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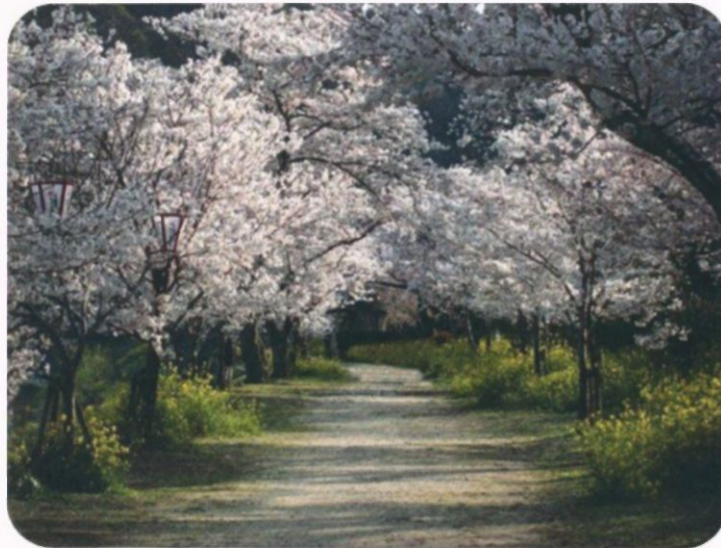
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# SUNY Cortland

WINNERS OF THE 2011  
COLLEGE WRITING CONTEST

TRANSFORMATIONS: A STUDENT RESEARCH AND CREATIVITY CONFERENCE  
APRIL 18, 2012



Prepared by Professor Mary Lynch Kennedy  
and Lyndsey Kelly Weiner

# Contributors

Robyn Macy, an undergraduate student majoring in Professional Writing, for “How to Find a Major,” a video produced in PWR 399-001, Rhetoric, Professor Victoria Boynton

Justin Curry, an undergraduate student majoring in Professional Writing, for “Downs Riley,” a fiction piece produced in PWR 212-501, Writing Fiction, Professor Victoria Boynton

Bryanna Grillo, an undergraduate student majoring in Economics, for “Humans’ Ability to Harm so Many,” a composition piece produced in CPN 101-005, Writing Studies II, Lecturer Mario Hernandez  
Winner: Composition Award

Jacqueline Carlson, an undergraduate student majoring in Professional Writing, for “Flamingo Tongue,” a poem produced in PWR 412-001, Advanced Creative Writing, Professor Victoria Boynton

Collin Anderson, a graduate student majoring in Adolescent Education, for “A Seriously Charming Sociopath,” an academic paper produced in ENG 618-001, Global Multicultural Literature, Professor Emmanuel Nelson

Brennan D. Gerlach, an undergraduate student majoring in Biology, for “Life History and Distribution of Blanding’s Turtles in New York State,” an academic paper produced in BIO 439-001, Special Studies in Biology, Assistant Professor Theresa Curtis

Kaitlin M. Doyle, an undergraduate student majoring in Professional Writing, for “Straight Back Lawn Chair,” a creative nonfiction piece produced in PWR 315-001, Writing Creative Nonfiction, Instructor Lorraine Berry

Kevin M. Phoenix, an undergraduate student majoring in Communication Studies – Journalism, for “In Weeks Following,” a personal writing piece.  
Winner: All-College Excellence in Writing Award

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# How to Find a Major

Robyn Macy



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWUYRMfRUJQ&context=C4c8a943ADvjVQa1PpcFMQ62zWm1V7PXUxzFMPAEUZrELgn54kxJ0>

# Downs Riley

Justin Curry



Nobody will brag about the extreme upside of living in the middle of nowhere. What would you do with yourself they asked, coming from crowded areas where you could meet your friends on foot. We were not so lucky. I was only a teenager, too young to drive a vehicle, but permitted to ride a bike. A good deal of pedaling could get me to a friend's house a mile away in under fifteen minutes. But the mountainous countryside of upstate New York will test any amateur biker's will to move. The truth was, growing fatigued is something to do.

There are few homes that withstand centuries, but the house I approached was a piece of history itself. No landmark sign would capture its true significance, which could have been relatively nothing. A white colonial with ionic pillars holding up the porch roof and green shutters hugging the windows. It had once been a brothel in the 1700's, and then a funeral home during the 19th century. A small graveyard was tucked away in the trees out back, but we never saw the ghosts nor worried of their presence. When I arrived, Charlie and Josh were sitting on the sofa perched up against the exterior wall on the porch. We hid behind the hedges, where they were just tall enough so we could sit there without being gawked by nosy drivers who mindlessly ignore the road. Mostly however, it was the men in blue and gray, the State and County authorities whom we feared. Breaking the law is easier than breathing at times, and we exploited it, but we were never dangerous to others. Only to ourselves, and since I am here to say a kind word of the past, it means at least one of us survived.

The sun stalled slightly east overhead, preparing for the climax of day and unaccompanied by the pestering balls of cloud. It was a day for fire. People say never play with matches. The human body is flammable. However, we were young men, ballsy and cutthroat. There was a cliff next door, a gravel pit with mountains of refined rock we used to climb and slide down. For some reason the men had dug out a extensive, gaping hole. When we got there, we noticed a few hay bails resting at the bottom of the crater. We understood why God had given us a warm day. Just like a human body, dry hay is flammable. So we went on a hunt, through the house, the garage, and the barn, for anything and everything to bring this coming moment to its maximum effect. Nail polish remover, diesel, a can of WD-40, spray-on deodorants, hydrogen peroxide, and vegetable oil among others. Charlie was the brave one to light the flame after all the accessories were applied. We waited at the top of the hole and watched him scurry up the rocky ledge. When he reached us, the flame reached the additives, and burst like a solar flare.

The flame crawled up the pit like a serpent sneaking through a hayfield.

The fire was controlled, but the smoke had accumulated to the size of many bonfires put together or an applause-worthy portrayal of a lurking thunderstorm, creeping slowly across the horizon in a dark wave to turn day into night. The cloud shooting into the sky uncontrollably, high enough for people to wonder why. Soon enough a red truck rolled up. He rushed over to the pit and gazed into the miracle oven, then asked us how it started. We denied knowing the answer, but the man looked at us and I could see by the crooked frown on his face; he knew we were the guilty party. The guilty should never return to the scene of the crime, but we stood assured that this would be a one-time moment in our course of life. A front row seat reserved for our hard work. The man returned to his truck to radio in the disaster. He went to the passenger's seat, which suggested he was to see the fire through. I glanced to another white house across the way, where ten or more children were home schooled by nervous parents. They sent



one of the boys to the four of us, who ran with flailing arms. He had a parted hairdo, combed to perfection, dressed in suspenders and fine black leather shoes. He lived so close to us, yet we had no idea he lived until that day.

“What happened?” he asked us.

“Hay caught fire,” said the man, who rejoined us. We heard no fire whistle, so I concluded that the man called off the fire department. The boy looked to the fire innocently, hands in his pockets.

“Maybe it spontaneously combusted,” said the neighbor boy to the baffled man. My friends and I laughed in our heads, and remembered his words well afterward. To think he was imprisoned by his own blood, our age, unable to do much except for cross the street and see the work of deviants. Maybe he will be the next Albert Einstein. Days spent trudging in pace, contemplating the next thousand pages to boost his intellect. What he has he does in solace, isolated in confinement, working toward a goal many should chase but instead leave it to him, for what joy that comes from study proves to be melancholy. He stands in the front line, ready to take the blow no matter how devastating. One could only hope. At least he was there to see.

The fire burned out and we all broke away. Charlie had been snooping in the barn they used for storage and found a collection of antique rifles hidden in the corner of a room. Better yet were the boxes of shells that had been left as junk. The weapons were all powerful, twelve-gauge shotguns and a row of the beasts known as thirty-aught six. However, the only ammunition were shotgun shells, so we could not experience the thrilling pull of an infamous trigger. We continued with the shells, loading them into the barrels. Mine was a one-shot, but when I pulled the trigger nothing happened. None of us knew the term backfire, so there was immense satisfaction in the hunt for the right cartridge. The only rule was to point the gun away from the friend well within the range of death. But following several failed shots, Josh got lazy with his aiming and talked to me. The room was dark with no electricity running through the barn. What little sunlight broke through the cracks hardly made a difference. I prepared another shell in my gun, when I witnessed the bottom edge of a couch in front of me explode into orange. Foam pieces shot in several directions, the little hairs on the new arrangement before me burned briefly and recoiled into foul air. All the while, less than twelve inches from my left leg and foot. I was shaking.

“Works,” said Josh and dropped his gun. As we had overcome our obstacle, we all left the guns and ditched the barn. There was an argument that continued for years and a few lessons to be learned. I knew a man with my luck should rejoice, because close calls never come this close in reality. I could hear the ambulance sirens and the screams of my parents from our tomfoolery. The possibilities that would have been consequence never arrived in my fate, yet I could not excuse myself for doing the same thing. I was just as guilty for loading that gun, but what can I say. We played with fire, and we played with guns.

The day was aging, which meant a crucial decision. It seemed hotter than before with a dead breeze and a warmer sun. The swimming hole in the river would be refreshing. Although the walk was excessive, roughly a mile and a half, we concluded that the gruesome stretch would be rewarding. So we rolled up a few things, grabbed an assortment of snacks and drinks. No electronics; we had no cell service or phones. We were free from outer conversation and blessed with individual company. We weaved through the cornfield next door for fun and lost ourselves. Luckily when we left the jungle, the four-wheeler path was in sight. From there was a long unused field, where we stumbled in groundhog and rabbit holes. The river was in a close range. Arriving at a rusty bridge with a wooden platform meant only for ATV's and snowmobiles, we crossed the river. Charlie walked along a thin beam, testing his balance against the ten foot drop into shallow water. Only a few feet further south, the water settled briefly in a dip so one day three boys could shed their shirts and dive in from the cliff edge. An angle so perfect for cannonballs and easy climbs.

The two hour exercise punctuated our day. Water at prime temperature. No sound of motors or unfamiliar voices. We had our space, for few people understood that this spot in the river was suitable. They swam in public pools and jumped off diving boards, but little did they know fun could be had for free elsewhere amongst only those who care that you are there with them. In a valley unappreciated. Perhaps it needed glorification, and on that day after the swim I put on my shirt and gazed at the horizon. A long plain of what some see as nothing. Grass, trees, and a waterway.

On the walk back I imagined what it could be like, even that night while tossing and turning. The acute insomnia from wondering if one day the free land will fill with boxes, when strangers mark this place as their own. Upon discovery, those who reside will see the river as a luxury, when it is the solitude surrounding the river where isolation is acceptable. But when that day comes, the birds will no longer sing as joyfully, and the flow of water will be only a whisper to the obnoxious rampage of heavy metal music. Music to the ears of those crowds who wonder what to do.

No stretch of dialogue could thoroughly explain anything about the world because they would be about topics we knew little about, and people who most have no idea exist. Three people maybe a thousand people knew altogether, just enough to make a small village of acquaintances. Any fact can be mistaken for fiction and in a piece like this; none of that matters. American history is all this can be, but even history has to be examined greatly before the mesmerizing word of truth is found. Then again, most who find history important are similar to those who worry about the future. Both can be shaped with just one mind, until the day comes where a question arises. Where does the time go? On that day, time came for me to turn my back. I did not say goodbye to them, because I knew for a fact we would speak again.

