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English 101-07

Essay #1 Final

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The Difference of a Word

The dirty hand paused above the form. I saw it shake slightly. *Just sign it*, I thought frustrated. We were running out of time, day light was almost gone and we still had another load to get out. All we needed was for my skidder driver to sign his name to the tax form and we could get back to work. His name was keeping me from making payroll that week. “Hey Dave, just sign your name man, we gotta get back to the woods!”my foreman yelled out. “You boys from Dry Pond can’t write a lick,” the timber faller joked. The crew all snickered. A red flush jumped into Dave’s cheeks and I knew: he couldn’t write his name.

“Alright get back to work; we’ll finish this after dark, after all a man’s got the right to read though what he’s signing.” I put the men back to work. Dave dropped the pen in the dirt and turned back to the woods. I snatched the tax forms off the cut tree stump and stuffed them back in my truck. Soon the sounds of trees falling and diesel motors running filled the air, but I didn’t hear them. I was lost in thought. I didn’t know there were people left in America who couldn’t write their name.

At dark the crew stopped working. All of us were covered in saw dust and motor oil. The hardwood timber was of prime grade, and we had been pushing hard to get it into the mill. As the men were all piling into the back of a little truck held together with hay twine and duct-tape to go back into town, Dave brushed by me; “It’s not true, ya’ know. I know how to write my name and

read some. I never did great in school anyway. Besides, I've been out in these woods full time since I was 14 years old. Had to...".

I looked at him, but I couldn't meet his eye. To a stranger we would look the same: blue collar workers covered in a days' work, doing our best to get by. Yet there was a huge difference between us, I had the luxury of an education and he had not.

The blue ridge mountains of Virginia are as beautiful as they are cruel. Some of the most talented self-taught bluegrass music musicians live there, most of them unknown but to the small communities around them. Patrick County, Virginia hosts a festival called the Crooked Road. Every year hundreds of people drive their sporty little convertibles over the Blue Ridge parkway, tasting wines from the area, enjoying the exceptional music and learning the regional art of flat-foot dancing. They entertain for a moment living in this quaint little world; blind to the shacks, hitch-hikers, and the moonshine stills. Eventually when the summer ends and the music fades away, they all drive away back to their white-collar lives.

When I first moved to Patrick County, I didn't see the poverty either. All I wanted was a quiet life tucked away in a valley. I pioneered a new practice of sustainable logging which confronted traditional exploitation of the Appalachian forest. I was a maverick, but my crew consisted of some of the best local loggers in the area. Logging was the lives of these men. They taught me more about the woods than any book I ever read. In the region, after the textile mills began to close, soon the only income left was logging and moonshine--either is a boom or bust business. With my fancy ideas and modern philosophy I offered a new vision, and they made it happen. Together we sweat and bled, each of us carrying the scars from America's most deadly profession.

The Blue Ridge Mountains have a history of poverty and subsequent heart ache. According to the Stuart Enterprise News Paper; in Patrick Country Virginia, 60% of the population is functionally illiterate. Most of the older population never finished high school because they had to work whatever job they could to help support their families. Today, not much has changed. Those lucky few who manage to get a college scholarship leave and never come back. No Child Left Behind needs to take a field trip to Appalachia.

Poverty is a slave driver, and ignorance its chains. So many of the aspects of daily life that most take for granted, are luxuries. Of the men in my crew, only two had personal vehicles. None of them had cell phones, and many of them had to poach deer for meat. My Foreman finished his GED at 66 and felt that was his greatest accomplishment. Dave, the worker who at 38 signed his name with an 'X', never finished school and led a life on both sides of the law, often just to get by. I couldn't blame him, I have never been hungry. I have led a life a comfort and have been privileged enough to choose when to get my hands dirty.

Until that moment on the top of the mountain I had never thought about illiteracy. I cannot even remember a time in my life when I haven't been able to read. I was never the best student but reading has always been a pleasure for me, something I took for granted. In reflection, I realized the advantages I have had because I know how to read and write. Dave called me "Boss" because he never had the same opportunities.

This country is good for giving help and resources to those who need it in other countries. Yet, here in our own back yard we have Americans living in third-world conditions, unable to enjoy life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because they cannot read well enough to get a job to feed their families. Poverty is perpetuated by ignorance. Dave and I are not different men, but a single word: *education* will separate us forever.

Jake Carlson

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English 102, Section 25

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Armageddon: 1929

Rising unemployment, failing banks, foreclosure sweeping America, and a crashing stock market; in 2008 The Great Recession hit the economic shores of Wall Street. Democrats and Republicans alike went swiftly into action to attempt to buoy the U.S. economy by passing stimulus packages, bailing out banks, and printing billions of new dollars. As millions of Americans panicked over lost life savings, jobs, and livelihoods, the future looked bleaker with every woeful opening bell of the New York Stock Exchange. Being born in 1991, it was the first time my generation had seen anything but a continually prospering nation on the evening news. However, this was the repetition of a history almost eighty years old; gone, but not forgotten.

In 1929, The Great Depression seized America. The country wallowed for four years in desperation, until a new leader was elected. Franklin Delano Roosevelt came to the presidency in 1933 focused and with a plan like never before. His so called “New Deal” was the innovation of policy at the time, and the public responded in turn. The country seemed to be on the steady process to recovery. The twelve years of desperation from 1929 to 1941 changed the face of America today. While kissing away college scholarships and hours at my government-sponsored after-school job, I had a revelation like a concertgoer at the '69 Woodstock (minus the LSD): these two defining periods of American history were simultaneously changing my life despite the eighty years difference in that moment. As we continue on our own path to what we hope will repair the shards of our shattered American capitalism, I wondered if my faith in President Obama’s plan was justified. The similarities between the 2009 recovery and the New Deal were

immense, and I sought my answer through analyzing Franklin D. Roosevelt's response to an even greater economic plight. Economists still debate the true success of the New Deal and the resounding impact it had on the country. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies eventually succeeded in rebuilding the American economy to functionality and its legacy is still proving effective in today's modern economic dilemmas.

In the 1920's the United States was on the road to recovery. Having survived World War I and now an established international powerhouse, the U.S. economy was becoming a lion in world economics. The American stock market had risen to new heights, and had become a central force in the American economy. However, like a child with sugar and climbing a tree, this proved to be more of a demon than a blessing. An article published in the New York Times on March 24, 1929 described the credit frenzy of the decade:

...the number of brokerage accounts had doubled in the past two years [1927-1929]. . . .

It is quite true that the people who know the least about the stock market have made the most money out of it in the last few months. Fools who rushed in where wise men feared to tread ran up high gains. (Norris)

This article was the doomsday prophecy that soon came true. The stock market suffered through scrapes and scratches in the months that followed, dipping for weeks at a time then rallying back to a lesser average than before. A mere six months after the article appeared in the New York Times the credit that American stockholders were consuming ran out. The Dow Jones Industrial Average spiraled out of control over the course of two days, crashing 12.8 percent on October 28 and an additional plummet of 11.7 percent the next day; the day that became to be known as Black Tuesday. (Norris)

This crash and burn was not exactly a zombie apocalypse, but it was the pivotal turning point in the U.S. economy's road to hard times; poverty so bad it makes modern day rappers look

like they were born with a bathrobe in a Sheraton. This period of a groveling economy came to be known as The Great Depression. In 1932, the stock market fall had stopped on its descent, and rested at a level 89 percent lower of the highest average before the 1929 catastrophe (Norris). During the following year of 1933, the calculated unemployment rate had reached 25 percent, although economists estimate that the true rate was closer to 50 percent (Lohr). These economic indicators are the black marks that were forever stained on President Hoover's name as he left office in early 1933.

With an atmosphere of fresh excitement and a desperate call for help from the American people, President-elect Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) was inaugurated on March 4, 1933 (Lohr). His policies of his young presidency became known as the "New Deal" and changed the world's economic views forever through what is now called Keynesian economics; developed by John Maynard Keynes, a British economist (Lohr). On March 6, Roosevelt signed the Emergency Banking Act into law and officially ordered a national banking holiday (Olson). This mandate closed the banks for four days as Congress and FDR developed a reorganization plan for banks healthy enough to have survived the crisis of the previous few years (Lohr). Having confidence in his strategy, FDR reopened banks and communicated with the American people. He took to the radio waves in what would become known as his signature "fireside chats", broadcasting his first on March 12:

It is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than under the mattress. It was the Government's job to straighten out this situation and do it as quickly as possible -- and the job is being performed. You people must have faith; you must not be stampeded by rumors or guesses. Let us unite in banishing fear. (Lohr)

This exemplifies Roosevelt's achievements of increasing consumer confidence to restore economic demand through communicating to the public. A business historian by the name of

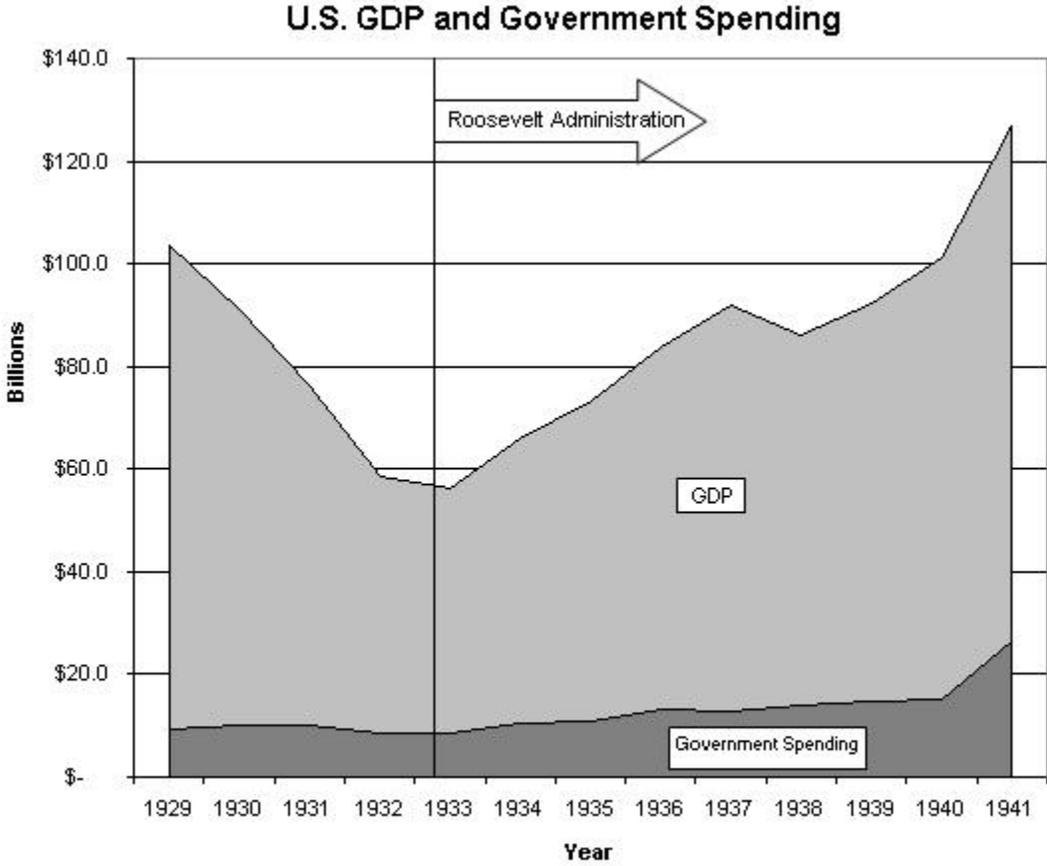
John Steele Gordon noted, “Roosevelt was a genius at using those fireside chats to calm the national mood and restore confidence” (Lohr). His open communication with the average Joe became standard, and throughout the years amassed faith in the New Deal and its updated financial systems.

Nine days after the starting gun of Roosevelt’s race to recovery, the stock market reopened with a gain of more than 15 percent (Lohr). FDR had successfully sprouted a rescue for the U.S. within the first two weeks of his presidency evidenced by the first victories of the New Deal.

Despite these good first steps, the infant success of the New Deal was hindered by the overall mediocrity of its effect through the rest of the 1930’s. Nobel Prize economist and columnist for the New York Times Paul Krugman said, “...the reason for FDR’s limited short-run success, which almost undid his whole program, was the fact that his economic policies were too cautious” (Lohr). In the fall of 1936 unemployment rested at a calculated rate of 10 percent, a significant reduction from the fever pitch of 1933, but not enough to be rated successful (Shlaes). By the end of the decade, the average calculated unemployment rate still lied above 17 percent, due to stagnation in the early years with the decline arriving in the later 1930’s (Lohr).

According to Amity Shlaes, an anti-New Deal economics columnist, between 1933 and 1936 FDR developed budgets of gargantuan proportions, increasing the federal budget by 3 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, afterwards resting at 9 percent (Shlaes). FDR was re-elected in 1936, and soon after the “Recession Within the Depression” happened; a period of relapse from the progress made. Production nearly halted and America struggled again for two years. Shlaes again attacks FDR in writing, “Even British economist John Maynard Keynes, who believed in deficit spending, chastised the U.S. President: ‘It is a mistake to think businessmen are more immoral than politicians’” (Shlaes). In contrast, government spending

had not increased a significant amount throughout the 1929 to 1936 Depression era anyways, yet the United States' GDP still crashed and gained on its own. The difference of government spending from 1930 to 1936 is only \$3.1 billion, a percent increase that has been typical of the U.S. government from post-WWII to now. The following graph examples that an increase in government spending had little effect on the 1936 "Recession Within the Depression":



SOURCE: "Budget of the United States Government: Fiscal Year 2009" Historical Tables, Table 1.1; Bureau of Economic Analysis "National Economic Accounts," Table 1.1.5.

(Firey)

Despite these short-run attempts, for eight years FDR's New Deal desperately tried to lift the shroud of the Great Depression off of the United States but never fully succeeded in its purpose. In late 1941 the United States entered World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor. By joining a war on such a titanic scale, FDR urged Congress to begin incredible amounts of

government spending for war production, military service, and aid to the Allies. Steve Lohr brings new light to the real end of the Depression by stating, “The unemployment rate fell somewhat under Roosevelt, but remained stubbornly high throughout the 1930s... It was not until World War II, and the massive government spending require[d] to fight it, that the Depression finally ended” (Lohr). The Library of Congress confirms this with, “The end to the Great Depression came about in 1941 with America's entry into World War II” (Depression). Ultimately, the New Deal failed its sole objective: to recover the U.S. from economic depression in the short-term.

So what did the New Deal actually do? It fought the flames of an economy that had dropped out of the sky, which was no easy task. Such a feat is commendable, but if the U.S. had not entered World War II, how much longer would the Depression have had its kung-fu grip on the United States? The New Deal acted as an ICU to the dying American economy until the doctor arrived in the form of World War II. Although FDR was a revolutionary, much of his credit for “fixing” the Great Depression goes unwarranted.

This shortcoming however does not address the lasting effects of such revolutionary policymaking and previous thirteen years of slaving over the nation’s troubles. FDR’s iconic mindset and work ethic when tackling modern America’s greatest economic obstacle proved to be like looking into a crystal ball. Paul Krugman again praises FDR in this aspect by conceding, “The truth is the New Deal wasn’t as successful in the short run as it was in the long run” (Lohr). The lasting legacy of the New Deal is through the various agencies established before World War II that persist in the American economy to this day, as well as the maiden voyage of Keynesian economics under his watch. This is where FDR’s true success lies.

These alphabet agencies are safeguards against further economic catastrophes for Americans. A few of the most important agencies that proved to be essential in the 2008 Great

Recession include the Social Security Agency (SSA), Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

The Social Security Agency was created in 1935 to protect the elderly that had received a large blow when the Depression hit (Lohr). It provides a monthly stipend from the government to individuals who qualify for the program, allowing enough money to live off of and buy the basics; food, utilities, and medical services. Social Security was a safety net in the Great Recession where it has already dispensed \$450 billion in funds to 32 million Americans. Of this lump sum are things like retirement benefits, disability pay, and money to almost 2 million children of deceased parents (Lohr).

Another safeguard for hard times is the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation which prevented a run on the banks in 2008. Founded in 1933, the FDIC provides insurance to the checking and savings accounts of American banks for up to \$250,000 (Lohr). Banking customers' confidence has a strong foundation through this agency, and eliminates the fear of disappearing wealth like that of the 1929 crash, as well as practices like mattress stuffing.

