as the Big Nurse, runs her outfit like a well-oiled machine. Bromden says:

“What she dreams of there in the center of those wires is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren’t outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronicles with catheter tubes run direct from every pant leg to the sewer under the floor” (Kesey 29).

The wheelchair Chronicles remain the only ones outside of Nurse Ratched’s time control until McMurphy enters the ward. Yet, Nurse Ratched has such a strong control over time

that Bromden says, “About the only time we get any letup from this time control is in the fog; then time doesn’t mean anything. It’s lost in the fog, like everything else” (Kesey 78). She has turned the hands of the clock so tightly that the patients have no other choice than to lose their handle on time completely and to fall into the non-time of the fog—to remain in the fog like the bird in the tree so that the dogs cannot find them. Yet, they do not have a tree, they cannot even see the tree through the fog, so they cannot have control of their time—they must wait in the fog, unable to sense time.

Randal Patrick McMurphy’s initials, RPM, stand for revolutions per minute, or, “...the number of full rotations completed in one minute around a fixed axis” (Wikipedia.org). We commonly use RPMs as a unit of frequency to measure the rotational speed or angular velocity of some mechanical component. McMurphy embodies time and frequency—working against the tightening and winding of Nurse Ratched’s ratchet. He knows his place in the tree and he lifts the patients out of the fog and out of the clutches of the dogs. He does this by taking small steps, at first, in order to reclaim his time. When Nurse Ratched and the black boys insist that McMurphy can only brush his teeth at a certain time, McMurphy dips his toothbrush into a bucket of soapy water and brushes his teeth when he wants to. When he wants to watch the World Series on TV, he finds a way to reclaim his time again.

McMurphy gathers the men around and has them all watching the game. The Big Nurse will not let them actually watch TV, but they all stop cleaning and sit in front of the screen anyways. Bromden says, “For the first time she’s on the other side of the glass and getting a taste of how it feels to be watched when you wish more than anything else to be able to pull a green shade between your face and all the eyes that you can’t get

away from” (Kesey 149). The Big Nurse finally experiences the feeling of when time no longer remains her own because all of the other eyes now intrude on it. Bromden also notices that, “There’s no more fog any place” (Kesey 149). McMurphy has reclaimed time and pulled the other men up into the tree along with him.

Once McMurphy pulls Bromden into the tree, the Chief begins to examine how he has spent his time, “sponging and dusting and mopping” (Kesey 151). However, the Nurse tries her best to reclaim time at their meetings. One look at the doctor and she has him fidgeting, looking at his watch, and winding it and winding it and winding it. Bromden says, “Some way she has regained all her old power in a few short minutes. Just sitting there, smiling up at the ceiling and not saying anything, she has taken control again and made everyone aware that she’s the force in here to be dealt with” (Kesey 153). She controls time by predicting the future and tries to frighten the staff by outlining what McMurphy might do if they do not “do something about him.” She believes that she has all the time in the world to get control of McMurphy so that she can regain control of the ward.

Bromden finally begins to regain his natural sense of time as he notices the change of seasons. For the first time in a long time, he knows that fall has arrived. Yet, McMurphy becomes squeamish when he discovers at the pool that the nurse has more control over his time than he had counted on. She decides how long McMurphy stays on the ward. As the other patients begin to orientate themselves with time, like Bromden begins to with his ability to sense the natural seasons, they do not want to give up their control of time, but they still need McMurphy to hold them up in the tree. When McMurphy appears to have given up his control of time to the Big Nurse, the other

patients do not really know how to take control of time on their own. Some patients, such as Cheswick and Billy Bibbit, take control of their time by ending it. The Big Nurse discourages them from valuing their own time in the way that Huck Finn, Santiago, and Xuela do. Naturally then, with the inability to appreciate a meaningful life and reach their potential, they choose death and kill themselves.

