

# Gathering of Voices





# A GATHERING OF VOICES



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An Anthology of Student Writing  
Whatcom Community College  
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This anthology is the product of an Outcomes project to assess student learning and critical thinking.





Michael Anstett  
*Self-Portrait*  
Acrylic, 24" x 18"



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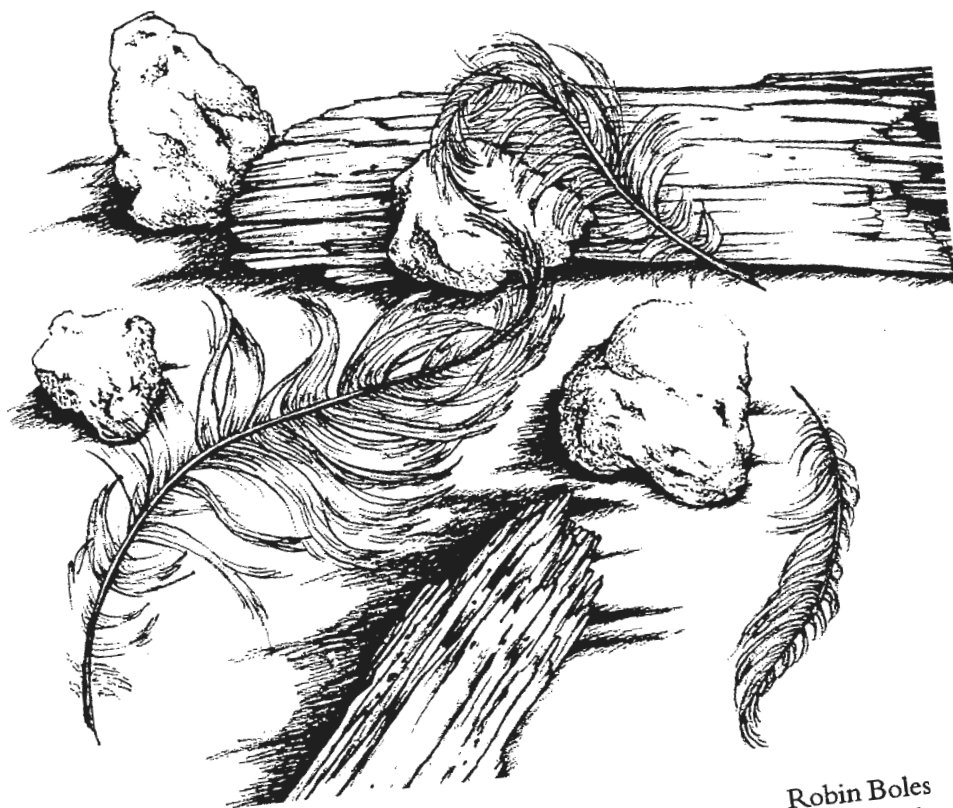


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Robin Boles  
Rock, Feather, Wood  
Ink, 14" x 17"



## Introduction

As one of our contributors, Jeremiah Welch, writes in his essay, “Information Immortal: The Role of Myth in Modern Culture”: “Defining who you are can be trickier than it may seem.” Now I may just be stretching for a theme, for a thread unites the essays in this anthology—and of course they all speak to many different topics—it might be said that the writings collected here address this question in one way or another. That may simply be because the best sort of work in school always, ultimately, addresses that question.

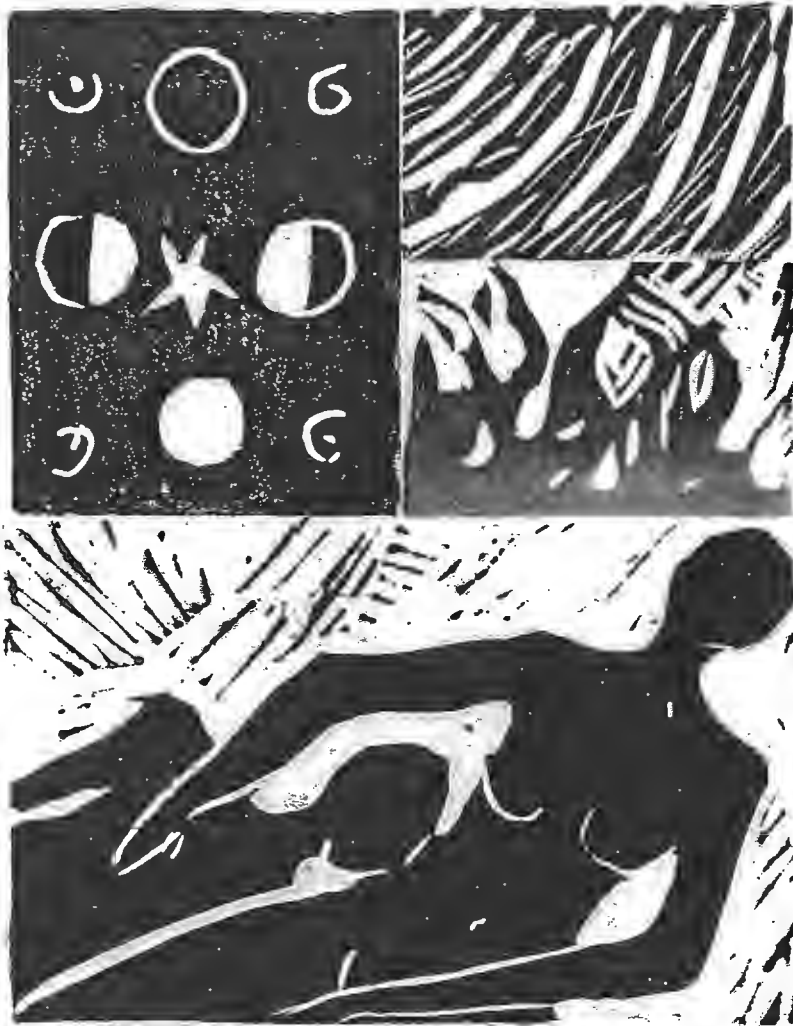
In any case, when Melissa de Jong, who opens our collection with her auto-ethnography, “To Be a Hero,” writes about becoming a firefighter, and how she eventually came to question her choice of a career, she is, I think examining who she is, and how she came to be that person. And although Josh Landrus is writing about civil disobedience in his synthesis of the ideas of Martin Luther King, Henry Thoreau, and Machiavelli, “Breaking the Law: A Conscious Account,” at the heart of the essay, I believe, is the idea that we must live according to our beliefs, regardless of the consequences, and that we must know ourselves in order to accomplish that. As Josh puts it:

Anyone who lives life and is consistently faced with decisions, opportunities, and obstacles, realizes that these challenges are more easily met, and with a greater success rate, when we encounter and contend with them on our own terms.

In other essays, Amarpreet Manikthala writes about a discovery she made while analyzing two movies about death, a discovery that has changed the way she looks at death; Timofey Tsiporenko presents a history of three dictatorships of the Hispanic world, a history he was inspired to write in part because of his own experience with tyranny; and in an entertaining look at some of Plato’s “timeless rhetoric,” Andy Christensen takes on the philosopher’s “Allegory of the Cave”: there could hardly be a work more focused on our ongoing struggle to know ourselves and the world we inhabit. There’s no question that Joey Martinez is confronting his sense of himself in “Fade from Brown,” a powerful account of what happens when one begins to lose one’s native language. And in our final essay, Martha Asselin describes her dissatisfaction with the life of a telemarketer, and how she got past that: “I may not be happy and free in life as I was before, but I am still myself. For some reason now, I am okay with just being me.”

—Brian Patterson





Melissa Helzer  
*Just Wait*  
Linocut, 8" x 6"





# To Be a Hero

*Melissa de Jong*

When I was eight years old my brother was eighteen. He was discussing his goals with our parents. He stated, "I want to be firefighter." I, at that glorious young age, looked at my parents and said, "So do I!" My brother smirked at me, and said, "You can't; girls can't be firefighters." At that moment I knew what I was going to do once I grew up.

This memory was lost as time went on. It seemed to fade into the background. I graduated from school early, spent a year in college and found out that I didn't care for Southern California. I came back home to Washington and met my husband. One day while we were having lunch we began to talk about his friend, a Seattle Fire Fighter. Suddenly I recalled my older brother's words and figured out how I wanted to spend the next year: going to Bates Technical School and becoming what I was told I couldn't be—a fire fighter. I enrolled in school the next month for the fall session. I knew that I had a long road ahead of me, one that would be fraught with the challenge of being a woman in a male-dominated field.

I walked into Bates Technical School the first day with nerves so bad that I wanted to vomit. I had already begun to regret my decision, but I went on. I had a poor instructor those first three months. He was an older man who was almost ready to retire. His class was twenty-four men and one female. The class was out of his control. One man in my class took control, and he became our leader. After only three months our instructor moved on, and a new one was brought in. He was young, fresh faced, and ready to teach us. He was the reason that I fought on for the next four months. He gave us time, and taught us as much as he could.

Within the class there was competition, always competition. Competition for jobs, for class, and for respect. I wasn't considered much of a threat, but I always came in above the line. The men were so much more physically adept that I had a new fear – that I would never get a job. Little did I know the need that departments had developed—a need for female fire fighters. I began to learn

through rumors that if you were a woman who could do the requirements, you were going to get to a job in any department.

The worst part of Bates for me was the last year. During this time we worked one day (twenty-four hours) on, one day off for a rotation of five days. We then got four days off in a row. All of this was without pay, and while still attending classes. I would get off work as a resident (I lived in the fire department) and go straight to school, then back to the fire station, and do it all over again. Five straight days of this, and then four days off that I spent just at school. This intense schedule was another hurdle that I had to overcome.

I still remember my first bad EMS (Emergency Medical Service) call. We had been warned, shown videos and told, but nothing truly prepares you. It was a car accident, and I was in charge of holding the guy's leg. His femur had been broken in at least three places. The consistency of the leg was gone. Anytime that I shifted slightly his leg did too. It was horribly gruesome, and as I stood there with this young man's leg in my hand I wondered, not for the first time, what I had gotten myself into. The scene was horrifically surreal. I put it behind me, and moved on knowing that I had to finish this no matter what.

I applied with the City of \_\_\_\_\_ and waited. They delayed, put things off, and drew it out until it was almost painful. Finally, with about two months left to my training I got word that I was going to start in the next Drill School. I remember, when the letter finally came, calling my older brother (he never did become a Fire Fighter) and telling him. I began by laughing and making fun of him; his little sister had done what he had said she couldn't. By the time the phone call was over with I was crying. It was too much, I thought it was my dream come true.

I finished at Bates, took the summer off, and prepared for the September Drill School. I had heard horrible things about the school in the media, and was apprehensive. What I did not realize is that Drill School would be simply a review of what I had already learned. There was less to learn at the school than I already had learned. At the Drill School we just had to make sure that we knew how to do things specific to the new department we were with. At Bates we had to learn everything that every department had done, because they had no idea where you will end up working (only ten percent of people in the fire program actually get jobs as fire fighters).

When I got my assignment I was thrilled: the busiest station in the city, bordering a very high crime area. I was going to get to see some real action, and get to prove myself. What I didn't realize is that I would have a severe problem with the Lieutenant at that station. She was a woman, which I thought would make things easier. However, I hadn't weighed the fact that she had just given birth to a severely autistic child, was studying for the Captain's test (she did pass it while I was there), and was the Lieutenant at the busiest station. This pressure was overwhelming for her. She would come out into the station and just say, "Drill the boot." Now, what I came to realize was that this was no joke. I would go and study my books, learning, always learning. The guys would come over and ask me horribly obscure questions that I did not know the answer to. They would joke with me; they knew it wasn't really fair either. But hey, what are you going to do?

One month into this work I suddenly got the first big call. It was a self-inflicted gun shot wound-accidental. As we drove up the neighbors were on the street; the family was screaming. We got a brief run down as we ran inside. A fifteen-year-old boy had been playing with his father's gun. He was showing it to his sisters when it accidentally went off. He had blown his head off in front of his sisters. Where do you begin to help? We did our best, but the kid died on scene. I just sat back on my heels for a moment and wondered again, what had I gotten myself into?

Finally, I was able to get a transfer after four months. The Lieutenant at that station had heard that I was having a hard time, and decided to bring me to the second busiest station. He didn't like me, but he gave me a chance and eventually chose to keep me. But, I do get ahead of myself here. What is it like in the station house for a recruit? The job isn't full of hazing, but it is full of joking. A lot of razzing, but mostly they are teaching you. After all, you are going to walk into a life-threatening situation and their lives may depend on you. The only joke that I can really remember was when I had left a shirt out while I was showering. A couple of the guys chose to sneak into the shower room and steal it. They then proceeded to place it in a huge pan of water, and put it in the freezer. By the time I got out of the shower, got down into the station (lucky for me I had civilian clothes), and found them red faced giggling like school children, my shirt was frozen. I, of course, did not have another uniform shirt. That was a very cold night. That was also the night that I realized I had been accepted. I was now one of them.

Things were fairly mundane over the next couple of years. It was all the same. There were days when I had to go to work; my alarm went off, and I dreaded it. I think that we all have that. There was horrific death and mutilation, but we all dealt with it. What I had learned was that being female didn't change the fact that I was first a fire fighter. I was treated no differently; expectations were neither higher nor lower. It was a great career, but I finally burned out.