Policing the fraudulent practices in America is the Securities and Exchange Commission, established in 1934. The SEC is a watchdog agency for the stock and financial markets, checking for fraud and misinformation in American investments (Lohr). The SEC established a policy of mandatory financial disclosure to shareholders, and created an avenue for shareholder participation through the shareholder proposal rule. This allows shareholders to be more active in the company. These establishments have since led to the modern practice of proposals being presented at annual shareholder meetings, crossing corporate governance and social boundaries between shareholders and the companies they invest in (Nicholas). There is debate as to whether the SEC should have been more active in its role to stop fraud in the 2008 Great Recession. Sub-prime mortgage lending brought the crashing investment megabanks and a several year billion-

dollar scandal with the discovery of Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme; however none of this has been proved. An article from *Time Magazine* on March 9, 2009 evidences the hostile nature of American citizens towards the former SEC Chairman Christopher Cox:

Though he left the *SEC* on Jan. 20, he has emerged as a symbol of much of what went wrong at the small but crucial federal agency, from ignoring evidence of a massive Ponzi scheme set up by investment guru Bernard Madoff to the passive supervision of giant investment banks that went under on his watch. (Zagorin)

Not only did physical establishments succeed FDR's presidency, but his influence was prevalent throughout the United States. In the post-World War II America of 1946, President Truman continued FDR's legacy of government intervention during recessions (Keynesian economics) signing the law that makes the government's objective to keep the economy at a maximum employment. (Grant)

Today, the landmark policies implemented during the Great Depression still stand as guidelines to how America navigates economic storms, both in the twentieth century and in the current crisis of the new millennium. Other countries have since mirrored the economic policies and recovery strategies that Franklin D. Roosevelt pioneered during the catastrophe of the 1920's, '30's, and '40's, despite their failure to prove themselves in the early stages of his comprehensive plan. In the short-run, the New Deal failed to cure the Great Depression before World War II took it off its hands. However, this simple fact does not discredit FDR's ability to shepherd the United States; he simply was not bold enough with the correct plans. In hindsight, FDR aimed for greatness when he implemented ideologies and institutions that continue to safeguard America today from the invisible threats of epic economic failures, and quite clearly hit his mark. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies ultimately strengthened the bulwarks of

America's economy for the generations of Americans that succeeded him, and prevented the Great Recession of 2008 from becoming a second economic Armageddon.

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The Fourth Angel

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Revelation 16:8-9

I think of this memory whenever I think of flame, which is pretty often.

Sometimes I can't stop thinking of flame. Flame licks at the edge of everything. Flame blackens everything. Everything is burning to the ground. Everything is burning. The firemen can't put it all out, they can't stop it, it is consuming them and it will consume us. Sometimes flame makes its way out of my mind and into my poetry. I think that maybe flame is what is in the end of that big black book with silver letters sitting on my shelf. The final word, that nightmare in the end, was not written with ink but with flame. Flame closes it down, shuts it all off. It is the end of hope. The end of hope. The end of hope. There is one flame that I dream about all the time. It is the flame that flickers from my mind to my pen and then into words that burn it all down. Let's burn one down right now, right here.

That is how that night began in San Sebastian. That is how most of my nights began and ended, how the mornings, the afternoons were bearable. I was burning slowly, slowly smoldering down a little more every day. On Halloween I saw a band play at a bar in Bilbao. They played "Trimmed and Burning" and I remember it still. "So keep the lamps all trimmed and burning, you might be alarmed at what you see." Nothing startles me anymore, I am never alarmed when something goes ablaze. Everything is burning. And that is what I was doing that evening in San Sebastian, keeping my lamps trimmed and burning. I sat on the windowsill of my sixth floor downtown flat with my legs

dangling above the courtyard. My roommate sat out there all the time and watched the neighbor children play. The sun was going, burning away over the sea, burning the white clouds a brilliant orange. I sat and swung my legs. I held a bit of blown glass in my left hand up to my lips. I tilted my head and struck a lighter. A flint strike and then flame filled my lungs, the orange sky filled me. I sat and I relaxed. I burned down. I climbed back in the window and shut it firmly, latched it. I was done waiting for my friend, she was probably out in a disco, probably out with another guy, out burning somewhere else. Out burning for someone else.

I walked to my kitchen, the green tiles like the green of the operating rooms in older hospitals, like the rooms in Michael Crichton's ER. On these tiles we sat glasses stolen from bars and stood on chairs to lift cider bottles high, high into the air and pour them into stolen glasses. Drink a whole glass in one gulp, a whole bottle in a few minutes. Then hit the streets. But on this night I walked into the kitchen and took a bottle of good red that my parents had bought me in Tuscany and put it in my jacket. I had been saving the bottle to drink with the girl, the Columbian with the flower tattoo on her lower back and the childish smile and innocent eyes. She had a flower tattoo on her lower back, off to one side. She showed it to me, but she didn't show up that night and I wanted to enjoy the night and I wanted to drink the good wine even if I had to drink it alone.

I put a corkscrew in my pocket and walked out the door. The old, uneven hard wood floors of the entryway and long hallway creaked behind me as if someone were following immediately behind. Nobody was there. I blew out the candles in the living room before I left. I blew out the flames. I got into the elevator and pushed zero. The light was broken, it flickered. The numbers in the elevator flickered. This is a black and

white film, a horror film. All is black and white but flame. The sky was still orange when I stepped into the streets. I walked the three blocks to the beach, past the large stone church that dominates the neighborhood and that my American roommate was always urging me to climb when I drank or smoked. I was supposed to climb the church. Later I would fall off of stonework on a cathedral in the town of Burgos. That cathedral was more majestic and more impressive than Notre Dame, it was incredible and I sprained my ankle and scraped my knees. That night we drank with local girls and danced with them in a bar until at least one jealous boyfriend showed up and made things awkward, maybe dangerous. I walked an American girl home that night, her seeing me in the streets. “Jason! I know you, I know you!” she screamed at me across a plaza as I left a bar, the cathedral illuminated in the background against a starless black sky. I walked her back to her hotel room and her friends. She tackled me in the street playfully. I always walked Daisy Miller home that year. I once went inside with a Daisy Miller after walking her home. On her nightstand sat a small piece of glass, blackened by the flame she had used to burn herself down and burn herself out.

And the Columbian was really a Daisy Miller with darker skin, black hair and deep brown eyes. From a distance her eyes were only black, no definition at all. When she burned and her pupils grew it was hard to notice. And she had blown me off and I had blown out my candles and walked to the beach with my wine and my corkscrew under the receding orange light of the heavens burning away. Everything is burning away still. I remember old men fishing from the pier. I looked beyond them to the massive blocks of black granite jutting into the violent surf. A storm was coming, or already happening off shore. For the first night in weeks it was not raining. It drizzled off and on, but it was not

raining. I walked past this pier and crossed the river. Later, before returning to the states I threw my cell phone into that river in a rage when some people called to go drink and spend time in discos –the only phone calls I ever seemed to get and the only invitations I ever heard from their mouths. I crossed the bridge that night and walked out onto a walkway over the sea wall around a mountain that had been used as a bunker and graveyard during the war. Which war? All of the wars. San Sebastian had burned to the ground in 1813. All but one street in the old part, one street now named August 31. The day that it did not burn with the rest of the city. This was the day, months past on the calendar, I arrived in San Sebastian, my first day. There had been a silent candle vigil in the street. Light your candle.

I walked on the sea wall and out to the furthestmost point into the sea between the two main beaches in San Sebastian. I sat on the wall and hung my feet over the edge. Black granite blocks with small strips of marble-white below broke the breakers into white frothy foam. I got damp from the salt water that splashed up and the salt water that got carried on the wind into the seaside of the mountain battery where turrets and old artillery were decaying. I looked out on the Atlantic and could see a storm raging, in the distance. Flame came down from the sky and touched the sea at irregular, frequent, terrifying intervals. I sat in safety on the sea wall. The thunder never reached me, it was swallowed by the distance and the breakers and carried on the wind in some other direction. I uncorked my bottle.

The wind fought to get through my jacket, to touch me, to sting my skin. I pulled my collar up and tipped the wine bottle back and drank myself warmer. My flame burned. Flame stays with me, I can't douse it, drown it out. Out to sea it was raining

hard. There were dark lines on the horizon where it began and ended. My father described to me once seeing this while riding his motorcycle across vast stretches of flat farmland and deserts during a lone cross country ride from Pennsylvania to Oregon. You could see the storm you would be riding in, a hundred or more miles before you arrived to it, or before it arrived and consumed you he told me. I could see the dark lines on the horizon and I thought of the lines and shadows on my face growing darker. I drank my red wine. The blood of Christ, my pastor told the congregation, take and drink. I passed it to them in my white robe from my place at the altar. I drank my red that night and watched the sky in the distance. In the dark places where the air was wet the sky burned powerfully to the sea where the two powers met and formed some momentary bond. The rain did not stop the lightning, it encouraged it. The wine didn't put out the flame, but it fueled it. I drank and I burned.

Here is a note on wine, on time, and on the melting away of things: The snow melted away last night and this morning I walked to the store fighting the wind and the cold, losing by degrees Fahrenheit the battle against winter in the college town of Moscow, Idaho. Across the street from my home is parked a metallic brown Jeep Cherokee, a box, a relic that always has its hood propped open so that its owner can tinker with battery cables and spray starting fluid. The points spin around and around sparking, until the petroleum in the carburetor ignites and six cylinders explode into controlled violent mechanization. In front of this explosive, troublesome steel box today I found a full bottle of merlot rolled up against the curb, half covered in pine needles and road debris. I brushed it off. The wrapper still bound around the neck and the cork, I placed it inside the

black plastic ski boot I carried and continued on. Wine and time, and cold walks. I looked up to the hills beyond town, still covered in white champagne snow where the white of a robe lies. *These in the white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?*

As a child my white altar boy robe fit well, tied at the waist with two lengths of golden cord. I would stand in the space outside of the pastor's office, waiting for the wick at the end of a brass candle wand to be lit. I would wait for the organ playing to stop, the congregation to quiet, and the organ playing to begin again. The wick lit, I would walk slowly with the flame flickering toward the altar. I used to light those candles with care, with meaning, as if the fire meant the beginning of something bigger than myself. I delivered the flames. I remember nights in the church helping my mother prepare for special events or communion the following day. I remember the sanctuary, off limits, standing in the loft area where the organ lay quiet and the pews filled silently with darkness. I remember the only light being a faint and occasional beam coming through the stained glass windows lining the red brick walls to the altar and the eternal flame trimmed and burning, hanging on a golden chain from the high ceiling in a vase of deep red. I remember the Sunday view from the high place at the altar with the sanctuary pews filled with family, friends, and strangers—a line snaking around the edges of the room to where I stood with a tray full of shot sized portions of red wine. Wine meant redemption, blood, peace for nearly all. For nearly all. For those who could not, a shot of grape juice was placed in every tray. Which wine did I drink? The good stuff, of course. And which wine do I drink tonight? From the curb wine that came chilled by the cold receding white of a Moscow, Idaho winter. It burns my cheeks. The wine burns my throat. I wonder which wine I drink today *for all the nations have drunk*

the maddening wine of her adulteries.

I drink today, from the wine press of man. Melodramatic, probably. I worry that I will never recapture that altar boy fire, that desire. I will never again look to the sea as in San Sebastian and drink and think and feel with the same depth I did when I saw *what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire*. And I worry because I still see candles burning with an intensity beyond anything I can comprehend. Fire changes tone as you watch it, its character and mine flicker and evolve, devolve to pools of wax and emotion, mostly worry and tension for I am adding to myself *the plagues described in this book*. I sit. I type. I drink. I burn.

I tried to think of nothing. I was sitting in the dark, the sun had left me and San Sebastian in the dark. The large statue of Jesus on top of the battery mountain was illuminated and looked down upon the city of San Sebastian where somewhere my Columbian Daisy was dancing in heels in a club and drinking free drinks from a Basque bartender who looked at her with fire in his eyes. That was the only point in the city where Jesus had his back to you, where he could not see you, look down upon you. We had our backs turned against one another and I watched the storm. I drank his blood. He looked away. I was alone with myself and my flame when three black men speaking French walked up, surprising me. I didn't understand them at first. They asked what I was doing. I was certain they would rob me, beat me. They were drunk and looked mean. I told them I was drinking, alone. Alone. I offered them a drink from the bottle. They all took a swig and commented on how good it was. They invited me to come to a disco with

them. I turned them down, this is when I get stabbed I was sure. They walked away and left me looking out to sea.

I finished my bottle and walked home. The storm still flickered on the horizon, it would not reach San Sebastian but burn out over the sea somewhere. When I got to my apartment I was swaying, stumbling and alone. I sat in my room and I watched a candle burn on my desk. I watched it burn and I wrote this poem in my journal:

God sees me,
whispers in my ear,
explains to me
what candle means,

shows me myself
looking intently,
looking intently
at the flame

and from the
outside I see
the scene through
the flame,

and its
soft glare
off of the whites
of my eyes

I went to the kitchen to get a beer, or to eat, or to do something that I never did. I grabbed one of the dry erase markers that I left intentionally in different places around the large flat. I leaned against the dirty plaster wall next to the refrigerator and I wrote a poem on its side. The brimstone memory I had been resisting all this night and most of my life flickered from the pen to the refrigerator. Even in that state, when I was trying so hard to think of other things and resist this memory I could not sleep without confronting

it. I wrote a bad poem, not worth reprinting, that recounted that certain fire of my past. And this is how strong my earliest memory is inside of me.

I cannot remember the year of the fire. My father's memory is a little ashed out as well. He tells me it must have been 1991 or 92 when the Brock Candle factory burned to the ground. I remember being there, along the highway where the factory had been located, and watching the fire burn hotter and hotter. We were there before the fire department, I have always thought, but I am told that this isn't true. I remember my father getting out of the car and talking to a local police officer. They talk and smile, gesturing toward the flames and the night sky filled with ash, a starless sky because of the brightness of the fire. "It was a hot fire for sure," my dad tells me. "All that wax, it smelled good too." I think that the police officer must have known my father because I felt that he knew everyone and everyone was friendly to him. They talked and then he came back and got into the driver's seat. We sat next to each other and watched the fire burn for a long time, hours. "Your mother must have had a class or something that night," he tells me. She used to teach at the church.

The actual fire was not along Highway 30, which leads from Portland to the Oregon coast and cuts a five lane wide asphalt scar through my home town. It was near the town dike along the Columbia River, at the second location of Western Candle which my father calls Brock Candle for the former owner of the company. I think that I remember that night as being along the highway because that is where the Peace Candle of the World is located. The candle was dedicated by Mr. Brock and Oregon Governor Tom McCall in 1971 as an eternal flame for peace. This is also one year of Nixon's Vietnamization, the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam slowly taking over a war already

lost. It was the same year smoke rolled over the waters of Lake Geneva from the burning of Montreux Casino, and Deep Purple immortalized the flaregun accident in song. The desire for peace shown by the construction of this highway-side curiosity may or may not have been false, but it was certainly no genuine candle. It was actually an old metal grain silo covered with more than 45,000 pounds of Brock Candle wax. A giant match lit the propane flame at the candle's dedication.

When I was young the candle was yellow painted concrete, still a silo at its core. The eternal gas flame had been replaced with flickering red neon sometime before me. At some time the candle was painted red. I could see the neon flame from my bedroom window in our home when I was a child. I used to lie in my bed with my three large windows that overlooked Scappoose and watch planes land at Portland International Airport or at the local Scappoose airport. I could see the flame at what was then the very edge of town. It flashed on and off, on and off, like a neon open sign at a bar. The neon was a comfort, like the midnight echo of freight trains across town seemingly traveling forever on crisp, cool nights, reaching my ears somehow more readily, with more immediacy than the sound of my own thoughts. That whistle –like that neon –somehow captured my childhood psyche. I was lulled to sleep by the certainty of its coming. And today, the memories of that flame and that train whistle mingle in my memory and still bring a fleeting comfort. The memory flashes at no regular interval, follows no switch line schedule. But in my childhood, the flame was always there, always buzzing.

I remember my Father that night, we had probably chased sirens to the fire or maybe a friend had called my dad to tell him there was a spectacle out at Brown's Landing on Dike Road. I remember him outside of the car looking excited and happy, the

factory burning and breaking apart in the background. He doesn't remember how we got there, from which direction we drove out, or when they closed the main road going by the factory. I remember the flames, the flames, all those flames. The sky was filled with ash and soot. When we left, the building was still smoldering, fires flaring up here and there. There is something about that fire that has kept me for all these years. I am burning away daily still, and maybe it all started then, maybe the candle factory fire started it all. I think about it when I feel that I am reduced to ash and blowing away. When I feel burned out, or engulfed and falling, failing—I remember that fire and those flames. This is not an explanation, this is a memory. Trimmed and burning, my memory is an etching born of flame. I cannot escape it and I cannot deny it. It comes out at times like this, when I don't want to think about the flammability of things, the fragility of things and the beauty of the moment when they finally go up and burn down in flame.

It is now March 2010 –almost exactly a year since that electric wine-saturated night in San Sebastian –and I have just returned to Moscow from a five-day, four night, fifty mile backpacking trip in Hell's Canyon. I had brought a copy of this essay with me in my pack, to rework and tune between days of walking the trail seared into the canyon wall. At the trailhead I decided to leave the paper in the car, to try and escape it for five more days, to extinguish the torment from my mind. I couldn't do it. I strapped the big buckles around my waist and chest, adjusting my burden of tent, food, clothes, camp stove, and white gas to rest on shoulders and hips. I walked through Hell's Gate south of Lewiston, Idaho onto a sage-lined trail of ticks, rattlesnakes, prickly pear cacti with spines longer than bodies, and switchbacks following the Snake River—against the current—passing a

lonely homestead headstone and the breathtaking tempt of Suicide Point. At night sitting on my foam bed mat near the fire ring of river rock I tried not to agonize over the meaning of this piece, of *The Fourth Angel*. The campfire curls of smoke warmed me, choked me, and antagonized me for writing a piece without meaning. Everything burns, but nothing was at stake, nothing seemed to matter. My hiking partners passed around a bottle of whiskey and took small nips. I declined, still on the wagon, I reminded them. Lent ends in two weeks. I lit myself a big cigar and watched the tobacco smoke merge with that of burning Ponderosa.

