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Prof. Ramser

English 1b

25 February 2019

Proof is in the Body

It is often easy for philosophical types to know a philosophy in theory, but not actually know what it means in the real world. The chapter-story placed in Viet Thanh Nguyen's book *The Displaced*, called "Flesh and Sand" is a story by Fatima Bhutto that uses the eastern concept of "maya" to explain why realizing the illusion of life helps treat trauma, especially her own. She then compares that to the virtual reality experience of Inarritu's "Carne y Arena," by saying that the VR experience is similar to the concept of maya. The realization that VR is not real is like experiencing those traumas only to remind oneself of maya and how we are its users and are participating in the separateness of illusion. Similarly, the chapter-story "This Is What The Journey Does," by Maaza Mengiste explores the confines of a refugee's reality. Mengiste compares an absurdist Ethiopian refugee in Florence to Lazarus from the New Testament. She says that Lazarus was given a second chance at life but he was not allowed to talk. Such voicelessness is highly correlated to the life of a refugee. They are given a second chance at life only to not have a voice in their new community. I believe this story is especially relevant in today's current events given the point of *The Displaced* was to allow refugee stories to be properly heard and expressed using clever writing so that one can better understand the mindset and experience of such displaced peoples. In the moments of uncertainty, the resilience in the face of trauma, the relevancy and the reimagining of history identity, and politics, the common

theme is usually the strength to rebel against the absurd with carefully orchestrated steps. It is those with a constant awareness of their smallness in the world that usually surpass their own size.

→ The moments of uncertainty in "Flesh and Sand" consist of when the author doubts if she should take off her shoes during the virtual reality experience. There was a sign in the "icebox room" that read to: take off your shoes, put them in a locker, and wait for the alarm to go off. Initially the author did not want to do this. Then she wondered why the alarm is not going off. It is almost as if she did not want to fully engage in this virtual reality because it became too real. What is it about that reality principle that makes subjects so nervous? The moments of

→ uncertainty gave Bhutto an **ambivalent** reminder that all humans are prisoners to the present.

→ John Gribben's book, "In Search of Schrodinger's Cat," says, "the underlying reality - the fundamental clockwork - has 'hidden variables,' and the experiment [of testing a reality] concerned the behavior of [two particles] flying in opposite directions from a source" (page 72). ←

The source of uncertainty is often trauma and it causes the experience to run away from you as much as you run away from it. That reality will not engage anyone unless they engage it, much like the VR experience. The alarm did not ring until Bhutto took off her shoes and put them in the locker. Thus, she engaged her reality. This uncertainty is also shown in, "This Is What The

→ Journey Does," by Mengiste had a moment where the man she is observing (she calls him Lazarus), "abruptly stops. He is so still that curious eyes turn on him, this sunlit figure stepping calming into the middle of the busy intersection." While he stood there immobile, the man became slightly stunned as cars came to a sudden halt. The man was uncertain in the actions he was about to perform, yet **prolific** in his stillness. Lazarus was experiencing the "hidden

variables,” similarly seen in Bhutto initially not taking off her shoes. We must often take that pause, that breathe of uncertainty in order to really carry through our actions. This kind of anxiety must be exactly what is felt by refugees leaving home and leaving behind their language, culture, land, and overall lifestyles.

→ In order for one to overcome the anxiety of leaving one’s former identity, they cannot become **docile**. In the book, *Tattoos on the Heart*, by Father Gregory Boyle, it is said that, “the

→ highest form of sanctity is living in hell and not losing hope.” In “Flesh and Sand,” Bhutto overcomes her moments of uncertainty with a reminder that none of it is real in the first place.

Her essay begins with a prose style, but ends with poetic,

That this very installation/experience/narrative that I’m in is only 6.5 minutes long, that people have gone in before me and/ will go in after me, that it will be over in January/ that I don’t live here, I can leave here and go anywhere—to any place in the world—all of that fades away and I can only/ feel my heart racing, beating behind the walls of my breast.