Burnout is common in the fire department; in fact, except for death it is the only reason you leave. My burnout was rapid, I think, because this wasn't my dream job—it was something that I did to prove to myself I could. I had to make it and show that "girls" could be fire fighters, and my brother was wrong. I remember my last call before I decided it was time to hang up my bunker gear for good. I was with my husband's friend. I was in the Aid Car; he was on the Engine. For some reason this call was one of the worst. It was summer, and full day light at about six a.m. We had all been sleeping so peacefully; I remember it was a quiet night. Tones echoed through the station, and we all went running, grateful that we had gotten sleep the night before. We thought that we were ready. The call was for a jumper; someone across the street in the apartment building had seen a body go down. Now, this wasn't a big deal because we got this call a lot. Usually the person had actually seen a bag of garbage or other debris that had fallen. Then dispatch radioed that they had calls from a jogger. This was a real call. The woman was twenty-three, my age, and had jumped ten stories. Her entire facial structure on one side was flat, and her head had been cracked open. I hate to use such a simple phrase, but it was like an egg. Her blood pooled on the sidewalk, and the color still stands out in my mind; it was such a deep red. There was so much of it that our lieutenant and medic team told us just to leave her. I realized that I was burned out when I was relieved not to have to look at her. I just couldn't do it anymore.

Now, it wasn't just this one call; please understand. Earlier the night before we had been called out on an eight-day-old child who had stopped breathing. What is necessary to point out here is that child death was not a regular thing in my station; we dealt with adults. There was not much residential housing, and what there was consisted of homeless shelters, low income housing, or quarter of million-dollar high rise condos. We get on scene and there is a group of six people in the living area. The home is filthy, disgusting and it stinks. Oh, it stinks of rotting garbage and food. It was nearly overwhelming. We ask about the

child, and are prepared (I admit it) to see a child who had been beaten to death or neglected. What we did not even think of was that the child would be lying peacefully on the bed, with a needle stuck in its arm. The story, as we later found out, was that this mother (can she really be called that?) had given birth to a child who was addicted to heroin. Her baby would not stop crying, and the hospital had done little to help either of them. Once she got home she thought that she had stumbled on the perfect solution, injecting her newborn with heroin. She overdosed the baby, and when we arrived on scene even asked for the needle back because it had heroin in it. Later, at the hospital, we found out that she had asked that her baby's blood to be drained—so that she could get the drugs back out.

That was when I decided that I had enough. It was over for me. I was callus, and becoming inhuman. I had begun to expect the worst of humans. I had seen good things, but they were few and far between. I don't know if other people felt that as much as I did. I think it was more common for people in the police department. I was just odd. I could not stare at another human being (are they really?) and tell them that I was sorry their baby was dead. I was, oddly enough, glad that baby had died so early –I had seen the future of children like her play out in the last couple of years. Car accidents, drug overdoses, gunshots, knives, and every other weapon of choice were in that little girl's future unless a miracle occurred. I don't know; when I began to think that her mother had done her a favor I knew it was time to leave. I submitted my resignation, but it couldn't be accepted for another two months. I had to wait for the fresh recruits. In exchange for my waiting they agreed to pay for my schooling, allow me to keep my benefits as long as I am in school, and to place me on staff as a psychologist or counselor once I have my degree.

I guess in the end I came full circle. I wanted out so badly, and I find myself heading back in. Maybe this time it will be different. At least now I know what I am getting into. I don't think that makes it any easier, but I hope that I can help just one person from feeling the way that I did. Keep them from feeling that horrible numbness and sadness. That is a noble goal, I think.

Speech instructor Dr. Martha Hagan writes about Melissa de Jong and her essay, "To Be a Hero": Melissa's paper was written for a speech 240, Language and Social Interaction, assignment Winter Quarter, 2002, that was simply titled, "auto-

ethnography." The LSI course is taught using a theme. The quarter's theme was "working" and a variety of texts were used to explore the theme using ethnography of communication theory. Using this approach, the class identified what makes a speech community distinctive, as well as, how communication is situated in time and place, shapes and constitutes social life, and is a social activity. The auto-ethnography assignment was grounded in Studs Terkel's *Working, People Talk about what They do All Day and How They Feel about What they Do*.

The goals of the assignment were to:

- identify new methods of creative expression using ethnography;
- learn how language use constitutes identity and place,
- learn that social actors co-construct social activities and social realities through everyday, interactional practices,
- learn that ways of enacting culture are visible and audible via language use,
- identify and utilize available resources to complete assignments,
- understand a range of theoretical approaches that support ethnography of communication practices
- learn methods of inquiry that support diverse perspectives, and
- learn to understand how members employ interactional resources to manage everyday social interaction.

Melissa accomplished these goals by identifying a work experience, then analyzing the everyday "talk" surrounding the experience to formulate an understanding of the distinctiveness of her speech community. Melissa's analysis of the "fire-fighter" gives us a unique insight into a culture shaped by disaster, human suffering, and heroism. Melissa's essay captures, through the telling of her story, the human toll exacted by such experiences. The story shows us not only an individual in a community but allows us to see the culture through her eyes. This is the goal of the auto-ethnographer. Melissa's auto-ethnography came from a quarter long analysis of the firefighter community. Her efforts here speak to her compassion and her humanity.



Jamie Majors  
*Untitled*  
Charcoal, 18" x 24"





# Breaking the Law: A Conscious Account

*Josh Landrus*

For as long as governmental bodies have set forth laws and ordinances, for the purpose of instilling order and justice, those laws have become subject to manipulation by individuals in a position of authority. Henry David Thoreau once observed that government itself “is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, [and] is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it” (145). To institute a government and its accompanying policies alone is not to ensure order and justice, for as long as power is granted to a supreme (governing) force, it will ultimately serve an unintended purpose. Therefore, the governed must determine the means necessary to alter a misguided governing body, so as to obtain desirable ends. From this the question arises: does there exist an instance in which circumstances oblige one to knowingly disobey the law? In the event of one people being confronted by injustices, one must determine the most effective course of action necessary to evoke change and right the people’s fortune. Yet there remains the question: how does one contend with and presumably overcome a flawed system of government?

Henry David Thoreau contends with this question in his essay “Civil Disobedience”; he suggests that “every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it” (146). Though this assertion holds much truth – for there is no course of action better suited to having one’s needs met than explicit expression of what one desires – this tactical approach in many instances is likely to result in failure. As long as an authoritative government controls the fate of many, this inherited power always has been, is, and will continue to remain abused when placed in the hands of authority. Therefore, in order to combat such a tragic undertaking, Thoreau poses the question: “Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience?” (146). A government where emphasis is given to a majority rule is not a government based on justice, as Thoreau explains; rather decisions and consequent rules and laws and ordinances should be

determined through a collective conscience. Though it is true that government alone hasn't a conscience, a government comprised of conscious men becomes a governmental body with a conscience. After all, consciences among men exist for a purpose, and that purpose is not to be dismissed and replaced by an arbitrary form of majority rule.

Martin Luther King Jr., in his piece "Letter from Birmingham Jail" also grapples with this concept of rightful conscience as it pertains to a law's justness. In defining what constitutes a just law, King writes: "A just law is a manmade code that squares with the moral law or the law of God . . . [or] any law that uplifts human personality" (187). By deriving a law's justification based on what is morally right, King - like Thoreau - calls attention away from arbitrary and likely selfish means of decision and instead emphasizes that morals and virtues must be considered. The harsh reality remains, however. In governmental decisions (including issues that range from a nation's war to domestic issues that trouble its citizens every day) the unfortunate reality still persists: law and order are grounded on not common logic and moral responsibilities, but selfishness. I am speaking of the selfishness of a nation's "elite" - that is, those who reside at the forefront of government, and consequently control all aspects of legal existence. Therein exists a most serious problem that has continually plagued society (a problem Thoreau tends to at great length in his writing): people are often all too accepting of their present circumstances. Injustices exist, and individuals are daily made servants of these unjust circumstances (Thoreau 146).

Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" in essence traces the misplacement of government and how it relates to, or becomes dependent upon, the manipulation of just laws. In a most forceful tone, Thoreau demands:

The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right...Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustices. (146)

By one's obedience to law and to what has been deemed just, one actually becomes a blinded servant of injustice. For when circumstances warrant one to question authority and this observance is not met, one consequently gives up one's esteem and therefore becomes submissive to unjust circumstances.

Hideous as it is, some men actually condone, even promote, such heinous tactics. "The Qualities of the Prince," by Niccolo Machiavelli, subscribes to the very crimes of which I speak. Throughout his piece of writing, Machiavelli

preaches religiously on the necessary means of authority – or rather, control – emphasizing above all else, deception. Deceive the people; lie, cheat, steal; ensure power through any means necessary. Machiavelli states, “princes who have accomplished great deeds are those who have cared little for keeping their promises and who have known how to manipulate the minds of men by shrewdness” (46). It is through such deceptive tactics as this that those who are under influence by government are made agents of injustice. Are such measures to ensure a nation’s power truly justifiable?

I fully concur with the notion “that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek” (King 196). Though not stated explicitly, Machiavelli most blatantly implies the opposite: that the ends themselves are due to justifying the means used. Deception, among other immoral tactics, is justified, with the assumption that it yields a positive effect on the nation – or so Machiavelli would have us believe. However, as Martin Luther King points out, this logic is deeply flawed. And “it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends . . . it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends” (King 196). In order to more fully understand and appreciate King’s logic, let us for a moment consider his situation and circumstances.

King drafted his Letter from Birmingham Jail while he was in fact imprisoned at the penitentiary in Birmingham, Alabama. King’s previously mentioned statement – “it is just as wrong . . . to use moral means to preserve immoral ends” (196) – must surely be called to attention when discussing the grounds for his imprisonment. King describes:

I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.  
(188)

Provided the circumstances for King’s unlawful arrest, one can clearly see the distinction between the intended purpose of a law, and how that very law can be disrupted and flawed when put in the hands of authority.

Consider yet another example of moral means being contorted in such a way as to yield immoral results. As King and his fellow demonstrators preached and practiced nonviolent protest, they were met by an equally charged demonstration of “nonviolent” tolerance on behalf of the Birmingham City Police – or so it appeared. King explains:

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather “nonviolently” in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation...they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. (196)

Yet again it becomes blatantly clear: to exploit the moral goodness in people, by abusing the power to which they are willing to submit, is undoubtedly an unjust practice, not to say a heinous act.

In light of the potential for injustices such as those presented thus far, I pose the question: should a population of individuals be so willing as to empower a majority rule, or should the distribution of power be not so unbalanced? It only seems reasonable that the power more equally distributed among the people will yield a society with better clarity and motivation as to what direction the people desire to progress. Unfortunately this reality is often not realized; rather man is subject to an all-encompassing rule – a form of government which operates and acts only to control the people, who are reduced to mere servants. No single line of outrageous thought is more central to Machiavelli’s argument than this.

Already established is the disabling fashion in which Machiavelli uses deception as trickery to demote the integrity of the people and consequently promote the status of the ruler. Still further, Machiavelli would have us believe that it is essential for a government (or those individuals in power) to always be conscience of social affairs. He believes a ruler should practice constant awareness, not in service of the people, to look out for their well being, but to be conscious of social affairs so as to practice and exercise continuous control over the people and their daily partaking. Again, Machiavelli’s opinions on rule are empty and flawed, and essentially promote endless acts of evil. The system of rule Machiavelli asserts is a system that operates through selfish means: it consistently disregards the people and always focuses on the ruler’s status.

This line of thought is misguided and deeply flawed, as Thoreau further demonstrates through his writing. Thoreau asserts “that government is best which governs least...[and further] government is best which governs not at all” (145). I fully concur with this notion. Anyone who lives life and is consistently faced with decisions, opportunities, and obstacles, realizes that these challenges are more easily met, and with a greater success rate, when we encounter and contend with them on our own terms. When obligations confront us and we act not on our own terms but on those of another, failure to meet demands is common and often

inevitable. The same holds true when speaking in a larger context of government rule and its servants:

The character inherent in the people has done all that has been accomplished; and it would have done somewhat more, if the government had not sometimes got in its way. For government is an expedient by which men would fain succeed in letting one another alone; and, as has been said, when it is most expedient, the governed are most let alone by it. (Thoreau 146)

Therefore I concur that it is not one government's duty to suffocate its people, but rather share in nurturing the human spirit in service of individual growth; it is the growth of the individual that will service a vast growth in the nation's prestige.

Understandably, contrasts among sources run quite deep, especially when the thoughts and opinions of Machiavelli are brought to the forefront. However, I dare say that no differentiation proves more disastrous than the comparison of opinions concerning the *means* used to ensure law and order. The means to be used to ensure law and order are a direct product of where the power lies, and what the motivation behind this power is. In other words, is the ruler motivated by power or by justice?

Let us consider the views of our sources: we have already established that both King and Thoreau insist that nonviolent means are necessary to ensure law and order. It goes without saying that Machiavelli fully subscribes to the contrary. Machiavelli promotes that power rather than justice need motivate a ruler; sadly, to ensure these ends, it is inevitable that violence become necessary. It is from this that the paramount question arises: when one is obliged to submit to unjust circumstances, likely in the presence of violent tension, is one then given merit to move forth in what has been deemed right, even if that calls for disobedience of the law? I believe Thoreau said it best:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go . . . . If the injustice has a spring or a pulley or a rope or a crank exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say break the law. (153)

To knowingly partake in disobedience of the law is truly a courageous act. For freedom is exploited all too often, leaving one people with but few alternatives to the intentional disobedience of law. To transgress an immoral law, and to do so in service of a higher moral standard, a standard that conscience tells us is right, is to show a great admiration for law itself. Martin Luther King further demonstrates this concept of true civil disobedience in his writing:

I submit that an individual who breaks a law that *conscience* [emphasis added] tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law. (188)

Civil disobedience, to refuse or transgress an immoral law in service of obtaining a higher moral law, is often the *only* mechanism for obtaining freedom. And is truly justifiable, as it has been said that we, as individuals, do not respect the law in and of itself, but the right it is meant to protect (Thoreau 146). To civilly disobey a law is the best – if not the only – way to assure that inherent power does not serve an unintended purpose.