I had four moonless nights in Hell to ponder this essay's meaning. A canyon sky filled with stars and coyote echo howling at a moon that skirts beyond human vision and the high peaks of the Seven Devils Mountains. Through the nightmare writings of Revelation, man learned God will send seven bowls of wrath delivered by seven angels. And I there, already sat in the shadow of seven devils of God's own making. Deepest river gorge in North America, the air warm on bare skin by day, chilling and frosting bedroll and beard by night. Here I left my fuel bottle pump with a wandering out of season raft guide stuck with a broken pump and the prospect of two frustrating flameless weeks ahead. Stuck in Hell without a flame. He patted his black lab on the head and smiled at me from across the fire, thankful for the pump, flammable white gas redemption in this remote corner of the world. Redemption by flame. I smiled too, glad to have saved him two weeks of half cooked chili over brush fueled campfires. The next morning I was lighting a morning cigar on campfire coals when the right sleeve of my sweater caught and flamed up my arm. Quick and blue, it burned a thin layer of lint and

died out. I laughed uneasily and showed my companions, looked up to the morning sun's rays slowly pouring down the western canyon wall.

This is still a memory. But maybe this is also a revelation. A personal revelation without the looming lake of sulfur. I believe my memory to be accurate, but why would I remember that factory fire whenever I am burnt out, smoked out, drunk out? It was a time in my life when I still believed. I still believed my mother's efforts in the church mattered, that the eternal flame mattered as more than a symbol. I believed that my alter boy years were going to be important in some way, making my path clear, setting myself on the right path to heaven or something like it. I couldn't have understood at that young age that the fire was a tragedy for the Brock family, that the community was losing a part of itself. I only saw the beauty of things. I imagine that the night stayed with me in childhood dreams as pleasant, warm, comforting, and lovely. Today though, that earliest memory is associated with some nightmare in the end, some terrible revelation. I can't stop the revelation, nor kill the memory. I can only try to see the beauty of things. I can try to *be* the beauty, to live for something larger than myself. To light fires that illuminate the darker parts of myself, not which feebly try to destroy them, to take the trail leading out of Hell while still somehow recognizing the beauty found there.

On the final day, hiking with the current now—downriver and out of Hell's Canyon—my pack lighter and my mind clearer, I allowed myself to fall behind the group. I hiked alone, not thinking, just hiking. That golden bowl of sun brimmed over with heat at my back, just emerged above canyon wall. For no reason I stopped and watched the three

bodies in front of me disappear over the distant ridge of sage. I rested both hands on the top of my hiking stick, into which I'd carved a string of connecting circles descending to the earth—and the word HELL. I bowed my head, light sunburn on my neck, the pads of my feet blistered from boot friction. I didn't think, or feel, or consider my actions. I closed my eyes and opened my heart and my mouth: *Our Father...* I faltered, looked around at Hell's Canyon. I was in its bosom, not quite out. I continued...*who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will...*

Jasmine Warne Rowe
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Eng215 Final Paper
12/15/09

Freedom in the Domestic:
An exploration of female legacy in Margaret Atwood's Feminist Poetry

Margaret Atwood is a renowned Canadian author who has been acknowledged as a master artist and commentator in such varied mediums as nonfiction, novels, poetry, and even opera. A long time advocate of the oppressed, as evidenced in her creation of an entire series of poems written explicitly for Amnesty International, many of Margaret Atwood's work addresses feminist concerns and woman's issues. Although the wide breadth of viewpoints and styles in Atwood's feminist work cannot be stressed enough, she has many poems that employ similar strategies and similar themes. Several critics have noted that one enduring theme in Margaret Atwood's writing involves different stages in the experience of and reaction to being victimized as a result of oppression. The literary critic Marge Piercy notes in "Margaret Atwood: Beyond Victimhood" that Margaret Atwood herself describes her "obsession with the obstacles to physical and / or physical survival" as the "Basic Victim Positions" (53). Piercy's detailing of Atwood's "Basic Victim Positions" follows the progression of many of Atwood's poems.

Atwood describes the four "Basic Victim Positions" in order to illustrate different ways of coping with violence and oppression, with the higher stages set off as more healthy than the lower stages. It is important to note that these reactions can be specific to an individual or encompass an entire culture; they can involve a reaction to one specific act or a persistent environment of violence and oppression. Generally, a victim would move sequentially up the progression, always in danger of sliding back to a less healthy position. The first two stages are

the least healthy; they both involve a misinterpretation of both the victim's situation and the source of the oppression and/or violence. In Atwood's first position of victimhood, the victim denies even the fact that they are being oppressed and blame their fellow victims for the suffering that violence oppression has caused. In the second position, the victim acknowledges their victimhood, but maintains that the oppression and violence is inevitable. Their suffering is usually blamed on "God's will, history [or] fate.... The explanation displaces the cause of oppression to something too vast to change" (Piercy 53).

The third position is far more healthy in that the victims "Acknowledge victimization but don't accept it as inevitable....Here, you can make real decisions....anger can be directed against what is oppressing you" (Piercy 53). This stage is described as "dynamic" and is also important as it reflects the mode of most of Atwood's poetry: as she speaks out in opposition of current oppression, often with anger or acidity. The fourth stage is that of a "creative non-victim" unaffected by violence or oppression. This final stage in Atwood's progression is described as "almost impossible in an oppressive society" and generally only "achievable in moments" (53). The critic goes on to explain that some of Atwood's poetry is centered on a single mode, while others explore more than one mode and illustrate the tension and catharsis as an individual or culture changes from mode to the other.

Atwood's poems "Spelling" and "A Red Shirt" are two prime examples of Atwood's exploration of various reactions to and consequences of victimhood. In both, the speaker is generally in the third stage, but she describes past female victims in the second stage and watches her daughter triumph in ways that suggest that she is in the fourth stage. This progression is mirrored by the motif exploring the legacy of oppression of women through the lens of a mother's relationship with her daughter. Although they differ some in tone, both "A

Red Shirt” and “Spelling” explore the connections between the speaker’s relationship with her daughter and the historical legacy of violence against and oppression of women; in this way, the integration of the two topics raises the stakes of both struggles and further emphasizes the importance of the topics.

“Spelling” and “A Red Shirt” are similar in structure and general content. Both begin with the speaker discussing her daughter in a way that reveals the speaker’s own struggle against an issue of oppression. Both continue with a discussion of historical violence against women, bringing more depth to the topic as the connection between the present and past situations enhances both struggles. Likewise, both end with the speaker observing her daughter engage in some form of triumph, in part due to the speaker’s own actions in defying the legacy of oppression. This succession reflects three of the steps in Margaret Atwood’s self-described progression from victimhood, to speaking out against oppression, to becoming a “creative non-victim” (Piercy 53). However, while both poems make it clear that they are telling a story of female triumph over the ages, “A Red Shirt” is far more explicit in portraying the legacy of feminine experience and mystique, or the “profoundly transformative aspects of the feminine” (Carter). This is probably in part due to the poem’s length. While “Spelling” barely fills an entire page, “A Red Shirt” is comprised of a series of five nearly page-long poems, each focused on a different aspect of the speaker’s ruminations and experience. Despite “A Red Shirt’s” comparative length, the succession of thoughts and images are fragmented in both poems; often, they appear out of chronological order without any transitions between one thought or image to the next. This fragmentation enhances the expansive view of both poems as Atwood calls up events that are separated by vast swaths of time and space and, like an archeologist inferring an entire bowl from a few shards of pottery, pieces together a portrait of the evolution of the female

condition in the western patriarchal culture. (SEE APPENDIX FOR FULL TEXT OF BOTH POEMS)

In the second stanza of the first section of Atwood's "A Red Shirt," the speaker clearly identifies an aspect of patriarchal oppression that she is working against, the attitude that "Young girls should not wear red." She then explains that this statement reflects the attitude that "A girl should be a veil, a white shadow...not dangerous;" and that "she should / keep silent..." In effect, the speaker is battling the attitudes that do not allow for women to express themselves, either by "dancing," or by wearing colors that symbolize huge swaths of human experience, including "passion," "death," and "the sacrifice / of shed blood." A criticism by Nancy and James Carter discusses Atwood's writing as suggesting that "women become increasingly alienated from themselves...in a culture which attempts to freeze them...untouched except by cosmeticians...self-deprived of the profoundly transformative aspects of the feminine" (328). In this particular poem, this self deprivation indicates a removal of power, rendering them voiceless and "not dangerous" (Atwood "A Red Shirt").

Likewise, the speaker in Atwood's "Spelling" alludes to oppressive attitudes that kept women from being able to safely express themselves through creation, be it through creating children, or by creating words. She illustrates that countless woman "denied themselves daughters," shutting themselves from public view in order to "mainline words." Because the act of "spelling," or creating words, is beautifully equated with making spells and some form of ethereal power, the fact that most women were not able to express themselves through words denied them power. Structurally, the plainly stated sixth stanza, "A word after a word / after a word is power," emphasizes this point through the fact that it is set off as a whole stanza even though it is only two lines long. The repetition and un-garnished syntax without commas further

emphasize that the ability to express one-self through words, in effect to possess a voice, is crucial. In addition, the speaker makes it plain that this choice is unfair because the two are not equivalent: “A child is not a poem, / a poem is not a child. / There is not either / or.” Unlike the speaker in “A Red Shirt,” who focuses on allowing her daughter to have access to the sensual, “passionate,” and “dangerous” aspects of human existence, the speaker in “Spelling” is more concerned with woman’s right to intellectually learn and express herself through language, thereby gaining power, without having to sacrifice bearing children in order to “mainline words.”

In both poems, the oppressive attitudes in regards to women are linked to specific forms of historical violence against women. This straightforward, un-flinching address of past issues not only stresses the importance of defying the oppressive attitudes the speaker is fighting, but also makes it clear that the poems are addressing the legacy of oppression and violence against women. In “Spelling,” the speaker is direct in describing two instances of violence in history: the woman “caught in the war / & in labour, her thighs tied,” and the ancestral “burning witch.” Through diction, Atwood stresses the connection between past violence and the current situation through the phrase “I return” to the woman caught in the war, implying that the speaker finds the historical acts of violence relevant to her current situation often, and that the consequences of the past are cyclical in nature, necessitating “a return.” In the fifth stanza, the speaker draws a personal feminine connection with the burning witch by calling her “Ancestress,” thus strengthening the concept of the legacy of the feminine bloodline that continues from mother to daughter.

The symbolism of these two instances of graphic historical violence relates back to the themes of the poem on several levels. The two instances differ in that the first woman is a victim of violence through her act of producing a child, whereas the “Ancestress” is a victim of

violence, gagged in order “to strangle words” (Atwood, “Spelling”). This difference further illustrates the struggle addressed by the speaker in the previous two stanzas: the dichotomy between creating a child and having a voice through words.

Despite Atwood’s exploration of this difference, the methods of the two instances of violence are strikingly similar. Both of the victims suffer through being bound. This provides a specific, physical manifestation of women’s historical, and in some cultures, contemporary, position as virtual slaves in bondage to male relatives. Being hobbled or gagged also graphically represents the constriction of women’s power of expression. In effect, their power is being taken away because they are being forced not to express themselves, and they suffer horribly because of it. The similarity between these two acts cement the perception that the central conflict of the poem deals with gaining power through expression, despite the oppression of the patriarchal society. The severity of the historical violence in Atwood’s “unflinching perception” of violence to woman raises the stakes for all concerned, as the current speaker’s struggle becomes the struggle of her “Ancestress,” and the triumph of her daughter becomes the triumph of all involved in the struggle (Stocks). At this point the speaker has entered the third stage of Piercy’s interpretation of Atwood’s stages of victimhood: she has decided to refuse to accept the violence as inevitable and justified, and speaks out against oppression. That “Atwood refuses the option of silence, grimly offering witness to horrors” is in itself a triumph of self expression and thus self-empowerment through words (Stocks).

Though the speaker in “A Red Shirt” has some descriptions of historical violence against women, it is more focused on the connections between women and how the legacy of femininity has been hampered, but not destroyed, by patriarchal oppression. The variance of point of view and chronological setting in “A Red Shirt” makes this clear. Throughout the five sections of the

poem, the speaker talks about what the man told “me” in the present, that “we” (meaning women as a collective) suffer in domesticity, and that “you burned” the witch sometime in the distant past. In the fourth section of “A Red Shirt,” Atwood blames previous oppressive or superstitious views for both historical violence and thus discredits the view that “Dancing in red shoes will kill you” by giving examples of past historical violence based on unfounded myths. This comparison ups the ante in that it intimates that the assumptions that confront the speaker’s daughter, and women in general, are as dangerous and as preposterous as belief in “the imaginary jewels they used to split the heads of Jews for” (Atwood “Red Shirt”). Atwood’s speaker has established her credibility throughout the poem through generally cool and collected diction, which allows the more volatile descriptions an intense, but not sappy effect. In contrast, the ludicrous idea that dancing in red shoes may somehow seem fatal brands the patriarchal perpetrators of the violence and oppression as hysterical, using any excuse to condone their harmful actions.

One clear commonality between both “A Red Shirt” and “Spelling” is that the speaker makes it very explicit that this is a story of the feminine being oppressed by the masculine. Though Atwood’s speaker in “Spelling” never directly points at men or patriarchal culture as the source of femininity’s collective woes, the nature of the violence against women and the complete lack of acknowledgement toward men make it clear that the speaker is concerned with women and their story. In “A Red Shirt,” the only time that men or masculinity is directly mentioned in the lengthy poem is in the second stanza, when the speaker states that “a man once told me” that “children should not wear red” (Atwood). The fourth stanza also implies that the belief that “Dancing in red shoes will kill you” is one pushed on women by men and the patriarchal culture, which also implies that the speaker may view men and the western patriarchal culture in a similar vein.

This attitude is completely in contrast with the speaker's rich portrayal of the legacy of the women who have come before her in "A Red Shirt." Throughout the poem, the speaker makes much of women as a collective, emphasizing their closeness. In the first stanza, the speaker is sewing the red shirt for her daughter in tandem, as they "pass the scissors back & forth across the table." Later, the speaker asserts that by doing so, they are becoming part of the "procession / of the old leather mothers /...passing the work from hand to hand, / mother to daughter, / A long thread of red blood, not yet broken." The strength and mystic qualities attributed to femininity further assert that "red is our color by birth- / right, the color...that joins us to each other." This is not only a reference to the history of violence against women, but more importantly a clear reference to giving birth as well as menstruation, which is further accentuated by the reference to cycles of the moon later in the section.

In the third section of "A Red Shirt," the speaker reaches back further, her calm, undecorated diction slightly compromised by her "story" paying homage to the "Old Woman." Here, Atwood alludes to ancient Goddess mythologies, as well as superstitions about wise-women that eventually led to the burning of witches. Although many traditions attribute creation to some sort of fertility goddess, the Old Woman's weaving of souls' could possibly relate to the Greek fates. The "black Madonna / studded with miniature / arms and legs" is almost certainly a reference to the Hindu Goddess Khali, the goddess of death and destruction. The speaker's celebration of the more mystic, powerful, and even violent aspects of femininity defies the categorization of women as "bloodless...not dangerous," and thus attracts negative, sometimes violent reactions from men.

In contrast, feminine characteristics in "Spelling" are not necessarily celebrated. The woman are painted mostly as victims, which is perhaps why some portion of the triumphs

depicted in “Spelling” are treated with little joy by the speaker. In the seventh stanza, the speaker loses her objective, precise tone and instead engages in the single depiction of feminine strength: making a statement through victimhood. The whole seventh stanza is one continuous fragment. This structure reflects the speaker’s passion as she describes “the point where language falls away / from hot bones...when the bones know they are hollow & the word / splits & doubles...& the body / itself becomes a mouth.” Atwood then resorts back to her familiar deadpan delivery, with stanza eighteen as she helpfully points out that “This is a metaphor.” Clearly, the speaker believes that in some ways the stifling violence perpetrated against women historically was not successful in fully depriving them of their voice. Because “the body / itself becomes a mouth,” the very act of suffering is in itself a form of expression. Still, it’s no wonder that the speaker’s overall tone is rather bleak and colorless. In contrast to “A Red Shirt,” the speaker in “Spelling” does not play an active role in her daughter’s achievement; she is simply watching her daughter spell. Although the speaker’s own expression through her description of the injustices serve as her own triumph, there is no suggestion that anything of the speaker’s power or knowledge being transferred to her daughter. Other than in the first line, the speaker’s daughter is not mentioned directly, and the speaker spends most of her time describing past injustices rather than her daughter’s triumph. This difference in attention is illustrated by the lack of imagery featuring the speaker’s daughter, despite the scorching imagery featuring the more violent acts of “Spelling.”

In contrast, the speaker in “A Red Shirt” plays an active role in her daughter’s triumph over the wrongs done to her ancestors in the past. In the very beginning of the poem, the speaker is already creating her gift of freedom (symbolized by the red shirt) for her daughter. In the fourth section, the speaker further invests herself in empowering her daughter by making a “tiny

stitch, my private magic” in order to protect her daughter against harmful, archaic beliefs.