When McMurphy discovers that Bromden keeps old pieces of gum under his bed, he sings, “Does the spearmint lose its flavor on the bedpost overnight?”, and assures Bromden that he has until 6:30 in the morning to listen to the Chief practice talking. He also reassures Bromden that they both have enough time to regain control. The gum will last into the morning—they have some time. Then he invites Bromden on his fishing trip, a whole day where they can control their own time fishing on a boat. The chief notices that the Chronicles know instinctively that he will go on the trip saying, “...old Chronicles wake up sudden some nights, before anybody else knows a guy’s died in the dorm, and throw back their heads and howl” (Kesey 227). Bromden characterizes the Chronicles as dogs with an innate sense of time and death, like the dog that runs around the tree in Bromden’s memory, but can never climb the trunk, or truly know what hides in its branches. Bromden must learn to climb the tree on his own.

The girls that McMurphy invites to the ward always arrive late, but when they do arrive, their tardiness does not matter—the moment matters. A feeble patient, named George, becomes the captain on their fishing trip, and all of the men take control of the boat. McMurphy pulls everything out of the fog, as the doctor pulls a giant fish with the help of the other men out of the fog of the ocean. When they all return to the ward, The Big Nurse tries to put them back into the fog by giving them “special showers” that she

knows will break George (who fears soap) and then McMurphy (who will fight on George's behalf). Yet, Bromden shines and both McMurphy and the Chief pull themselves out of the Electro Shock Therapy (EST) fog quicker than ever.

When McMurphy returns to the ward, the men make their last great stand against Nurse Ratched's clock. They fill the night with excitement, life, and a true freedom from the Big Nurse's tightly wound watch. McMurphy oversleeps because he no longer falls in step with Nurse Ratched's schedule. He falls outside of her time control and so she turns him into a Vegetable, but Bromden frees McMurphy in the night—crushing his skull. Then he takes off and takes back his control of time fully by throwing a *control* panel through a window and escaping. The other men follow Bromden's lead, and leave the ward. In the end, the Big Nurse loses the battle of the clock, while the men gain the ability to appreciate time and claim their independence. As they move forward, they take time into their own hands, so that they can begin to live fully and independently.

The soldiers in *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller also encounter difficulty in gaining control of their own time. Heller begins the book with the line, "It was love at first sight," focusing in on an instant—the moment that the main character, Yossarian, sees the chaplain for the first time (Heller 7). Throughout the story, Yossarian continues to fall madly in love in only an instant. Just as quickly as these moments of love arrive, we as readers see them pass. These moments pass so quickly because Yossarian's story takes place during *wartime*—dormant time. After all, the definition of time in regards to the military states, "The rate of marching, calculated on the number of paces taken per minute: *double time*; *quick time*" (Dictionary.com). Yossarian and the other soldiers become slaves to *wartime*, which marches on without purpose or meaning.

At the beginning of the story, Yossarian stays in the hospital for a liver condition, which falls just short of being jaundice. Heller explains, “If it became jaundice they could treat it. If it didn’t become jaundice and went away they could discharge him. But this just being short of jaundice all the time confused them” (Heller 7). His condition remains trapped between jaundice and not jaundice creating a tension of opposites where Yossarian rests in the center unable to move forward in time.

Yossarian spends his time censoring letters and lying around idly. His chosen mode of inaction further displays the unproductive and still characteristics of wartime. He chooses to remain inactive as a way to adjust to the unnatural time that the system inflicts upon him. Yet, his daily whims help him to take small steps towards reclaiming time. For example, instead of simply censoring letters, as he should, he invents games. He begins signing letters as either Washington Irving or Irving Washington, a practice that another victim of wartime, Major Major, also adopts in order to cope with the restraints of this time. Through this practice, both Yossarian and Major Major help to create a character and a story that takes on a life of its own.

The constant threat of death beats down on many of the soldiers, and because of this threat, many of them cannot live. Heller describes another soldier, named Dunbar, saying, “He was working hard at increasing his lifespan. He did it by cultivating boredom. Dunbar was working so hard at increasing his lifespan that Yossarian thought he was dead” (Heller 9). This creates the ultimate paradox or Catch-22 because most of the soldiers feel so afraid of dying that they cannot live. Yossarian’s roommate, Orr, contrasts the rest of the soldiers in that he confronts his fear of death and practices crash

landings. He continues to learn and create under the pressures of wartime and this contributes to his ability to claim his own independence.