Despite the challenging bike ride home at dusk, I felt comfortable knowing I still had a foot for the left pedal. Things you can't take for granted, and once you forget, fate tends to be the cruelest reminder. I rode the shoulder of a reticent highway toward home, where I would find a full leech who enjoyed the meal of his life at my expense. But I was distracted, nosily eyeing the descending flame, one of the most memorable and impatient New York sunsets. I was a kid of newfound wisdom. A lone traveler with no sense of purpose, only an array of picturesque moments to define myself. Meaning the foolish let slip through their hands.



# Humans' Ability to Harm So Many

Bryanna Grillo



Organisms have been changing and evolving since the beginning of living things. We have evolved from primitive humanlike species. Throughout this journey humans have evolved to be killers. We not only evolve to kill, but we simply evolve and kill for our selfish benefit. We killed our close relative, the Neanderthal. Some humans even had sex with them, and then we killed them. We have a laundry list of animals we are willing to kill for food including fellow mammals and even insects. But, one animal in particular we are not willing to kill, is the dog.

Dogs have been companions to us for the past 30,000 years. It is hard to say why or how we became so close to dogs, because it has never happened with any other species. "Since the domestication of the dog predates agriculture, dogs couldn't have wandered into settlements; there were no settlements" (Gopnik 2011). Even scientists have trouble figuring out why wolves decided to branch off and become man's best friend. Any other animal could have, in theory done the same thing. But they didn't. Dogs are unique to every other species. According to Gopnik, "They chose us" (Gopnik 2011). Not only did dogs choose us, but we really chose them as well. Ancient humans could have easily eaten them and killed them like we do with everything else. But we didn't. We decided to keep them around. Gopnik notes that at the pet store, his daughter just knew which one was her dog.

When I was three, I wanted a dog. I'm pretty sure every child does, but I loved dogs. I think my obsession started with the dog that lived up the street. His name was Smokey, and he was a black lab. I wanted nothing more than a black dog just like Smokey. And just like Gopnik, my dad did not want a dog. My dad had no trauma as a child pertaining to dogs; he simply didn't want one. So he was surely thrilled when our neighbor stopped by one day to tell us that her little white American Eskimo got impregnated by the promiscuous black lab "Bear" from our neighborhood. Even though my dad didn't want a dog, well, the puppies were going to be free. So once these little fluffy love children were born, we were invited over to pick one out. I chose, of course, a black one. He was a boy, and I named him Bingo, after the children's song. He was a cute mutt, black and large like his father, yet had long soft fur like his mother. But, he was just an ordinary dog. He didn't know too many tricks, he wasn't too well behaved, but I loved him, and he loved my family. He lived a relatively healthy life until the last year. At age 14 he started to become deaf, and a few months later he started to become blind. He made it to age 15, and a month later he had to be put down. When my mom called me to inform me I was in my dorm room. She told me Bingo was going to be put down the next day. I wept for hours. He was my best friend; he was family. The next day my mom and dad brought him to the vet, a sad Thursday morning October 28, 2011. Much like Gopnik, my dad loved that dog. That dog he didn't even want. I remember talking to him on the phone later that day, and he wept as hard as I did. My dad was in disbelief that he was crying so hard over a dog. He thought he could handle it as a 47 year old, grown man. But he couldn't, because dog is man's best friend. He couldn't help but love Bingo. He was much like Gopnik, "annoyed beyond words at the hold she had put on our unwilling hearts" (Gopnik 2011). Even the most stubborn, unwilling people, will end up loving dogs. They can't help it. Something in our blood, and something in dogs' blood tells us we need each other. It has been that way for 30,000 years. I think dogs will forever be our



companions. I agree with Gopnik when he says, "How does anyone live without a dog? I can't imagine" (Gopnik 2011).

Unlike the dog, we had absolutely no problem killing the Neanderthal. The Neanderthal was another species from the genus Homo. "Neanderthals were very closely related to modern humans-so closely that we shared our prehistoric beds with them" (Kolbert 2011). Like the similarity with dogs and wolves, we were able to interbreed with the Neanderthals. But, in the competitive self-obsessed nature of humans we killed them. "Modern humans encountered Neanderthals and other so-called 'archaic humans,' who already inhabited those regions. The modern humans 'replaced' the archaic humans, which is a nice way of saying they drove them into extinction" (Kolbert 2011). There was no real need to kill our distant relatives, but we did. Humans by nature are competitive, greedy, and self absorbed, hence why we live in a capitalist society. We are naturally killers. We even kill other humans in wars, and we even kill humans who have different traits than others. If we would do that to our own species, I guess it is easy to believe we would do it to a distant cousin. It was nothing to us to kill the Neanderthal. Even scientists have no respect for this extinct species. We simply have no problems believing we killed them because we have no regard for this lost life. "The shape of their skulls indicated 'the predominance of functions of a purely vegetative or bestial kind'" (Kolbert 2011). Also they have been described as "walking with a 'half stooping slouch' upon 'legs of a peculiarly ungraceful form.' Smith also claimed the Neanderthals 'unattractiveness' was 'further emphasized by a shaggy covering of hair over most of the body'" (Kolbert 2011). These scientists are clearly looking down upon them, and disrespecting their features. I'm sure if the Neanderthal was still walking around; they wouldn't be here much longer because I'm sure modern humans would kill them off as our ancestors did. "The question of what defines the human has... been kicking around since Socrates" (Kolbert 2011). The answer to that question could easily be, the human is a killing machine. Jean Jacques Hublin has also said "To me the mystery is what makes humans such a successful group that they have been replacing not just the Neanderthals but everything" (Kolbert 2011). We are successful because we are killers. We just kill everything that gets in our way.

Another way humans try to savage and kill every other species on the planet, is what we do for food. We eat many different animals. We even eat fellow mammals. It is actually the norm to eat mammals like cows, sheep, and even pigs, which I hear are actually similar to us internally. We kill and eat so many animals; we barely have enough food for third world countries. The human population is exponentially growing, and we need a better source of food to feed all of us. "By 2050 the world's population will have increased to 9 billion and the demand for meat will grow with it" (Goodyear 2011). Because of this dilemma, many humans have toyed with the idea of eating insects and why not? We kill them all the time just because we think of them as vermin. We "tend to associate insects with filth, death, and decay" (Goodyear 2011). Since we have absolutely no respect for the species, we might as well kill them to feed ourselves. Even though many people are grossed out by the idea of eating insects, we really shouldn't be. "Genetically, they are so distant from humans that there is little likelihood of diseases jumping species" (Goodyear 2011). So really, it is safer to eat bugs. Also, "Once for ounce, many have the same amount of protein as beef" (Goodyear 2011). Insects are a very good choice nutritionally, and it takes less energy to feed them. If humans want to continue to ravage and destroy every species that gets in our way, we really should consider feeding our fast growing population with insects.

Humans are greedy, competitive killers. We have no trouble killing species very similar to our own. But, when it comes to dogs, we could not fathom ever hurting them. For the past 30,000 years we have considered them our companions, and I do not think we will ever destroy them like we do with every other species.



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# Flamingo Tongue

Jacqueline Carlson



I worry too much  
I think and think and I  
spin webs  
a grainy green substance sloshes in my skull  
soaking the cables connecting my  
thought process  
the color puce--  
I have dirt underneath my misshapen nails  
weird—I don't remember playing in dirt  
I'll file it down until the white tip is gone  
unable to divide into layers  
making it hard for you to wedge yourself under  
wedge yourself in between  
wedge yourself  
forcing protection from my skin--

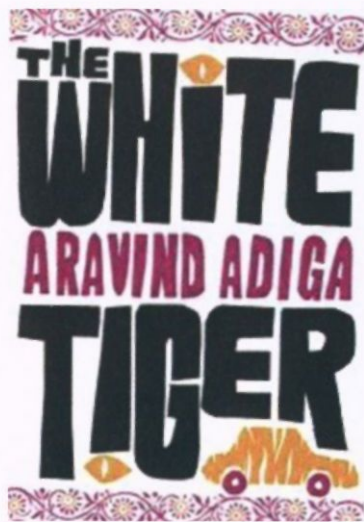
You always tell me I worry too much--  
that my brain will explode  
when my nerves spark a flame  
igniting the Polaroid I trapped our love in  
a submerged in a rustic poison  
Like the time you kissed my cheek and left a  
bruise

Or the time we danced and I got sick on your  
shoes  
it's flammable  
and now it's burning—  
It's like jumping out of a nightmare  
relieved that your fingers aren't soaked in crimson  
rather, the pain only shows when soaked in florescent purple  
uneasy, unsteady, unsure  
whether or not the walls of my stomach are strong enough  
to hold the acid bubbling an electric yellow—  
It's minor lines but they're major  
This fucking dirt  
from underneath the brittle edges of my nails  
I'll file them down until they can't trace me  
they won't be able to trace my thoughts back to the  
day I sat at the mahogany table and carved  
empty boxes with the index and pinky  
and then with a butter knife  
because the lines weren't straight enough  
They won't find me because the worm  
in my head,  
--it doesn't bother to pick up feet or feelings when it slinks around  
tripping my wires  
controlling the way my eyes flicker  
pulling them out of the sockets that control my  
oral fixation—  
It swirls it's flamingo tongue onto the  
grey areas highlighting them with  
rainbow feathers  
forcing a radical understanding of  
who you are  
when you aren't--  
It settles.  
And I stare at my thumbs.



## “A Seriously Charming Sociopath”: Neo-Orientalism and Aravind Adiga’s *The White Tiger*

Collin Anderson



When Aravind Adiga’s novel *The White Tiger* was published in 2008, it was met, broadly speaking, with overwhelming critical acclaim in the West—including Adiga’s well-publicized acceptance of the Man Booker Prize—and a degree of concurrent backlash from India. The latter focused largely on the issue of Adiga’s inauthenticity in writing from the perspective of an Indian subaltern and accused him of what Lisa Lau calls “Re-Orientalism”: “no longer an Orientalism propagated by Occidentals, but ironically enough, by Orientals, albeit by diasporic Orientals” (571). Rather than venture into tenuous philosophical or biographical arguments about the nature of authenticity, arguments that Ana Cristina Mendes has already concluded are “far from original” (289), this essay intends to use the concepts of Orientalism and Re-Orientalism to confront a particular paradox presented by the novel’s critical reception: namely, that Western critics persistently characterized the novel as one that undercuts, rather than propagates, those stereotypic and exoticized images of India typically associated with Orientalism. In other words, the context of globalization in *The White Tiger* successfully destabilizes the term

“Orientalism” such that its boundaries and bearing are less clear than in traditional Orientalist literature. I will ultimately argue that, although there is validity to the grievance that some principles of Orientalism informed *The White Tiger*’s Western reception, the backlash fails to recognize *The White Tiger* as an ironic parable that implicates all of global capitalist society.