Because Atwood specifies that this gift is given “where you will inherit it,” this stanza reinforces the motif of the unbroken red thread of power and wisdom, passing from mother to daughter.

The final section of “A Red Shirt” depicts the culmination of the mother’s gift for her daughter. The daughter’s obvious delight in the gift of the red shirt belies the original assertions that wearing red was somehow unseemly or unhealthy for a girl child. In this way, the rather serious and sometimes bloody legacy of her ancestors is portrayed as something that is beautiful and comforting. The joy that the gift brings to the child and to the rest of the world adds a sort of brightness to the poem that is most emphatically lacking in “Spelling.” Here, the mother sets out with an intention of fixing a wrong in the world that had affected many women, then proceeds to fix it, with much care to address the gravity of the seemingly domestic action. Unlike “Spelling,” “A Red Shirt” is in part a lengthy exploration of the speaker’s relationship with her daughter, as well as with her ancestry. It is clear that the speaker is not alone as she has a sister to work on the shirt, as well as an ever-present awareness of her ancestresses and their own strengths and sufferings. In contrast, the speaker in “Spelling” seems alone even in the presence of her daughter, as there is no interaction between them.

In either scenario, the speaker has either helped or simply witnessed her daughter’s progression to Atwood’s fourth stage in her “Basic Victim Positions:” that of a “creative non-victim” (Piercy 53). Although the speakers make it clear that they are not yet living in a world free of oppression of women, the fact that their daughters do not have to struggle for freedom the way the speaker’s themselves had to, nor fear the casual, graphic violence against women of recent history is in itself a resounding triumph. As opposed to the women of the past, this new generation of women has a hope for a better future where they can achieve all that is possible for

them to achieve through self expression, without being cut off either from the power and culture of their ancestors, or from the triumph of future generations. Perhaps what is most striking about the material nature of these triumphs is the every-day domesticity of the objects the daughters now have access to. In this way, Atwood reminds us that some of the most potent ways of empowering ourselves may be through common things. Many women of past generations sacrificed much in order for the younger generation to have what they have now, even something as common as a red shirt. And in the end, it means a lot.

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APPENDIX

A Red Shirt

My sister and I are sewing
a red shirt for my daughter.
She pins, I hem, we pass the scissors
back & forth across the table.

Children should not wear red,
a man once told me.
Young girls should not wear red.

In some countries it is the color
of death; in others passion,
in others, in others, anger,
in others, the sacrifice.

of shed blood. A girl should be
a veil, a white shadow, bloodless
as a moon on water; not
dangerous; she should

keep silent and avoid
red shoes, red stockings, dancing.
Dancing in red shoes will kill you.

--Margaret Atwood

"Spelling"
My daughter plays on the floor
with plastic letters,
red, blue & hard yellow,
learning how to spell,
spelling,
how to make spells.

*

I wonder how many women
denied themselves daughters,
closed themselves in rooms,
drew the curtains

so they could mainline words.

*

A child is not a poem,
a poem is not a child.
There is no either / or.
However.

*

I return to the story
of the woman caught in the war
& in labour, her thighs tied
together by the enemy
so she could not give birth.

Ancestress: the burning witch,
her mouth covered by leather
to strangle words.

A word after a word
after a word is power.

*

At the point where language falls away
from the hot bones, at the point
where the rock breaks open and darkness
flows out of it like blood, at
the melting point of granite
when the bones know
they are hollow & the word
splits & doubles & speaks
the truth & the body
itself becomes a mouth.

This is a metaphor.

*

How do you learn to spell?
Blood, sky & the sun,
your own name first,
your first naming, your first name,
your first word.

Past Waking

That summer I felt the dead walk beside me. That summer I lived a life that ran parallel to the long shadowed past, walking the paths that thousands before me had walked, tracing their footsteps and sighs, their words and their laughter. I was fifteen and it was the perfect freedom; a month away from my parents and my sheltered Idaho town. A month among other writers and dreamers, with whom I wandered graveyards and covered alleyways, brushing from my hair the ancient webs woven by those who came before me. After years of dreaming, I had come to Oxford.

I spent the first ten minutes stuck in a bathroom. As I stood there, frantically rattling the doorknob and approaching hyperventilation, I thought, “This is *not* what is supposed to happen.”

In my imagination, I swept into the city with the grandeur of a city sophisticate. People stared, whispering behind their hands, impressed by my obvious maturity. Everyone was desperate to be my friend. It didn't matter that I was the only scholarship student among hundreds of Hollywood types with private jets and bowling allies in their living rooms, and life-long Ivy Leaguers who regularly vacationed in the Swiss Alps. I, the girl from small-town Idaho with a purse from Wal-Mart and no knowledge of Manolo Blahnik, defined Ultimate Cool.

In reality, I whispered inaudible hellos to a few people without making eye contact and deposited my luggage in my room, and within ten minutes of arriving I'd gotten myself stuck in a bathroom.

It was not, to say the least, the grand entrance I had dreamt about.

My breathing increased and I felt heat flood my cheeks as I grasped at the doorknob. I didn't understand. Had I accidentally locked it from the outside? Was this someone's idea of a

joke?

The summer was humid and someone had left the second floor window ajar. Through it the voices of other students outside floated up to me. I surveyed my options. I could wait until someone else had to use the bathroom, and then meet them at the door, feigning a look of surprise. “Oh,” I would say, laughing. “I was just leaving.”

Or I could call for help.

I banged on the door a few more times, but the hall outside remained silent. I debated for about five minutes as I leaned against the door, but at this point I could feel the beginnings of claustrophobia.

I took a breath and faced the open window. “Hello?” I called, so quietly that I barely heard myself.

No answer.

“Hello?” I repeated, cringing.

“Yeah?” called a voice from outside. “Who’s there?” They were British, and that made them cool. I closed my eyes.

“It’s, um, me.” Details didn’t seem necessary. “I need help. I’m, uh, well...

I’m stuck in the bathroom.”

Muttering, maybe laughter. “What?”

I took a deep breath. The entire moment seemed from a dream or some pseudo-reality, too awful to possibly be true. “I’m stuck in the bathroom!” I shouted.

It was definitely laughter this time, and I blushed again.

“Where are you?”

“Second floor of the New Building Annex!”

The image of my fantasy first impression had shattered with my dignity, and as the voices assured me they were on their way I kicked the door in anger, wrenching the knob to the left.

It popped open. I'd been turning the knob the wrong way.

My breath caught and my stomach rose into my throat. Below me, I could hear my would-be rescue party stomping up the stairs. I sprinted from the bathroom, fumbling with my lanyard as I threw open the door to my room and crouched down below the window, turning out the lights. At the time it seemed the only logical option.

They passed the door, laughing among themselves, mocking me. I held my breath, afraid that somehow they'd hear, and somehow they'd know that behind the door was the idiot who'd thought she was stuck in the bathroom.

When at last the sound of their footsteps and laughter faded from my hearing, I stood on shaky feet and flicked on the light, collapsing onto my bed. My dignity was wounded, my heart was pounding, but I had survived.

Happily I can say that everything improved from that point.

Thirteen of us studied Creative Writing together in the TV room at Corpus Christi college of Oxford that summer, and we came from everywhere.

Gina was British and adorable, and Jenna spent winters skiing in California. Charisma lived up to her name, Coral wanted to be a journalist, and Rafael frightened us with his dark stories and well-chosen words. Freeman and McKay could have been brothers. Harper intimidated me with her spot-on fashion, and one day Kat wore fairy wings to class. Stephanie thought everything was poisoned and flinched when spoken to, but she wrote beautifully. Frankie was the Catholic schoolgirl idealist who told us dreamily that swans mated for life, while Gabriel and I invented a soap-opera swan story of deception and intrigue. We were pragmatists.

We ate sappy swan stories for breakfast.

Mr. Ben was our teacher, but in his classroom no subject was taboo. Once when the girls lounged on blankets at Warrick Castle, Frankie asked him, “D’you wonder if people think we’re your grandchildren?”

He grinned. “I was hoping they’d think you were my harem.”

We learned not to be shocked in his classroom. Each day we spent three hours lounging in overstuffed chairs while we discussed eroticism and the nature of the universe.

“No, seriously,” Kat would insist. “Do girls have wet dreams? It’s a legitimate question.”

At fifteen, I was embarrassed to not know what a wet dream *was*, regardless of whether or not girls could have them. We had so much to teach each other, and I had so much to learn.

The most important moments for me, however, were the ones I spent outside of the classroom. For hours I would explore the city, pounding the worn cobblestone paths so many times that on the last night my shoes broke and I walked back in the dirt, singing. Coming to Oxford, I felt as though I had come *home*.

Opposite my bedroom window, the building was lined with a dozen gargoyles, the ferocity of their expressions softened by rain and time. Each morning I would stare out and greet them, tracing their worn faces until I knew them.

I spent long hours watching the world from my window, especially when night fell and the only light came from streetlamps and rooms like mine. I watched as light and laughter spilled from open doorways into the night and I sat above it, wanting to capture the picture and the feelings it conjured forever. Sometimes Frankie and I would sit on the window seat, our

faces covered in avocado pore-reducing masks, as we wrote for hours. We said we were facial-wearing serial killers as we watched the world unseen, but we stalked with words.

Only once was the illusion broken, when a boy who walked below glanced up at the sound of our voices. He saw me and laughed. I felt as if my anonymity had been stripped from me, my precious façade that I maintained from the lofty seat above everything.

I touched my face and grinned. I still wore a mask. “Hey!” I yelled, waving.

Frankie shrieked and begged me to stop, diving to the floor and burying her head beneath a pink chair cushion.

He waved back, still laughing, and then he disappeared into the night.

Sometimes I remember that moment, and the strange stillness of the evening. Sometimes I think that the entire world is that night and sometimes we all go disappearing.

On the night of the World Cup, I felt the dead walk beside me. France and Italy were contending for the title. I had never been enveloped in a culture where soccer mattered. The city burst with supporters from both countries, and packs of them moved like lazy rivers along the streets, chanting in their respective languages. I didn’t understand the words but I understood the sentiment, the emotions and excitement that emanate from the primal part of us where language is not spoken, but felt.

I understood, walking with them, swept into crowds and standing on top of the highest tower in Oxford, singing in the darkness and lying in the grass of the Botanic Garden, that we are all connected beneath what we recognize.

The night of the World Cup, the world balanced on an intangible edge, unbroken by football or words. I sat on my windowsill, observing an empty world. Everyone else was inside, gathered in groups around televisions, waiting for the verdict. France or Italy?

I waited alone for a different verdict, my pen poised above my notebook, unmoving. Across the street were my friends the gargoyles, their weathered faces made even more unknowable by night.

In the still, perfect silence I did not write. Instead, I thought about possibilities and impossibilities. I thought about faith, and love, and the incomprehensible breadth of the universe. I was afraid, I thought as I looked around, of *this*. I was afraid of sitting alone forever, of dying, of being unloved. I was afraid of never mattering at all.

I had come to Oxford, I told myself, to write. Writing is a way of touching, of reaching out to others, but it is not enough. We lie to ourselves and pretend it is alright to be an island when in truth we are terrified by the empty sea.

Connections are more important. Physical touch and shared glances run deeper than written words.

I stared off alone into the empty night.

Below me, at once, the frozen world slipped from its finite edge and split open. People and light spilled out onto the road, and at once a river of bodies flooded the street below, packed together and cheering. Strangers hugged strangers, and all around I heard the cry of, “Italy! Italy!” They communicated with gestures and thoughts, feeding from each other, joy increasing joy, ecstasy leading to ecstasy, until everyone was screaming. I wanted to join them, but I felt I would be entering into something in which I did not belong. I climbed from my seat above the world and I shut the window.

When the cobbled streets were empty again later that night, I went out alone. The stones were strange beneath my feet, and the air lay moist and heavy. I could feel them around me—the ambiguous *them*, something animate that gave the air weight and meaning. Perhaps, I thought, I

was feeling the memories and imprints of all those who had come before. Perhaps I walked with the dead.

The air grew cold and thick, and the hairs on my arms roused in a nonexistent breeze. Everyone had vanished into their homes, where they shared words and warmth. The world had emptied again. Looking around, I could have been in another time.

This is now, I assured myself, touching my hands to my face. But as I walked on, I realized that *now* was much richer than what I saw. I was walking through layered time, a “now” that was the culmination of the present and all that had come before it. The night was translucent with life and meaning. I touched the ancient stones of the Bodleian Library with my fingertips, I took off my shoes and felt the dirt to which we all return beneath my feet. I felt as though my molecules had joined with the world, and I was a part of everything.

Before, watching the world from my window, I had felt acutely alone. I had looked into the sky and been frightened by my own insignificance, the fact that I was only a microscopic speck in the scope of the universe. I had thought that I didn’t matter.

Because alone, we really *don’t* matter. Alone, we *are* insignificant in the scope of the universe.

But we are not alone.

As I walked with the dead and with the living, I understood. We are important because of our connections; the connections formed by the depth of our shared human experiences. We are *all* afraid, we all feel alone, we all know joy and hope and despair and loss. Our connections magnify us a thousand fold and we become significant, the universe shrinking beneath the size and power of what we all share.

Once, I stood in a choir as we all sang the same simple C note. “Listen!” our director shouted above us. “You can hear the fifth!” High above the low rumble of the basses, above the tenors and altos and above even the soaring sopranos, an unsung G rang like the chime of a hand bell, as clearly as if a ghost choir stood singing it beside us.

People alone, like individual voices singing a single note, are insignificant. We are remarkable in what we share—our fears, our dreams, our capacities to love. Alone and unconscious of connections, we are no more than the root: that simple C note. It is our shared emotions and the bridges they build that create the chord.

I felt the chord in Oxford. Even without realizing it, even as I spent nights alone on the windowsill wishing for meaning, I felt the chord.

I’d felt it drinking Cranberry Freezes with Hannah and Arline at G&D’s off High Street. I’d felt it running with my roommate Becca in a sudden downpour to rescue our laundry, exploring the tunnels beneath Corpus Christi college, writing psychotic murder stories with Frankie, and jumping fully clothed into the slime-tinged Thames river on the hottest day of the year.

I would feel it again in the last few hours we spent in Oxford, when we climbed to the top of the highest tower and said goodbye to the sleep-cloaked city, just as the sky was touched by morning.

Strange, I thought, that when the world seemed empty I felt it clearest of all. I felt the most connected when I was alone, and I realized that I wasn’t.

I walked back to Corpus by myself, but I was not alone. The long dead and the living and the yet-to-be-born were present with me. My cynicism was caught in those ancient webs of

the past and I believed in spirits and in the beautiful, impossible future that only late at night can one imagine.

The impossible future filled with closeness and meaning that, late at night, sometimes we all need to believe is possible.

Method, Memory, and Blood

*"I've been through the desert on a horse with no name"
America*

The high-desert sun was bright and as sharp as scissors. It cut precise shadows even from thin blades of grass and small pebbles. It was one of those days that, viewed from a car window, looked like the heart of summer. It was one of those days that a five-year-old-boy, clad in nothing but cutoffs and a scraped knee, could launch himself into grandma's back yard—the screen door shouts *BANG!*—find his favorite sprinkler (grandmas always have plenty to choose from), and then laughing, chase those elusive rainbows that dance, just out of reach, to the tune of a tiny, whizzing, water windmill. But summer had gone forever and this was autumn. This was hunting season.

Earlier, the predawn battle plans had been laid. Longing to be one of the hunters, I watched as my grandfather and the other adults sallied out into the clear and moonless night with their dark and deadly rifles. I watched as they faded into shadows, shadows to diminishing silhouettes, to finally be swallowed by the tall desert starscape. Frustrated, I retreated from the lonely cold, back to the camper and the warm smells of coffee, gun oil, leather, and sleeping bags. Having latched the flimsy door, at once shutting out the enormous night and magnifying the hiss of the gas lantern, I looked into the face of the Oldest Person in the World. This was going to be a long and boring day and, if someone didn't shoot a deer early, probably the longest day ever. The Oldest Person in the World smiled knowingly and told me she had "something to show me, later." I may have groaned. She knew nothing of guns or stealth or blood or danger. She lived in a house that smelled stale—dried flowers, old-lady clothes, and dry old boards—not of gun oil. She only knew about crocheting and apricot jam and Reader's Digest. I cared nothing about those tame and domestic icons. But her bright and intelligent pale eyes smiled at me over her coffee cup, as if to say "You'll see."

∞

Geography fascinates me. In the United States we tend to think of geography as merely memorizing states and capitols. This is a very narrow view of the subject. Geography is a process of studying people and places, events and environmental interactions. It is an over-arching discipline that is a cohesive thread, unifying many other disciplines to create a "bigger picture." Geology, archeology, demographics, climatology, economics, and linguistics are just a small sample of the many sciences that are ultimately geographic in nature, or direct offshoots of this ancient field of study. Cartography, evidence of which dates to approximately 11,000 B.C. (James) is the most widely recognizable output of geographic endeavor. Yet by necessity each and every human being, perhaps every living creature, pursues the course of their individual desires according to, and using, geographic methodologies. Because of stimuli, of pain and pleasure, geography is our first real study as infants. Geography is at the heart of our quest to understand, to succeed, and to be loved. In so many ways it is the very first and very last of all sciences.