Joseph Heller states in an interview with Paul Krassner that:

“There is a tradition of taboo against submitting to the examination of many of our ideological beliefs, religious beliefs; many things that become a matter of traditional behavior, or habit, acquire status where they seem to be exempt from examination. Or even to suggest that they do be examined becomes a form of heresy” (Krassner 6).

Heller points to the source of many of the risks that we encounter in life. Yossarian and the other soldiers debate whether to risk their lives in order to fight the system and reclaim their time as their own. Yossarian remains unable to break free from the Catch-22 until he believes that he has nothing left to lose. Catch-22 enslaves all of the soldiers.

Heller explains:

“There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask; and as soon as he did, he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't, but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to; but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle” (Heller 46).

Orr breaks free from Catch-22. He carefully makes use of his time without wasting it, and he constantly works towards the goal of escape—independence! When the chaplain suggests that Orr has miraculously washed ashore in Sweden, Yossarian responds by saying, “He didn't wash ashore in Sweden. He rowed there! He rowed there, chaplain, he rowed there” (Heller 449). Yossarian says this in order to give Orr the credit he deserves. Orr takes control of his own time and destiny; it does not fall into his lap like a miraculous fate. Orr owns his identity. He knew the risk involved in escaping, but he decided to do it anyways. Yossarian reinforces the importance of this saying, “He planned it that way! He went to Sweden deliberately” (Heller 449).

The chaplain's belief and struggle with God serves as an interesting contrast to Orr's self-driven deliberative actions. Orr takes control of the clock, while the chaplain hands it over to God. This also ties in with the chaplain's experiences of *déjà vu*. He feels as though everything has already happened to him. Events repeat themselves as if predestined. The chaplain finds himself stuck in a time loop, seeing everything twice, instead of living and moving beyond singular moments as Orr does. Repeating mission after mission only ends in death. Yossarian realizes this and becomes ready to make his own escape. He takes control of his own clock saying, "There's nothing negative about running away to save my life" (Heller 451). As Yossarian moves forward, he holds time in his own hands, so that he can begin to live fully and independently.

Life's Adventures: Where Time Leads Us in *On the Road* and *Dreams from My Father*

Finally, *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, and *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama show us that life should consist of adventure. We will never have full control over our time, so we should take in the whole experience of life, and make the most of it. Adventure becomes the next stage in the map of time that this thesis outlines. In regards to music, the definition of time refers to, "The general movement of a particular kind of musical composition with reference to its rhythm, metrical structure, and tempo" (Dictionary.com). Music plays an important role in *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. The relationship of two of the main characters, Sal and Dean, parallels a musical composition, where the book reflects the general movement of their relationship in time.

The narrator, Sal, describes the beginning of their relationship saying, "This is all far back, when Dean was not the way he is today. When he was a young jailkid shrouded in mystery" (Kerouac 1). Sal reaches back in time renewing the story of his relationship with Dean, similar to Biagio's renewal of Cossimo's story in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino. He outlines Dean as a kid with newly discovered independence. Yet despite Dean's young age, he has already begun to control his own clock, and he works to maintain the schedule of his life. He says to his wife, Marylou, "...it is absolutely necessary now to postpone all those leftover things concerning our personal love-things and at once begin thinking of specific worklife plans..." (Kerouac 2).

Sal's other friends float through time, while Dean works to cement his place in it. Sal says, "That night we all drank beer and pulled wrists and talked till dawn, and in the morning, while we sat around dumbly smoking butts from ashtrays in the gray lights of a

gloomy day, Dean got up nervously, paced around, thinking, and decided that the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor” (Kerouac 2). Dean’s death anxiety, similar to Huck’s in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, gives Dean the intense desire to live fully in the moment. Dean says to Marylou, “In other words we’ve got to get on the ball, darling, what I’m saying, otherwise it’ll be fluctuating and lack of true knowledge or crystallization of our plans” (Kerouac 3). Dean wants a real control over his time and life; in turn, he attempts to control the time and life of Marylou, so that her life fits neatly into his.