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"Breaking the Law: A Conscious Account" was written for English 102: Composition II. Instructor: Dr. Jennifer Bullis.

# Learning to Fly

*Matthew C. Ridge*

I sat there by myself, or at least I felt that I was alone. The kid next to me started drooling over his reading book as he squealed with an unknown pleasure at seeing the ceiling. I felt neither resentment toward him nor resentment for being placed in the same reading group as he. I felt nothing. I was calm. Unresponsive. Uncaring to anything that happened to or around me. All I wanted was to get out of class so I could play Transformers with my friend on the bus. I don't even remember his name. I don't think I ever found out what it was in the first place.

My mind wandered in perfect atrophy. I was content doing nothing. I was content at not getting anywhere. This is about the time I remember looking over at the "Blue Jays" group (I think my group was called the "Robins"). They were tearing through the text as if it were below their reading level. It probably was. Something stirred within me then. I felt something. What was it? Envy I think. Why would I be feeling this now? I knew the answer to the question before it even formed the creases in my brow.

It was because I should be sitting there. With the "Blue Jays." Tearing through the text along with them. I looked at my companion who seemed to have averted his attention from the ceiling to his book, then to the sleeping person to his right. I was to his left.

I decided then that I would earn my way out of this group. I could read. I was always good at it. So what was I trying to accomplish sitting here? I resolved then and there that I would revive myself from my pit of content nothingness, to another place of self-fulfillment in the world of knowledge. A's and B's on report cards. Consumption of books left and right. Advanced classes in school not only in Reading and English, but Math and History as well. All these I would achieve, but not until later. It's pretty much agreed that the path to achieving one's goals is always a rough one. Mine was no exception. The hardest part was taking that first step. I hated walking. I silently bid my companion goodbye.

Two years later I was tutoring other kids in reading. Kids like me who at one time had a hard time not in reading, but in caring enough about it to actually

do it. They all were good readers. I remember sitting in my fourth-grade classroom during my lunchtime with a book in hand. I was in a beanbag chair following along in the book of my pupil's choice while he struggled with a word. He would look up at me and I would state it, not slowly like one would to a simpleton or a foreigner learning a new language, but quickly so that he would move on before he lost what little interest he had in the book. I know he didn't want to read. I felt the same way at one time. I even remember chasing him down on the playground and dragging him inside, while at the same time scolding him about how I was sacrificing my half-hour lunch recess so he should too. Sometimes I let him run free. But what I remember most about that year was the last "Awards" assembly of the year. My pupil was called up to the front of the school to receive his award for getting a 3.5 grade point average. He later got another award for being the most improved student in his class. I personally like to think that I played a part in his area of improvement, but I also know that if he didn't want to learn anything I taught him, he didn't have to. He earned his reward because he wanted to improve. He just needed someone to be there to help him with his first step. I helped him with that first step just like wanting to be a "Blue Jay" helped me with mine.

A year later I was sitting in class. The auction was about to start. I had over two thousands points I could auction away. I had dreamed of the items that I was going to be able to buy. I couldn't wait for the teacher to pull out the first item. Would I like it? Would I bid on it even if I didn't? Probably, after all, I had more points than half the class combined. My passion for reading had given the advantage to me. My gaze shifted to the paper on the wall that held everyone's page amount read for that month on it. It was bar graphed. The teacher had to extend the paper to finish my bar. I had set a personal record that month. Nine Hundred and fifty eight pages. I was happy with myself. I already wanted to beat it. That is where all my extra auction points came from. From those pages and all the other extra credit I did. Something caught my attention. What was it? Why is everyone smiling at me? I looked at my teacher and opened my ears just in time to hear her say that she was limiting the amount of things a person can purchase to two. I knew she made this rule to make the odds fair for others to auction against me. It wasn't anything personal. I could have owned this auction. It didn't bother me that she changed the rules. It made it more exciting. Should I bid on this? Or shouldn't I? I was more excited. I still wanted to beat this month's record.



That same year I was leaning in my chair, just at the right angle so that I could get the perfect view of the clock and still make it look like I was paying attention. My attention, however, was not there. It was at home with my imaginary nose in my imaginary book that I only knew the title to. I already couldn't wait for the ending. The wondrous feeling of actually completing something, seeing it through to the never-bitter end. My teacher broke through my thoughts. What was it she said? Something about the highest spelling grade she's ever put on a report card. I was half paying attention now. My gaze drifted from the teacher to the girl across the room. I suspected her to be the best candidate. Had she ever missed a word on the final spelling test? I snorted my doubt. Something caught my attention. I looked at the teacher again. She was staring right at me. Had she asked me a question? I looked around the room to seek help from my peers. They stared at me with useless faces of wonder. Even the smart girl across the room was staring. That face did her no justice. She was no help. None of them were. Well, time to fess up. My response was a confused "Huh?" That's when I saw what the overhead projector was displaying. I fell back in my chair in surprise. Stupid chair.

I never suspected that I would be that one person to receive the 104% score in spelling. I still dedicate that grade to my obsession with reading, and the whole new world of vocabulary that it opened to me.

Sometimes I dream about going into the past and abducting that past me that was just realizing what it might be like to be school-smart. I would take him throughout our life showing him specific events that seemed to be a turning point of some kind or another. I would take him to the time we first stepped into Michael's bookstore. I would take him to see us kissing the foundation of Barnes and Nobles bookstore and thanking the gods for allowing a piece of heaven to remain on earth. I would take him to when we argued with our grandma about not wanting to move on to reading novels because we weren't ready for them. I would take him to the first time we got our grubby hands on one of those novels and realized that no matter what Grammie said, we could still go back to the kid's books if we found one that struck our fancy. We never found one. I would take him to see us counting our books after every time we came back from the bookstore. I would take him to see the archaic bookstore that my Grandpa and I stumbled upon, and see our excitement over seeing the four Shakespearean volumes that were published over a hundred years ago.

I would then take him to the time of Science Fiction when aliens and mysterious planets were not out of the ordinary; teachers wanted to suck out your brain and use it for experiments; and the only thing that made someone “unusual” was if they acted normal. Or to the time of Fantasy when dragons flew in the sky and princesses ran away not to be captured by them, but to join them in the life of freedom, while at the same time knights in shining armor would face off with entire armies of demons. Or to the time of Horror when slimy creatures slithered out from underneath beds and your own neighbor could be just as slimy. Or to the time of Mystery when murders were frequent and too tricky for the local police to solve, so another kid and I would, and some famous person would disappear and I would follow a local kid who believed the school janitor was that person. I would take him to the world of Biographies where amazing achievements in a person’s life were real, and someday one of those books in the library might be about me.

But most importantly I would take him to a few seconds before the teacher announced that we were the ones to receive that 104% grade. I want to take him to see that so that he can see our reaction of pure joy and see the smiling classmates that didn’t envy us, but congratulated us instead and applauded our achievement. I would then take us outside and then home so that he could see that excited us running home to share this news with our mom, not to read as we had planned. I would show him this and thank him for this event. I would show him this so that he knew our effort was not wasted. I think that he would be pleased.

**Sherri Winans, English Instructor, writes about "Learning to Fly" and Matthew C. Ridge:** Matthew wrote this piece for English 201, Advanced Composition, a class that examines writing style and language usage in the students’ writing, in our culture, and in academia. Matt was responding to the first assignment for the quarter, a literacy narrative—an essay that explores some aspect of the writer’s development as a student/writer/reader. To get ideas and a context, the class read and discussed literacy narratives by English 100 and 201 students, essays that had been published, with the writers’ consent, to my WCC faculty web pages (<http://faculty.whatcom.ctc.edu/swinans/>). We read Harshpreet Walia’s piece about his school experiences in India and the United States, Matthias Todd’s account of how he developed a love of reading when he was in the military,

Jennifer Coons' reflections on her difficulty with spelling and its impact on her schooling, and Abundio Ramirez's essay about how his schooling was affected by his and others' perceptions about being Hispanic. During our class sessions and in a threaded discussion online, the class discussed these and other essays and our own early reading and writing experiences.





Abigail McKinley  
*You're the Good Things*  
Computer art, 11" x 8.5"



# A Virus Story

Eli Ross

It's March 19<sup>th</sup> and Bob, a lowly grunt at an anonymous IT firm, is working late. He's reasonably happy with his life. He has a decent job, a beautiful wife, two energetic kids waiting at home, and an imaginative Internet romance to keep him entertained at work. Oh and what is this? He has just received a message from his wayward lover "sexylegs69@hotmail.com." "Habeas Corpus" —a strange subject, but oh baby, there are the goods! Finally those pictures she's been promising for months now! He happily opens the attachment, and nothing happens.

"Ah what a rip-off!" Bob thinks.

Bob heads home a few hours later, a little disappointed still, but glad to be off work. He pulls his Pinto into the driveway and sees his front door wide open. He enters his house to find his living room in quite a state. A lamp lies smashed on the floor and his clothes are strewn all over the living room. As soon as the door clicks shut his wife comes storming into the room. Her hair is a mess and she's obviously been crying.

"So, I got your e-mail today, honey. Who's this Sexy legs? And what's this about riding around in a Mustang with you!" she shouts.

Uh-oh, looks like Bob has got a bit of trouble on his hands, but what e-mail? He never sent an e-mail. And that Mustang fantasy, that was in a document he hadn't even sent to Sexy yet.

A month later we find Bob once again at work. He's unshaven and his clothes are disheveled, but he's managing the divorce all right. He's a little irked that Sexylegs hasn't written in a few days, but work's going well. He's just about to finish up on a major project when the stupid icons on his desktop start running away from his pointer! Then all of a sudden a box pops up on the screen. "Another haughty bloodsucker . . . YOU THINK YOU ARE GOD, BUT YOU ARE ONLY A CHUNK OF SHIT" it states. Frustrated with this tiresome joke he resets his computer while he thinks of the scathing e-mail that he'll write his co-

workers about this stupid gag. Wait, the computer's not doing anything! He stares at the blank screen for a few moments before he picks up the phone and calls the support guys. After ten minutes on hold he finally gets through to the technicians to find out that computers are going down all over the company. Well, nothing to do for now but go home and come back tomorrow.

The next morning Bob arrives to find a pink slip waiting for him. Fired due to abuse of Internet privileges leading to a massive security breach. In shock, Bob's about to leave the building when he's intercepted by a lawyer from the fifth floor. It seems Bob's being sued by his now ex-employer for damages due to his misuse of company resources. He should never have signed that Internet contract!

Soon we find Bob wandering the streets in ragged cloths with the smell of alcohol on his breath.

"Beware of Magistr!" he shouts.

"Beware, Magistr will get you, Magistr will get us all! It got me, BEWARE!" he slurs as he walks down the street.

He stinks. He's homeless. He's a victim of Magistr. That's right; it's real. Magistr is a rather vicious worm/virus, and while Bob's case would be an extreme case, if it were true, Magistr can do all that's described above. Magistr is a hybrid of virii and uses many advanced techniques to spread, infect, avoid detection, and avoid disinfecting, but luckily for us we do have protection (Kaspersky).

Magistr is one fat virus/worm. It's pumped full of algorithms and routines, and not to mention a few tricks up its sleeve to escape detection. The little monster contains a Win32 application infection algorithm, e-mail *and* network spreading routines, *two* polymorphic engines, payload routines, and anti-debugging routines. All these routines and algorithms are in assembler language stuffed with 30kb of memory (Kaspersky).

That's a pretty impressive list of stuff, but what does it all mean? Well, let's start with the terms virus and worm. Simply put, a virus is code that replicates and spreads by infection of a program, boot sector, partition sector, or document macros on a computer or network. A worm is very similar in that it is a program that copies itself and spreads from disk to disk, or via email. A worm, however, doesn't infect like a virus but is still capable of doing damage or breaching security. The most popular way to spread a worm is through email attachments. Another category of malicious program not to be confused with worms or virii is called the Trojan Horse. Trojan Horses are programs that, when running, either obtain



information from your computer, open access to your computer, or in some other way breach security (Symantec).

So Magistr is a Virus/Worm. It's a program that not only replicates and spreads but also infects using computer code. Win32 applications are the backbone of windows. With the ability to infect these files, Magistr is pretty much guaranteed access to all unprotected computers running windows (Kaspersky).

Okay, it knows how to get access, but how does it spread, you ask. Well, with the freedom of the Internet, and considering most people's promiscuous Internet use it's pretty simple. Magistr is like an innocent looking individual knocking at your door. He says he's been sent over by your friend. You don't know him but you're curious about what he has to say. When you open the door he pulls a gun and proceeds to thoroughly sack your place. With Magistr you receive an e-mail from a friend with an almost random title. You open it to find an attachment and a few random documents and or text files from your friend. So trusting your buddy, you open the attachment and voila, you've just contracted Magistr. Magistr loads a small loader program into EXPLOERER.EXE (a program necessary to run windows) and then the loader program loads the main body of the Virus. Now, not only is the Virus in your computer's memory, but your computer actuality thinks it's part of a file that is necessary for it to run. Next the virus infects a random file and then edits the registry so that that file loads every time windows loads. Now that the virus has established a secure beachhead, it spreads to files all throughout your operating system, onto all your drives, and onto all the network drives and their operating systems, if it has access (Kaspersky).