Admittedly, such a comprehensive approach of the subject is unusual and might even be deemed folly, or dismissed out of hand by accredited geographers. I hope to provide evidence that this is not justified, even though the scope of proving such an assertion is likely far beyond the work of my lifetime. Physicists have been seeking a single unifying theory of the universe for centuries, particularly since the model of quantum mechanics described the observable Newtonian laws as being specialized, isolated events. I seek a unifying geographical theory of the universe, one with plenty of room for everybody, including embattled physicists.

The two main branches of geography are described as physical and human. Both are essentially spatial studies. Psychology is a study of mental processes and behavior. I am convinced that geo-

graphy is spatial, *as well as psychological*, and that what may appear to be a gap between the two is simply a lack of understanding how completely interconnected and codependent the two sciences are. Like quantum and Newtonian physics, both are valid and both apply to common circumstances, even if the connection is not immediately perceptible. Geography is moot without human observation, intent, and interaction.

A map is the essential culmination of a geographic analysis. The primary difference between geographic maps and cognitive maps, spatial or otherwise, is the medium on which they are recorded. Both exist to orient ourselves to a larger and unknown world. Both exist in order to extrapolate. Many of us have had the opportunity to travel to, or within, a new city and have used a GPS or hardcopy map to find our destination. Initially we orientate ourselves to point “A,” *Here I am!* then plot our course to the unknown point “B,” *This is where I want to be!* We expect, even take for granted, that these maps are accurate. But what happens if the directions are wrong: what if the map does not match the conditions “on the ground?” And equally important, what if we misinterpret the map that is our guidance? We may become overwhelmed—at best confused and delayed, at worst lost or in true peril. And while cartography has long been recognized as an art, what accountability should we hold these artists to?

Consider that the emergency response routes in our community, the placement of fire stations, fire hydrants, and even fire exits are determined by the analysis of maps. These, and countless other points, boundaries, and paths, all critical to our well-being, even survival, are in the hands of cartographers. Of artists. If we include ourselves as cartographers, as the builders of the cognitive maps that we use to define our desires and the route towards our personal and social goals, it becomes apparent how distinctly important these models, these maps, and the people that fashion them, are.

We are all familiar with the obnoxious person who stands too close, violates our personal space during casual conversation, and persists despite our body language, or other cues that we are uncomfort-

able. His cognitive model does not represent the conditions on the ground. And we have all heard of hapless travelers blindly following a GPS and meeting death from oncoming traffic on a one-way street, or ending up stranded on an isolated mountain road while pursuing the “shortest” path. They were using very poor maps, indeed. So where is that balance of accuracy, aesthetic, exclusion, and convenience that typifies a functional, credible map; what is a good map? What constitutes a good cartographer?

∞

My Great-Grandma Alice Allen, the Oldest Person in the World, held my hand as she wound our way through the giant sagebrush, down game trails, and over the rough high-desert terrain. The same chill breeze that hurried small puffball clouds across the sky, a sky not quite the right blue to really be summer, scratched at my skin like an icy rug burn. She paused often, stooping to scoop up a stone or pick a bit of a plant, examine it closely with eyeglass-exaggerated eyes, and hand it to me. As she told me its name and how to know it from all of the myriad of other rocks or plants, I would copy her by holding it first at arms length, tilting my head and squinting, then bringing it nearly to my nose, turning it the whole time in my fingers, as if that sequence of gestures might somehow impart the occult knowledge she possessed.

Some of the rocks I dropped to the ground but a few fell from my chilled fingers to land in my pocket. In these years afterwards, many rocks have slid into my pockets. And, to my mother’s (and ex-wife’s) chagrin, most of those roll up onto my private gravel bar in the washing machine. Yet I would love to still have one of the agates Grandma Allen showed me that day, much more than *any* diamond. But the big show, the secret Grandma had in mind when she led a small pouting boy from the warm camper into the cold sun, lay just ahead. I had all but forgotten the deer hunt. I was hooked.

∞

“Surveying can be regarded as that discipline which encompasses all methods for measuring, processing, and disseminating information about the

physical earth and our environment” (Wolf 1). A survey is the first component of creating an accurate map. Any survey is, generally, a process of defining perceivable occurrences as abstract points, and using those points to determine relative positions and boundaries, often for the purpose of spatially, or intellectually, engaging our surroundings. These points are not by necessity physical points. I am attempting a definition that encompasses all experience: emotional, existential, and tangible. We must survey the world around us, and our location within, before we can construct a good map.

When putting our newly surveyed information in context, we consider accuracy and use. Accuracy is relevant to scale. I cannot pinpoint the location of a fire hydrant in New York from a globe. I cannot declare I’m an effective public speaker by successfully wooing my girlfriend. Bolstad says “scale, size, and shape depend primarily on the intended map use” (159). Accuracy is also pinned to the style of delivery and end audience.

For example, a mines engineer and a geotechnical engineer have overlapping geological interests in an area, and decide to share the cost of hiring out a survey to collect data. It is unlikely that the same display of that data would suite both equally. For instance, the mines engineer is exploring the probability of locating a shifted silver vein across a fault, while the geotechnical engineer is interested in soil composition in order to determine a footer depth so his new structure will withstand predicted seismic activity. The geologic map a cartographer fashions from the survey of that area may be quite accurate, however, both engineers will need the same data interpreted, and displayed, differently for the map to be useful. No matter how accurate, a map is worthless unless it shows us *what we need to know!*

Aesthetics in map-making is a double-edged sword. “Most maps are massive reductions of the reality they represent, and clarity demands that much of that reality be suppressed” (Monmonier 215). The exclusion of information for the convenience of the intended audience, the aesthetics of the presentation, can also be a function of error. People tend to believe a proper looking map to be authoritative and, like “statistics” quoted by the news or oth-

er media, rarely question the authenticity or possible motive for deception behind the representation. An unappealing map, no matter how accurate, is easy to dismiss out of hand because presentation is crucial for orientating the model to reality. The chronic pessimist or severely depressed seem a bore because their speech is representative of the model of reality they are orientated to. Even when their observations are essentially correct, they are easily disregarded simply because the presentation is ugly.

∞

The Oldest, and perhaps Wisest, Person in the World led me to the maw of Box Canyon. I listened wide-eyed as Grandma Allen described how the Indians would use this unique and grisly place. Game would be herded into the canyon, she explained. The women and very young and very old would spring from behind *this* very bush and *these* very boulders, in ambush, to wave and jump and yell, forming a human fence so that no animal could escape the mouth of the small, steep canyon. The scene reminded me of how we would get a loose horse back into pasture when a young boy—who shall remain anonymous—despite constant reminding, would leave the gates unlatched. But at Box Canyon the men and older boys, boys maybe as old as I, would suddenly rush from hiding to the rim of the canyon and slaughter the unhappy catch from above with spears, stones, or arrows. A child wishing to prove himself as a man might descend into the panicked herd armed with nothing but a club or a spear to dispatch the largest, or fiercest, of the bunch. In this way his courage and skill would be beyond refute; he would be the hero of the coming feast.

I clearly recall the picture that came to my mind. The firelight, the smell of roasting meat, every sharp, dark, savage Indian eye on me, a new Man of the tribe under a vast desert night sky, and the story of my own bravery being told and retold to all by my own proud kin, as everyone gluttoned on the kill. The next day I would be unanimously nominated to chair the predawn plans for raiding settler’s horses or scalps. Next hunt I would melt into the starlight with my grandpa.

∞

As my Great-Grandma Allen was showing me, survey is the key element of any map. Although she was concerned with passing a geographical knowledge of environment to me, a physical and anthropological survey of the Oregon desert, the professional side of survey must be considered to realize the implications of the maps we make.

Two hundred years ago Thomas Jefferson, a good friend and professional peer of George Washington, both land surveyors, faced a huge conundrum. President Jefferson needed a system to legally define and appropriate the land, recently secured in the Revolution, in a uniform, legal, and comprehensive manner. His ambition reached much further than the former colonies. This ambition became known as Manifest Destiny. An enormous wilderness of vast space and resource lay beyond the frontier of the newly formed republic. Historical claims to these lands were described largely by water tributaries, and were in dispute—never mind the natives. Europe was not in a position to exploit her colonies. New World territorial disputes had led, and would likely lead again to war, and war was becoming economically and politically destabilizing. So, incredibly, Jefferson was able to secure title to land across an entire continent for his fledgling nation, largely through diplomacy. But his claim needed to be legal and be defined.

Jefferson devised twelve systems to measure land, experimented in what is now Ohio to test their validity, and failed. The thirteenth system, however, proved true enough to unite two oceans legally, spatially, and mathematically. The township and the Public Land Survey System were born.

Lewis and Clark, two surveyors, were immediately dispatched to begin recording the virtues of this heretofore legally indescribable wilderness.

∞

Grandma pointed to a patch of golden brush at the box end of the canyon: “What do you suppose that is?” I shrugged. It looked like a tall patch of weeds or small trees, a good place for a fort, or maybe to look for buried treasure. I could read and write from an exceptionally young age. I had recent-

ly finished an ancient threadbare copy of Robert Louis Stevenson’s Treasure Island, and was reading Kidnapped, so I was on high guard for any likely clues to cached booty. We picked our way through the sage and boulders towards the glen, she with the careful steps of nearly seventy years, and I with the determined precision of a stealthy pirate brave. Her head was bent towards the ground as she chose a safe path, while my eyes were drawn to the canyon rim, hoping and terrified that the Hawayee Indians might suddenly appear. The Hawayee Indians, as was commonly known amongst all my friends, were a lost renegade band of Indian warriors from Hawaii roaming the Owyhee desert and seeking revenge against the white man for building farms and fences and roads, for driving them into the empty desert, and because we stole their tropical island. In fact, the origin of the word “Owyhee” probably came from the word “Hawaii,” coined by the screams of the victims of an exotic and violent vengeance.

By consensus, the Hawayee had survived using stealth, by living in caves, and eating coyotes, or white children they would steal during night raids. Hidden from modern civilization, they were inland pirates, their ships were horses, and no one could extinguish their spirit of freedom, nor elude their systematic revenge for our ancestors killing the buffalo and ruining the land. Some of my friends had uncles that had known someone that had actually seen the tribe, and only barely escaped with their women and their lives. When my friends and I spoke of the Hawayee and their bloody deeds, it was only in hushed whispers. A Hawayee might be behind the lilac bush or the pump house, one could never be too careful. We were all certain that anytime soon the news people or the government would find the bloodthirsty savages by following the trail of carnage, in a helicopter, and make them account for their misdeeds. But each one of us feared being staked to the ground, slathered in honey, and devoured by red ants before the Hawayee were arrested. We had all seen the commercial on TV where the litterbugs made the Indian warrior cry. One does not get away with making a man with a spear on a horse cry. Even if the litter was in California.

∞

Because I was curious about the legal aspect of geography, and intrigued about the type of professional that develops raw data for cartography, I interviewed a licensed professional land surveyor, Allison Younger, at her home, during the spring of 2010. My greeting at the Younger household was warm and informal. Younger and her husband had just arrived home from work in Moscow, Idaho. Their kids go to school in Deary, a school district some twenty three miles away from where they live, partly because of quality of education and partly because of a constitutional dispute the Younger's have with the local district. The kids had been home about an hour, dropped off by a neighbor, and apparently hadn't done any of their chores. The dogs were excited, and very friendly, and the family was beginning to settle in for an evening at home with laundry and dishes, conversation, and dinner while watching *Family Guy*. I felt like a welcome intruder and a bit embarrassed to be conducting an interview.

Sitting in a recliner is a small woman wearing muddy logging boots, jeans, and a nice blouse. She squints at me behind her glasses and through the smoke of her cigarette. I take a seat next to her. "I never know how to dress," she says as a manner of apology, "especially when I have to come in out of the field for a meeting." (Younger) She laughs and describes the irony of pointing out details on a legal document she has prepared to a client that has paid thousands of dollars, with dirt under her fingernails. To me surveying seems like it should be both an art and science, but not to Younger. "Only in maps does it feel like art." She sees it much closer to history and law. "The work I do is a legacy of work, made on the shoulders of every surveyor that has worked in this area. My work is about creating a good platform for future surveyors. It is the legacy of every surveyor to create a history." It is intensely personal, and Younger, as well as her peers, feels a very direct connection all the way back to Thomas Jefferson. Allison is a living part of this system. She is a licensed Professional Land Surveyor (PLS).

Because PLSs are private professionals, hired by private citizens, to *serve the public*, Younger is held to a high standard of ethical and moral conduct

in her private life. She is adamant about voting, but would never put a political bumper sticker on any vehicle she was attached to. She may dislike her neighbor's conduct, but would not speak of it in public because her word is literally law. She used a hypothetical judge as an example.

If a judge ran around town saying so-and-so is a no good such-and-such, then he had to preside over a hearing for that person, his [the judge's] integrity would be called into question. Hiring me is like hiring a judge to decide where your fence ought to be. And it is legally binding. Your neighbor can hire me, too, to contest that same fence, and I am bound to serve both parties equally and fairly. I am absolutely accountable for what I do professionally, and privately.

Younger's personal integrity is not entirely in her own hands. There is a system of checks and balances to ensure that the public is being served in a manner befitting any judge. Perhaps it is even stricter than a judge's ethical accountability, because it is largely based on reputation and the scrutiny of a very tight professional community.

The Idaho State Board of Professional Engineers and Professional Land Surveyors (ISBPEPLS) oversee PLS conduct, mediate professional disputes, and have the power to revoke a license. And though professional surveyors are bound by ethics laws, they tend to self regulate. A genuine mistake is not a reason for the Board to step in, but the surveying community will certainly address it. As long as it is admitted and rectified, an honest mistake remains exactly that. Consistent unprofessionalism, however, is not tolerated.

Every PLS, including Younger is expected to attend a yearly regional conference where, for a week, they socialize and attend presentations. Attendance is essentially mandatory. In one respect, this is akin to a census. The community wants to know its members: to know itself. Furthermore, much as an MD, every PLS is required to complete and document at least sixteen hours of education and public service each year (called professional development hours) in the form of published re-

search, university classes, or community outreach. Professional engineers, even though they are governed by the same Board, are not required to do this. For a PLS, failure to complete professional development hours is a \$5000 fine, and possibly revocation of licensure, and repeat offenders will most certainly be stripped of their license. Being a professional surveyor is a way of life, not simply a job.

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The yellow grove was a copse of willows surrounding a small spring, willows touched by the wand of autumn. Grandma Allen explained to me the significance of water in this arid place to families without wells or electricity. She scoured the ground for dropped artifacts, dropped perhaps, when a hapless brave, much less astute than me, had hunkered for a drink of sweet water. *Grandma, did you come out west in a covered wagon?* She laughed with a smile. *No, I was born here.* Just over five years had passed since a young woman, pregnant and near term with her son, stood on a front porch with Grandma Allen during the Apollo moon landing. As they surveyed the celestial twilight, marveling at the wonder of mankind's expanding geographical understanding, to the backdrop of Walter Cronkite's emotional narrative, Grandma told the eighteen year old mother-to-be about the news from Kittyhawk, North Carolina reaching Baker County, Oregon, many decades before. Man had flown. When my mother told me that story, I remember, she cried.

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Although Younger has worked for the BLM and INEEL, her favorite job was "Smeltonville, Idaho. The job, the town, the time, [was] the end all be all of every tool, every effort that a surveyor has [and these] had to be used to accomplish the goal. It was the only way to accomplish the goal and we used every facet. All of the detective work, amazing people, amazing geography, amazing history—it could not get any more involved than that job." The contract sounded easy, simply lay out the public and railroad right-of-ways, but it was much more difficult than it seemed on the surface. The surface was missing.

The Jesuits built the Cataldo Mission, in what became Silver Valley, by invitation of the Coure d'Alene tribe in the 1840s, before Idaho was a territory. This was the source of the earliest useful records. Later, in the 1880s, a "great surveyor that could be trusted" built and recorded the original plats. In the 1980s the area became an EPA Superfund site because of the high levels of lead present in the soil. The soil, from the surface down to depths of three feet, were removed and replaced in a process called remediation. Though maps existed, the survey markers needed to orientate those maps to legal, physical, boundaries on the ground were disturbed or missing, and it was Younger's job to put the city back in the original place. She resorted to walking the streets, looking for grey-haired folks that might remember the land before remediation. She built a resolution using collateral evidence and, eventually, buried on a hillside, she found one undisturbed monument. From this single monument, and the careful work of a long dead surveyor, she rebuilt the entire origin of the area: a tangible, legal, historical recreation. A "legacy built on the shoulders of another legacy." She beams with pride.