However, Sal and Dean’s lives constantly fluctuate. Sal describes his passive compliance with Dean’s time control saying:

“I shambled after as I’ve been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a common place thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes ‘Aww!’” (Kerouac 5).

Sal wants to live intensely, so he gives up control and looks to others with the same desire. He sees Dean’s thirst for life as Promethean fire—knowledge and truth. Therefore, Sal chases flames because people like Dean take all of time’s chaos and grasp it tightly, backing “...a car forty miles an hour into a tight squeeze” (Kerouac 6). Dean offers Sal adventure through a controlled frame. During Sal’s adventures on the road, time also takes on the frame of the American landscape. Sal says, “I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my past and the West of my future, and maybe that’s why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon” (Kerouac 14). When Sal finally reaches Denver for the first time, he learns that Dean has created an even tighter schedule. Dean says, “So now in this exact minute I must dress, put on my

pants, go back to life, that is outside life, streets and what not, as we agreed, it is now one-*fifteen* and time's running, running—" (Kerouac 39).

At the beginning of the story, Sal says, "I first met Dean not long after my wife and I split up. I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up and my feeling that everything was dead" (Kerouac 1). Sal starts the story/composition with his feeling of the end—death. However, with this death, Sal starts a new life, another big bang like the one found in *The Baron in the Trees*, and he creates yet another big bang with the creation of his book. The world of the storyteller, Sal, explodes as if it has become a part of the ultimate end, and yet the beginning of an entirely new universe. Sal offers us a glimpse at the foods that nourish his life on the road, from apple pie and fistfuls of ice cream, to several pre-made sandwiches bound to go bad before the journey's end. At one point, Sal nearly starves to death.

When Dean travels, he moves, and he moves fast. Sal describes this saying, "Fury spat out of his eyes when he told of things he hated; great glows of joy replaced this when he suddenly got happy, every muscle twitched to live and go" (Kerouac 105). The pace of Dean's life transitions during a trip that they take to Mexico. Time, once again, takes on the physical/geographical landscape. Sal says, "Behind us lay the whole of America and everything Dean and I had previously known about life, and life on the road" (Kerouac 264). America becomes a whole life dead, and gone, and left behind. Dean no longer speeds to "make time." Instead, Sal explains, "We bounced along Main Street at ten miles an hour, taking everything in" (Kerouac 265).

The two of them visualize a new life, but also an ancient one. Sal says, “The sun rose pure on pure and ancient activities of human life” (Kerouac 266). He also says, “The waves are Chinese, but the earth is an Indian thing. As essential as rocks in the desert are they in the dessert of ‘history’” (Kerouac 268). All of their thoughts reach into high-eternity. When they see the son of one of their Mexican acquaintances for the first time, Sal says:

“So great was our intensity over the child’s soul that he sensed something and began to grimace which led to bitter tears and some unknown sorrow that we had no means to sooth because it reached too far back into the innumerable mysteries and time” (Kerouac 272).

Throughout the story, Sal mentions birds, spiders, and bugs. Both birds and spiders devour bugs. Birds migrate with the change of seasons. Dean and Sal parallel birds because they often get the urge to pick up and go. When Sal and Dean drive through Gregoria, they go through a “scream of insects” (Kerouac 279). Bugs smash against Sal’s face. The men struggle against the insects in the same way that they have struggled against time throughout the novel. Dead bugs cake up on Sal’s skin like collected memories. Sal comes to realize that, “...the jungle takes you over and you become it” (Kerouac 281). Birds and spiders devour insects, like humans devour time, but sometimes the insects overpower us—sometimes we let time take us. When this happens, we can “know Time”—we can “be Time.” Life should consist of adventure. We will never have full control over our time, so we should take in the whole experience of life, and make the most of it like Sal and Dean.