Why would your friend send you a Virus? Well it's not your friend's fault. Once Magistr is on a computer it mails itself unannounced to all the e-mail addresses in your Outlook Express, Netscape Messenger, and Internet Mail and News clients (Kaspersky).

In the analogy above we imagined Magistr was knocking on your door; now let's imagine you live in a huge apartment complex. This time when you let the innocent looking guy (i.e., Magistr) in the door, he doesn't just have access to you, but he also has access to all the other people living in your complex. This is what happens when someone receives Magistr on an unprotected computer on a network. Now, all the resources that that worker has access to, Magistr suddenly has access to. Besides being able to spread through a network and e-mail, Magistr

also infects files, and if these files are then swapped it can also spread this way (Kaspersky)

Now we have a weapon against virii; it's called anti-virus software. However, Magistr has many techniques to deal with our defense. First off, it's really good at hiding. Magistr is called a polymorphic virus. When an anti-virus program looks for virii, one of the many things it does is look for certain patterns of bytes that are known to the program to be virii. A polymorphic virus can change its byte pattern to "evade" such techniques of detection. Magistr has unprecedented two polymorphic engines. This doubles the chances of the virus' ability to hide. Not only that, but once an anti-virus specialist finds Magistr it's another challenge just to debug the monster. Magistr has an anti-debugging routine so when it detects a program trying to get at it, it crashes the whole system (Symantec).

So far we've heard how this bug gets in, around, and hides in your system, but what does it actually do that's so bad? This is where we get down to the meat and potatoes of why virii are bad news. Magistr waits for about a month before it unleashes its payload. Not all virii have detrimental affects on a system; however, Magistr can do some serious damage. In fact, Magistr is so mean it likes to play with you before it ruins your life. It gains access to your desktop and makes the icons move away from your pointer. Then it replaces all the files on your hard drives and network drives with "YOUARESHIT" text. Next, under Windows9x, it erases the CMOS, flash BIOS, and hard drive data. Finally it informs you exactly what it thinks of you by posting the text "Another haughty bloodsucker . . . YOU THINK YOU ARE GOD, BUT YOU ARE ONLY A CHUNK OF SHIT." So now, your computer will not even boot up. You are actually forced to send it back to the manufacturer to get it repaired (Kaspersky).

One must wonder if everyone takes a pounding like this from virii. Companies rely heavily on their computers and infrastructure to do business. Even one hour of down time can cost big business tens of thousands of dollars. Loss due to hacking and virii is up an astronomical 70% from last year's \$265 million to this year's \$378 million. Although this figure is misleading due to the fact that more companies are aware of and reporting these problems, it's even more amazing that 65% of companies are still unwilling, or more likely unable, to intelligently answer the question of "Have you had losses due to virii or hackers?" (CNN Interactive).

How can anyone win? Luckily for us we have big business on our side. Anti-virus is a booming industry, and its virii like Magistr that keep it so. Most Anti-virus software will show Magistr no mercy even though Magistr is only a few months old. This is due to a huge army of workers who specialize in detection and disinfecting just such virii. The Internet has proven to be the biggest transmission media for virii ever, but it also proves to be the route for its cure. Updates for anti-virus vendors will keep most companies and individuals safe from such invasions. But, as in every war, there will be casualties. Anti-virus vendors are not seers; they cannot see the future. As technology changes and the creators of virii get more and more creative, Anti-Virus companies will always be playing a game of catch up. If you happen to be one of the first to catch a new virus, then woe is you (Kaspersky).

We all feel sorry for people such as Bob, the casualties of a new technological era. However, Bob would be an extreme exception as technology races to try to make everyone's lives easier. Virii are out there. They infect, spread, and destroy, and as fast as they act, anti-virus vendors try to act faster.

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**Pamela Helberg, CIS instructor, writes about Eli Ross and "A Virus Story":** When I asked my beginning Hardware 160 students to write about viruses (virii?), I knew that such an assignment could elicit many cookie-cutter papers, so I designed the assignment carefully. My mission was threefold: I wanted students to learn something NEW about virii; I wanted them to exercise their writing skills, and I desperately wanted to read interesting papers (this was assigned right after the outbreak of the Melissa virus—and I did not want to read 25 Melissa papers). In the assignment handout, I encouraged students to "dare to be different," and I offered them extra credit for going above and beyond the parameters of the

original assignment which was to write a three page paper on one of the many virii out there.

Unfortunately, technical topics can be a chore to write about—technical papers have a deserved reputation for being boring and dry. I wanted students to see that this didn't have to be the case. I wanted to ignite a passion in the students; I wanted to allow them to pursue something that interested them (within the general topic of virii). When I was taking classes in the CIS program, I once had to write about copyright law. It could have been a boring paper, but in digging around on the Internet, I found the CopyLeft movement and I developed a passion for that paper. I wanted my students to experience the possibilities of research.

Eli Ross, who at the time this paper was written was taking his first class with me, met my challenge. He turned in a paper full of humor, intelligence, and, importantly, information about a lesser known virus called Magistr. Eli clearly researched his topic, led the reader skillfully through the dastardly consequences awaiting the poor folks who confront such a virus, and educated his readers about what exactly this virus can do to a computer system (not to mention a life!). It's the papers like this one—funny, intelligent, different—that get noticed. Eli is currently in his fourth class with me as he progresses toward his CIS degree, and he continues to be a dedicated, intelligent, and witty student.

# Is Death the Final Destination?

*Amarpreet Manikthala*

As I was growing up, I always believed that the journey of my life would come to an end as I meet my fate, which is “Death.” The materialistic possessions on the earth like money, fame, and family will not bother me any more once I close my eyes forever. But to my greatest surprise, two movies, *What Dreams May Come* and *Defending Your Life* made me realize that this might not be the end. There will be a lot more to face. These movies highlighted the struggle that the characters went through after they were dead. The movie *What Dreams May Come* features Chris and Annie as husband and wife in the lead roles. Chris, after death, lands in heaven due to his positive attitude and Annie ends up in hell as a consequence of her negative outlook towards life. The movie shows their struggle to reunite in the next world. Subsequently, the movie, *Defending Your Life* features Dan and Julia in the lead roles as friends becoming lovers in the eternal life. They try to justify their action of the past life in the next world.

One of the most important conceptions to consider is the message given by each of the plots. Within the first fifteen minutes of *What Dreams May Come*, Chris and Annie lose their kids in a car accident, Chris helps his wife to overcome the misfortune, and they fight to continue their lives. Four years later Chris meets his fate. Annie can’t handle his death and kills herself and ends up in hell. Chris wants her back and so without a second thought he makes his move to hell to find her. To summarize, the message delivered by the movie is to never give up in life or afterlife, which was very well demonstrated by Chris. Equally important, the message of the movie, *Defending Your Life* is to overcome our fear, which is the cause for our failures in life. Dan was a successful advertising executive who loses his life in a car accident. He finds himself in a next world with other dead people where he must defend the life he lived to determine the extent to which he overcame his fear. During the course, he was accused of being afraid to use knowledge to make a fortune on the stock market. He was held accountable for not going to bed with Julia because he was afraid to lose her. According to the

movie, it is fear in one form or another that prevents us from leading a genuine life.

The second feature to confer on after discussing the morals of the movies, is the reflection about reincarnation. Each of the movies fully supports the theory of reincarnation, which means re-embodiment. To illustrate, in the movie, *What Dreams May Come* the residents of heaven had an open alternative to get back on the earth. Chris' guide in heaven says, "We can go back and be reborn, but only if we choose to." However, the inhabitants of hell had no options. Chris, unlike his wife, always had a choice to be reborn. In much the same way, the characters in *Defending Your Life* were judged concerning whether they were worthy of advancing to a higher level of existence or should be sent back to earth for another incarnation. Moreover, this movie had a sequence in which the guests of the Judgement City can glimpse their past life manifestation at a place called "Past Life Pavilion."

Each movie presented the thought of life after death in a very dissimilar pattern. The difference was in the way these ideas were demonstrated. In the movie *What Dreams May Come* the next world is made up of things borrowed from your own memories and imagination. For instance, Chris throughout his life dreamed of a world full of colors and happiness, so finally ends up in a place similar to his own world of imagination, which is termed as heaven in the movies. At the same time, Chris' wife Annie considers her life on earth as a hell after she loses her children and her husband and commits suicide. She ends up in a place that is full of darkness and guilt of the supreme offense against god, which is misery. Conversely, the next world in *Defending Your Life* is a station where you are judged on the actions during your most recent lifetime. The next world is termed as "Judgment City." In the movie, Dan, after his death, awakens in a new city, which looks identical to any other city on the earth with offices and hotels. In short, both movies have an utterly different concept of the world after death.

Finally, another dissimilarity to ponder over is the concept of soulmates. The movie, *What Dreams May Come* provides strong evidence about the concept of soulmate. Chris' heaven that was based on his wife's painting changes as she paints new figures; we were told that Chris and Annie are soulmates. Another juncture where the notion of soulmates comes into the picture is when Annie commits suicide. She is destined to hell and Chris wants to find her. He says, "I am her soulmate." In sharp contrast, the movie *Defending Your Life* did not

dialogue about the concept of soulmate in a straight line. Once Julia says, “ I think we have met before” and Dan is still not sure. Therefore, it is tough to say whether this movie supports the idea of soulmates or not.

To conclude, the movies *What Dreams May Come* and *Defending Your Life* were a delight to watch. Despite talking about a same idea of the human journey after death, each of the movies was successfully able to present the detail in a very diverse way. The concepts of afterlife, reincarnation, and soulmates were the few heartwarming thoughts that leave you thinking. These movies not only introduced me to a concept of life after death but also made me believe in something even more powerful called love and what one can do because of it.

**Patti Braimes, ESL instructor, writes about "Is Death the Final Destination," and Amarpreet Manikthala:** In ESL 115, one type of essay that we learn is comparison/contrast. For this quarter, we decided to compare and contrast two movies. I think my students thought it would be really easy— (“Watch movies? Alright!”) They soon discovered, however, that thinking about ideas presented in films or texts is challenging. My goals for this assignment were for students to begin to think about themes/concepts presented in the films, to analyze those themes, and to organize their ideas into a coherent essay showing how the themes are similar and different. This assignment is especially challenging for ESL students who must first comprehend the themes in the films, find English words to apply to those ideas, learn syntactical structures for presenting their ideas clearly, and somehow synthesize their ideas into organized paragraphs. It was a struggle for all the students, but Amarpreet accomplished it.







Rosemarie Quimby  
*Sunshine for Lola Felipa*  
Linocut, 9" x 5.75"



# Comparing and Contrasting the Hindu and Buddhist Terms: *Samsara*, *Atman*, *Anatman*

Tony R. Kuphaldt

In Sanskrit, the word *samsara* literally means "successive states," and is a foundational concept in both Hinduism and Buddhism. However, this one word is interpreted somewhat differently within the two religious traditions, and involves radically different philosophical positions on the nature of self (*atman* in Hinduism and *anatman* in Buddhism) and reality.

The Hindu concept of *samsara* is the so-called "Wheel of Life," whereby the eternal soul (*atman*, literally "breath") transmigrates after death to another body, the lot of that body determined by the karma accumulated in the prior life. *Samsara* is a painful process, and salvation in the Hindu sense of the word consists in escaping this "Wheel" and finding liberation in oneness with *Brahman*, the ineffable being.

In Buddhism, *samsara* is interpreted to mean "successive states of existence." As in Hinduism, *samsara* is seen as a painful process. Gautama Buddha taught a "Chain of Causation" consisting of twelve elements in the life of an individual: ignorance, volition, consciousness, body and mind, physical senses, contact, sensation, craving, attachment, becoming, birth, and finally old age/death. In a radical departure from Hindu doctrine, he opposed the Hindu concept of *being* (*sat*), substituting *non-being* (*annica* in Pali, *anitya* in Sanskrit) in its place, and likewise replaced the Hindu concept of *self* (*atman*) with the concept of *non-self* (*anatta* in Pali, *anatman* in Sanskrit). Rather than the phenomenal world being a grand illusion (*maya*) from which we must escape to join with True Being, Gautama Buddha saw all reality as impermanence and flux, and our personal cravings for stability and being as a form of self-inflicted torture. Liberation from suffering consists of emptying ourselves of craving, and embracing the reality of constant change that is all around us. Hence the emphasis on *enlightenment* as a cure for our natural *ignorance* that causes suffering.

To summarize and contrast, Hinduism views all reality as *being*, with process and change as illusion from which we must escape. Buddhism holds just the opposite view: that all reality is process and change, and it is static *being* that is the illusion from which one must escape. This diametrical opposition, if I understand it correctly, is virtually identical to the polarization in ancient Greek philosophy between Heraclitus' view that all of reality is *becoming* versus Parmenides' view that all reality is *being*. It is also the essence of the “radical departure in fundamental understanding of the nature of reality” referred to by Gotama in *Into The Fire* (p. 55) with regard to Buddhism's evolution out of Hinduism. In either the Hindu or the Buddhist understanding, though, *samsara* is a chain of events causing suffering, and it is to be escaped.