I will present my thesis with two major arguments, each of which will consist of several minor arguments. The first half of the essay will be devoted to clarifying the specific type of “Neo-Orientalism” with which the West seems to have met *The White Tiger*. I will begin this portion by defining Orientalism and demonstrating that *The White Tiger* was seen as a response against a strand of Orientalist literature; I will go on to show that the Western criticism nonetheless succeeded in Othering and disempowering India; I will conclude that the Darkness, rather than remaining “untouched” by capitalism, is constructed by it. The second half of the essay deals broadly with Balram as a metonymic figure whose contradictory role as a “charming sociopath” involves the West. I will frame this argument using postcolonialism as a product of globalization; I will investigate the instability of Balram’s voice and its tendency to add an ironic layer to hard-and-fast distinctions of “Light” and “Darkness”; finally, I will question whether Balram’s “charm” is warranted by briefly examining the ethical and literary precedents for his actions.

In its original incarnation, Edward Said’s “Orientalism” refers to “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (3). Although this broad sociocultural definition will remain significant, it is also imperative to examine in particular the “dogmatic views of ‘the Oriental’ as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction” (8) which Said sees threaded through the body of Western art and literature pertaining to the Orient. The Western construct of the Orient as a unified entity collapses variation between the region’s many cultures and, when enacted, selectively utilizes its images in order to maintain that unity. Of particular import is the concept that the Orient is somehow immune to change or influence from the outside world. Orientalism is denoted as a specific subset of exoticism—exoticism of the Orient—and connoted as a pejorative that critiques the draw of this exoticism as ultimately disempowering. As Mendes notes, in the framework of Graham Huggan’s *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, the forces of globalization have only exacerbated the demand for a unified Orientalism, and India is at the



heart of that market (276). In other words, as the global market moves forward, the demand for an India that does not move forward escalates.

Perhaps no one summarizes the static, centuries-old precedent of Indian Orientalist literature better than the Western critics themselves, who situate *The White Tiger* as the antithesis of that tradition. New York magazine admits that the novel was “sold as a corrective to the glib, dreamy exoticism Western readers often get,” citing an ad campaign that declares, “No saris. No scents. No spices” (“Is This Book...?”). If this quip was truly a central advertising angle, the critics took the proverbial bait: even a brief skim of the Western critical reception reveals not only that Orientalist literature has persisted, but that the expectations of Orientalism have persisted as well; the surprise in reaction to Adiga’s novel is a product of the “internal constraints [posed by] the persistence and durability of saturating hegemonic systems” (Said 15). The key to the novel’s success, according to *Time Out New York*’s Scott Indrisek, is that it “refus[es] to wallow in superficial exoticism.” Randy Boyagoda uses somewhat harsher language for the Orientalist tradition—“[the] tragic-aromatic truckload... of Indian novels” (qtd. in Adiga viii)—while *The Washington Post* brings up the milieu of colonialism vis-à-vis pop-cultural exports by describing the precedent as “the same old yogier-than-thou, Bollywood vision of India” (qtd. in Adiga i).

The genre of Bollywood is particularly relevant to *The White Tiger* because the Bollywood-steeped American film *Slumdog Millionaire*—which also told of a “thin notion of upward mobility acquired through improbable means” (Doron and Rao 419)—won the Academy Award for Best Motion Picture in 2008, the same year that *The White Tiger* won the Man Booker Prize. Although Madhurita Choudhary and Charul Jain lump the two works together for presenting “saleable images of poverty, hopelessness and mystery” and thus “retain[ing] the same old image and assumption of the Orient and the Oriental” (101-102), the *Washington Post* quotation suggests that the majority of critics saw *The White Tiger* as a departure from the ornate, romantic-Orientalist attitudes of Bollywood. Furthermore, though critics may describe *The White Tiger* as “subversive” or “unsettling,” or may disagree about the accuracy of its content, one would be hard-pressed to find anyone who might describe it as “mysterious.”

Choudhary and Jain’s depiction of *The White Tiger* as a work continuous with Orientalist lineage does emphasize one crucial aspect of Orientalism: its constructions can only exist in relation to the West—by the West, apart from the West and for the West. In other words, Orientalism is—much like Adiga’s Ganges River which, despite being filled with “feces, straw, soggy parts of human bodies, buffalo carrion, and seven different kinds of industrial acids” (12) is visited and swum by American tourists every year—less a consequence of the traits of a work itself than a consequence of how it is consumed. It’s here that the novel’s critical acclaim in the West becomes problematic: even though *The White Tiger* is perceived as a reversal of classical exoticism, and is therefore perceived as “utterly without illusions” (Bhattacharya), its India is still presented as an Other in binary opposition to the West.

This much is evident in the relish with which Western critics use Adiga’s novel as a lens to discuss the “underbelly” of India’s global reputation as a “tiger economy” that can compete on the same scale as the United States. Some critics point to Adiga’s training in journalism in order to paint him as a sort of fictionalizing muckraker in the lineage of Upton Sinclair (Thomas). Numerous reviews take at face value Balram’s depiction of India as “two countries in one: an India of Light, and an India of Darkness” (Adiga 12) and depict the novel as primarily a “corrective version of the sanitised, censored, prosperous India that Jiabao is inevitably going to be shown” (Mukherjee). Soumya Bhattacharya juxtaposes these two ‘sides’ of India before she even mentions the novel itself:

[New India] isn’t India Shining – the tagline previously used to describe a country whose economy had just begun to catch fire. This is an India so dazzled by the glow of its own success that it has turned an adjective into a proper noun. We have learnt to embrace New India as a different entity – like the New Testament, perhaps, or New Labour. Elsewhere, everyday India (the old India) limps, coughs, splutters and throws up a good deal of blood.



Neel Mukherjee sees the economic statistics of India as succeeding in “airbrushing” the word “inequality” out of existence, and goes so far to describe *The White Tiger* as “relentless in its stripping away of the veneer of ‘India Rising’ to expose its rotting heart”; tellingly, the final adverb phrase “to expose its rotting heart” was edited out of the print version but was still placed on the novel’s dust jacket. Perhaps Hal Crowther, writing for the *Oxford American* (a magazine based in Arkansas), is the most overblown in Othering Adiga’s India: “A midnight black satire of the corrupt, irrational, incorrigibly feudal society that India hilariously calls ‘the world’s largest democracy’” (qtd. in Adiga iii). Crowther’s gleeful edge suggests that the reason *The White Tiger* is so pleasing to Westerners is because it presents the spectacle of Orientals attempting to imitate Western models of democracy, individualism and capitalism.

The endurance of Orientalist modes of criticism even as the traditional content of Orientalism is turned on its head is unique, which is why I would hone the concept of neo-Orientalism—typically, simply anything that has been absorbed into Orientalism since its inception in 1978—to accurately describe it. Anis Shivani’s “new Orientalism,” though juxtaposing the depictions of Orientals by a separate group of Indian-American writers as “paralysed... in a world of hypermodernity,” continues to retain the central concept of the Oriental as static and somehow unchanged by the modern world: “an Indian subcontinent untouched by globalisation, feminism, capitalism and individualism” (1). Certainly, this “new Orientalism” fails to go far enough to describe the Orientalism of *The White Tiger*—if feminism has had no mark on Adiga’s India, the book seems to be exclusively about the ways in which India is anything but “untouched” by globalization, capitalism and individualism.

Although critics appear on the surface to agree with Balram that there are indeed two Indias in the book—one that is effectively prospering and one that is suffering—there are subtleties to the language that they use to orient these two Indias in relation to one another. Bhattacharya describes “the old India” as simply “elsewhere,” which aligns with Balram’s clear geographic distinction between the northeastern part of the country surrounding the Ganges River and the rest. Yet Mukherjee is quick to describe “India Rising” as a “veneer,” Scott Medintz says we get a “glimpse beneath the surface of an Indian economic ‘miracle,’” and Deirdre Donahue summarizes Adiga’s India as “a merciless, corrupt Darwinian jungle where only the ruthless survive.” The question arises as to whether the novel portrays the “Darkness” as a paralyzed space left behind by “India Rising” or if they are in fact two sides of the same coin.

The question is complicated by Balram’s unforgiving repudiation of Hinduism, a religion that, to a Western audience, carries many of the signifiers of exoticism. Robbie B. H. Goh draws attention to the “doctrines of servitude that [Balram] sees enshrined in Hinduism and its narratives” (334), especially through the story of the servant-god Hanuman described early in the novel and to whom Balram as a driver later compares himself. Balram depicts strict adherence to principles of despotism, and backwardness in the context of individualism, as built into the mindset of Hinduism; it is easy to see why some Indian critics see the novel as one that depicts a Re-Orientalized “seething mass of unwashed hordes which worship pagan gods [and] are trapped in caste-based prejudices” (Gupta). However, Goh goes on to show that Balram sees the “economic free-for-all, reinforcing socioeconomic inequality and Darwinian survival” (335) as not a product of tradition, but a dissolving of tradition—ironically, when the bona fide colonialists, the British, left in 1947-- “These days,” Balram writes, “there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies” (Adiga 54).

Regardless of geographical separations, the fact that Balram depicts success in India as a zero-sum game refutes the notion that the Darkness is a place “untouched,” to return to Shivani’s word. Rather, the Darkness is more akin to the “untouchable” caste, whose name itself confronts the contradiction between the sociological fact of being “touched” by a hierarchical social system and the denial of its existence by not being physically touched and ultimately being relegated to the periphery. No moment in *The White Tiger* demonstrates this better than Mr. Ashok’s response to the murder of a child:



“What are these children doing, walking about Delhi at one in the morning, with no one to look after them?”

When he said this, his eyes lit up.

“Oh, she was one of those people.”

“Who live under the flyovers and bridges, sir. That’s my guess too.”

“In that case, will anyone miss her...?”

“I don’t think so, sir. You know how those people in the Darkness are: they have eight, nine, ten children—sometimes they don’t know the names of their own children. Her parents—if they’re even here in Delhi, if they even know where she is tonight—won’t go to the police.” (Adiga 140; first emphasis mine)

Because the very existence of the Darkness’ inhabitants has already been negated by society, Balram is ready to assume that whether they live or die is of no consequence. “Will anyone miss her?” is Mr. Ashok’s euphemism for “will anyone go to the police?” The extent to which the girl from the darkness emerges from Mr. Ashok’s periphery is the extent to which the law responds to or actualizes her death.

The Darkness is consistently depicted as a place haunted by the spectre of capitalism. Its byproducts—“seven different kinds of industrial acids” (Adiga 12)—flow through the Ganges River, while four landlords continually suck the community dry from the comfort of their “high-walled mansions” (21). Balram quickly learns that part of his minute social mobility is his ability to deny the existence of the lower classes. He is mocked and abandoned on the road for merely glancing—“just a tilt of [his] head, just a thing that happened for half a second” (136)—at a Delhi beggar selling a Buddha statue. Balram admits in the first few pages that such beggars, this time with a business bent, exist even in the “light” of Bangalore. David Mattin draws from this overarching sense of a simultaneous lightness and darkness: “Microsoft call-centre workers tread the same pavement as beggars who burn street rubbish for warmth.” Surely, consistent blindness to the suffering of the lower classes renders “India Rising” closer to a “veneer” than a geographic distinction.