It's long after dark and I can smell dinner coming out of the oven upstairs, Younger is on her third cigarette, her daughter needs help with her homework, *Family Guy* is about to start, and I get the feeling that I should wrap it up. I can't resist the issue of her being one of about five women PLS in Idaho, and if that is a challenge or an advantage. The answer is simply no, at least not with a sexist bias. The "P" stands for professional, and she commands the same respect, and obligations, as any other LPLS in Idaho. "Well," she muses, "except at conference." Because, being female, she is something of a rarity in her field. She has not met all of the people that know her by reputation. "Oh, *you're Allison!*" is a typical response from an introduction. Some of the men attending conference are not as universally known, even if equally respected. And she adds, thoughtfully, that being a woman actually has a few advantages, but only with her field partner, Mike. "He still opens the doors for me going into the courthouse, I don't have to drive very much, and he pretty much deals with the mad cows and mean dogs." Her half-moon eyes squint as she

laughs, and I laugh with her. Somehow I'm not surprised by gentlemanly conduct in her circles. I should be leaving.

But I have one more question. I want to know what she would like to tell the world about her or her profession. She looks at me over her glasses, and says bluntly, "75% of PLS are due to retire in the next few years and there is a 10 to 12 year gap to fill the coming void. In 10 years we will be so much in demand, that we may not be serving the public very well." Younger spends personal time, beyond professional development, trying to recruit new surveyors. She is working for a legacy of maps. With thanks, I said my goodbyes and departed.

The interview confirmed my supposition: that a survey must be conducted with honesty and integrity, that even something so dry as legal description could not accurately exist without the intimacy afforded by the human mind and heart. If a person in employ of the public should conduct themselves with this degree of integrity, a lifestyle dedicated to the good of the public, it ought to fall on each one of us to do the same with every cartographic endeavor, not only for our own good, but the good of our neighbors.

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We made our way to an overhang on the north side of the canyon, an overhang naturally protected from the wind and rain, and began to carefully dig in the soft earth using sticks and our hands. Grandma Allen described the strata. The grey soils were ashes, the black were charcoal, and she explained how, for hundreds of years, cook fires had been built upon this spot, and why. She identified the charred bones of birds and deer in the dirt we dug. The larger flint and obsidian arrowheads and points we recovered were explained to me in detail: what jobs they would be used for, how they were attached to shaft, what type of animal they would be directed at, and why they may have been discarded. We found one small, black glass, incredibly fine arrowhead, perfect in every way. It was delicate, very beautiful, and so very sharp and deadly—nothing like a gun. Somehow it seemed more graceful, even noble, for being more silent and cruel. "Probably for a chucker

or a sage hen," she said. "If you're careful not to cut yourself, you can keep that." *Discovery is the reward of science. Put the world in perspective. Know where to look. Share it with someone you love.* She brought an invisible world, her world, to tangible life that cold morning. Only the need for lunch finally pulled us away.

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Though the scientific disciplines of psychology and geography are as distinct as apples and, say, rocks, I believe that the line between them is debatable, perhaps non-existent. Where we are on the planet and where we are emotionally are connected. We navigate ourselves towards comfort and happiness, towards security and love. The tools we use are maps. It is imperative to reflect upon our location, destination, and motive for travel as we move, both spatially and cognitively, through a vast space of place and experience, as we move through time. Equally, we must use the critical tool of our mind to judge the accuracy of our position, and the relevance of the map we are using to arrive at our intended destination. As I ponder this connection, as I survey from the general to the specific, I find the line between those sciences blur. As I map that boundary, moving from the specific to the general, the two sciences appear to blend. Ultimately, a good map is one that gets us there, on time, in one piece, and provides for a little reflection along the way. I think Grandma Allen would agree.

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Because of human biology and our planet's atmosphere, our perception of the sky appears as a grand semi-sphere that terminates in a relatively flat plane that is earth. This universal perception has led to many erroneous models of the earth and heavens. The sun does not revolve around the earth, and the earth is not flat, as many of us know, even though it does appear that way. An honest mistake, however, I find the perception profound. I arrive at a deep and satisfactory sense of awe, from time to time, when I am outdoors, and it occurs to me that that primeval perception is uncannily similar to the shape of a human brain, my brain. While the model seems to validate the biological reality—for the sky I see and

the earth I tread is indeed only within my own mind, a product of my brain alone—I find it tantalizing to consider what is really, *really* outside of the boundaries of all my maps. Overwhelmed, I cannot but smile and wonder.

Alice Allen died when I was nineteen. Before she passed, she taught me a little of the desert she grew up in, a harsh and unforgiving land, a place she knew well. She showed me the plants and stones, and more importantly, the human aspects of the landscape, the landmarks that meant, and proved, survival. We all live in a desert of sorts, in a world of intense beauty and desolation, of boon and hardship, of legacy and imagination, of fortitude and ghosts. I did not know it then, but I became a geographer that bright and frigid day. I feel her hand upon me still, as I consider these words I write. And because of her, those lessons of awe and wonder, and the maps we made together, I know not only who but *why* it is important to be *where* I am.

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I miss you Grandma. I wish you could be here to see what I am trying to become, trying to accomplish, and how much of what I am is because of you, a continuation of you. As I venture through time into the unknown, I find solace and draw certitude knowing that your curiosity, your intellect, and your perception walk with and within me—through me. This is my inheritance: method, memory, and blood. Science, geography, and love. Thank you.

Though I would like to imagine you took my hand and led me into a wider world for my benefit alone, I know better. It was for yourself, and to spite your own mortality. You took your own hand as you took mine. You described your own fascination of the desert to the child you once were, you confirmed your own knowledge to yourself. I merely witnessed. And by witnessing, I became enchanted. I began to perceive, interpret, and “feel” the world like you. I still do. I suspect this was your intention, or at least your hope, from the onset of our trip.

I miss you Grandma. I wish you could be here to see what you have created; in a sense what you are still becoming. I am expanding the boundaries of

the map you gave to me, and I hope it describes a landscape that would please you. I, in my turn, shall pass this map to another cartographer, another adventurer, perhaps to a skeptical and pouting child that cannot see beyond the cold, star-crested desert horizon. A child, perhaps as I had been, that has yet to fathom a greater, deeper, and more meaningful world, a world beyond blood and guns and stealth and danger—a curious child, one that could stand in humble awe of a world revealed only by pause and reflection, by experience, and by careful, and caring observations. Perhaps the map shall pass to a new geographer.

Passing this map, this methodology, and such a profound sense of wonder to a child would be the most meaningful scientific contribution, the greatest gift of, or from, my life. That child may become another “great surveyor that can be trusted,” and might continue the Magnum Opus which was passed to *you* from our own half-remembered and forgotten ancestors; a history built on the shoulders of *our* legacy. In turn my descendant, your inheritor, may eventually gift another, and the knowledge and the long line remain unbroken. This is my inspiration, and my deepest hope. Method and memory and blood. Thank you.

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Margret Bergerud

English 342

Prof. David Sigler

26 Mar 2010

Wollstonecraft, Shelley, and Rousseau on Education

Throughout Mary Shelley's works we see responses to her mother. Even the topic of her most well-known novel, *Frankenstein*, is a response to her mother's death. Mary Wollstonecraft died of perpetual fever, a disease spread by doctors who neglected to wash their hands after working with cadavers, shortly after giving birth to Mary, who went on to write a horror novel about a monster created from corpses. Most of her other replies, however, are not quite so grotesque in nature. While the two women agreed in some areas, one topic Mary disagreed with her mother on quite firmly was education. Who should control it and why and how it should be undertaken are vital questions to both women, although they both answer the questions in very different manners. Throughout *Frankenstein*, we see that Mary Shelley has a very different view on the form education should take, a difference that seems largely based in Rousseau. While both women strongly link education and societal reform together, they disagree about which must come first. Additionally, we see Wollstonecraft advocating radical reform to the system, while Shelley views education as something to be seized upon by individuals.

Both women demonstrate philosophical agreement with Rousseau in some aspects of his education reform ideas; both differ with him in important ways, however Wollstonecraft places a much higher value on the family unit and its role in education than Rousseau, who advocates for state-run boarding schools, while Shelley takes his notion of an inherently good human being who is corrupted by society to the logical conclusion of simply removing an individual from

society—both are willing to accept the same primary premise, however both Shelley and Rousseau follow the premise to very different endings. Although both believe education happens outside a family unit and home, Rousseau argues that the state should have a hand in education in order to create citizens, while Shelley demonstrates her belief in education as an individual endeavor.

Many have argued that Shelley simply parrots Rousseau in *Frankenstein*. James O'Rourke writes, "It has often been assumed that Mary Shelley's adoption of Rousseauian ideas in *Frankenstein* is fairly derivative and can be easily described" (O'Rourke 543). Also important to note is that others assume that, based on her education by her father, Shelley is much more in agreement with her mother in opposition to Rousseauian ideology than in disagreement. Pamela Clemit argues throughout her article "Frankenstein, Madilta, and the Legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft" that Shelley and Wollstonecraft are both in strong opposition to Rousseau, although they disagree with different parts of his philosophies. However, Wollstonecraft's distaste for Rousseau and his philosophies is and was well-known, as are similarities between Shelley and Rousseau. However, we see that Shelley is, at times, in discord with both her mother and Rousseau, taking his theory of an innately good creature away from society to be educated while still becoming corrupt even from the very outskirts of society.

The two Marys do share one important similarity in their educational philosophies. For both Shelley and Wollstonecraft, education cannot begin without the recognition of oneself as a self-realized being. In *Frankenstein*, we see that the Creature's quest for education, as well as his tale to Victor, begins with his realization of alterity, as John Bugg points out in "Education and Exile in *Frankenstein*." The Creature starts his story with a description of the process of becoming aware of himself and his senses, and his real education begins when he observes others

and his relationship to them—as the cottagers are autonomous beings, the Creature recognizes that he, too, is a being, and this is when his study to language commences. Likewise, Wollstonecraft strongly argues that women must be recognized as humans rather than simply “women” before any meaningful education of women can happen. She writes,

One cause of this barren blooming I attribute to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers...My own sex, I hope, will excuse me if I treat them like rational creatures instead of flattering their *fascinating graces*, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood. (Wollstonecraft 1459, 1461)

Wollstonecraft’s argument is that, for consequential education to take place, it is not enough that those in charge of doing the educating recognize a woman’s place as a human, but also that women themselves must recognize it. For both Wollstonecraft and Shelley, recognition of one’s own place as an intelligent and autonomous being is absolutely essential for substantial education to even begin.

Mary Wollstonecraft was very much a product of her political times, and the blood and upheaval of the French Revolution affected the way she believed change would happen. For Wollstonecraft, changing the education system meant changing the entire system. It was not a simple matter of education reform, but rather an issue with all of the ways society thought and acted. Oddly, though, Wollstonecraft argued for a dual schooling system, in which children would be sent to country schools and also educated in their own homes. The idea that she would place faith in any government system seems rather counter-intuitive for a woman arguing that the

system must be broken down. It is also an argument that has far more in common with Rousseau than she would probably be willing to admit—although her idea is not as extreme as Rousseau's. Wollstonecraft was also a strong proponent of family units. Children, she thought, should be educated at home, “to inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures” (Wollstonecraft in London 243). In the end, Wollstonecraft places education in the hands of society, arguing firmly that it must be remade in order for the education of women can take place meaningfully, and she argues that the process of changing the way a society works and thinks will be a slow process.

Conversely, Mary Shelley places the responsibility for education squarely in the hands of individuals. Education, either for men or women, is a personal quest that absolutely takes place outside of the home and outside of one's comfort zone. We can see this ideology alluded to near the beginning of the tale, when Victor must leave home to further pursue his own education. For Victor, home was where he was allowed to study old and antiquated sciences that do not even merit actual consideration. Once he leaves his home and family, Victor's intellect is challenged and his real and meaningful education commences. However, this can only happen outside of his home and family unit. Additionally, even the rate at which Victor can process and apply information increases after he has left his home. Victor's teacher elaborates: “Why, M. Clerval, I assure you he [Victor] has outstripped us all...A youngster who, but a few years ago, believed in Cornelius Agrippa as firmly as in the Gospel, has no set himself at the head of the university” (Shelley 56). Victor's education at his home was so backwards and wrong that his teachers and peers are indeed surprised at his ability to catch up, let alone surpass them, in scientific knowledge, but the absence of his family provides a catalyst for learning.

Shelley's argument for self-sufficiency in education is made even more apparent when we learn the story of the Creature. Although he certainly models his behaviors after those he

observes, there is almost no other way to learn such basic skills other than to observe them in others, and that is certainly not the type of education that Wollstonecraft, Shelley, or Rousseau are discussing in their works.

Shelley is not making the argument that learning must take place completely devoid from contact with any others. Indeed, without the ability to observe the cottagers, the Creature would have been completely unable to educate himself in any manner. The key word, however, is “himself.” The Creature depends on no one else, and has no one else to depend on. His learning takes place after his creator has abandoned him, and he is left to rely on his own logic and intelligence to learn how to relate to the world around him and obtain literacy skills. The beginning of the Creature’s narrative is filled with recollections about his observations of other people as a learning method. In fact, Shelley makes the argument that education is inherently more valuable when one has taken it upon oneself to acquire knowledge. While Victor’s education has seemingly left him with little in the way of his humanity intact, the Creature, with his autodidacticism, has developed logical skills as well as a concept of social norms and an idea about what it means to be human. He reasons with Victor, “You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame...shall I respect man when he contemns me? Let him live with me in the interchange of kindness” (Shelley 134). The Creature has come to understand his place in the world and the people around him much more fully than Victor has in all his years of education in formal institutions.

Shelley's advocacy for self-taught education is also inherently more natural than the concept of reliance on another for knowledge. The Creature's description of how he learned speech is the same process by which children learn—they simply do not remember doing it. He describes it:

I found that these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers...by great application, however, and after having remained during the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse. (Shelley 100)

Because the Creature expects to rely solely on himself for the continuance of his education, he sees his pursuit of reading analogous to his pursuit of speech—he must teach it to himself, and he is responsible for his acquisition of knowledge.

This reading had puzzled me at first, but by degrees I discovered that he uttered many of the same sounds when he read as when he talked. I conjectured, therefore, that he found on the paper signs for speech which he understood, and I ardently longed to comprehend these also; but how was that possible when I did not even understand the sounds for which they stood as signs? (Shelley 101)

The description of the Creature making the connection between what it said and the symbols on a page is a vital step in his education—without that realization, the rest of his learning would have come to a halt. However, based on his own reason, the Creature understands not only the concept of language, but also the concept of reading.

The Creature is not only self-taught, but also takes place distinctly outside of a home and family. In this aspect, Shelley is very much in agreement with Rousseau's philosophy of separating children from their parents for the purposes of education.

Shelley and Rousseau are in agreement about the concept of man in a hypothetical "state of nature." Rousseau's premise that men are inherently good and kind is repeated by Shelley. The Creature, without and prior training or example, makes a habit of helping those he cares about (the cottagers). We first see this in the Creature's sacrifice of his own food after he sees that his actions to sustain himself are detrimental to others. "I had been accustomed, during the night, to steal a part of their store for my own consumption, but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on the cottagers, I abstained" (Shelley 99). Later, we see that the Creature not only assists the cottagers through inaction (not stealing from them), but also that he goes out of his way to make life easier when possible. "I discovered also another means through which I was enabled to assist their labours. I found that the youth spend a great part of each day in collecting wood for the family fire, and during the night, I often too his tools, the use of which I quickly discovered, and brought home firing sufficient for the consumption of several days" (Shelley 99). The Creature continues with his story, and we learn even more about his naturally helpful state.

Shelley, however, draws different conclusions from the inherent goodness of man than Rousseau does. Rousseau believed in individual goodness but collective corruptness. Shelley's conclusion, then, is to maintain goodness by maintaining "oneness." While complete seclusion is not a necessity, it is the way to keep a creature uncorrupt. Shelley's advocacy for education in the hands of the individuals takes Rousseau's theory about inherent goodness one step further than Rousseau himself, who advocated for a completely nationalized system. If a system is

corrupt by definition, because it is made up of many individuals, then any system will be corrupt, and so the best solution is to exclude an uncorrupted individual from the system.

Mary Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft are both writers who have contributed to the discussion of what an education means and how one should be obtained. Both of these women were undeniably influenced by Rousseau, who penned what was arguably the first western philosophy text regarding the topic of education. What stands out about his influence on the works of both Shelley and Wollstonecraft is response both women had to his proposals. Neither could deny the influence he had on education reform and practices, neither agreed with his final conclusions, and yet the women did not agree with each other, either. Both argued that the state, under Rousseau, would have far too much control over education, although for completely different reasons. For Wollstonecraft, the family was of utmost importance, and education should emphasize the home as well as a more formal institution, and women should be educated as a means for producing stronger marriages as a backbone for society. Shelley, however, advocates throughout *Frankenstein* for education to be placed more firmly in the hands of those who want it. For Shelley, an education is both better and more valuable for those who reach outside of their homes and families to gain it—and the most pure education in her work is attained by the being who is excluded from a family from the beginning. She follows Rousseau's logic to mean that the state should be completely removed from education, itself being inherently corrupting. It is surprising that she uses his logic and agrees with him until the very conclusion.

Both women, and indeed, Rousseau as well, use their texts to provide insights into the world and different methods of education reform. Each of these writers propose a change of the system, from completely changing it from the inside out before true education reform can even begin to completely excluding any type of system in favor of individuals seizing control over

their own learning, both women make powerful statements about the role that education plays in societies and the best ways to regulate it.