In the film *Satori in the Right Context*, the statement is made that “the enemy is your own ego.” This essence of self, this striving and craving for satisfaction of self is, in Buddhist thought, what holds us in bondage to suffering. The de-emphasizing of self is reflected in Eastern art, especially the Japanese paintings shown in that film where people are dwarfed by nature, in stark contrast to Western art where personal images center and define the image. Hinduism similarly downplays the importance of the ego in everyday life, although it doesn't deny the permanent existence of the self as Buddhism does. The Brahmin's attitude in *A Passage to India* illustrates this: he felt no need to take personal action on behalf of his incarcerated friend Dr. Aziz, because he didn't believe any action of his could or would change fate. The Bhagavad-Gita teaches much the same thing: that one should act on principle and not on speculation of consequence, because objective reality in the Hindu perspective is not altered by self-action. So, even with widely differing viewpoints on the nature of *self*, Hinduism and Buddhism arrive at surprisingly similar conclusions regarding the individual's place and role in life.

“Comparing and Contrasting the Hindu and Buddhist Terms: *Samsara, Atman, Anatman*” was written for Philosophy 140: Introduction to World Religions.  
Instructor: Joanne Munroe.

# Discussing the Discussion of a Dialogue Master: An Exploration of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"

*Andy Christensen*

In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," a story is being told about shadows and light, evil and good, and political ambition. With key elements like that, no wonder Plato was such a hit. Unlike many entertainers of today, Plato manages to incorporate a purpose in his B.C. bestseller. The audience of his century must have waited in line for hours to get their copy of The Republic signed; just reading a tiny excerpt sent my head reeling at the thought of what reality I live in. I think what he intended to convey was how ignorant we all are initially of our reality. And, until we rise to a higher vantage point, from which we can clearly see where we live, then each of us will see only mere "shadows" of the truth. Plato's seamless use of persuasive analogies and smooth execution of his student-teacher dialogues makes for a powerful and potentially imposing piece of writing. However, with some help from a knowledgeable friend, I am able to understand some of Plato's timeless rhetoric.

My good friend Diana Logg and I both read the same excerpt, Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," for our English class. In the process of writing our essays, we ended up discussing what the purpose of Plato's work was.

Di started by recapping what she thought Plato was saying about the cave. If the cave is a metaphor for the unenlightened state, she said, and being introduced to the light is essentially representative of intellectual advancement, then the cave is a prison of the mind. In this lower world, she speculated, the prisoners have a very restricted view on life. In the excerpt, Plato states "to them...the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images..." (317), which indicates his mistrust in the sensory perceptions. Di took this to mean that as the shadows were the only way of life known to these cave dwellers, the reality in which they lived would be based entirely around those misconceived perceptions. Since such a reality was all these prisoners know, then they would likely find comfort and security in the shadows on the wall, and be unwilling to leave. She

asked if I myself would have difficulty accepting a new truth should someone tell me that the reality in which I lived was not as it seemed.

Certainly so, I replied.

Miss Logg furthered her inquiry as she examined the life of a man who has been introduced to the light. Would you, she asked, in the face of new enlightenment, be unreceptive to the idea of returning to your prior state, to a place full of elementary thought?

I would be unreceptive, I conceded.

Then, she concluded with triumph, that is exactly why Plato describes the transition from the darkness to the light in such detail. He needs his students and listeners to step into the mind of the person he is describing in order for his dialogs to be effective. And, if his dialogs are effective, then he can accomplish his purpose more effectively. Now, Di said, the purpose of his writing lies in question. I believe that his intention is to encourage all statesmen to embrace enlightenment, but still perform their duties to the State. Plato seems to chide these statesmen, based upon the lines in which he states, "Moreover...you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs: for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted ..." (319). Plato, it appears, is teaching so that others may be enlightened. However, he would also have these students teach others, and spread the divine truths that they once knew. Does my conclusion seem inaccurate? Or, is Plato teaching and writing simply to justify his own existence to himself?

No, your conclusion seems astute, I said, if I am following you correctly.

Then, she continued, we see that Plato's seeds of enlightenment that he has sown seem to have a dual purpose. While he appears to appreciate the beautiful flowers that such enlightenment can grow, I sense his political idealism taking advantage of the fruits that these new flowers come to bear. Plato seems to bend his philosophical ponderings to the idea of government when he asserts that educated men must return to the "den" and serve their state. He dismisses Glaucon's inquiry "But is not this unjust? Ought we to give them a worse life, when they might have a better?" (322) by declaring that men who are raised and educated by the state are obligated to serve it. So, Diana continued, by this declaration here, it seems that we have Plato's desired purpose in our grasp. But

before we step forward, is it safe to assume that Plato is supporting the role of enlightened men in government?

It is safe, I agreed.

Then, if we turn to paragraph sixty-five, we find the underlying cause for this essay. When Plato states “You must contrive for your future rulers another and a better life than that of a ruler, and then you may have a well-ordered state...” (323), he is saying that future kings or officials should have better and richer lives than that of the actual ruler; therefore the power of government will not be so sought after. Diana continued by making the connection between this paragraph and the intended audience of the essay. Should you happen to write a book on governing, in which qualities of a future ruler were discussed, who would your audience be? she asked.

To the potential rulers and other lawmakers, I ventured.

Precisely, she exclaimed. Throughout the excerpt, Plato makes reference to the enlightened portion of the social classes, although we never quite understand to whom he is addressing his thoughts. Now however, the audience is clearly revealed. He appears to be challenging the enlightened statesmen in paragraphs sixty-three and sixty-four, as he states:

And will our pupils, when they hear this, refuse to take their turn at the toils of State, when they are allowed to spend the greater part of their time with one another in the heavenly light? (323)

To this, Glaucon replies:

Impossible...for they are just men, and the commands which we impose upon them are just; there can be no doubt that every one of them will take office as a stern necessity, and not after the fashion of our present rulers of State. (323)

Undoubtedly, Di declared, the audience of this piece of writing is the rulers and potential rulers who are either rejecting or coveting the power of office. From the line of reasoning that I have just put forth, can you find any fault in my thinking?

Indeed, I can not, I said.

Well, my friend, Di Logg said, I think we should wrap things up. We have discussed the purpose of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” and made some good conclusions. Plato is trying to examine the psychological path that the mind follows as it ascends from the shadowy pit of unreliable senses to the limitless world of knowledge and remembering. However, while he preaches the gospel of enlightenment, he bids those who would forever travel this newfound path not to forget their responsibilities to the State. And, because they would much rather

travel and explore the light, these philosophers will make the best rulers of all. We have also addressed the intended audience of Plato's excerpt. Here we found that his words bring the most meaning to the potential rulers and other statesmen who yearn for office.

Finally, she said, I want to touch on the simple yet effective rhetoric Plato used. His entire excerpt was made of an imagined story where his mentor, Socrates, spoke to a student or perhaps a friend. Because the dialogue touches on the ideas that the writer wishes, the argument laid forth is very convincing. Perhaps this is why his writing is still so respected today. So, have I forgotten anything, having touched upon his purpose, audience, and rhetoric?

No, I think that you have said it all, I admitted.

Well in that case, she said, good luck on your essay writing and I shall leave you with goodnight.

Goodnight, I said.

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Domenico Ghirlandaio's  
"The Birth of John the Baptist"

*Katie Thompson*

Three women enter and approach the newborn child,  
who is held in the arms of a woman  
sitting expressionless on the floor.  
They do not see the golden aura  
around the head of the baby.  
The first is young, elegantly dressed  
in a gown that reaches the floor,  
her hair curled and crimped and pinned.  
She has stopped abruptly, and stares at you.

The two women behind her,  
who were walking side by side,  
stop also, so as not to run into her.  
The one on the left, lips parted in silent warning,  
holds up an arm, a restraining gesture,  
to stay her companion,  
who puts out one slippered foot to brace herself.  
They exchange glances, a look  
that suggests this awkward moment was half expected.

Behind them another woman enters;  
she is a servant, dressed in flowing layers  
that flutter with her movement,  
her rush to get into the room.  
On her head she carries a platter of fruits,  
in her hand a bottle of wine.

*(Continued, no stanza)*

She barely pauses in response  
to the motionless figures ahead of her,  
but turns on her foot to angle her body around them  
and looks toward another servant,  
who is laying cloth and cups out on a table,  
oblivious in the back shadows of the room.

Your attention is drawn again  
to the young woman, still staring,  
and you feel that you are an intruder here,  
the reason for her halt.  
She stands defensively, arms drawn up to her waist  
in a subtle but guarded pose.  
She watches you, eyes slightly narrowed.  
*Get out, says her look, you do not belong here.*

“Domenico Ghirlandaio's *The Birth of John the Baptist*” was written for English  
121: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry. Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Klausman

# Comparatively Clean

Jabez Richard

My bathroom is clean,  
Not to the point of sparkling  
Or worthy of comment from a visitor.  
It is clean, not like the starched plaster walls of a nun's mind,  
Sterile, but I am still able to reproduce  
A perfect image of my bathroom  
In the "not-so-scrubbed" walls of my sinner's mind.

My bathtub is clean,  
Except for the filth,  
Once removed from my "not-so-scrubbed" mortal feet.  
Clean by my standards,  
But certainly not suitable for a hypochondriac.  
Sanitary enough for a poet,  
But an AIDS patient? A burn victim?  
Could a goddess bathe her halo in my modest Jacuzzi?  
Would the cloud dust between her toes mingle  
Or float like lint angels above the scum on the waters' surface?

My sink is clean,  
A wonder of the natural world.  
Every day I wash the labor from my hands.  
I place palms together  
And let the soap and hot water do the rest.  
Dear God,  
Every day I wash dirt down the drain  
Into space.

*(Continued, no stanza break)*

I polish windows, and clearly  
There are many who are in heaven seeing,  
And all in the world that is dirty  
Seems to me comparatively clean.

“Comparatively Clean” was written for English 121: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry. Instructor: Jeffrey Klausman.

Salvador Dali's *Alice in Wonderland*  
Meghan Thompson

Such an explosion of colors,  
A child's nirvana  
Turned narcotic nightmare,  
A female innocent jumping rope,  
Atop a brightly colored mushroom  
Cloud. As though an atom bomb  
Has been dispensed  
Onto an artist's pallet.  
Her shadow, always one step  
Behind.  
Utter nonsense,  
Mixing with youthful truth and purity,  
Creating an asylum-like playground.  
A Mantis, praying,  
Bounds across the watercolored endless sky.  
A giant hare  
Seeming to materialize from nothing,  
Come to keep watch  
Over this precious jewel.

"Salvador Dali's *Alice in Wonderland*" was written for English 121: Introduction to Fiction and Poetry. Instructor: Dr. Jeffrey Klausman.

# Dictatorships of the Hispanic World

*Timofey Tsiporenko*

If it were possible to gather the multitudes of people that have lived under the oppression and iron fist-rule of strong dictatorships, their stories would overwhelm listeners with the depths of suffering and the cries of the hearts. Instead, historical documents provide witness to a small portion of those dark and not-so-dark times. The Hispanic World has had many dictators, and their rule became normal life in some countries for extended periods of their histories. Most of the countries of Latin and Central America, as well as Spain in Europe, form the Hispanic World. Brazil, Belize, Jamaica, Haiti, and series of the small countries in the north of South America, however, do not share the Hispanic culture, and are therefore not part of the Hispanic world. It is impossible to write about all of the Hispanic dictators because of their great number; I will instead discuss only a few countries like Guatemala, Cuba, and Argentina in detail. The experiences and sorrows of the Hispanic people should not be lost in the busy run of history, or else they might be repeated again. Dictatorships of the Hispanic World have hidden the suffering of millions and left significant marks upon the Hispanic culture.

Guatemala is a small country to the South of Mexico that has had many dictators in its history. After it was separated from the Spain, this country received its independence on July 1, 1823. However, it was only in 1847 that Guatemala became fully independent under the rule of Rafael Carrera. Civil war swept the country in 1827-1829, and strong dictators ruled the country until 1944. From 1944 to 1954, there was period called the "Ten Years of Spring" when the Guatemalan leaders worked for social welfare and democracy. However, "spring" gave way to harsh military rule until 1985. In 1960, civil war broke out again and lasted until 1996, when dictators were no longer in power and guerrillas united for peace. The military rule of Guatemala was eventually forced to surrender to elected presidents because of the international diplomatic pressure that condemned their atrocities. In the last years of Guatemala, the civilian rulers have improved many aspects of the country and have brought it closer to a democracy.

One of the early dictatorships of Guatemala was Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who ruled from 1898 until 1920. During his reign, the economy grew from the successful exportation of bananas and coffee. Moreover, Cabrera built a few schools; public health and sanitation also improved. Nevertheless, some say that most of these benefits can be credited to the local businesses, and not to the dictator. And he was a dictator in the full sense of the word. He used the army and a secret police force to suppress his opponents. Even wars in Honduras and El Salvador were supported by him and the Nicaraguan dictator José Santos Zelaya. He also created a few new national holidays for the country: Guatemala had to celebrate the dates of his “reelections,” his birthday, and his mother’s birthday. Indians, as well as the army, did not enjoy his rule. The Indians were forced to work and the army was starving while human-rights critics criticized prison conditions and executions. Consequently, at the end of his twenty-two years in power, some people thought that he was not a good ruler, and a few unsuccessful assassination plots were attempted. Finally, the army, with the support of the National Assembly and US President Woodrow Wilson, overthrew his reign.