Crowther cleverly uses the word “feudal” to displace the social stratification of Adiga’s India from the 21st century—an Orientalist concept that the nation is backward or unable to progress. However, I will devote the next portion of this essay to argue that Western critics failed to view Western capitalism as implicated by this version of India. In order to do so, I will invoke postcolonialist theory. (It is important to note that, although postcolonialism is already entwined with Orientalism, I am here examining the postcolonial circumstances within the book itself rather than those surrounding its market and reception). Sara D. Schotland proposes that although *The White Tiger* does not seem to fit “the usual postcolonial mold” (Mr. Ashok being a native master), it “can be understood as postcolonial in that [it] describes an unbridgeable chasm between marginalized, impoverished populations and dominant wealthy elites who mimic colonizers” (1). Mr. Ashok’s position as a colonizer has nothing to do with his time spent in America (in which he allegedly picked up liberal habits)—it has to do with how colonized countries absorb and sustain colonial hierarchies. I would take Schotland’s concept a step further and suggest that the forces of globalization that have shaped contemporary India incriminate the so-called “colonialist” that manifests in the West. For Huggan, postcolonialist theory “resists millennial and/or apocalyptic conceptions of globalization that collapse the distinction between economic hegemony (‘the global economy’) and cultural uniformity (‘the global village’) while celebrating the transcendence of Western capitalist modernity” (29).

Balram provides little direct commentary on America itself that might cause American critics discomfort. He initially presents the power relationship between India and America as farcical—India has no drinking water, yet it has entrepreneurs who “have set up all these outsourcing companies that virtually run America now” (Adiga 3). India



has, according to Balram, already beat the capitalist nexus of the world at its own game, and it has done so by sucking dry communities like Laxmangarh. Sneharika Roy identifies Balram's vague, absurd and superstitious explanation for the decline of America—"the white-skinned man has wasted himself through buggery, cell phone usage, and drug abuse" (Adiga 4)—as the moment at which the narrative destabilizes and calls into question Subrahmanyam's conviction that the novel "wants to be realistic." The line "prompts us to describe Balram's position as midway between a postcolonial critique of the west and a 'neocolonial tall tale', so to speak" (Roy 59). The analysis of narrative instability is echoed by Mendes, who confronts critical arguments of inauthenticity—that Balram's voice is too clearly educated, for example—with two critics who note that Balram's voice is decidedly inconsistent; Adiga, according to Mendes, is "quite explicitly mocking the longing for the ideal of authenticity" (287). Balram's voice is, to use his own adjective, "half-baked" (Adiga 8).

One clear example of how Balram's unstable voice lends the novel a layer of the ironic is the book in which he reads about China, *Exciting Tales of the Exotic East* (Adiga 3). The unsolvable matter is not whether or not Balram read the book; it is whether or not he read it, and refers to it, in earnest. The fact that it is "good enough" for his aspirations provides a critique of the knowledge base necessary to be an entrepreneur. Cheekily, Balram chastises business books named *Become An Entrepreneur In Seven Easy Days!* just as he launches into, indeed, a seven-day story of his own rise to entrepreneurship. He occasionally seems to bear his ignorance as a mark of pride:

Have you noticed that all four of the greatest poets in the world are Muslim? And yet all the Muslims you meet are illiterate or covered head to toe in black burkas or looking for buildings to blow up? It's a puzzle, isn't it? If you ever figure these people out, send me an e-mail. (35)

He cyclically refers back to these same four poets as the "greatest" in an incontestable sense even though he later recounts one specific encounter in which he was read a handful of poems by a Muslim on the street (217). Meanwhile, in his "odd museum of ideas" (8), international stereotypes of Muslims endure. I would argue that this exaggerated, farcical mode carries into the fabric of the story itself. As one review scorns, "The tone of the writing is breezy-absurd, which means we can't hold [Balram] accountable for anything that happens in the book" (Padmanabhan).

These ruptures in voice notwithstanding, very few critics questioned the India of Darkness/India of Light dichotomy; in fact, very few depicted this dichotomy as belonging to Balram rather than Adiga. However, or perhaps as a cause for this, the theme of light vs. darkness has a long history in colonial literature—most famously codified in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—and has been subject to postcolonial critique for decades. It is, in other words, entirely likely that "Adiga's" distinction between the two is a nod in the direction of postcolonialism. Writing from the vantage of a successful entrepreneur (alone with his chandelier, a symbol of both light and wealth) Balram can quite simply afford the depiction of the wealthier areas in India as "the India of Light" and his origins as "the Darkness," just as he can afford to go on about the same four poets and cell phone infertility. Throughout the novel, Balram's quiet servitude and reputation as an intellectual inferior—"Even this man driving our car knows more about India than you do right now," the Mongoose tells Mr. Ashok on one occasion (100)—contrast more and more sharply with his narrative voice, which is framed as a letter to one of the most powerful men in the world. Far more than formal education, wealth itself has enabled Balram to become bold and articulate.

Despite Balram's conviction that he is the White Tiger—unique and dangerous—his story was occasionally described as an "allegory" (Medintz) "fable" (Thomas) or "parable" (Rushby). "He has the voice of what may, or may not, be a new India," remarks Kevin Rushby; his motivations could be transferable. Roy points out that Balram seems to describe himself as the "exemplar of the Indian entrepreneur"—a spokesperson for his social class rather than an "individual as an allegorical mode to express the narrative of the nation" as a whole (59). Balram is a "synecdochic figure" (59), though not, I would maintain, of an Indian entrepreneur, but of a global entrepreneur.



His singular declaration, “I am tomorrow” (4), might lead us to read the novel like we would a dystopia, Balram acting as a harbinger of the direction that globalization is headed—a world in which money is proportional to murder. He is, after all, writing to the Chinese Prime Minister solely because those two countries dominate the global market and will continue to do so. The West, though past its prime, remains the origin of the capitalist ideology and is thus present in this India.

If Balram proclaims himself to be the paragon of the global entrepreneur, and if there is an ironic element that problematizes his role as a mouthpiece for Adiga, it is worth investigating the critical response to his character in particular. With the exception of those few that find his fractured half-educated tone unsettling, the critics responded quite favorably: “the reader’s sympathy for the former teaboy never flags” (“His Master’s Voice”) and “his reasons for murder become completely understandable by the end” (qtd. in Adiga v) are typical promises. I have neither quarrel nor compliance with the assertion that readers tend to side with Balram, but I will argue that they do so in spite of the vast majority of his actions. Medintz succinctly encapsulates the inherent contradiction involved in siding with Balram simply because of his narrative voice: “Balram proves to be a seriously charming sociopath.” It is worth investigating further what exactly it is that Westerners find seductive, especially if Balram is intended to represent an inordinancy or nadir of capitalism in the 21st century. Daniel Menaker toys with the concomitant appeal and repulsion at work: “Despite his scapegrace behavior and racist convictions, Balram somehow manages to win the reader over. Maybe,” he productively adds, “it’s because of his scapegrace behavior.”

Perhaps the charm of the sociopath arrives for the same reason that some critics read *The White Tiger* as an unlikely twist in the tradition of the classic (American) “rags-to-riches” tale. Multiple reviewers mentioned Charles Dickens, Horatio Alger, and some summarized the plot as Balram “detailing his rise to power” (Donahue). In fact, although Balram is lucky and does relatively well as a servant, he does not demonstrate ‘social mobility’ until most of the way through the book, when he murders Mr. Ashok and steals 700,000 rupees. His success as a result of this move is presented as almost comically instantaneous and unproblematic—he doesn’t even transfer the money into a different-colored bag. India Today reviewer S. Prasannarajan provides a much more accurate verb than “rise”: Balram “seamlessly blend[s] into the stream of light.” The details of his recognizable business strategies thereafter are relatively spare. The message is clear: murder alone turned him into an entrepreneur.

Other critics write admiringly of Balram’s “anger” in the context of his class and caste, which is perhaps reflects pride in the individualist spirit in the face of collectivist stasis. But despite a few telling turns of phrase—“what did I feel? Rage. The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me” (Adiga 196)—Balram’s attack on his boss cannot be construed as a fit of anger borne of repression. Critics rationalize the killing of Mr. Ashok by downplaying the liberal tendencies he picked up in the United States, but besides agreeing with his family to pin the car accident on Balram, Mr. Ashok does little to deserve his murder besides simply being in the master position. Rushby argues that there was no “transcend[ing] age-old grievances [...] this weak creature must be punished for the sins of his forefathers.”

Schotland isn’t the first to mention Adiga’s debt to Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, but she does assess how *The White Tiger* ultimately fails to meet the criteria of Frantz Fanon’s “fighting stage” of postcolonial literature embodied by Wright: “Balram’s neocolonialism ends up mimicking the old order against which he revolts” (3). The most telling example is his evasion of punishment for the death of a bicyclist in Bangalore. He feels barely a shrug of remorse for his actions:

The brother understood at last why I had brought him to the station—he understood at last that the trap had shut on him. Maybe he had only seen policemen in Hindi movies until now. Poor boy. (265)



The assistant commissioner who is on Balram's side is "the worst kind of man, who [has] nothing in his mind but taking money away from everyone who [comes] into his office" (264). In the context of the rest of the novel, this line is ironic: Balram cares about money more than anything else, and when Mr. Ashok meditates on suicide, Balram frantically thinks, "The point of your living is that if you die, who's going to pay me three and a half thousand rupees a month?" (159; emphasis Adiga's). He mocks the cliché of guilt-riddled dreams post-murder (269). At perhaps the crucial thematic moment of the book, he describes the only way to break out of India's "Rooster Coop":

Only a man who is prepared to see his family destroyed—hunted, beaten, and burned alive by the masters—can break out of the coop. That would take no normal human being, but a freak, a pervert of nature.

It would, in fact, take a White Tiger. You are listening to the story of a social entrepreneur, sir. (150)

"Charming" or not, and fainting episodes (Adiga 238-239) notwithstanding, Balram is far from a character who has "evolve[d] to see the injustice of having to choose between family and self" (Thomas); money is the only impetus that Balram perceives, and therefore it is not difficult for him to sever ties to the poor. Regarding the animalistic competition over household funds in the Darkness, Kumar accuses Adiga himself of "seem[ing] to know next to nothing about either the love or the despair of the people he [is] writing about." It is a shame that Adiga must bear the brunt of confusion between an author and his sociopathic, but Kumar's next doubt highlights the global significance of the mistake: whether "others, who might never have visited Bihar, read [it] and recognise[...] how wrong it [is]." If not, Balram has been too "charming" for his own metonymic good.

Goh places Adiga in a recent swell of "dark" Indian Anglophone fictionalists who have "stronger overseas links, [...] highly transnational careers, and thus [...] a much looser personal connection with India" (331), and one of the first demographic trends that becomes apparent in scanning rave Western reviews is that they, too, are often written by diasporic Indians. By revealing Balram's construction as a character who inexorably acts as an ironic comment on the direction of globalization, I have hoped to interrogate two prevailing critical trends that the novel received upon release: the Western critical perception that the novel is about India's inability to gracefully handle concepts of capitalism and individualism; and the Indian backlash that suggests the novel goes too far in demystifying the Orient. The former, although a fascinating and unique example of Western "Neo-Orientalism" which keeps the Orient at arm's length even as Western principles reign worldwide, does not go far enough in unpacking the contradiction of the "charming sociopath"—charming, perhaps, because he is inherently Western and a sociopath perhaps also because he is inherently Western. The latter is justly incensed on the assumption that the novel is intended as both an assault on India itself and a realistic depiction of social strata, an assumption problematized by evidence that Adiga is using the lens of India and a decidedly unstable character to discuss the dehumanizing consequences of globalization and the radical ideological myopia that it promotes. These readings are crucial: without them, Balram might really be tomorrow.