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On the Death of the Man Who Married Us
Heather Janz

Funny, Jimmy said, *what you recall of the day you marry*. He remembered how Darlene's knees popped as they prayed, bent at the altar; a secret smile passing between them, the eyelash on her cheek.

At the diner, we were rehearsing the rhetoric of marriage, six months before September, when Matt and I would wed. My stomach grumbled as we lied, independently about God and sex and the relationship between the two.

Darlene leaned on the bench, the aqua vinyl sticking to the flesh of her cantaloupe arms. At that moment, cancer jarred Jimmy, spread like an inadvertent yawn. He was so tired, that Tuesday, less than two years left to live.

It rained on the third Saturday in September, the thunder clapping like the congregation on the lawn; Matt and Jimmy, juxtaposed in lightning at one end of the aisle, and me, at the other. The first raindrops did not fall

until we'd said our vows, but skipped the poem my sister was to read, EE Cummings, *I carry your heart with me*. Jimmy's hair was as white as the meat of an onion, a kind of translucent hood. His suit was pale olive, the shirt and tie

a stormy blue, he carried a red folder, perfectly matched to the roses in my bouquet. It was like living in a snow globe, that bubble of immaculate lawn, fake lake, the fragrance of flowers flooding the blue air, and I thought, *how very like a funeral*,

but didn't think at all about the man in the olive suit. Darlene sat in the front row, her hair in rough curls, water brimming at the edge of her emerald eyes. Darlene doesn't know now that she'll remember his pink cheeks gone pale, his black eyes closed in prayer.

Karyn Resch
Paper #3 – Tobias Wolff
ENGL 393 – Joy Passanante

Jedidiah
Beloved of the Lord

The summer I was fifteen, my mother was pregnant again; it was her third pregnancy in a year and would be, I was sure, her third miscarriage in a year.

Dad and I had been running errands together on a July afternoon when the bright heat made a haze on the blacktop of the parking lots. I liked to run errands with Dad because it meant that we spent time together, just the two of us, me trailing a few feet behind him in the grocery store aisles and chattering about my books, my made-up stories, and my friends, him hunched over the cart and murmuring to himself about cents per ounce and whether or not Albertson's had a better deal on ground beef than Safeway did. I was the oldest of four children in a homeschooling family that, at the time, revolved around a hormonal woman in her second trimester, so it wasn't easy to spend time with Dad, and I needed time with him. I had a lot to talk about, and he was a patient listener, considering that my imaginary life must have held the equivalent amount of interest for him that sale prices did for me.

I had been meaning to ask him about Mom and the baby for a long time, but I was scared to, and it wasn't until we were a few blocks from home that I brought the subject up.

"Dad, are you excited that Mom's going to have a baby?"

He was even slower to answer than usual. "I don't know."

I had been thrilled, once. But now, two miscarriages later, it was hard to care. I did care, more than I wanted to, which meant that I was afraid. It wasn't that I didn't want the baby – I had told Mom, only days before she lost the first one, that I'd never wanted anything more, and I think it was still true –

but I wished that the pregnancy itself had never happened, so that I didn't have to be afraid. It was hard – it hurt – to care.

“Do you ever think what it will be like, you know, to have another kid?”

“Yeah, sometimes I do.”

“Like...well, it would be weird, wouldn't it? To have a kid so much younger than the rest of us? Katie's six...the baby would be...um, twelve, I guess, when Katie finishes high school. That's weird.”

I waited. I wanted to know that he believed there was hope enough for this baby to imagine its future. He was silent for a few more heavy seconds.

“I don't know. Sometimes I...sometimes I wonder what it will be like for Mom to have another kid. I don't think she understands everything that it means, how hard it could be. Four kids is a lot for her. Mom doesn't handle stress well.”

“Well, but, she's excited for the baby, isn't she?”

“Yes. She's very excited. She's been praying to have another child for a long time; she always wanted another one.”

There was something strange in his tone of voice that made me feel cold inside; he sounded too vulnerable, too weary, too sad to be my father. He parked the maroon Dynasty against the curb in front of the house, and I stared at the sun glinting off the hail-damaged hood to avoid looking at him.

“Dad?” My throat was throbbing.

“Hm?”

“Do you want the baby?”

He turned off the engine and sighed like a dying man. “No. No, I don't. I worry for Mom and what it will do to her...I worry that the baby will have cystic fibrosis, too. You know that the baby has a 25% chance of that, right?”

Yes, I knew. I nodded silently. My brother Andy had been diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, a chronic respiratory disease, when he was three; I was only nine years old then, so no one had explained to me what cystic fibrosis meant, why the rest of us had to be tested, or why Mom and Dad had sobbed with relief when our tests came back negative. I remembered the camera-sized machine the nurse strapped to my upper arm and the funny tingling on my skin while it measured the salt-content in my sweat; that made sense, because I knew how salty Andy's skin was. What didn't make sense was Mom clutching Andy on her lap, her shoulders shaking, her eyelids squeezed so hard the lashes disappeared, the tears seeping through anyway, while Pastor Jeff made an announcement and prayer request to the church congregation about Andy. But now, six years later, no one had explained much more to me, and I suspected that Mom wasn't answering my questions honestly; she didn't say the same things about CF as the books on her shelf did, which I read sometimes when she wasn't home.

"I worry about what that would do to our family, to have another child with CF." Dad's propped his knee against the steering wheel and ran a hand over his bald head. "And I wonder about what the baby's life would be like. Mom is angry with me for thinking that, but..." he shrugged.

With the air conditioning off, the heat in the car was suffocating; I cracked the door open. It felt like someone had seized my throat and was squeezing it, squeezing it in quick, vicious pulses.

"Oh," I said.

That was all I ever said. It was all I said the day before Easter last year, when Mom told me on the way back from the movie theatre that she had just miscarried and there wasn't going to be a baby after all. It was all I said the morning after she miscarried the second time, at twelve weeks, when she told me she almost woke me up to call 911, but then didn't, because she "didn't want me to have to deal with something like that." It had been just the two of us in the house that night; every August, smoke from forest fires pooled in the Missoula valley where we lived, but that summer it had been so thick that the mailboxes across the street were swallowed in yellow haze and the sun was red at midday,

and we'd had to leave home for a month to keep Andy's lungs from further damage. The rest of the family was still at the little cabin half an hour from the nearest phone and an hour from the nearest walk-in clinic, and Mom and I had only come back to town for her to miscarry. And she miscarried alone.

"Oh" was all I said when Mom told me, just six months after that miscarriage, that she was pregnant again. Then I'd walked to my room and sat down on the floor, bracing my back against the door, and wept for three hours, muffling the sounds with my teddy bear.

"Oh" was all that my secretive, self-absorbed, confused teenage self could ever express of guilt, shame, hurt, fear, and anger. Guilt that I had been asleep when Mom's dead baby poured out of her in the bathroom, shame that I hadn't taken care of her when I should have, hurt that God would take away something I wanted so much, fear that he would do it again, and anger, which I didn't understand.

Dad apologized and said he shouldn't have told me any of that, shouldn't have told me that he didn't want the baby. I said it was okay, said I'd rather know than not know. Then I didn't eat for three days, hoping the emptiness in my body could swallow the other emptiness, the one that felt like grief. My father didn't want his child. My parents found out about my self-inflicted starvation when I almost fainted at youth group from low blood sugar; John O'Dell, the concerned, twenty-six-year-old youth pastor, called my parents and told them, but the part they never found out was that I had a tearful breakdown in the arms of my friend Hannah, in the hallway outside the church's youth room.

Mom had been just as surprised as I was to discover that she was pregnant at the age of 39, but because she miscarried so shortly after, I don't think she fully adjusted to the idea. She always wanted more kids; every time she had a baby, she would talk about having another one. She'd had a miscarriage after my younger brother Mark, and then she'd had Andy; she'd had another miscarriage after she'd had

Andy, and then she'd had Katie. So I wasn't surprised when she got pregnant only months after the Easter miscarriage.

Dad told me that during that second pregnancy, when the smoke chased us out of town, she was struggling with the idea of having another child. She didn't want it, maybe because she was afraid, or maybe because she liked things the way they were, so when it died at twelve weeks, she blamed herself. She began praying for another chance, because she didn't want to end her childbearing years with death and she didn't want to end the growth of our family with Andy's diagnosis. Dad said he shouldn't have told me that either.

In April, when Mom told me she miscarried, I cried with her; I sat on the floor of my bedroom and she sat on my bed with her arms around me, and Dad told me that evening how much it helped Mom to cry with me. In September, when Mom told me she miscarried, I was eating cereal in the kitchen and thinking bitterly about my friends, and how none of them had missed me while I was gone because of the smoke; she stood on the other side of the kitchen in her bathrobe, her arms crossed tightly, her face haggard and lined with soul-deep exhaustion, and I didn't even go to her to hug her.

That was the day I stopped letting her touch me. For five years I flinched and shied away every time she tried to hug me, or even put her hand on my shoulder. I didn't do it on purpose; it was a physical reaction I couldn't control. Her touch made my skin crawl. I didn't hate her, but I hated her as my mother and I hated it when she tried to mother me.

It wasn't because my mother had failed me; it was because I had failed her as a daughter. The thought of her suffering what she once described to me as primeval pain was repulsive to me. I was glad I hadn't been there, and yet I felt as guilty as if I had abandoned her.

The following summer, when she was pregnant again, it was Dad who didn't want the baby whom she cherished as her redemption. They fought all the time, about everything. The whole street could hear their arguments in the evenings, when everyone, including us, opened their windows to let

the hot, stuffy air out of the house. One night, after they'd yelled at each other for a while, Dad left the house at ten o'clock and said he was going to go get drunk. Neither of my parents drinks at all, but Mom had grown up with an alcoholic father. She was furious with Dad. When I saw him the next day, I asked him if he'd really been to a bar. I didn't believe that he had gone to a bar, but I wanted to hear him say it so I could tell Mom. He said he went to the dollar theatre and saw the late showing of the movie *Troy*; I knew then that he'd just wanted to hurt her.

"Brad Pitt, right? Was it good?" I asked.

"It was alright. Pretty violent. Kind of a guy movie."

"Oh."

When I wasn't standing between Mom and Dad while they fought, trying to referee and making things worse, I would find Andy listening to them and crying in some distant corner of the house. He was afraid they were going to get a divorce, so I always told him Mom and Dad would never do that. I wondered sometimes, though, and finally I cornered Mom as she was folding laundry and asked her.

"Oh, honey, no, Dad and I aren't going to get a divorce. You know, we may not be very happy with each other right now, but your father and I are never going to get a divorce. We made a commitment to each other, and we made a commitment to you guys when we got married. We'll work things out. Don't worry; we will never divorce each other."

I nodded. At Bible study that Sunday, I started crying when I asked my friends to pray for my family.

I came of age during my mother's pregnancies.

I slipped into my first major depression when we were staying at the cabin because of the smoke – colorless, brooding, devouring depression, too heavy to throw off. Mom called it teenage angst. I had no energy and I never smiled; when I came out into the sun, it hurt my eyes and made me shrink

back as if I was ashamed to be in the light, so most of the time I hovered in the half-dark of the cabin, listening to melancholy instrumental music and making up stories about cursed heroes, evil enchantments, dragons that withered the color of the world with their fire, and demons that shriveled fair maidens with their unseen presence – the only vocabulary I had for depression. The cabin was on a dammed river, but only once do I remember leaving my lair of self-pity to play in the water with my brothers; Mom took pictures of the three of us clowning around on the water trampoline while Katie, bundled up in a life jacket on the dock, clapped her hands and whined to be included. Within hours, worn out in mind and body, I was huddling under the edge of the sloping attic roof with my notebook and my music again. Even the strangers staying in the cabin next door recognized that there was something broken about me.

I learned about life from my friends. I had a friend named Lexi, a hobbit-sized fifteen-year-old with blonde hair and harshly blue eyes, whom I knew from youth group on Wednesday and Bible study on Sunday. She told me secrets. She told me how hard it was to “stay pure” when she and her boyfriend, Alan, were alone in his house together. She told me about his ex-girlfriend’s eating disorder. She told me about her parents’ divorce and the woman her father lived with. She told me about the gun he kept in his closet, and how she’d held it to her head the year before and almost pulled the trigger. I was homeschooled, and sheltered, and I didn’t know about eating disorders, pre-marital sex, or suicide.

I didn’t know about boys, either, but I liked it when Alan’s gaze lingered on me and he told me my eyes looked like lakes in February when the ice is just beginning to crack. He broke up with Lexi, and while she became suicidal again, sobbing through her classes during the day and sobbing on her bedroom floor at night, Alan and I became friends. I didn’t know how to flirt, but I let him flirt with me; the possibility that he could like me never crossed my mind, yet I was terrified by the way Lexi hated me. The cruel blue of her eyes staring at me from across the room made me flinch if I looked that way.

I learned other things, too. Ashley, another girl at youth group, was a junior who won leads in all the school plays because of her elegant nose, her aged beauty, and her tremulous voice; her drama teacher wanted her to audition for a fine arts school in New York, but she wanted to be a nurse. Before Bible study on Sunday evenings, we would all play ultimate Frisbee for an hour, barefoot on thin grass that radiated heat. One afternoon, Ashley ripped open a scab when she swatted the Frisbee out of the air. I remember her standing by the sink in the youth room, a paper towel held idly in one hand, lips parted, eyes wide and hollow, just watching the blood run down her arm and drip off her elbow; for the first time I noticed all the raised white lines crisscrossing on her pale forearms. As we left the church in the muggy summer twilight, Marissa, her bubbly, dark-haired friend with a round cherub face, told me in a hushed voice that the white lines were scars.

Whenever I look at the raised white lines on my own arms, the first of which appeared during the autumn of my mother's pregnancy, I think of Ashley.

In mid-October my friends took me to a haunted corn maze. There were nine of us, including Lexi, Ashley, Marissa, and Hannah, all crammed into Katherine's parents' SUV. Hannah had heard the maze was so scary that sometimes people peed themselves, so she wore a pad. We went through the maze in one large clump, giggling, shrieking, and leaving creases in the backs of each other's coats with our sweaty, clutching hands; we were each afraid to be in the front and afraid to be in the back, so we made slow progress, but it was part of the fun.

A masked man jumped out of the cornstalks at us; he was short, but he had a roaring chainsaw, so we screamed, scattered, and threw ourselves on the ground. He didn't know what to do – it was his job to chase us, but we were too scared to run. He disappeared silently back into the corn and we clumped together again. Hannah scraped her cheek close to her eye when she fell.

The last stretch of the maze was lit with strobe-lights. They made me dizzy; I stumbled and caught Hannah's hand, and she led me out the rest of the way. All nine of us clustered on the gravel outside the maze, laughing and trembling, talking at the top of our voices all at once, admiring Hannah's cut, and discussing how easy it would be for a bloodthirsty creep with a real chainsaw to sneak into the maze. I couldn't catch my breath. My head was spinning and my knees were weak. The harder I tried to slow my panting, the more rapid my gasps became until I was shuddering and wheezing. I sat down on the gravel, my shoulders heaving.

They had to help me back to the car. I hyperventilated for close to two hours, until I lost feeling in my hands and feet, and even my chin and the tip of my nose tingled with pins and needles from too much oxygen. My friends were terrified, so they massaged my back and told jokes until the combination of laughing and hyperventilating almost made me black out.

Ashley rubbed my numb hands in hers. "It's at times like these," she murmured, her tremulous voice sweet and full of pain, "that I *know* I want to be a nurse someday."

I gasped out that I thought she would be a good nurse. She had a nurse's hands – smooth, strong, and long-fingered, with oval nails and reddened knuckles.

My breathing had calmed by the time Ashley and Marissa walked me to my front door – that is, walked me halfway to my front door, because I jerked away from their hands as soon as my father's silhouette appeared in the front window, so he wouldn't see me leaning on them. Mom decided it must have been asthma and gave me one of Andy's Albuterol inhalers. The medication only made my heart race. It wasn't asthma. It had been my first panic attack.

I had not panicked because of the corn maze – I craved adrenaline, and the giggling, squealing, and carrying on was just for fun. I had panicked because it was only weeks away from my mother's due date and I knew either she or the baby was going to die. My friends and I had met at the church to

carpool in Katherine's SUV that night, and while we were still waiting, I lay on my back on top of Hannah's little red car with the ice-cream cone danglely swinging from the rearview mirror. Looking at the church steeple upside down against the stars, I told Hannah, Marissa, and Ashley how scared I was. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are awkward comforters; they didn't know how to respond. It was easier for them to help me – easier for me to let them help me – when I was weak and shaking than when I bared my raw emotions. What their words couldn't do for me, their hands could. It was simpler for them, safer for me. A wounded soul is so much messier than a broken body.

All through Mom's pregnancy, I had refused to become attached to the unborn, unnamed, unrealized child inside her. At first I never mentioned the baby to anyone, to avoid having to give explanations when it died, but even after she finished her first trimester, even when her rounding belly began to show, I couldn't bear it. I was sure, irrationally, that one of them would have to die; I had been in too much pain during the past year for anything good to happen now. I was angry at God, and afraid of him. He could do as he pleased because he was God, so he was going to hurt me again and then command me to praise him as always, to love him and believe in his goodness.