After him appeared Jorge Ubico Castañeda, Guatemala’s next dictator. His rule was from 1931 to 1944. He initially won some popularity by visiting the countryside and distributing gifts to the rural people. His projects, in which many people were forced to work, provided the country with better roads and telegraph lines. However, troubled by the rising upheaval of Communism in El Salvador, Castaneda executed and exiled many communists in his own country. He left the office under the pressure of the public in 1944, providing an opportunity for democratic sympathizers.

The “Spring” of Guatemala was not followed by the warm summer sun. A series of military rulers took control of the country, each for only a short time, including Efraín Ríos Montt from 1982 to 1983. Like most of the other rulers, he did not want to destroy his country, but to improve it. He desired to have less corruption and more democracy in the Guatemalan government. He even offered an amnesty to the guerrillas if they would agree with his terms, but they refused. New wave of war and brutality were launched after the disagreements. In addition to the war against the guerrillas, the army destroyed hundreds of villages where indigenous people lived. Many people were forced to be Civil Defense Patrols and

to fight against the guerrillas. President Montt was taken out of office by the military, who later handed governance to civilian rulers after a few years.

The rule of Montt marked the peak of “La Violencia,” a period of Guatemalan history from 1978 to 1985. This period is stained by the genocide of the Mayan Indians and by a brutal military regime. Hundreds of Indian villages were destroyed and thousands of Guatemalans were killed. Victor Montejo opens his book, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, with the following dedication:

I dedicate this book to the memory  
Of the many thousand Guatemalans  
Who were killed or disappeared during this decade  
Of aggression and struggle.  
And even if there are attempts to blot out their names  
Little by little  
I know that wild flowers are growing daily  
From their clandestine bones –  
Scattered there in the ravines and the mountains.

From our distance of many miles and years, it is difficult to acknowledge the terror of “La Violencia.” Only a portion of the whole story can be seen through different historical documents.

One of the stories that helps people to understand Guatemala in the early eighties is “El Norte.” Literal meaning of the title suggests the USA, but the actual meaning of the title is the plea for life and liberty. This story is about the hard work of Indians and it focuses on one family. The father of the family was killed, and the brother and sister were left without parents. Because it was too dangerous to stay in their native village any longer, they fled to the North. Their final goal was to reach the United States. They illegally passed two borders and succeeded in reaching California. The sister, Rosa, got sick soon after and died, while her brother, being alone and afraid, worked hard for discriminatory low wages. The USA was not a good shelter for the refugees; in fact, the USA supported the military government of Guatemala during this time.

Although Guatemala is now considered a democratic republic, it still has many problems and there is no guarantee that this country will have fewer problems in the future. Poor health care and education, as well as a lack of political integrity, each contribute to the depressed state of the country. The future of the country is hidden, but Guatemala is still unstable and could return to violence under unfavorable circumstances.



Another country that is famous for dictators is Cuba. It was a Spanish colony, until 1898 when the United States assumed dominance through 1902, after Spain lost the Spanish-American War. After Cuba officially became independent and democratic, the USA continued to dominate the island until the '20's. The USA was, in a way, the very first Cuban dictator.

From 1933 to 1952, Cuba had series of presidents, and some of them worked for improved conditions in their country, while others worked hard for an improved condition of their bank accounts. One of the strong leaders of that time, Fulgencio Batista, was a president during that period serving a four-year term. Many presidents that followed governed under his supervision and influence. Eventually, he took control of the country as a dictator. His reign in 1952-1959 had typical dictatorial features, like repression and strong military rule according to his orders. However, the quality of life and the condition of Cuba generally improved.

His first official term in the office was beneficial for Cuba. Cuba had more safety, education, new roads, bridges, and plants under his rule. The National Treasury filled while press and critics had relative freedom. There is evident only one act of selfishness during his first reign; he found ways to become very rich while he was a president.

Batista's next term was different. Although Cuba had a growing economy, a bustling capital, the construction of tunnel under the Havana Harbor, and relative prosperity, Batista was a dictator who came to power by overthrowing the former president. Press was soon restricted and critics were either exiled or jailed. The university was closed for opposition activities. Military law replaced the congress. Protests and terrorism by the police were typical during his later years. The constitution was suspended and corruption prevailed in the government.

Growing opposition, however, threatened the power of the dictator more every year. Batista understood that he would not last much longer and so he took an airplane to the Dominican Republic. Later he lived on the Portuguese Island Madeira and died in 1973.

The next dictator, Fidel Castro, is the most widely-known dictator of Cuba in the world. However, his background is not so famous. Castro was a law student at the university. He organized a revolt in which more than half of the participating students died under the guns of Batista. Because of Fidel and Raúl Castro, police killed many people suspected of the revolt. Raúl was a brother of

Fidel and helped him in the plot. Finally, they decided to surrender and were sentenced to a fifteen years in prison. However, after eleven months Castros were granted amnesty. Castro fled to Mexico where he planned his next attack. In 1956, he came to the shores of Cuba with eighty-two other people. Most of his people were shot by the army upon arrival, but he fled to Sierra Maestra jungle. It was his refugee camp until he made the final attack and seized the control of the country.

The powerful hand of the Castro's dictatorship, as well as irritation at anything that does not fit into his understanding, mark his more than forty years of rule. He has delivered millions of words by way of television and other media outlets. However, Castro has no tolerance for criticism, even from his close friends. Batista's political criminals, as well as sympathizers, were severely punished. Fidel Castro placed his people into all important governmental positions, and demanded honesty from them. His Land Reform, in theory, was beneficial for the average Cuban. However, in reality, he robbed many people and companies by claiming ownership of everything for the country. He created cooperative farms, like ones in the Soviet Union, and forced people to work for the community on the shared property instead of granting permission for everyone to have his own land.

A great irritation of Castro was an embargo by the USA , which consequentially established ties between Cuba and the USSR. Cuba became a Communist nation. This was very challenging for non-communists. There was no personal choice of ideology; there is only the "official" ideology. Even to this day, Cuba is known for persecuting Christians; however, the persecutions seem to be weaker now. Nevertheless, with all the hardships that Cuba experienced at the hands of the USA and other countries, Castro has proven to be very talented in sustaining the nation. The future of the Cuba is uncertain. Castro will not live forever, at least on the earth. The forthcoming change of power in Cuba could move the country forward to democracy, or it could return Cuba back into the corruption of dictators.

One last example of another Hispanic World dictatorship is Argentina. This country received independence from Spain on July 9, 1816. Due to disagreements about which political systems the independent nation should choose, Argentineans had civil war in 1819-1820. From 1829 to 1852, Argentina had a powerful ruler and a dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas. Before 1880, the country had three more wars. However, from that time and until the Great

Depression in 1929, Argentina made significant progress in economical and social issues and became one of the leading nations in the South America.

Nevertheless, change came again in late twenties and early thirties. The Great Depression affected the economy of the country and marked the beginning of political turmoil that led to the reign of the powerful dictator Juan Domingo Perón in 1944-1955.

The most eminent political figure of twentieth century in Argentina was Perón. He ruled twice. His first term was in 1946-1955. His beginning was marked by popularity and the hope of the masses that he would bring positive change for Argentina. He improved labor, and nationalized foreign property. However, he did not seize it like Castro, but negotiated with the owners and paid them money. He also founded the political policy *justicialismo* which claimed to be between Communism and capitalism. The reign of Perón is known for increasing anti-American feelings, partly because the USA sold much to but bought little from Argentina.

Under his regime, the press was controlled and his promises of improved economy were not fulfilled at the end of his presidency. Economy and the morale of Argentina became worse. The president restricted many of the benefits and influences of the Church and legalized divorce and prostitution. Therefore, he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. Many revolts and dissatisfaction appeared during his last years in the office. Finally, he was overthrown by the military commander and fled from the country. His second term in 1973-1974 is not so famous and active. He established close relationship with the army and appointed his third wife Isabel de Perón for a vice-president. Perón died in office at seventy-eight years of age.

Another powerful leader of Argentina was Jorge Rafael Videla. Reigning in 1976-1981, he committed serious political crimes for which he was judged. At first, he warred only against guerrillas and dissidents, at least officially. However, later his list included journalists and intellectuals also. History states that from fifteen to thirty thousand people were killed during his presidency. Many abductions, tortures, and imprisonments haunted the country. A few years after his presidency, courts found him guilty of murder and other crimes and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Nevertheless, he received amnesty in 1990. Another court trial in 1998 found him guilty of adult and child kidnappings.

Victims of brutal dictatorships do not testify about the Hispanic culture alone, they testify about human suffering all over the world. The power of the strong to oppress the weak has been the principle of countless rulers. There is much more that can be said about the rule of Trujillo in The Dominican Republic, Somoza in Nicaragua, and Franco in Spain. Even more, people can learn from it to understand the hearts of suffering people and to avoid the reign of tyrants, who have ruled, are ruling, and will rule in the future.

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**Maria Thompson, Spanish instructor, writes about Timofey and his essay:** The emphasis of the Spanish 295 Honors Seminar was on the Hispanic culture. Throughout the quarter students gained an overall understanding of the language through cultural means. This was accomplished through class discussion, the study of excerpts from literary pieces and cultural notes, and the viewing of videos from various regions of the Spanish-speaking world. At the end of the quarter, as a seminar project, students had to write an essay in which they selected a topic of interest studied in class. The elected subject was to be researched and analyzed in depth in order to be able to submit a complete and critical document about the subject matter.

Because Timofey and his family were forced to flee their own country because of their religious beliefs, Timofey was able to relate to the oppression, and to the cruelty and suffering that were the consequence of the dictatorships of the Hispanic countries. I believe Timofey wanted to explore this issue from another point of view in order to analyze the similarities and differences of a common ground: tyranny. The material and films viewed in class raised a series of questions about the subject, and this was, in my perception, what sparked Timofey's interest on the subject.

At the beginning of the process, he had some difficulty focusing on the scope of the essay. He wanted to cover all the dictatorships of the Hispanic world, a task that could not be achieved in an essay in a short period of time. Once he decided to research the dictatorships of only three countries, the undertaking was easier to accomplish.





Katie Loomis  
*Cubist Still Life*  
Charcoal, 18" x 24"





# Information Immortal: The Role of Myth in Modern Culture

*Jeremiah Welch*

Defining who you are can be trickier than it may seem. On one hand, you run across the argument “I am.” Fairly irrefutable . . . but consider the paradox of this interview with a chicken:

*Interviewer: Who are you?*

Chicken: I am a chicken.

*Interviewer: What makes you a chicken?*

Chicken: I lay eggs.

*Interviewer: Why do you lay eggs?*

Chicken: Because I am a chicken.

What this simple example shows is the complex interaction between personal identity and cultural identity. The paradox is that while our culture defines who we are, we are at the same time defining what our culture is. While people love the autonomy of making their “own” decisions, the community they live in influences a significant part of their actions. In other words, while it is fun to talk about your individuality, you need the language of your culture to do so. Faced with this complexity, one must ask the question, “Does society have an intermediary for this process of community and individual defining one another?” The answer is yes; a culture’s mythology fills this role. Mythology is the DNA of humankind.

Mythic literature is often dismissed as fairy tales, “other people’s religions,” or even “old dusty stories.” However, a much more robust definition exists. While we often think of mythology as belonging in the past, it surrounds us today. Much of what we see from the past has withstood the test of time. That is, it has been important enough for subsequent generations to remember. This longevity would imply that mythology is any sort of literature that deals with fundamental human issues. Examples of this sort of literature includes Greek myths, the Bible, *The Odyssey*, Shakespeare’s plays, or more recent additions such as

Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, Mark Twain's *Huck Finn*, or a thousand other novels, plays, stories, films, or other venues which deal with the basic themes of humanity.

What does mythology have to do with the process of defining a group or individual? An analogy can be drawn between mythology and a blackboard. Mythology is the blackboard upon which a community communicates what is important to it. Members of the community read what is on the blackboard, and members of the community also write what is on the blackboard. Over time, the contents of the blackboard change along with the community, and different communities will have different blackboards. There is no master plan; i.e. the blackboard is not controlled by one individual. All these subsequent differences, revisions, and erasures make for a very confusing message, but the blackboard is the best indicator of how the community feels. Similarly, mythic literature is both the meeting place for the values of a community and the foundation of the decisions that community members make.

For myth to be the cultural blueprint of humankind, one has to view humankind as an organism. Not surprisingly, this is a train of thought that goes back several hundred years. Several variations of the theme exist, but a contemporary starting point is Richard Dawkin's selfish gene theory. To illustrate the components of this theory, let's use a person as an example. Selfish gene theory is biological model in which specific cells in an individual act for their own good, and not for the good of the person that they inhabit. Their prime goal is to make life safe and comfortable for them and their next generation. In order to do this, they will make whatever alliances and enemies they need to. They "care" about the whole system only so far as to ensure themselves an environment to live and multiply in.

Two basic components in this system are cooperation and competition. They both coexist as two sides of the same coin. The competition is obvious: individual cells are fighting for dominance, with the strongest one winning. The cooperation is a little harder to see. Besides tactical cooperation between mutualistic cells for short-term advantage (such as stomach cells digesting food for mouth cells which will in turn feed the stomach raw material), there also exists a grudging cooperation generally. This overall cooperation shows up when viewing the behavior of the entire person. First, the internal competition ensures that the person is made up of the strongest possible cells, making for a strong individual.