In *Dreams from My Father*, the author, Barack Obama, also takes his readers through a journey in time. He entitles the first section of his story *Origins*—the first stage of existence, or the opposite of a destination or end. At 21, Barack lived between East

Harlem and the rest of Manhattan. He says, “I was impatient in those days, busy with work and unrealized plans, and prone to see other people as unnecessary distractions” (Obama 3). Barack finds himself busy with plans in the same way that Mitch in *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom did. He lives somewhere between East Harlem and the rest of Manhattan in the same way that he lives torn between the forces of the past, present, and future.

In regards to his father, Barack says, “At the time of his death, my father remained a myth a to me, both more or less than a man” (Obama 5). His father plays a strong role in Barack’s origin, but Barack’s origin remains separate from his own memories and so he must rely on the stories of others. Barack explains, “That’s how all the stories went—compact, apocryphal, told in rapid succession in the course of one evening, then packed away for months, sometimes years, in my family’s memory” (Obama 8). His family remembers Barack’s father. They share the past with Barack only to take their memories back, packing them away. Barack would hear the stories of his father, “...and listen as the events of his life tumbled into a single narrative” (Obama 9).

The word, origins, has an extended meaning for Barack. He says that:

“Instead, the path of my father’s life occupied the same terrain as a book my mother once bought for me, a book called *Origins*, a collection of creation tales from around the world, stories of Genesis, and the tree where man was born, Prometheus and the gift of fire, the tortoise of Hindu legend that floated into space, supporting the weight of the world on its back” (Obama 10).

These creation tales parallel the story of Cossimo that Biagio creates in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino. The tree where man was born parallels the trees where Cossimo built his own world. The trees Thoreau found in the Walden woods, the tree that lifts the patients out of the fog in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by Ken Kesey, and the tree

that Yossarian climbs into in *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller all tie into the tree found in *Origins*. We as readers see Prometheus and the gift of fire in the lanterns of both Cossimo in *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino, and Mr. Jones in *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. Yossarian and Orr serve as Prometheus in *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, and Sal chases the Promethean flame in *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. We can find the tortoise in *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway and *The Autobiography of My Mother* by Jamaica Kincaid. Both Santiago and Xuela carry a heavy weight. These stories of creation and origin contribute to Barack's origin—an origin he knows only through stories like the culminating stories mentioned in this thesis.

The first section of Barack Obama's book, entitled *Origins*, ends with Barack seeing a play. One of the actors says, "I found god in myself and I loved her / I loved her fiercely" (Obama 206). Barack discovers his origin within himself. His ability to find an origin within himself connects to his ability to listen and understand the origin stories of others. Barack says:

"That's what the leadership was teaching me, day by day: that the self-interest I was supposed to be looking for extended well beyond the immediacy of issues, that beneath the small talk and sketchy biographies and received opinions people carried within themselves stories full of terror and wonder, studded with events that haunted or inspired them. Sacred stories" (Obama 190).

Barack develops an understanding of how the past influences a person's future. He can see beyond the frame of a person's body to the stories that a person carries within, which influence reality just as much as past events and memories.

Obama ends his book saying, "We dribbled our drinks onto the checkered floor. And for that moment, at least, I felt like the luckiest man alive" (Obama 442). Obama speaks to the pull and impact of simple and significant moments in life. When time flows

out and spills onto the black and white tiles of the checkered floor, what happens to the tiles themselves? Often we tend to overlook, or worse, forget, such moments and questions. For example, Barack says:

“All too rarely do I hear people asking just what it is that we’ve done to make so many children’s hearts so hard, or what collectively we might do to right their moral compass—what values we must live by. Instead I see us doing what we’ve always done—pretending that these children are somehow not our own” (Obama 438).

In this quote, Barack speaks about the importance of staking a claim in time. He talks about the importance of taking responsibility for our own influence on the direction of history and time. When we consider the infinite influences on time, we cannot exclude our own. Barack shares his story, and through this, sheds light (like the light of a lantern) onto the significance of stories themselves. Barack goes on to mention the phrase, “We hold these truths to be self-evident” (Obama 437). This simple phrase has had a huge impact on the story of America. Barack talks about the people that helped to breathe life into these words. They acted in accordance with the words themselves influencing the story, history, and time within our own lives.