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# Life History and Distribution of Blanding's Turtles in New York State

Brennan D. Gerlach

## Introduction

As a requirement of Biology Research 439, this paper constitutes a review and summary of literature pertaining to the life history, distribution and threats of Blanding's turtle in New York State and research data collected during a summer of field monitoring a population of Blanding's turtle in Dutchess County, New York. Overall, the efforts to increase the population of Blanding's turtles in New York look promising. The increasing awareness and help from volunteers and college students will bring forth a better habitat and success for this fragile species.

## Life History

*Emydoidea blandingii* or Blanding's turtle is considered to be a "threatened" species in New York by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) (Kiviat 2000). The Blanding's turtle has a dark black carapace with yellow speckled dots with an overall length of around 8-10 inches (Hartwig 2007). This turtle is easily identifiable by its long neck, which is bright yellow. The plastron is the underside of the shell, which is pale yellow with large dark black spots along the sides (Carr 1952). The age can be determined by counting the annuli in the center of the plastron. The hatchlings have not yet developed the speckled yellow carapace when they hatch and just appear to have a black carapace with a light plastron and neck.

The Blanding's turtle prefers a very specific type of habitat. They are found in kettle wetlands, which are comprised of mainly buttonbush, sedge tussocks, cattails, alder, willow, blueberry bush, swamp azalea, duckweed, and trees surrounding the perimeter of the wetland (Kiviat 2000)(Hartwig 2007). Kettles are deep basins formed by retreating glacial ice that provides a great habitat for Blanding's turtles to thrive (Kiviat 2000). These turtles can also be found in wetlands made by beaver dams, vernal pools, marshes, slow-moving streams and shallow ponds (NYPA 2004) (Joscelyne 2007). During the month of June, the Blanding's use dirt patches, crop fields, roadsides, sandy soils, and gravel pits as nesting sites (Johnson 2007).

During the winter they hibernate in the deeper areas of the wetlands under the ice. They are very resistant to cold temperatures by greatly reducing their metabolic activity and accessing oxygen through their digestive system, allowing them to survive long winters (Hartwig 2009). In March the turtles come out of hibernation and move to areas of warmth to bask. In April to early May is when copulation occurs. In late May through the month of June, female Blanding's travel vast distances to find a suitable nesting site where they lay an average of 5-15 eggs (MacCulloch 1988). In late August to early September the eggs will hatch and the hatchlings will make their way to vernal pools or small ponds (Butler 1995).

When it comes to behavior, these turtles are very docile. They have never been known to bite, although they will hiss if felt threatened (Hartwig 2007). They are agile swimmers and if threatened, can move over land with relative ease. Blanding's turtles are omnivorous. Their diet consists of crustaceans, insects, mollusks, plants, and even fish (Carr 1952). During the spring these turtles can be seen basking on logs and open vegetation in the sun. Basking is a way for them to thermo-regulate their bodies and has been speculated to help in the development of the eggs (Hartwig 2007).



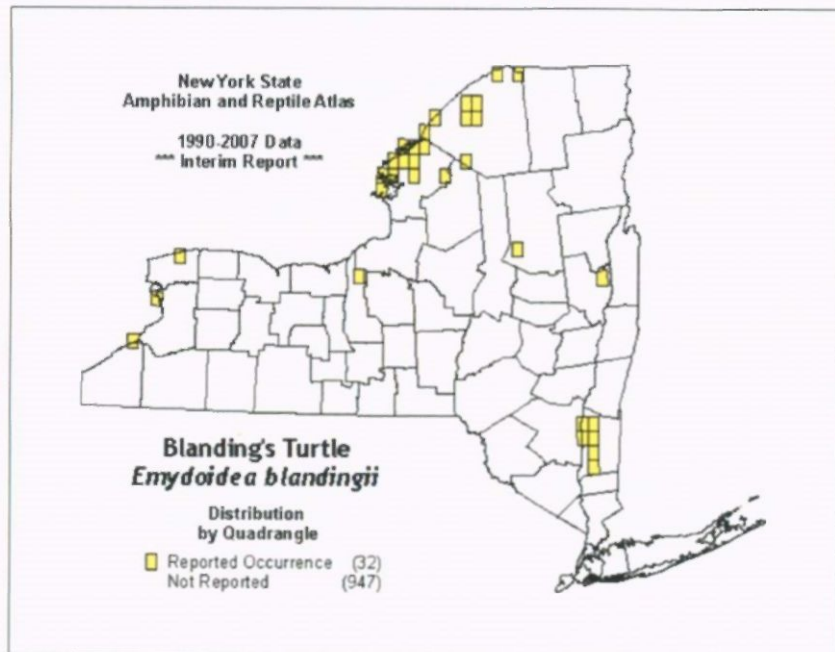
Blanding's turtles are known to have a very long life span. The oldest known Blanding's turtle was found to be 80 years old (Hartwig 2007). Their life begins around September when they hatch from their nests. Not much is known about the hatchling to juvenile stage of life, however studies have shown that hatchlings are known to prefer vernal pools and smaller ponds for their first years of life (Butler 1995). The sex of the hatchling is determined by temperature. The colder the temperature is the hatchling will be male, whereas, the warmer the temperature the hatchling will be female (Gutzke 1987). Juveniles around the ages of 3-6 have been trapped in deeper wetlands. Their sex can be determined early on by looking at the plastron. Males have a concave plastron while females' plastron are more flattened. Blanding's turtles become sexually mature around the ages of 14-15 (Hartwig 2004). The Blanding's are seen more frequently in their later years as they start to nest and forage in larger wetland areas. They will continue to be sexually active up until they die and can live up to a human's life span (Joscelyne 2007).

According to the Hudsonia protocol (see Attachment A), the nesting period for the Blanding's turtle starts May 25<sup>th</sup> and goes through the month of June. Female turtles come out to find suitable nesting sites around dusk. Female Blanding's will attempt nesting for several nights before they actually lay eggs. The Blanding's turtle prefers nesting in a tilled area with little vegetation; however, they have been known to nest near roads, cornfields, backyards, parking lots, or any place where the sun provides enough warmth for incubation (Dowling 2010). The nests are around 4 inches wide and 5-7 inches deep. The clutch size ranges from 5-15 eggs (MacCulloch 1988). It takes around 3-6 hours for the entire digging and laying process to occur. Once the eggs are laid, the nest is covered up and then the female turtle returns to the nearest wetland.

## Distribution



### Blanding's Turtle Distribution Map



The past distribution of Blanding's turtle included much of the Midwest and East Coast areas, however, due to human expansion resulting in habitat loss, their populations have dwindled and are now considered a "threatened" species. The areas around the United States that still have small populations of these turtles include Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, Massachusetts, Canada, and a population in Nova Scotia (Erb 2006). Within New York, populations of Blanding's are found in St. Lawrence County, Niagara County, and smaller populations found in Saratoga and Dutchess counties (Joscelyne 2007). According to the NYSDEC website (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/44428.html>), other counties with known Blanding's turtle populations include Jefferson county and a few locations within central New York (see Map 1).



One of the known populations in New York is within the St. Lawrence County with an estimated 64 turtles (New York Power Authority 2005). Another known population is within Dutchess County with an estimated 40 turtles (Hartwig 2009).

## Threats to Blanding's Turtle

There are several threats to the Blanding's turtle, which have caused it to become a "threatened" species. Many of these threats can be easily reduced by simple awareness and a motivation to help save this turtle and its environment. The first major threat is road mortality. As the month of June comes around, the female Blanding's turtle will travel long distances to find a suitable place to nest (Erb 2006). The increased expansion of the housing market and towns has resulted in more roads, which have cut through much of the migration pathways taken by these nesting females (Erb 2006). There are several disadvantages for the Blanding's concerning its ability to reproduce throughout its long life span. If road mortality of adult Blanding's increases, this could fracture the stability of the population and cause it to decline severely. This could also result in a skewed sex ratio within the population leading to more males than females and ultimately less genetic variation (Aresjco 2004). Many communities where known populations of these turtles reside have made it a priority to place turtle crossing signs to increase awareness (Steen 2004).

Over predation is another threat to the population of Blanding's turtles. However, with the increase of new housing developments in areas with Blanding's turtles, more species of predators are found, such as, skunks, raccoons, opossums, coyotes, and stray dogs, which pose a serious problem (Temple 1987). These predators prey on the eggs of the turtle by digging up their nest. They can also smell the pheromones of a female turtle laying her eggs. These predators will wait until the female is finished laying her eggs and then they will dig up the nest and eat the eggs (Aresjco 2004). Without successful offspring, predation is a serious concern for a population that is already declining.

Another component that contributes to the threat of species is fragmentation and destruction of the Blanding's wetland habitat. Projects such as new housing developments, businesses, factories, and other construction of natural areas pose a serious problem in depleting the turtle's habitat (Erb 2006). The decrease of livable habitat puts greater stress on the already fragile populations of Blanding's. The turtles would not have suitable nesting, foraging, and basking areas that contribute to the specific needs for survival (Erb 2006). The lack of these turtles decreases the biodiversity of an area. Many organizations such as the Arlington School District, New York Power Authority, and Waterborne Environmental Inc. have taken necessary precautions and investigations to ensure that the Blanding's turtle would not be specifically harmed by their projects. To ensure that fragmentation would not take place, the Arlington School District created several new wetlands for the Blanding's turtle to mitigate for their school expansion (Kiviat 2000). Mitigation is a great technique to ensure that fragmentation doesn't occur.

Lastly another threat that could easily be prevented is exposure to fertilizer, pesticides, and pollution. Exposure to concentrated toxic chemicals can cause illness or death in a population. If a wetland is polluted, the Blanding's are highly susceptible because most of their life is spent in the water. A study was conducted to determine the effects of Atrazine on hatchling success where this pesticide was applied to cornfields that were located adjacent to known nesting Blanding's turtles (Williams 2004). Atrazine was used to kill weeds between cornrows, which was where the turtles would nest. It was found that exposure to Atrazine at concentrations of 10-20 ppb is harmful to terrestrial and aquatic organisms (Williams 2004). These concentrations of Atrazine cause thinning of the eggshell, deformities, and unviable offspring. Further assessments were done to lower the concentrations in areas where these turtles would nest.



## Summer Research

During the summer of 2011 from mid-May to late August, I had the opportunity to participate in an internship with Vassar College to research the Blanding's turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*. The research team consisted of six undergraduate students and various numbers of High school volunteers, as well as, Professor Pregnall of Vassar College. A total of 209 hours were spent during a 50-day period over the summer for this research. Our main objective was to assist in the research and protection of the Blanding's turtle population found in the wetland complex behind Arlington High School in Dutchess County. My personal objective was to learn everything I could about the Blanding's turtle by reading primary literature of research and experience hands-on field-work with Blanding's turtles. In order to successfully accomplish our main objective we used field techniques, such as trapping, radio telemetry, nest searching, and water quality sampling.

## Background of Blanding's Site

Arlington High School was built in 1961 and has been expanded several times. It holds around 3,500 students living in the vast district. In 1996-1997, Hudsonia, a non-profit environmental research institute, and the NYSDEC helped organize a restoration project to replace wetland habitats for the Blanding's turtles. This threatened species was located in the existing wetlands behind the school, which would have been destroyed due to the school's expansion projects. Two newly constructed wetlands were made by transferring soil from the pre-existing wetlands and placed into excavated basins.