She has the philosophical coping mechanism of “maya” to remind herself that this reality does not exist. It is merely an illusion and a shadow of what formerly happened. One may not see the resilience in the face of trauma in “This Is What The Journey Does” at first. When the author describes Lazarus shouting and behaving erratically in traffic’s way, “everyone ignores him as best as they can, treating him as no more than a mild disturbance, unremarkable. He continues gesticulating, his head turning one way then the other, his actions getting progressively faster.” Lazarus is not giving up his spectacle. He is trying to get his voice back. He may not be easily understood or heard when he uses his normal speaking voice. He must use radical gestures, such as shouting at passersby in order to confirm his existence. He takes refuge in the **qualm** he causes his environment. The Ethiopian refugee deliberately jumps into the absurd in order to be

heard. His resilience comes from the awareness of how small he is in the new Western world, and the need to **stipulate** a bigger footprint.

Each story maintains a relevancy to the lives of the readers. Alejandro Inarritu was quoted in "Flesh and Sand" saying, "your body never lies." The VR experience he made gets people closer to the action of being displaced. In his particular display it is those in the Mexican desert trying to get into Arizona. In certain moments, Bhutto's body has certain reactions that bring familiarity. When, "a bag floats in the distance [she] hopes it's not [her] who dropped it." Or, more upsettingly, the "beating sensation of a helicopter in the sky instinctively made her want to find safety." It is precisely these kind of reactions that show VR as a tool for coping with trauma. These virtual experiences reveal a truth about oneself that they might not initially realize. "This Is What The Journey Does" is relevant to those who usually scoff at homeless or displaced people when they behave with wild movements or speak a different language. We may ignore them or get a flesh line between our eyebrows because we see them as disturbing the peace. Westerners can often judge actions like Lazarus's to be **deign**. However, the *other* does not see this. The *other* is one who is marginalized by society due to the **disingenuous** acceptance of that person from that society's culture. Otherness is not an **ephemeral** condition, because one can never truly identify with any particular culture. Cultures are fluid entities which **waft** through scholarly definitions everytime it creates an outsider. Mengiste merely observes in awe and admiration at what the journey of being displaced has done to this man. He is not a madman, or maybe he is, but this is what the journey does nevertheless.

To reexamine history, identity, and politics with a displaced lens might be to look at it correctly. Traditionally, we view the scope of migration as a purely economic phenomena where

people seek out resources to survive. While that is true, many do not consider the hardships of the individuals who have to endure such migrations. One might say that because the government does not protect Mexicans or Ethiopians, their government gave them a choice of life and death.


→ Michel Foucault, a postmodern philosopher who takes a liking in examining the scope of history with a different lens, writes “this determination to die, strange and yet so persistent and constant in its manifestations... was one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life.” Some say it is certain death to try to cross the Mexican desert, especially in day time. Yet, people do it despite the United States government’s constant attempt to **vitate** the citizenship of Mexican immigrants. In any measure, “Flesh and Sand” is not a critique of Inarritu’s VR installation, it is a memoir of Bhutto’s experience. “This Is What The Journey Does” is not about transgenerational assimilation, rather the Ethiopian man who is probably alive today. We should be like Lazarus when “he continues as observers pause, shake their heads and walk on by.” The French-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus might say Lazarus is like Sisyphus: the Greek king who was condemned to push a boulder up a large mountain only to watch it fall back down again in a never ending cycle. Many say Sisyphus’s narrative is a tragic one, but Camus argues that it is a **paean**. The writer’s famous formula in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” (page 200) gives the Greek king moral agency and command over his existence. The power shifts from the absurdity of pointlessly pushing a boulder up a mountain, to Sisyphus having a **monolithic** grip on his happiness. In radical inconvenience, resilience comes from attempting to own the open totality of that same preposterousness. When one takes their privileged eurocentric view off they can see the irrationalities they put people through by looking at them funny when they speak a different

language. If we re-examine history from the *other's* perspective, we may see the similarities between all displaced people and make a philosophy of similarity, not difference.