Towards the end of the book, Barack goes on an adventure to Kenya, the place of his father’s origin. Again, the symbol of the tree reoccurs when Obama travels with his sister, Auma. ““They look as if each one could tell a story,’ Auma said, and it was true, each tree seemed to possess a character, a character neither benevolent nor cruel but simply enduring, with secrets whose depths I would never pierce” (Obama 437). He reaches beyond simply discovering the stories of those around him, but the stories of the earth, of a world that Thoreau went to understand in *Walden*.

Barack then goes on to say, “They both disturbed and comforted me, those trees that looked as if they might uproot themselves and simply walk away, were it not for the

knowledge that one moment carries within it all that's gone on before" (Obama 437). Barack sees the trees rooted in history like moments in time and that the trees carry stories as humans carry moments. Each moment and each story carries within it huge implications for our future both as individuals (waves) and as a collective humanity (ocean). For example, when Barack meets one of his sister's formal history teachers, Dr Rukia Odera, Barack says, "But her words would stay with me, bringing into focus my own memories, my own lingering questions" (Obama 436). Rukia's words influence Barack's story. She goes on to say, "Perhaps the African, having traveled so far so fast, has a unique perspective on time" (Obama 435). These unique perspectives lead to independence. Barack's life consists of culminating moments and adventure. He knows that he can never have full control over his time, so he takes in the whole experience of life, and makes the most of it—sharing it with others.

The Epiphany: Perceptions of Time that Lead to Independence

The map of time that this thesis outlines culminates into an epiphany ending with the revelations discovered through reading these books. In *The Baron in the Trees* by Italo Calvino, from Cossimo's spot in the tree, he views the world and time from a different perspective than those on the ground. Cossimo's unique perspective opens him up to new experiences that he otherwise would never dream of encountering and he occupies his time with concerns over seeds and manure—the ingredients for creating new life. He learns from the stories of others and his story becomes a part of the eternal thanks to the story his brother, Biagio, tells. Using time to create the new and everlasting contributes greatly to the independence that the characters discussed in this thesis claim. Sharing stories becomes a link to a deeper and more independent existence. The story belongs independently to each character and yet it becomes tied to us as our own.

Cossimo can see the family clearly, but in order for them to see him they often have to shield their eyes from the sun. Covering our eyes often impedes our vision. In order for those on the ground to see Cossimo at all, they have to give up a portion of their sight. In order for others to understand his story, Biagio has to put it into a context and frame the story in time, even though the reader eventually *sees* that the story reaches beyond these confines. This thesis had a frame, which contributes to an understanding that reaches beyond the confines of the thesis itself and its form.

Wasting time will not help us to achieve our independence. Instead, we must discover the origins within, and in turn, our own potential, and genius. Death awaits us, but our stories exist apart from our bodies, and can live on eternally if we work to create and move forward as a part of all of humanity. We cannot let death hold us back, if

anything it should motivate us forward. As we move forward, our time should remain in our own hands, so that we can continue to live fully and independently. Finally, life should consist of adventure. We will never have full control over our time, so we should take in the whole experience of life, and make the most of it. Sometimes we need to let time and stories take us. When this happens, we can “know Time”—we can “be Time.”

These lessons contribute to the discovery of a meaningful life and serve as a culmination of a year’s worth of reading and research. Each book embraced as an individual moment contains its own independent revelations into time. Grouping these revelations together resulted in the specific themes covered in each section of this thesis. The stories explored in this thesis reveal the importance of creation and structure, time and potential, death and life, and control and adventure. These revelations culminate into guidelines for how to live fully and independently in time. We must constantly grapple with the short amount of time that we have to live; therefore, this culmination of meaning offers the writer of this thesis an illuminated map of time and the hope that her own map reaches into the map of others.

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