The constructed wetlands were then planted with vegetation specific to the Blanding's turtle habitat requirements. Nesting areas were also created adjacent to the wetlands. A barrier fence was also erected around the perimeter of the wetlands and nesting areas allowing turtles to venture into the restoration area, but not out. This barrier helps prevent the turtles from escaping and getting hit by cars. This restoration project served as a great success for the Blanding's turtle, which would have been eliminated from the area, if not for the awareness of Hudsonia and the NYSDEC.

## Methods

Trapping was a crucial part of the research done throughout the summer. Trapping and releasing allowed us to establish an accurate estimate of the total population of Blanding's turtles in our target area. Three-ring hoop nets 30" x 60" with 2" mesh were placed in specific sites in each wetland. A total of 17 traps were set: 4 in Corner swamp, 2 in Wetland B, 4 in North Campus swamp, 1 in Southeast swamp, 3 in A2, and 3 in A1. Map 2 shows the wetland complex at the Arlington High School and the location of nesting sites. The traps were baited with Bumblebee Sardines that were in soybean oil, which were then placed in coffee cans tied to the hoop net (Hartwig 2007). The coffee cans had holes poked in the bottom and top so that the oil from the fish and soybean could diffuse into the water. The traps were checked every day at 6 PM. The bait was changed at the end of every week.



Map 2:

Arlington High School Wetland complex and the location of the 3 successful Blanding's turtle nest sites (840, 701, and 845).

If a Blanding's turtle was captured in a net, it was taken back to the station for processing. Processing incorporated taking accurate measurements of the carapace, weight, counting the annuli for age, checking notch code or making new notch code by filing specific marginals, checking plastron, carapace, and claws for scars/injuries, counting leeches, estimating algae percent on carapace, counting marginals, checking to see if it was gravid, checking the sex, and where and when it was captured. Once the turtle was processed it was then returned to the area where it was captured. All data was recorded in the turtle log. Other turtle species caught in the traps were also identified and recorded.

Another technique that was used to complete our objective was radio telemetry to track the movements of female Blanding's that were radio tagged. A handheld radio receiver with an antenna was used to pick up the signals from the transmitters (radio tags) to track the movements of individual turtles. Epoxy was used to attach the radio tags onto females that were expected to become gravid and lay eggs. In order to pinpoint the exact location of the turtle, three-meter plots were used to check the intensity of the signal. As the receiver was moved across the plot, the locations where the signal was strongest could then be pinpointed and narrow down until a precise location was determined.

In the month of May before the turtles nested in June, the research group took responsibility in clearing the nesting areas and the trails that ran between the nesting sites. This conservation work included tilling the nesting sites, which preps the ground to the preferred soil consistency (Kiviat 2000). The trails were cleared by weed whacking and hand cutting weeds to create easy access to the nesting sites and allow easy visibility for nest searching at night. The more visibility the easier it was in spotting female turtles who were searching for a place to nest, as well as any skunks that might be out searching for nests to dig up. If conservation methods such as these are not taken, the nesting sites established for the turtles could easily be taken over by crown vetch, *Securigera varia*, honeysuckle, *Lonicera sp.* or a variety of invasive plants, which may discourage nesting turtles.

During the entire month of June a crucial technique was used in successfully completing our objective. The team gathered around 6:00 PM every night to check traps. Once traps were checked, the team waited until around 8:00 PM to start searching for nesting females along the trails around the wetland and in all of the nesting sites (Hartwig



2007). According to the Hudsonia protocol, if a nesting turtle was located and identified as a Blanding's turtle, the search team stayed a distance of 25 meters from the turtle so not to disturb it.

If the turtle appeared to be laying eggs it was acceptable to approach the turtle to around 2 meters to count how many eggs were laid. This close proximity allowed the team to ward off any predators that might try and eat the eggs. Once the turtle was done laying its eggs, it would cover the hole back up with soil. While the turtle was doing this, a piece of flagging tape was placed in the hole to identify the exact location of the nest. Once the turtle was finished and left the area, the team dug a 3-inch deep trench around the nest and set a wire cage over the area. This is used to prevent predators from digging up and eating the eggs.

If no turtles were found between the start time and 10 PM, then it was acceptable to stop searching and go home.

One night during the summer, a Blanding's turtle was captured and it showed signs of being sick. The turtle was elongating its neck, coughing, and wheezy, as if it had pneumonia. A wildlife rehabilitation center was called to come and take the turtle away for treatment. This observation led the team to question what caused the turtle to become sick. A former researcher Tanessa Hartwig was contacted and asked about a similar case she dealt with. A turtle was found out at the same wetlands that had similar symptoms and had contracted 12 human pathogens. Based on this case, water quality samples were collected to determine if the water was contaminated. We took 120 grab samples from the 6 wetlands, as well as 3 wetlands found in James Baird State Park (located north of the Arlington wetlands) during a period of two days. We then cultured the samples on agar plates and counted the colonies that grew.

## Results

### Trapping

During the summer of 2011 from May 15 to July 7, a total of 64 Blanding's turtles were captured in our hoop nets (Figure 1). As shown in Figure 2, Corner Swamp had the most turtles captured with 55 turtles compared to the six other wetlands. Corner Swamp also had the most Blanding's turtles captured with 24 turtles, when compared to the other wetlands (Figure 3). Southeast Swamp and Wetland A2 had the least Blanding's turtles captured at three, during the trapping period (Figure 4 & 5). Yet Southeast Swamp was the only wetland where no other turtle species were collected (Figure 4). This could be due to the shallow nature of Southeast swamp and its buttonbush cover making it a more suitable habitat for Blanding's to forage for food (Hartwig 2007).

Table 1 shows all the processing data taken by date. The three successful nesting turtles are highlighted. As shown in Table 1, Turtle 701 had traveled to several wetlands before settling on the final nesting site, which was more traveling than some of the other turtles had traveled, considering that 701 had three legs. Overall, from the trapping data shown in Table 1, the population size of Blanding's turtles found in the wetlands around Arlington High School was estimated to be approximately 30-40 turtles.

### Successful Nests/Nest attempts

During the nesting period in the month of June, three Blanding's turtles had successful nests. This is the same number of successful nests as the summer before. Turtle 840 nested on June 9, 2011, Turtle 701 nested on June 17, 2011 and Turtle 845 nested on June 18, 2011 (Map 2). Turtle 840 was spotted on June 9 while digging her nest in the nesting area between Wetland B and Corner Swamp around 11 PM. She did not finish laying her eggs and covering the hole until 2 PM. She laid 8 eggs. Turtle 701 was spotted on June 13 along the fence line near Corner



Swamp, but stopped traveling and settled under a pile of leaves and did not nest that night. The next four nights she was spotted traveling from Corner Swamp all the way to the middle of Wetland B, where she then dug a nest from 6:30 PM to 1 AM and laid 8 eggs. Turtle 840 was spotted traveling along the fence line near Wetland A2 on June 17. The next night she was spotted traveling along Wetland A1 to the farthest nesting site. There she dug from 9 PM to 12 AM and laid 10 eggs. It appears that these turtles are very specific as to where they lay their eggs. They test the nesting site and if they the conditions are not right they move to a new area and dig there until they are satisfied.

Each night as we looked for nesting turtles, we also kept track of partially dug holes, which we considered attempted nests. When eggshell fragments were seen at the hole, we considered those sites as unsuccessful nests that were predated. There were around 317 attempted or unsuccessful nests found along the six wetlands (Figure 6). To determine which species of turtle could have made the unsuccessful nests, we plotted the number of species caught at each wetland to the number of unsuccessful nests attempts in the adjacent nesting area (Figure 7). Qualitatively, it doesn't appear that these potential nesting sites are associated with an individual wetland or a specific species. More radio tagged turtles and tracking data would have to be collected to show if there was or was not a correlation between nesting sites, individual wetlands and species of turtle.

## Water Quality Samples

The water samples that were collected to possibly help discover the cause of the sick turtle were determined to contain differing amounts and types of bacteria. Figure 8 shows that in each of the six wetlands there was a considerable amount of general coliform bacteria, however North Campus Pond had the highest amount than the other wetlands. The concentrations of general coliforms found in the North Campus Pond water, were substantially higher than the NYSDEC water quality standard for coliforms (6 NYCRR Chapter 10, Part 703.4) which is also used to determine safe swimming conditions. Figure 9 shows that each of the six wetlands had high concentrations of *E. coli* which were also above the DEC water quality standard for fecal coliforms. Wetland B had the highest concentration of *E. coli* found in the samples taken. When looking at four specific bacteria: *E. coli*; *Salmonella*; *Shigella*; *Pseudomonas*, the North Campus Pond contained the highest amounts, however, Wetland B also has a considerable amount of these bacteria as well (Figure 10).

Further studies will need to be done in order to pinpoint where the contamination is coming from. The only plausible theory our team came up with, is a possible leak in the athletic field restroom septic system into the North Campus Pond. The North Campus Pond is located about 30 yards away from the restroom. Later studies will need to be done and the NYSDEC will need to be notified to have this problem fixed as soon as possible. The more contaminates that enter the wetlands, the greater chance the Blanding's population could be affected.

## Discussion

Overall I felt that this research opportunity was a great learning experience. I was able to apply myself virtually in every situation and also was able to meet and learn from other undergraduate students. My main conclusion for this summer's research is that the efforts to restore the Blanding's turtle population are at a good step. With the increased awareness, research and conservation efforts from numbers of volunteers, the Vassar College research program for undergraduates has a bright future. It would be interesting if next year a research question could be established for the entire group to collectively study. It would also be interesting if the team could solicit donations of sand from the township or local contractors that could be used as new nesting site material. This is the consistency of the nesting sites in St. Lawrence County where there is a large population of nesting Blanding's turtles.

Another way to increase the population size of the Blanding's turtle is through a captive breeding program. This method has been shown to be successful by the NYS DEC in 1994-2000 with the help of Cornell University, where they head-started 59 Blanding's turtles back into the wetland (Breisch 2005). The research team would have to get a license before doing trial runs. They could collect the hatchlings in late August when they hatch and raise them in captivity until they reach a certain age, weight, and length. The hatchlings could then be pit tagged and then released into a specific wetland. In order to test if captive breeding is a successful technique for the area, the team could pit tag hatchlings and then release them into a wetland without raising them in captivity to see which test group survives. If head starting is a successful technique then the population size will be able to increase at a steady rate.