→ It is people in constant struggle that know the value of life. The metaphysical rebel is not rebelling against something tactical or institutional. Rather, he is resisting the urge to end his absurdities by ending his life. Those Mexican refugees who walk through the desert in the virtual reality simulation are not pilgrims, but rebels. They see the life they had in Mexico and resist that life by walking into one of the harshest climates on Earth. Likewise they **whet** their less-willing peers' into **egressing** from their homes as well; to summon the **extant** will to strive for a better life. Lazarus orchestrated his traffic because he was in control of his life and therefore the world around him. Whether or not absurdists seem like rebels without a cause is up to the reader. However, what is not up to the reader is the choice to hear them. They can already be heard. All one has to do is listen so they might catch a narrative of that consists of both **euphony** and angst. The compared and contrasted the moments of uncertainty, the resilience in the face of trauma, relevancy, and reimagining of history, identity, and politics between the two stories may reveal some foresight for the West. I believe with technologies such as VR and social media, people are finally given a free platform to be heard and moved by real events. This will either create **altruism** through its connectivity, or a more polarized one where people only use these technologies as propaganda. Furthermore, the truths of how these technologies are used will not be up to philosophers to create abstract systems of thought, it will be through people's' bodies as proof of their stories. A **pastiche** of such stories might not be **redress** for the trauma caused before such technologies existed, but it might be something more powerful than that: a **sanguine scintilla** of the pride felt by many cultures' projects and achievements throughout history.

Works Cited

Nguyen, Viet Thanh, et al. *The Displaced : Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*. Abrams Press, 2018.




Boyle. *Tattoos on the Heart*. 2010.



Foucault, Michel, and Robert J. Hurley. *The History of Sexuality*. Vintage, 1990.



Velasquez, Manuel. *Philosophy: a Text with Readings*. Cengage Learning, 2017.



Camus, Albert, and Justin O'Brien. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Vintage International, 2018.

Essay 2: Compare and Contrast Two Texts

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| • proposal (1 page, 1 pt.) due on Canvas | Monday, Feb 18 |
| • reading notes (2+ pages, 2 pts.) due on Canvas | Monday, Feb 18 |
| • outline (2+ pages, 1 pt.) due | Monday, Feb 25 |
| • rough draft (6+ pages, 2 pts.) due | Monday, Feb 25 |
| • meet with a tutor or me by | Monday, March 4 |
| • final draft (2,000+ words, 10 pts.) due | Friday, March 8 |

- All of these assignments must be typed using MLA format.

Topic

Compare and Contrast Two Texts

Since our 1B course focuses on culture, identity, relationships, family, migration, refugees, race, gender, and class, and especially with a focus on history, politics, and identity, essay two will ask you to compare how two specific essays from “The Displaced” intersect on these issues. While “othering” shadows the essays, “memory” equally haunts the narratives.

While Chris Marker’s premise that “the function of remembering is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining,” consider the ethical, political, and aesthetic challenges for remembering and forgetting, both of which are necessary to confront war (ethnic, economic, environmental, religious, social, and physical) and its related traumas. Often our identities are created in this schism of war and how we response to its violence.

Since the new social movements of the 1960s, “identity” has been a key locus for political organization, social mobilization, and cultural production. The “culture wars” around identity reached their peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with opponents of so-called “identity politics” arguing that such politics threatened to disunite America. Proponents, of course, saw the recognition of diverse identities through multiculturalism as being fundamental to American unity. Since this period, identity-based movements and politics have arguably moved from being emergent or dissident political phenomena to being part of the cultural dominant of the United States and of late capitalism. Not surprisingly, cultural and political theorists are questioning the multivalent and contradictory roles played by these movements and politics (themes for this essay are taken from <https://vietnguyen.info/teaching> and <https://vietnguyen.info/category/essays>).

More information can be found at <http://www.choices.edu/teaching-news-lesson/refugee-stories-mapping-crisis/>

Building on the first writing assignment, your second essay will examine how the essays you selected examine the moments of uncertainty, the resilience in the face of trauma, and how reimagining history, identity, and politics could be a compelling look at what it means to be forced to leave home and find a place of refuge. In turn, your essay will question existing approaches to dialoging on our current immigration/refugee conversation. Be sure to support your position with additional readings from the texts, **plus at least two scholarly sources**.