This may not seem like cooperation until you consider that the competitive behavior of the cells is actually benefiting the whole. Secondly, when the individual faces a challenge, all the cells must work together or die. The theory is called the selfish gene theory because the way that the successful cells pass on their information to the next generation is through their genes, present in each cell's DNA. The genes are what persist on to the next generation. *While the cells may die, their knowledge doesn't.*

The basic model involved in selfish gene theory can be applied to many fields. Capitalism is the economic version of selfish gene theory, Meme theory is a version of selfish gene theory for knowledge, and the model can also be applied to humanity overall. This basic model applies in this way: what one considers a whole is really made up of many competing parts, each acting for its own good. The whole grows stronger (or possibly weaker!) over time, evolving because of this internal competition. Competition and cooperation coexist, and there is no master plan telling all the parts where to go and what to do. Out of chaos comes something resembling order.

This basic model is attractive for many reasons. Intriguingly, it bridges the gap between Eastern and Western philosophies. Much of eastern religion and culture views the individual as just a small piece of the whole, while western culture places emphasis on the individual. In the selfish gene model, individualism and being part of the whole are not mutually exclusive.

The model also provides a pattern for the decision making process present in personal consciousness. When a person makes a decision to act, the decision often arises from conflicting urges. Each of the urges in an individual is acting for itself, and the strongest urge wins. Sometimes a part of our selves is ignored in that process, or a part of us doesn't care. Sometimes a person does not act at all, caught in either gridlock or apathy. For example, the decision to get up and go to work could involve many conflicting urges; the urge for more sleep, the urge to not let down those who are expecting you, or the urge to have a larger paycheck in the future. The strongest urge (or combination of urges) will win. Usually it is responsibility towards your co-workers or your financial future that presents the strongest urge; otherwise the world would be a very different place. But say you are depressed, sick, exhausted, or even all three; then the urge for sleep is going to have a louder voice, one that may drown out all else. Each of us is a cacophony of parts, and the compromise reached between the parts represents the "individual."

Considering how the model can be applied to personal consciousness, one can see how this model also applies to humankind overall. Viewing humanity as the sum of many parts, one can see that the direction of a community is based upon conflicting desires of the community members. In turn, the history of decisions that a community makes will influence the decisions of future community members. In his novel *Earth*, David Brin envisions a world in which the digital age enables this decision/definition process to take on a more tangible feel in the form of ubiquitous information transfer through Internet. This improved communication leads to a tangible “collective conscious” for humanity, expressed through newsgroups and chat rooms. When imagining humanity as the summation of billions of conversations, actions, and ideas, it seems impossible, if not absurd, to determine that such talk amalgamates into anything intelligible, “a consciousness.” But consider your perspective as just one tiny piece of that whole. A person is the summation of millions of cells; who could ask one cell in a body to explain the whole? However, there must be some area one could look to get some sort of idea of what humankind has on its collective conscious. Brin has one of his characters try to define that place:

Imagine the island of blue in the middle of a tropical storm, its eye of peace.

You must admit the hurricane is there. To do otherwise is self-deception, which in nature is fatal, or worse, hypocritical. Even honest, decent, generous folk must fight to survive when the driving winds blow.

And yet such folk will also do whatever they can, whenever they can to, expand the blue. To expand that gentle, centered realm where patience prevails, and no law is made by tooth or claw.

You are never entirely helpless, nor ever entirely in it for yourself. You can always do something to expand the blue. (566)

This quote reveals Brin’s hopeful view of humanity’s center, its “soul.” Such a center would be quite unintelligible to someone caught in the hurricane’s winds; while they might catch glimpses of it, they obviously have other things on their mind. Even if the person made an effort to see the center, they could not push their way against the tremendous winds or ask the hurricane to stop and explain itself. So it would seem the center of humankind must appear just as obscure for the billions who interact to form the hurricane of humanity.

So by applying the selfish gene model, we can see that humankind does consist of many individuals, who are all competing, and humankind’s direction and decisions are a result of this process. Humankind acts as an organism, and no

one person is steering; there is no master plan or “ghost captain.” So in envisioning humankind’s conscious, the place where it stores its code of action, where do we look? We look to our modern mythology, the stories that are important to us today, the stories that tell us how to live, and stories that declare a culture’s collective values. As contradictory, confusing, and ever-changing as this canon of literature may be, it is the cultural inheritance of humanity; as mentioned before, it is the DNA of humankind.

Like DNA, myth deals with basic human issues. This could be a common rite or an issue that humans in general have to come to terms with. These basic themes consist of things such as birth, adolescence, what it means to be a man or woman, motherhood, fatherhood, betrayal, redemption, rebirth, death, and man’s relationship with the earth or the cosmos. These themes have been called things like universal truth, spiritual consciousness, and the human condition. The reason that myth is such an influential force in our culture is that it deals with questions (themes) that are basic to our very existence, much like our genetic code does.

Myth also evolves over time, much like DNA. In his discussion of mythology, William Ferrell offers this explanation of the changing nature of myth: “Myths . . . are stories that attempt to provide an understanding of the real world at the time they are conceived”(5). As time goes on and culture gets more and more complicated, so will the basic themes of humanity. Our understanding of what it means to be human is constantly changing. For example, take the theme of death. Cultures all over the world have created mythic tales to explain death. The stories are diverse in scope: the deceased taking a boat ride to an underworld for the unborn, being reborn as a goat or another person, or rising up to everlasting bliss in the sky. What happens to these myths when you factor in that we now live about three times as long as our ancestors, or that now people can drag their deaths out years, dying just a little bit at a time? Did the myth of reincarnation take into account that the comatose person might suddenly wake up? The process of human life and death is different now than it was 200 years ago. The basic themes of life are changing, and so our mythology also must change. Much as our cells pass on their knowledge in the form of DNA to the next generation, individuals pass on their knowledge to the next generation in the form of mythic literature. *Individuals die, but knowledge is passed on.*

So, a culture’s mythology is of critical importance in determining the actions of its members and the culture as a whole. Interfering with the flow of

mythology has in the past led to devastating consequences. Like a person, a culture or nation can also become sick, and crucial to keeping a culture healthy is the free flow of its mythology. In *Earth*, Brin uses this analogy between a body and a nation:

Although a body's cells all carry the same inheritance, they aren't identical. Specialists do their separate jobs, each crucial to the whole. If this weren't so, if all cells were the same, you would just have an undifferentiated blob.

On the other hand, whenever a small group of cells strives, unrestricted, for its own supremacy, you get another familiar catastrophe, known as cancer.

What does any of this have to do a social theory?

Nations are often likened to living bodies. And so, old-time state socialism may be said to have turned many a body politic into lazy, unproductive blobs. Likewise, inherited wealth and aristocracy were egoistic cancers that ate the hearts out of countless other great nations.

To carry the analogy further - what these two pervasive and ruinous social diseases had in common was that each could flourish only when a commonwealth's immune system was weakened. In this case we refer to the free flow of information. Light is the scourge of error, and so both aristocracy and blob-socialism thrived on secrecy. Each fought to maintain it at all costs.

But the ideal living structure, whether creature or ecosystem, is self-regulating. It must breathe. Blood and accurate data must course through all corners, or it can never thrive.

So it is, especially, in the complex interactions among human beings.  
(307-08)

Myth is crucial to the development of humankind. Where we have seen governments or cultures that repress cultural information about topics, such as communist nations banning discussion of god, or America repressing accurate reporting and criticism of its myriad wars, the consequences have been tragic. Clamping down on the flow of any kind of literature is an invitation to disease, because humans learn by telling stories, and when you cut off the free flow of information, humanity's ability to learn is hampered. People will have to relearn harsh lessons, or they will develop intolerant and provincial worldviews. Each generation of humanity has stood on the shoulders of its ancestors, and our mythology represents the summation of everything that humanity has learned in its time so far. It is also the basis of the whole of humanity's plan for the future. With humanity evolving and redefining its mythology along the way, we have seen it to be a critical part of cultural evolution. While the wide canon of myth can be

both confusing and enlightening, it is the part of humanity that defines humanity itself.

### Works Cited

Brin, David. *Earth*. New York: Bantam, 1990.

Ferrell, William K. *Literature and Film as Modern Mythology*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000.

**English instructor Dr. Susan Lonac writes about Jeremiah and his essay:** Jeremiah wrote this essay for my winter quarter honors seminar, “Modern Mythologies” (English 295). His paper was a response to an assignment that asked students to integrate a range of source materials into an analytical response to any of the central questions posed by the course: What is myth? What does it do for us? What does it do to us? How do ancient myths inform modern stories? Is myth only an ancient form, or do we continue to create viable, new myths today? These questions served as a springboard into whatever particular focus students wished to pursue in relation to the course’s readings and ideas. Jeremiah chose to approach the questions at their broadest, most philosophical level, proposing a model of myth as a kind of “cultural DNA” and connecting this model to ideas raised in David Brin’s novel *Earth*.

The result of Jeremiah’s labors is impressive in the scope of its synthesis and the grace of its execution. I was particularly struck by the essay’s ease of voice; readers sense, as Roger Atwan puts it, “a mind at work” in Jeremiah’s various speculations and conclusions, as well as a unique personality immediately present in the prose. As a whole, the essay serves as a fine model of both analysis and synthesis of fairly heady, abstruse subject matter. Jeremiah met the challenges posed by his project ably and with an admirable writerly poise.

# *Awoulaba: African Beauty*

*Marie-Chantal Guédé*

In 1998, I went to visit my aunt in Dananee located on the west side of the Ivory Coast. The night that I arrived there, I asked my cousin, Edwige, to come with me to the night market to buy some delicious Liberian fish. We were both very happy as we started walking and talking about our lives. During our journey, we walked by a small group of guys who did not stop looking at us. They're behavior made us feel very uncomfortable and as soon as we passed, one of them shouted "*Awoulaba*." I was upset and, with an angry, red face, I turned to make an unfriendly gesture at the group.

As we continued on our journey home, my cousin looked at me and asked, "What's wrong?" I told her that I did not appreciate the remark that the boys had made at us. She started to laugh, which caused me to become more upset. She looked at me very carefully and said, "They hold us in high regard. Nothing wrong with that!"

I said, "Ok, please tell me what *Awoulaba* means?"

"Miss *Awoulaba* or Pretty Woman," she replied. I still didn't understand, so she tried to go a little bit further in her explanation by saying that *Awoulaba* can be used to describe different types of beauty. I was still unsure about the correct use of the word *Awoulaba*, so I decided to ask my aunt, Philomene, who has more knowledge about African's languages, to tell me what *Awoulaba* means.

*Awoulaba* and the Miss Universe Contest are ways of celebrating beauty; one is to describe African beauty and other is the universal way to see the beauty. In order to understand and be open to the different visions of the African perspectives of the appearance of beauty, it will be useful to observe these elucidations.

The word *Awoulaba* was unknown by me until I found the convincing explanation. Like I was saying above, I asked my aunt for more clarification. Philomene, with great pleasure, said that the word *Awoulaba* came from the Akan clan, which is in Ghana and Ivory-Coast; otherwise, the Malinke from the north



say “*Saraman*” to give a picture of African beauty. But all we have to know is that we all have the same perception of beauty, no matter which part of Africa we’re from. When I say Malinke, I’m talking about people from Burkina-Faso, Guinea and Mali. Captivated by the story, I asked for more explanation.

Philomene explained to me that *Awoulaba* is a kind-of heavysset woman. She doesn’t have to be tall. She has to have in her moves the suppleness of a heron; when she is walking, the movement of her arms going back and forth should be forceless. *Awoulaba* are corpulent ladies so when they are moving their arms, it is difficult to see their elbows. The teeth like snow, giving light to her smile, should be separate by a gap in the middle of the superior teeth; that provides more beauty to her smile. Her legs should be well filled out and supple. Her neck has to have several visible deep lines crossing it. The harmony between posterior and anterior is very important. People have to understand that *Awoulaba* is not based on one’s weight such as being too fat or too thin, rather it is to be in concordance with our body without being unhappy about our physical appearance. In sum, Philomene was explaining to me the criteria to be considered as a beautiful lady in Africa.

In addition to the etymology and the characteristic of *Awoulaba*, we have the election of Miss *Awoulaba* in the Ivory-Coast. I finally understood the criteria necessary to be elected Miss *Awoulaba*. I heard on TV that in all of the neighboring countries, we’d start an election to honor African’s beauty. I was amused to hear that because it would be my first time to see exactly what *Awoulaba* looks like. By curiosity, I went to the *Palais des congres de l’Hotel Ivoire*, where the contest was held, to see the truth. There were thousand of people there just to see the show. The journalist who had the mission of explaining to people said: “Today we are going to beat the drum for our mothers and sisters. We have to celebrate them through their beauty.”

He also said that Miss *Awoulaba* and Miss Universe are very different except for a few similarities. Miss *Awoulaba*, unlike Miss Universe, is generally better proportioned in her physique; generally Miss *Awoulaba* is a full figured female who has at least one child. In Africa, we think that every woman loses some of her charm after her first pregnancy. When I say miss it does not mean that they are not married. It is just to show that it is a competition. Otherwise, those ladies are married and have children. She doesn’t need to be tall. We want her to have

her original skin color because most of our sisters use lotions only to make their skins lighter than they were. We want the authentic African beauty, authentic black.

During the election, I learned more, and I saw the differences between Miss *Awoulaba* and Miss Universe. Miss *Awoulaba*, plus her morphology, is someone who wears African clothes, and an elegant hairstyle. Miss *Awoulaba* competitions do not include bathing suit displays, unlike Miss Universe where a lot of emphasis is put into the bathing suit competition. The competitors wear different dresses, “*boubou*,” which is material worn loose on the body, and “*maxi*,” which is material that is worn tight against the body. This helps give jury members an idea about the candidates’ morphology. They have to put those clothes on during the different rounds. During the competition, when one of the candidates was walking, I had the feeling of seeing a true queen. Her physical appearance was magnificent. I was amazed by her smile and her moves. Her imposing arms and legs were moving back and forth with the suppleness of soft plumage. I had the feeling that she didn’t have bones in them. It was late at night when the ceremony ended by crowning to Mrs Amandine Dahoro as the new Miss *Awoulaba* 1999.