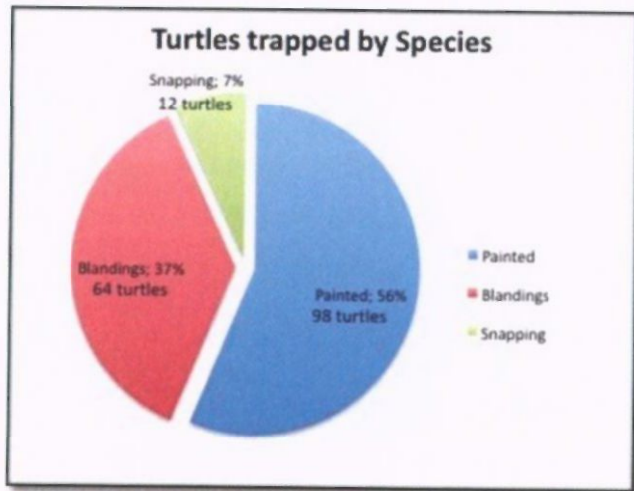


Figure 1:  
Total turtles trapped by species at  
Arlington High School 2011

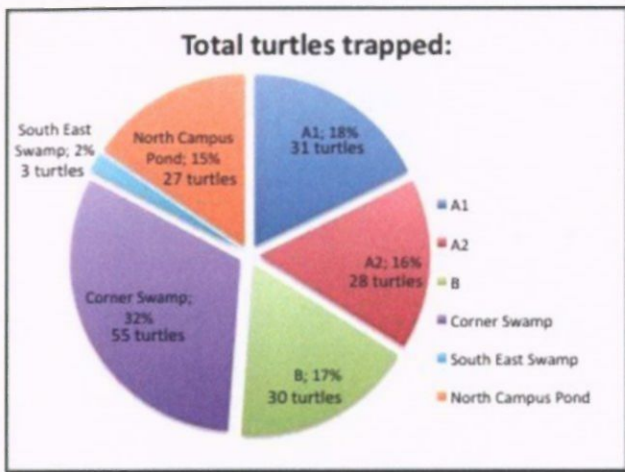


Figure 2:

Total turtles trapped in the wetlands at Arlington high school 2011

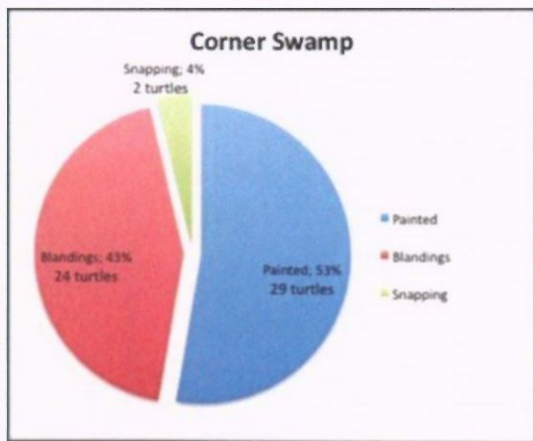


Figure 3:

Number and type of turtles trapped in Corner Swamp at Arlington High School 2011



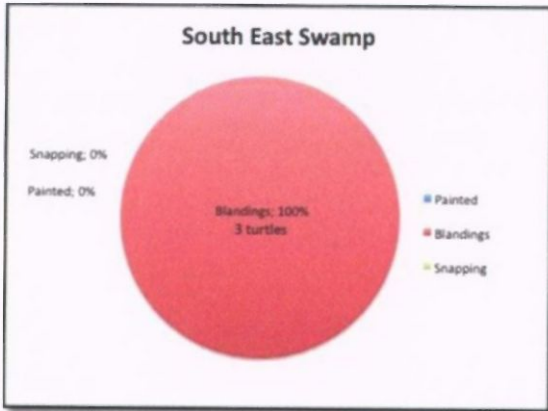


Figure 4:

Number and type of turtles trapped in Southeast Swamp at Arlington High School 2011

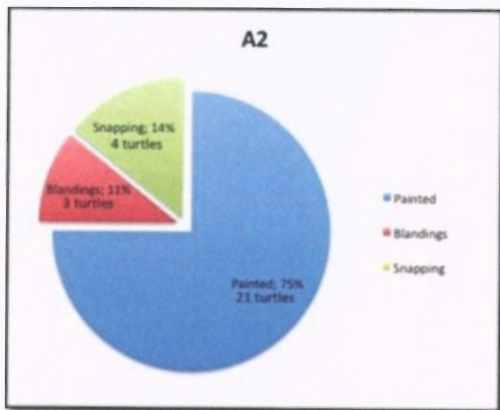


Figure 5:

Number and type of turtles trapped in Wetland A2 at Arlington High School 2011

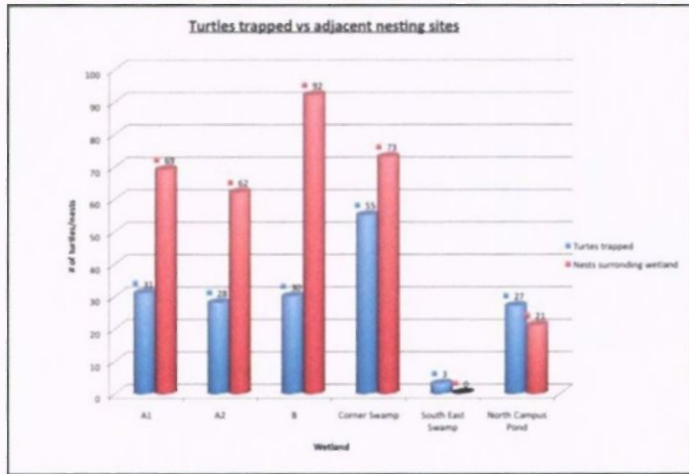


Figure 6:

Total number of turtles trapped vs number of potential nesting sites for each wetland at Arlington High School 2011

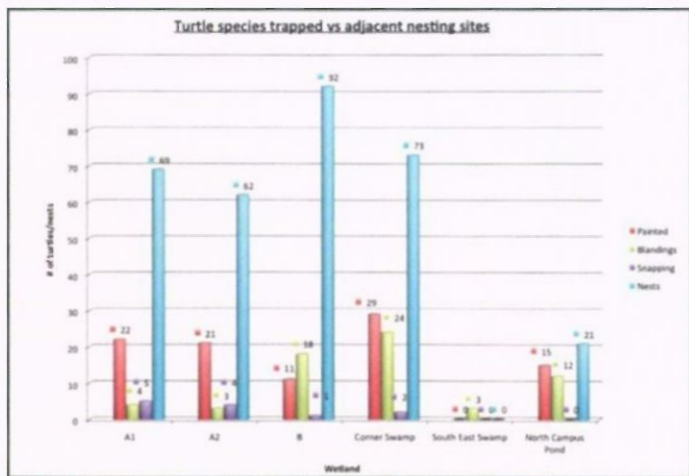


Figure 7:

Number of turtles species trapped vs number of potential nesting sites for each wetland at Arlington High School 2011



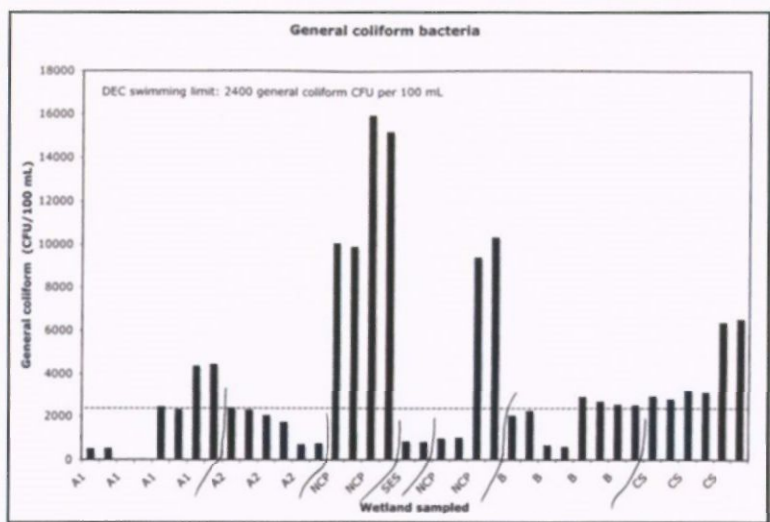


Figure 8:

General coliform bacteria results for water samples collected from each wetland at Arlington High School 2011

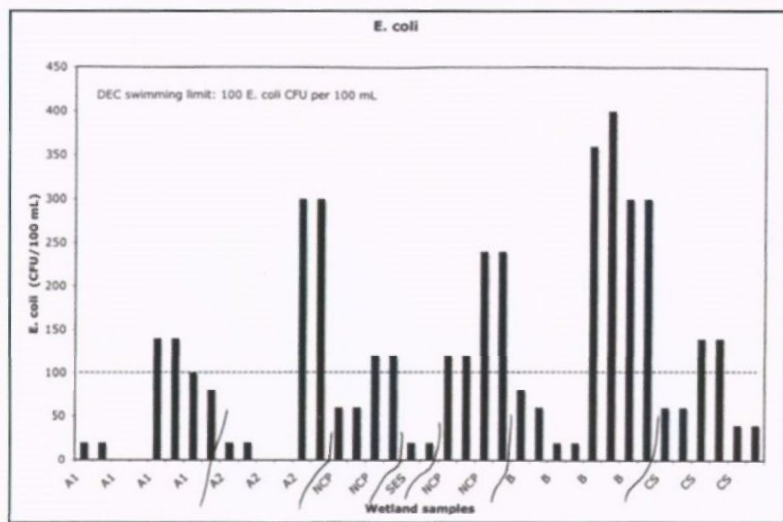


Figure 9:

*E. coli* bacteria results for water samples collected from each wetland at Arlington High School 2011





**Table 1:** Shows the data collected on each Blanding's turtle captured from 5/15/11 to 7/7/11.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Turtle #</u>	<u>M or F</u>	<u>Wetland unit</u>	<u>Notch R</u>	<u>Notch L</u>	<u>Gravid?</u>	<u>Length (mm)</u>	<u>Mass (g)</u>	<u>Age</u>
5/15/11	647	F	CS	1	2,4	Y	202	1200	17
5/16/11		J	B	9	3,4	N	138	350	7
5/19/11	845	F	B	4,8	4,8	Y	211	1250	14
5/19/11	857	M	CS	10	9	N	243	1950	14
5/20/11	809	F	B	9,12	3,12	Y	216	1400	18
5/21/11	853	M	B	1	2,9	N	207	1200	18
5/24/11		J	CS	9	3,8	N	138	350	7
5/24/11	809	F	B	9,12	3,12				
5/26/11	636	F	CS	2	1,3	N	200	1050	14
5/26/11	809	F	B	9,12	3,12	Y	216	1350	20
5/27/11	487	F	B	3,9	10,12	N	209	1160	20
5/27/11	807	M	SES	11		N	234	1740	16
5/27/11	838	F	CS	9	3,10	N	224	1300	16
5/27/11	472	M	CS	9	3,9	N	227	1500	18
5/28/11	487	F	A1	3,9	10,12				
5/28/11		J	SES	9	3,11	N	117	240	7
5/28/11	809	F	CS	9,12	3,12				
5/29/11	487	F	A1	3,9	10,12				
5/29/11	481	M	NCP	1	2,11	N	195	1050	15
5/29/11	488	F	CS	9	4,10	Y	164	750	14
5/29/11	853	M	B	1	2,9	N	206	1160	18
5/30/11		J	CS	9	4,9	N	139	410	9
5/31/11	647	F	NCP	1	2,4	Y	203	1240	17