Structure & Content Checklist

- ____ Write an informative yet creative title for your project; write an inventive hook for the introduction.
- ____ Identify the texts and their authors, and your prompt selection process in the introduction.
- ____ **The thesis statement should preview and connect the texts.**
- ____ Organize the compare/contrast essay carefully. Arrange the sections in a critical manner.
- ____ **You must integrate two sources and two quotations from the texts in each supporting paragraph.**
- ____ Each section should have a strong opening and closing section as well.
- ____ Compose developed, unified, coherent, stylistically fluent essay of 2000+ words that demonstrate command of grammar and style, employment of the rhetorical conventions of academic written discourse, and an ability to reflect critically on the reading and writing processes at the college level.
- ____ Synthesize multiple patterns of development, that pursue answers to challenging questions or advance substantial arguments; Illustrate and support claims effectively, with relevant, thoughtful, and sufficient evidence drawn (as appropriate) from written texts and the writer's own experience and knowledge; Employ the conventions of academic English to produce intelligible and stylistically mature essays almost entirely free from errors in syntax, grammar, punctuation, diction, and spelling;
- ____ Demonstrate awareness of all stages of the writing process, and critique, at an advanced level, their own work and the work of others.
- ____ Demonstrate awareness of audience and appropriate use of voice, tone, and level of formality;
- ____ Employ, at an advanced level, the standard methods of academic discourse (including effective thesis statements, introductions, conclusions, transitions, topic sentences, and summative sentences) for guiding readers through an analysis or argument;
- ____ Gather, evaluate, and synthesize appropriate research into college-level research papers using the MLA format.
- ____ Write a competent college-level research paper, gathering sources effectively, evaluating them for relevance and reliability, using a system to manage the research process so it leads to a thoughtful and intelligible paper, and employing MLA conventions at an advanced level to cite and incorporate sources effectively in the finished paper;

Process – You must complete and submit all of the following with the final draft:

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| ____ final draft & works cited page | ____ tutoring receipt or my comments** |
| ____ rough draft(s) & works cited page | ____ peer review comments |
| ____ outline | ____ reading notes |
| ____ proposal & any other prewriting notes | |

** You must visit a WRC tutor or visit me during my advice hours for this essay.

- Bring this assignment sheet, your notes, and your drafts with you when you see a tutor at the Writing Success Center.
- Please feel free to email me (dean.ramser@chaffey.edu) at any point in your writing process.

Proposal Questions - 1 page, typed, due on Canvas by Monday, Feb 18

1. Describe three active reading and writing techniques that you will use to read the texts and write the essay. Why do you think those will be helpful?
2. What do you already know about race and/or racism, or diaspora?
3. How do both authors use literary and poetic devices (rhythm, setting, point of view, imagery) to heighten the meaning or message of their story?
4. How is Otherness is represented?
5. How are themes of secrecy and/or deception represented?
6. What do you already know about immigration, migration, refugees?
7. What would you like to find out?

8. What do you already know about poetry, news articles, text-based games, or webcomics?
9. What would you like to learn about those different kinds of texts?
10. Which option do you think you will choose for this essay? Why?
11. What do you want your reader to learn or understand from your essay?
12. What obstacles or challenges might you face as you write?
13. How will you overcome those?
14. When & where will you write the essay?

- Reading Notes due Monday, Feb 18

	Theme and/or Significant Quotes AND analysis
<i>Displaced</i> 1-52 Introduction VIET THANH NGUYEN	
<i>Last, First, Middle</i> JOSEPH AZAM	
<i>Common Story</i> DAVID BEZMOZGIS	
<i>Flesh and Sand</i> FATIMA BHUTTO	
<i>Displaced</i> 53-90 Perspective and What Gets Lost THI BUI	
<i>How Succulent Food Defeated Trump's Wall Before It Has Been Built</i> ARIEL DORFMAN	
<i>Guests of the Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa</i> LEV GOLINKIN	
<i>The Parent Who Stays</i> REYNA GRANDE	
<i>To Walk in Their Shoes</i> MERON HADERO	
<i>Displaced</i> 105-136 Second Country JOSEPH KERTES	
<i>13 Ways of Being an Immigrant</i> POROCHISTA KHAKPOUR	
<i>Refugees and Exiles</i> MARINA LEWYCKA	
<i>This Is What the Journey Does</i> MAAZA MENGISTE	
<i>Displaced</i> 137-182 The Ungrateful Refugee DINA NAYERI	
<i>A Refugee Again</i> VU TRAN	
<i>New Lands, New Selves</i> NOVUYO ROSA TSHUMA	
<i>Refugee Children: The Yang Warriors</i> KAO KALIA YANG	