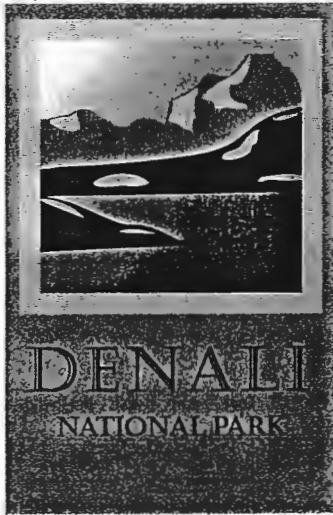
After the descriptions of *Awoulaba*, and the competition of Miss *Awoulaba*, which helps us learn the differences between Miss Universe and Miss *Awoulaba*, we have, moreover, some similarities. Both are considered queens of beauty. They express the refinement. Only the visions of people vary. They do their best to have a very high image of the beauty. They cry with happiness when they hear their names announced as the new queen. Miss Universe, like *Awoulaba*, is celebrated every year. I am sure that competitors from both of the pageants go through a lot of stress and anxiety before the elections. They must ask themselves, “Will I be the one that every body will claim tonight? What will my friends think or say if I lose?” Some give up before the election ends. The fear of crossing those moments is unbelievably hard, I am sure. In other words, in both pageants, women have a lot of stress to go through before the election, and they are also rewarded to know that they are considered to be ladies of the year. They are the ladies that people will look at as the most beautiful women of their country.

As you can see, *Awoulaba* is not an insulting word. It is beauty. Each woman should feel pretty if she has the criteria of *Awoulaba*. They should know that somewhere in this world, the way they are is celebrated. Some girls will give a lot to be the way they are. Unlike America, where some girls obsess about their

appearance and who watch their weight very carefully to be slim, many African girls use pills to gain weight. The president of Miss *Awoulaba* organization, Paul Dokui, once reminded us that “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder.” It is to say that the beauty itself does not have specific characteristic. Each person has his personal judgment about beauty.

David Kehe, ESL instructor, writes about "Awoulaba: African Beauty" and Marie-Chantal Guédé. For their Extended Definition Essay assignment, one of the options is for students to choose a word in their language that is difficult to (directly) translate into English. Marie-Chantal chose a terrific and complex word for her essay, *Awoulaba*. For the reader to truly understand this word in the way that an African does, it requires the four pages of description that Marie-Chantal wrote. She demonstrates here her ability to “develop and organize a text fully by using sufficient details, examples, etc.” We are fortunate to have a student like Marie-Chantal, who brings to our college a different way of looking at the world and who has the talent to explain these different perspectives in such an interesting style.





Patricia Stowell  
*Poster series*  
Computer illustration



# Fade from Brown

*Joey Martinez*

In the essays of Thomas Simmons and Maxine Kingston, “Motorcycle Talk” and “The Miser of Silence,” respectively, the authors face issues of language. Kingston struggles with the ability to adapt to a new social climate, and Simmons brings up issues of personal and intimate relationships. The common bond between these two issues is the need to respond through verbal communication in our lives. Language has always been a barrier in my life, especially coming from a Mexican background. I’ve dealt with race and language differences in my life, but it all feeds towards English’s spoken words.

At the age of ten, I watched my mother marry a white guy named Richard Mark Wilson. He was stubborn, silent, and an all-around “man’s man.” He was at the prime of his age and was raised American white boy-style. I appeared to him as a verbal consumer, always looking to shoot the shit with someone. I craved verbal communication; I could talk and talk for hours. My imagination was embodying me and for a Mexican that means talking. We talk about girls, love, mostly love, drugs, life, death—a lot about death—and family. The Spanish language is passionate, not secretive like English. Spanish people have to gossip. We talk about little Nino’s operation, and why the doctor is an idiot for thinking we had medical insurance. My family raves and rants about Noe, and why he left his wife and kids for some white slut. We have a sweet brutality in our voices. We’re brutal and we know it; we may be atrocious, but the language is charming and will make love to your ears even if the topic is death hanging in the air.

White people I can’t understand. They can never come to a conclusion; their words dictate and confuse what they are truly trying to say. I feel lost when I talk to white people. With other minorities, I feel fine communicating about life, but white people seem to have the ego consuming them. They refuse to come to my level and see my point of view. They snicker and whine as much as they can. White people constantly praise each other and flatter themselves and others. They are never content with what they have.

Mexicans seem to relish their gifts from god. They give their joyful soul to him in loving poems and songs, and in a language unmatched by any other. Mexicans do not waste their gift of language; we exalt it. We are born with a natural passion of language. We have developed it so much that it is the loveliest thing you will ever hear. English is crude and white people speak it that way. English is constantly drawing lines between good family members and bad ones. Mexicans may not like you, but if you're in the family, you have their full support, and their blood and language will tell you. My English family will never understand me and their language isn't powerful enough to pull us together. They will never learn the language of love and we will never come together.

English has a way of breaking you. My primary language is English now and the more I learn the less I am able to feel. I'm slipping away from a life that I once had. The passion is fleeting.

**English instructor Aimee Begalka writes about Joey Martinez and his essay, "Fade from Brown":** Joey wrote this piece for an in-class essay assignment on language and belonging. This in itself is quite an achievement since in-class timed writings often carry an intimidation factor that reduces a student's ability to cut beneath the surface. In this case, though, it seemed to lend an urgency and an edge to what Joey had to say. As a class, we had been reading Maxine Hong Kingston and Thomas Simmons, who each articulate different aspects of the connection between language and relationship. Joey was able to take what we had been discussing in class one step further because he experiences language differences and their effects within his own family. At first, I wasn't sure how to respond to his piece (being, after all, a white lady English teacher), but I liked the way his passion took over, enlivening the English, using English to bring home a powerful point about his experiences of the two languages.

I asked several of my colleagues in the department to read the essay, and they all found it powerful, too. It said what it had to say from a deeply personal point of view, which is something that the best "personal essays" do. And that seemed important to share.





Tess Utschinski  
*Reaching In*  
Mixed media, 14" x 18"



# Images

*Martha Asselin*

With the loss of Control, comes Acceptance within ourselves; We then learn that we are not defined through the image that we present.

I am walking through a field of tall grass, wind rolling down my back, small fluffs of cotton floating in the air. How fresh and new it is to be alive, looking at the world, and feeling a part of it all. I am contentment and peace, sharing with oneself, the love of being. This is me. This is life. This is what life truly is to me. I am happy.

A sharp noise fills my mind; my image of beauty is fading, lost in a world of confusion; the sharp loud noise filling everything. Where am I? What is going on? What happened? Where did it all go? I open my eyes and hit my alarm. It is 6:00 am, and I have to go to work. I am a Telemarketer. Pulling on my jeans and stretching a shirt over my head, I begin to clear my mind of the confusion of a dream of what my life was before and what is reality now.

Image is everything, some would say. Many believe the image that is projected from ourselves to the world is who we are and all that there is. Image is what we first see and what we first understand. It takes only ten seconds to make a first impression, and if allowed, impressions can last a lifetime. Many people spend an entire lifetime lost in an image: a delusion of what is really there. We are unable to see past the outer shell of life to what lies beneath. I once lived in an image, a delusion of what I truly believed life was, until I was thrown into the middle of what I had once rejected and denied to be good and true.

It is 6:58 am when I take my seat at my computer. I look back down at my watch, only eight more hours, and then I can go home. Today is a good day. I luckily got one of the black chairs at my computer. If I take off my shoes, then I can perfectly fold my legs up and sit comfortably for the remainder of my stay. "Log in!" the shift manager Steve yells as he strolls swiftly down our aisle. Punch, punch, click, click, Martha Asselin #1290, enter. My screen is activated and running. I pull on my headset and wait in quiet anticipation of a random name to appear on my screen. For the next eight hours of my day, I will be calling

unknown people and trying to sell them merchandise they do not need or desire. I am a Telemarketer. My personal definition of a Telemarketer: a person of low means and standards, working a dead end job and does hold a high value to their life.

Steve walks by. "So, are you going to work today Martha?" "

Yes, Steven, I am, don't I always?" I respond.

He says, "Now, no getting side-tracked today."

He strolls away, keeping a sharp eye on the long rows of telemarketers gibbering into their earpieces, zoned at their computers. With never-ending hums of a hundred computers pulsing down my neck, I think to myself, "Today is today, life is right now, make the best you can of it." The encouraging thought quickly leaves, and my face reddens and a new thought enters. "Telemarketers are not people; we are not humans of good standing, and we have no value to life." I find myself breathing deeply, shaking my head, and trying to loosen the disease that is growing in my mind. I rationalize to myself "No, this is life. Face it, this job is who I am. Simply this is what I am doing right now to pay my bills, and that is all there is." As the demons in my mind start eating away, I ask myself, "Am I in control? What is control?" Control for me in the past was when I had a good job; I could pay my bills and wear nice clothes. I had a pleasing image of myself; now it is 7:15 am. I am stuck in front of this computer, and this is my life. "You are nothing; telemarketers are nothing."

Punch, punch, click, click I type in another order. Steve stops at my terminal.

"Put another order through Martha, good job."

"Hey thanks," I respond "You know it amazes me how many people out there will just buy something they don't need just because they think that they should have it."

Steve replies, "That is why we have a job."

Thinking, I reply, "It is like these people really are trying to 'Be' these things that they are buying; it is like they are trying to be this image of something." Nodding his head, Steve continues down the aisle looking over the other workers. It is now 10:00 am; my legs are cramping, and my hands are tired from typing. The optimist in me says that I only have five hours to go; the pessimist in me says that I already have wasted three hours of my life as a Telemarketer.

The breeze is back again. My skin tingles. The sun is high in the air, and white fluffs of cotton are passing by. The cotton is simply there; streaming thought the light, catching a current, floating, weightless to everything. The grass is high at my knees; it tickles as I walk through it. This is the way life used to be: good, happy and I am myself. Everything is the way it is supposed to be. Complete within itself. There is that humming noise again. Where is it coming from? Shaking my head, the breeze is lifting away, away, gone. My neck is sore now from laying it on my desk, at my terminal, to my computer, which is my prison in life. It is 12:00 p.m.: time to take the lunch break.

Punch, punch, click, punch. Steven walks by, and I ask, "I still do not understand why these people are buying into this. It is like they believe that there is only one way to life, and you can only achieve this way of being by buying these objects. By buying this image. This image that they desire really is nothing at all. They truly believe that this image is all there is, but really it is just a bunch of crap."

"Martha you think too much." Steven replies. He leaves again, giving all his workers the eye as he walks away. I return to my computer screen; my mind was going numb from the constant hum of the computers.

A soft breeze runs across my arm. I am startled. Where is that coming from? Steve had left the door open. I close my eyes. How nice the breeze feels breathing over my arm and lightly across my face. My eyes shut, the soft cotton returns, and now I am spinning around and laughing. Happiness is rolling along the tall grass. How sweet it is to be alive and free. My eyes open. Whiz, whiz, click, click, I am staring at my cold terminal again. But wait, something is not right. I can still feel the breeze on my neck. How can the wind be in my life now? That is not possible. In aggravation I yell, "Someone shut the door." My dreams cannot come into this world of computers and chaos. I can not handle this. I can not have them here. My dreams used to be reality when my life was right, when I had a good job and quote-unquote good life. Now that those images are gone in my everyday life, I am not supposed to feel the wind anymore. Telemarketers do not know the wind.

Looking down at my hands, I noticed that they look the same as they always have. The same wrinkles, bumps and dimples are all still there. Have I really changed? My hands are the same, and the wind is still there and I can feel it on my neck! But all of that does not fit into the image that I now represent: a

broke, down on her luck, phone sales person. I close my eyes and see the brightness of the field with cotton and grass. It is still in my mind, and so am I. Then I realize that I have always been in my field of grass, and the breeze has never left me. But the image of my life now is defining who I am. And I was not able to look past it. I may not be happy and free in life as I was before, but I am still myself. For some reason now, I am okay with just being me. I may not have control over my life, but I understand that now. I am learning to accept myself for who I am now, not who I appear to be. I still have that freedom, it is inside of me. And who the hell is a Telemarketer anyway?

I am.

**English Instructor Wendy Borgesen writes about "Images":** Martha Asselin wrote this essay in response to a personal reflection essay assignment. One of the assignment choices was to write about an incident or series of incidences from the past that changed one's self-perception. One of the goals of the assignment was to make sense out of a pattern in one's past, by using writing as a way to clarify experience. Another goal was to practice showing readers an image or a situation through the use of descriptive detail. A third goal was to experiment with using dialogue to help readers identify with an actual situation, instead of hearing about it through generalization.

Martha fulfilled the above goals by describing her job as a telemarketer, a job which many students, unfortunately, have endured. Her use of detail and dialogue helped readers identify with the suffocating feeling of a tedious, dead end job. She alternated describing her work life with her dream life, where she escaped her temporary confinement. . When she read sections of her essay in class, it was evident that her audience empathized. She showed insight about how we can confuse our job with our personal identity.



Lyle Watson  
*Natural Blend*  
Monotype, 8" x 9.5"







## *Contributors*

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