5/31/11	853	M	NCP	1	2,9				
5/31/11	469	F	B	2	2,3	Y	179	790	12
6/1/11	647	F	NCP	1	2,4				
6/1/11	769	M	NCP	9	4,8	N	244	1740	18
6/1/11	811	F	CS	1	2,3	N	190	1020	n/a
6/2/11	481	M	NCP	1	2,11				
6/2/11	472	M	CS	9	3,9				
6/3/11	701	F	NCP	11		N	225	1570	16
6/3/11	480	F	CS	2	1,2	N	178	760	12
6/4/11	469	F	B	2	2,3				
<u>Date</u>	<u>Turtle #</u>	<u>M or F</u>	<u>Wetland unit</u>	<u>Notch R</u>	<u>Notch L</u>	<u>Gravid?</u>	<u>Length (mm)</u>	<u>Mass (g)</u>	<u>Age</u>
6/4/11	769	M	NCP	9	4,8				
6/5/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4	N	180	780	14
6/7/11	820	F	B	3,4	3,4	Y	213	1360	17
6/7/11	769	M	NCP	9	4,8				
6/8/11	811	F	SES	1	2,3				
6/9/11	701	F	B	11					
6/9/11	840	F	B		2,3,8,11				
6/11/11	701	F	B	11					
6/12/11	647	F	NCP	1	2,4	N	203	1320	17
6/13/11	701	F	B	11					
6/14/11	701	F	B	11					
6/15/11	807	M	CS	11		N	233	1800	16
6/15/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4	N	184	800	14
6/15/11	701	F	B	11					
6/16/11	807	M	CS	11					



6/16/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4				
6/16/11	845	F	A2	4,8	4,8				
6/17/11	807	M	B	11					
6/17/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4				
6/17/11	845	F	A2	4,8	4,8				
6/18/11	845	F	A1	4,8	4,8	Y	212	1320	14
6/19/11	488	F	CS	9	4,10	N	167	650	14
6/19/11	477	J	CS	2	1,10	N	166	610	13
6/19/11	845	F	A1	4,8	4,8	N	212	1190	14
6/20/11	481	M	NCP	1	2,11	N	201	1110	15
6/20/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4				
6/21/11	487	F	CS	3,9	10,12	N	209	1210	22
6/27/11	647	F	NCP	1	2,4	Y	202	1200	17
6/29/11	488	F	CS	9	4,10	N	167	650	14
7/6/11	499	F	CS	1	3,4				
7/7/11	807	M	A2	11					

\* Highlight indicates the turtles that nested successfully.

Photos



Blanding's turtle carapace



Blanding's turtle plastron





Blanding's turtle hatchlings

Hoop net in wetland



Blanding's turtle with a radio transmitter and antenna



The research team



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## Straight Back Lawn Chair

Kaitlin M. Doyle



I refuse to step foot on a public beach. I refuse to leave at nine in the morning, just to find a parking spot – if I'm lucky. I refuse to schlep over three miles from said parking spot to the boardwalk, carrying over forty pounds consisting of, but not limited to, a beach chair, three towels, proper reading material, iPod, iPod speakers, change of clothes, cooler for food, cooler for beer. I refuse to be surrounded by gaggles of preteens, clad in their barely-there-bikinis that are just inches away from the transition into skankinis.

I sound obnoxious, I know. My friends tell me all the time that I am pompous, arrogant and a straight-up bitch when I turn down their countless offers to spend a Saturday at Long Beach Field One, Two, or Three. While I may sound pompous, arrogant, and like a straight up bitch, I have my reasons for my aristocratic attitude towards public beaches.

My family has been members of Silver Point Beach Club since before I was even born. My parents and grandmother rented our first cabana when my oldest sister was just three years old, approximately twenty-four years ago. The cabanas are set up in courts. There are over thirty different courts throughout the entire club, all varying in what they have to offer, and of course, price. For example, our first cabana, located on C-court, had no electricity, and no running water. When we upgraded to G-court the year I was born, we were met with running water, albeit cool, and electricity. Another step up the price scale gets you hot water, a shower, and an extra four feet of cabana width and length. There are family memberships, couple memberships, individual memberships, and yes, a tiny-tot membership.

I have spent almost every weekend, of every summer, at Silver Point. There have been times where I've eaten every meal of the day there. The club once allowed us to spend the night in the cabanas, but legal "issues" – aka drunken people– made that stop. When I was younger, I don't remember spending a summer day home at all. Even in the rain, my mom bathing-suited me up and plopped me down in a playpen set up inside of the cabana.

Now that I am older, summer jobs, and a social life, keep me away from the beach as often as I used to go. But not my parents. My dinners consist of anything frozen and/or take-out on summer



weeknights because my mom refuses to cook for us unless it's in the cabana. I eat more hamburgers in the summer than should ever legally be consumed.

My passion for the beach club does not come from its atmosphere. While it is beautiful, and my first step onto the grainy sand at the start of every season is a feeling unlike any other to me, that is not what makes me yearn for June to come every time the temperature drops below sixty. The beach means more to me than coming home with the wonderfully overwhelming mixture of salt, sweat, and SPF on my skin. It means more to me than the feeling when I close my eyes and look directly in the sun, and get the chills because of its warmth.

To me the beach means my family. It is the place where I feel most connected to every single member of my family. The beach brings us together.

I credit my grandmother with giving me the gift of the beach. While I am not certain if she sought the club out and approached my parents about joining in '87, when I think of my summers growing up there, I think of her. She passed away when I was in third grade, but I can still see her sitting in the sand in front of the cabana. She never sat in the countless beach chairs we had stored. She had her own, straight back lawn chair, a good foot off the ground higher than everyone else who sat around her. She would sit for hours, reading, sleeping, observing, in her khaki knee shorts, floral print button down and sunhat. I have never met an older woman who could tolerate the beach for as long as she did, but she loved it.

Two cabanas over from us was an older couple, Al and Carol. I was born in April of '91; they joined the beach the following summer. They were my grandmother's best friends on the court. Al, especially. Carol was always flitting around the club, going from one cabana to the next to have sweet tea with various friends. Al usually stayed at the cabana. Grandma and he would sit with each other for entire afternoons. I couldn't tell you what they talked about, but there was never an empty silence when I walked by. My grandfather had died just months before my parent's wedding day. None of the grandchildren got to meet him. I looked at Al, and my grandmother's long time friend, Harry, another frequenter of Silver Point, as the two Grandpa McCloats I never had.

My grandmother died on New Year's Eve, 1998. Al and Carol spent the winter months in Florida, and we couldn't get in touch with them to tell them of her passing. They didn't find out until the club's opening weekend in May. Al was heartbroken. All I remember him saying was, "You needed to tell me."

Al and Carol only stayed at Silver Point for a couple of summers after my grandma's death. In those summers, my relationship with Al only improved. His children were starting their own families and I loved to sit with him when the babies were visiting. Sometimes, he even allowed me to put Alana, his oldest grandbaby, in the stroller and push her around the court. When I was really lucky, he tossed a few dollars my way for doing so, too. He used to call me beautiful, comment on my smile – the biggest in the world – and always give me some of whatever dessert he had.

When I found out of Al and Carol's plan to move to Florida for good, hence giving up their cabana, I was devastated. I didn't understand it. Why would anyone ever want to leave this place? I overheard my parents once talking to each other about how it was Carol's idea. She had been pressuring him to permanently retire down South for a while.

I couldn't help briefly resenting Carol for that.

They leased their cabana to relatives of theirs – a nephew and his family. I don't know if it was because I missed Al and Carol, or they truly were annoying, but I could not stand them. Any music I heard playing, game I was asked to partake in or meal being prepared made my skin crawl. In their second or third summer, Al and Carol came up to visit. While we were catching up – I was now fourteen at the time, I could do such “mature” things – I asked him why he had ever wanted to leave. I was expecting an answer filled with nonchalance, descriptions of the golf courses and better beaches that Florida had to offer. Instead, he looked at me very seriously and told me, “It just wasn't the same without your grandma, kiddo.”

I have only seen the passion my grandma had for the beach present in one other person, my father. My dad owns a personal share in and drives for Woodmere Taxi, a local car service. He has never had a set schedule, working whenever his clients needed him. With the economy currently in such poor conditions, he has more stress-inducing hours than ever before. He cannot afford to turn a call down, even if it means taking the multimillionaire lawyer to JFK airport at 3 AM, after picking up the six figure doctor at LaGuardia at 11 the night before. How hard my dad works for my family has often brought me to tears– from both gratefulness and anger. The beach is one of the only places I see my dad at ease. The shitheads he works with, the pretentious douche-bags he works for, all don't exist when he's at the beach. He has often referred to being at the cabana as being “in paradise.” The ocean, the sand, the sun, the beer, they all relax my dad unlike anything else can.

My dad is now the one who sits the straight back lawn chair.

I have dug for sand crabs at my beach. I have witnessed, and gone through my own, mental breakdowns at my beach. I have encountered too-many-to-count splinters, sunburns and sand in the worst of bodily crevices at my beach. I have gotten my ass kicked by waves at my beach and felt like a king when I body-surfed on the perfect one at my beach. I have gotten lost along the shore, and lost for hours in a book in the very same spot. I have made some pretty bad decisions at my beach. I have fallen in love on my beach.

Call me a bitch. Tell me I'm egotistical and cocky. Inform me that my beach really isn't as cool as I think. I don't care.

To me, it's home.



## In Weeks Following

Kevin M. Phoenix



If the early petals drain  
Into poisoned wrinkled auburn  
By the spores and knotted ivy underneath,

And the red and yellows peel  
Into decay of damp cinders  
Bruised under roots anchored by hard green,

Let me remember  
The bloom that surrounds the lilac days.  
The white dress suspended by honey  
And soft morning glory.

When the needles fall,  
May they sew the linens of the earth.  
And the eulogies of winter.

That the cloth of powdered april  
Lay to catch the tears of may.

## 2012 College Writing Contest

Each year, the College Writing Committee presents eight awards for outstanding undergraduate and graduate student writing in six categories:

- **Academic Writing** (papers based on sources or other data, both original research projects and short class assignments)
- **Academic Writing from Composition Courses**
- **Fiction** (short stories, scripts)
- **Poetry**
- **Creative Nonfiction** (memoirs, personal essays, travel writing)
- **Media** (Web Sites, blogs, videos)

Preference is given to writing assigned in SUNY Cortland courses taken in the calendar year of the contest. For example, papers written for classes taken between January 2012 and December 2012 are eligible for the 2012 contest. Students may also submit writing that did not originate in a course taken at Cortland, but the committee offers only one generic award for non-course writing. All entries are judged on the basis of **originality, clarity, organization, development, and editing.**

First place winners receive a cash prize of \$100. They have their writing published in a booklet, and they present it at the annual Transformations: A Student Research and Creativity Conference.

We encourage submissions by writers in all majors and at all levels of study. Entries may be submitted by professors or by students themselves. The contest deadline is **Friday, December 21, 2012.**

*Submit electronic entries only and follow the guidelines below:*

- Type the entry in Word format.
- Type your ID number on the competition paper itself, but do not type your name on it.
- Attach your entry to an email message in which you have provided your name and ID number, the title of the submission, the category of the writing (e.g., academic writing, fiction, creative nonfiction), the course for which the paper was written, and the name of the course professor.
- Send your message and attachment to **Priscilla.harvey@cortland.edu**

You may submit multiple submissions in one or more genres; however, each entry must be sent as a separate attachment to an email message.

For additional information, contact Professor Mary Lynch Kennedy at [mary.kennedy@cortland.edu](mailto:mary.kennedy@cortland.edu).



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Mary Lynch Kennedy

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