The great Scripture passages of comfort tasted bitter when I read them aloud in Bible study. I read of God's great faithfulness and unfailing love in the book of Lamentations, but all I saw was the verse that came after: *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him."*

I came to hate the inexorable goodness of God.

As summer ended, the fights between Mom and Dad tapered into as much of a lull as Mom's third trimester hormones would allow, and Dad announced that he was going to name the baby Jedidiah.

"But what if it's a girl?" I asked.

“It won’t be. It’s going to be a boy and we’ll name him Jedidiah.”

“But how do you know?”

“You know how John the Baptist was born, right? How the angel came to Zechariah and told him that his wife Elizabeth was going to have a son, and he should name him John?”

“An angel told you it’s going to be a boy?”

“I think it’s going to be a boy.”

And so we began to call the baby Jedidiah, and after a few weeks it seemed so natural that the name became gender neutral in my mind. Mom rolled her eyes whenever we talked about Jedidiah because she despised the name – heaven forbid she should have a son who went by “Jedi” for short – and she was still hoping for a girl, whom she would name Kristina Joy. I thought it would be a girl just because Dad was so sure it wasn’t, but I was content to call my future sister Jedidiah for a few more months; it was easier than saying “the baby” all the time.

Once we began to use the name Jedidiah, Dad’s demeanor changed, as if the name put him at peace – the name of his unborn child, a promise of life. He was gentler with Mom, and he talked about Jedidiah all the time. One night in the car, I asked him if he had changed his mind about the baby.

“Let me tell you about what God did, Karyn,” he said. He looked like a man about to become a father – unsmiling, masculine, and eager. “A few weeks ago I was praying about the baby, just, ah...just saying that I didn’t see how there could be anything good in this and I didn’t know why God allowed it to happen or what he was going to do. And then it was like God showed me just one way that he could possibly use this baby, that I hadn’t even thought of, not as if this was *the* reason for Jedidiah to be born, but as if God was saying ‘Look, this is just one way that it *could* be, just one of many, and you have no idea what I’m doing, because I am God, and my plans are so much greater than yours.’”

“What was it he showed you?”

Dad's voice was tender. "I can't tell you."

"Why not? Please can you tell me?"

"No. No, I can't tell you now. Maybe someday."

Dad would only explain that the name Jedidiah meant "Beloved of the Lord." It came from the book of 2nd Samuel: King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and she conceived, so he had her husband murdered and he married her. As punishment for his sin, God took the life of the baby she bore. *"Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah."* Dad said that Jedidiah was a baby of mercy, a baby that should never have been born, and yet he was the one whom God chose to become King Solomon, one of the greatest men the world has ever known; the Lord had a glorious future for the child King David did not deserve.

There is another verse in Lamentations, a verse I never saw: *"Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love."*

I stayed home on the night of Halloween – a chilly Sunday night – to hand out fun-sized Snickers and Crunch bars to the trick-or-treaters. I didn't dress up, but Mom borrowed a huge, hideous, hunter's-orange sweatshirt from me and taped black construction-paper shapes to her swollen, nine-month belly and paraded herself as a giant, ornery jack-o-lantern. The next morning, a couple hours after Dad left for work, she called us into the living room and told us she was in early labor. Andy curled up on the couch and started to cry, Katie screamed and danced with excitement, her blonde braids whipping around her face, and Mark went into shock.

"What? No you're not. You're joking. You're not really, are you? No, you're joking. Right?"

I just walked quietly into my room and sat down on the floor with my teddy bear, my hands icy and sweating.

Dad came home from work early and put our plans into action, carting each of us kids off to the houses of various friends, calling the midwife, calling Mom's best friend, Marlis Walter, to come over and assist, and taking care of Mom by trying to get her to eat a little before her labor became too intense. I went to spend the night with Jerilyn, the pastor's daughter; I was afraid of Mom's pain, and I wanted to get away to where I would be safe from it.

It was only half an hour after Jerilyn and I had gone to bed when the phone rang; we were sharing Jerilyn's cushy, canopied bed and were nowhere near being asleep. I yelped in excitement and held my breath, listening as Mrs. Valentine answered. We heard her coming downstairs.

"She's right here. I don't think they're asleep yet," she said into the phone.

I sat up.

"Karyn, your dad's on the phone!"

She held out the phone; the numbers glowed orange in the dark, and she was smiling.

"Dad?" I was trembling, too excited to notice if I was happy or scared.

"Karyn." He sounded dead tired, and a little giddy.

"Is it a boy or a girl?"

I could feel him grinning on the other end. "It's a boy," he said in a soft, weary voice.

"It's a boy? It's a boy! Can I come home? I want to come home!"

"I don't know. Let me see how things are going. I'll call back."

"Okay. Wait. Daddy!" My voice was shaking.

"Yeah?"

"I love you, Daddy!"

“I love you, too. Talk to you soon.”

Jerilyn and I were beside ourselves, so we left her bedroom and went outside in our pajamas. I was barefoot and her bushy red hair was spilling everywhere, a halo of frizz around her head. The steeple of the church across the street cast a towering shadow over the yard and a freezing breeze whisked through my t-shirt. I shivered, half-delirious with adrenaline. It was a boy. I had a brother. I had a new brother, my mother was alive, and I wanted to tell someone. But it was almost eleven o'clock on a Monday night, and no one in a quiet neighborhood built around a church is outside at eleven o'clock at night.

Just then, though, we saw Mike Wornath walking his ridiculous little tan fur-ball dog, Bubba, into his garage. He lived next door to the Valentine's, and his wife Nell and her sister Kathy directed the children's ministry at church. Mike was a little man, wiry and not quite five-foot-six, but he had a firm handshake, a gentle way of talking, and a pair of the most genuine, welcoming eyes I have ever seen. Jerilyn and I ran across the frosty grass, icy dew climbing up our pant-legs.

“Mr. Wornath!” I called.

“Well, hello, ladies! What are you doing?”

“Guess what? My mom just had a baby and it's a boy!”

“Well! Congratulations, Miss Resch! That's wonderful!”

Mrs. Valentine made us come back inside, but then Jerilyn's little sister Victoria came into her bedroom to join our giggling celebration, and then Olivia, who was only eight, wanted to get out of bed, too. Tense and disapproving, Mrs. Valentine told us to be quiet; it was school night, after all. Just then, Dad called again to say that I could come home if I still wanted to, and Mrs. Walter was going to drive up and get me. I think Mrs. Valentine was more than happy to get rid of me because of how much I was disturbing her household.

It was strange to come home so late at night, and even stranger to have no one was there but the grown-ups. At first, Mom didn't want me to come downstairs; she was worried that all the blood would be too much for me. I was a little nervous then, because she was making such a big deal about the blood, but as I stood at the top of the stairs I heard soft, hiccupping, infant cries. I begged. Dad overrode Mom and I came down. There was blood, and there was a lot of it, but I didn't think about it too much. Only once, on my way to the bathroom to fill a glass of water for Mom, did I get a nasty shock: as I passed the back table I glanced, did a double take, and realized that the weird mass of pale, bloody matter floating in a salad bowl was the placenta.

The air in the basement was as hot and thick as a rainforest and I started sweating; the gas fireplace was turned up high. The thin, graying midwife Michelle, her greasy-haired hippie-apprentice Charlotte, and matronly Mrs. Walter all bustled around merrily, women at home in their age-old role of presiding over birth; Dad was an anomaly, and he looked like he knew it, too, in the way he kept trying to maneuver his massive frame out of everyone's way. Mom, naked except for a black-and-white striped bra (which she later handed down to me while she was in nursing bras a size or two bigger), was still bleeding a little – she kept wincing, and her skinny thighs, spattered with blood, quivered. But curled against her breast was my brother, a tiny bundle with a red, squished face peeking out from beneath a purple cap. His head, the size of a grapefruit, was too small for the cap, so it puckered at the top like an elf's hat.

“Do you want to hold him?” Charlotte asked me. I nodded, breathless.

I sat down on the couch, tucking my bare feet under me, and waited while she picked him up and brought him to me. His fragile arms and legs were curled inside his sack-like onesie and his weight settled intimately against me so that I didn't dare shift under him. He was half an hour old, and he didn't have a name yet.

“He’s looking at you. He probably thinks you’re his mom,” said Charlotte. The baby’s blue eyes watched me, unblinking. Birth matter still clung to the skin of his forehead at the edge of the purple cap, and his distorted newborn expression with the bunched lips made him look mad about no longer being in the warm, wet womb.

Across the room, Mom said something, and the baby started to cry – thin newborn wails, loud and high.

“Uh-oh, he heard his mom and knows it’s not you!” Charlotte chuckled. She lifted him from my arms and took him back to Mom.

A couple hours later, after measuring and weighing and taking pictures, when Mom was in her bathrobe and some of the mess was cleaned up, and I was beginning to swallow back yawns, I brought up the issue of the name. I was uncomfortable having a nameless human being in the house; namelessness is like nakedness.

“What are we going to name him?”

“How ‘bout Jedidiah?”

“No, Paul! I hate that name! No...he can’t be Jedidiah. It’s not right,” Mom murmured.

We all paused, and Dad and I gazed at Mom while I thought about how surreal the process of naming is and how inseparable I was from my own name and how within moments my brother would be bound the same way for the rest of his life.

“What about Joel?” I suggested. The name came from nowhere; we had never mentioned it in all our months of name-searching.

“Joel. Joel Resch,” Mom whispered to the baby.

“No, not Joel! That’s a sissy name. I don’t like it,” said Dad.

“I like it,” said Mom. “It’s better than Jedidiah, anyway.”

“We could name him Joel Jedidiah.”

Mom and Dad looked at me, Dad resisting, Mom accepting, neither saying anything, until finally Dad said, "We'll decide in the morning. Have to have the whole family approve it."

Mom called the baby Joel all night long, so by morning, he had no chance of getting a different name. He was already Joel to her, Joel Jedidiah.

Sometime in the next few days, I asked Dad if he could tell me now what God had shown him when he first started using the name Jedidiah. Dad said he still couldn't tell me, but I made him promise to someday.

Joel had to be tested for cystic fibrosis just like the rest of us, but he was healthy and perfect and beautiful. While he was still an infant, I was the only one who could sing him to sleep at naptime; I also introduced him to opera music (I was in the middle of my brief Puccini phase) and tried to convince Mom that he liked it. Sometimes when Joel was restless and crying, Dad would recline in the arm chair, perch Joel on his chest, and then flap his short arms so that from behind it looked like Joel was drumming on his own, and the whole time Dad would chant, "I'm a little drummer boy, banging on my drum!" When Joel began to crawl, we had to childproof the house all over again and we were all astonished to realize how un-childproof it had become in the seven years since Katie was born. Then, when Mom wasn't looking, Mark introduced Joel to coffee at the ripe old age of ten months. He was our favorite, and we spoiled him beyond repair; Dad liked to say that Joel would end up in prison someday because of it, but he always said it affectionately.

Having a newborn was so demanding on Mom that she couldn't stay on top of my homeschool assignments, and by spring she had an unread stack of my papers more than half an inch thick; I gave her grief about it, but I worked just as hard on the papers as I would have anyway. As a Christmas present the following year, she put all my papers, read and graded, beneath the tree on Christmas morning. A year and a half later, when Joel was two years old, I left for college. When he was born, I had

calculated our ages in my head: I figured that I would finish college as he started Kindergarten; he would probably be closer in age to my own children than he was to me, since I would be thirty-four years old when he graduated from high school. I had known all along that he might never remember when I lived at home with him, but I prayed he would still recognize me when I came home for the holidays. I took a picture of him with my hot pink cell phone on the morning I left home and told him I would call him on it all the time.

Since it was stirred up the year of my mother's three pregnancies, the tumultuous disarray of emotions and ricocheting thoughts in my brain never settled down, and once I left for college I lost my ability to contain it. My freshman year passed in a horrible blur of panic attacks, depression, reckless energy, vicious long-distance arguments with my parents, and mind-games with myself. I did not know I was depressed any more than I had known it in high school, and I did not know that the fifty times I collapsed, gasping, shaking, and half-conscious, were panic attacks any more than I had known it at the corn maze. Instead, I saw doctors, had blood tests, wore a heart monitor for a month until the adhesive scarred my chest, and believed I was dying. There were moments, though, when I remembered waking nightmares, visions, and voices, and thought I might be demon-possessed. I came home that summer, my life mangled, expecting my neurologist to diagnose me with a terminal condition – even hoping he would, to prove I was sane – and instead my parents took me to a psychiatrist who told me I was making everything up because of my chronic, dysfunctional need for attention. My parents, she told me, had caused all this by homeschooling me, and my faith had crippled my ability to function as a normal human. After three sessions of therapy she pronounced me cured, but all she had achieved was shattering my psychological world. She took every truth I had ever known – moral, spiritual, mental, experiential, relational – and turned it inside out, until I no longer had even a reference point for reality.

My battle with trauma only began after I left her office; I began seeing a counselor just to undo the damage she'd caused.

Having me in counseling shook the entire family. Therapy was something we joked about; whenever one of us complained of injustice, Mom and Dad said we could send them our therapy bills someday. They had never expected to actually have any. Dad blamed himself and claimed he had emotionally abandoned me during the years of Mom's pregnancies and miscarriages, and Joel's infancy; Mom blamed her temper and her homeschooling, and a myriad of non-existent abuses that must, she believed, have happened somewhere in my past. She questioned me: had I ever been sexually abused? Did I remember absolutely *everything* that happened on this or that particular time I had been away from home? Was I hiding some traumatic experience out of shame? But there was nothing, no explanation and no precedent for my behavior. I never rebelled, I never drank or did drugs, I never messed around with guys, and I was a flawless student. I had always been a model young person, adored by all the adults who knew me; why, then, was there something so wrong inside me?

At the end of the summer, three weeks before I returned to school for a second year, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and a severe panic disorder. But there were other things, too. I confessed my motherlessness. From the night five years ago that Mom had miscarried alone, I had, in blaming myself for not taking care of her, made myself motherless. In trying to make up for rejecting her when she had needed me, I had refused to let her take care of me. Children are not meant to mother their parents; it had turned into a kind of loathing, so that I could not even let her touch me. Without my counselor's prompting, I wrote her a letter that broke her heart with its honesty – I had kept my secrets well. When she could bear to face me again, several silent, dreadful days after reading the letter, we began learning to touch each other. When I forgave her and forgave myself, I could let her embrace me – let her become my mother again – and I did not recoil.

Dad took me out to Applebee's so we could talk. We had virgin margaritas and French fries and talked about bipolar disorder, how it has a 20% fatality rate – one in five die by suicide – and how it would affect my relationships with friends, with a man, with my children, and with the Lord. We talked about when it started: my first depression at the age of fourteen, at the cabin during the summer of smoke, and even before that, the deep melancholy and irrationality of my childhood that had somehow gone unrecognized. We talked about the babies Mom lost, how much it hurt us, and all the things that, as a family, we hadn't said about those experiences. Dad apologized for saying more to me than I, as his daughter, had needed to know.

"Daddy, remember when I asked you where the name Jedidiah came from?"

"Yeah..." He stared at the ketchup smears on the nearly empty plate of fries

"Remember when you said that God showed you something, something about how he might use Joel, and you said you couldn't tell me?"

"Yeah, I remember."

"And remember how I made you promise to tell me someday?"

He nodded.

"Will you tell me now?"

He took a deep, slow breath. "I don't want to say more than I should again."

"Please."

"Well...he showed me...he said 'What if this baby –'" Dad started to cry. "'What if Joel – will be a comfort to you when Andy dies.'"

I looked down, blinking. "Oh." Tears fell on the table.

As Joel has grown up, he has begun to look like Andy – they have the same chin, the same round cheeks and huge bright eyes, the same light brown hair, the same curve of their noses and necks, the

same bone-structure. Whenever Joel sees pictures of Andy as a little kid, he is convinced they are pictures of himself, and with good reason; if we compare pictures of them at the same age, they are indistinguishable. I walked downstairs not long ago and saw them sitting side by side, playing video games together while Andy did his lung treatment in the vibrating vest attached to his physical therapy machine. Their profiles so close together made me choke.

No member of a family can replace another, because each one carves out their own place, in their own shape. Someday there will be a hole in the middle of our family, but I would rather not disrespect what was there by trying to fill it.

I wiped the tears off my face and waited, wrestling myself back into control.

“Daddy, will you please tell me the truth about Andy. I always wanted to know, and you guys, you and Mom, you never told me. I’d go do research, and then I’d ask Mom, and she’d make up some crap about it being false, or outdated, or whatever,” the words tumbled. “But I knew it couldn’t all be. And every time I asked, or even brought it up, she’d get so mad and I’d get in trouble, and I’m sick of not knowing. I’m sick of looking like an idiot when people ask me about my brother and I can’t even explain it. I’m sick of being surprised when I see things.”

During the winter of my freshman year, I sat in a cozy coffee shop, steaming up the windows as I did homework with a few friends. One of my friends was studying for medical school and her textbook lay open on the table. I caught the words “cystic fibrosis” on the page and decided to read it; cold fury started in the pit of my stomach and mounted to the back of my mouth as I read. Liars. My parents were liars.

Dad sighed. “Well, what do you want to know?”

“How long...” I cleared my throat. “How long is he going to live?”

It is hard to make sense of the fact that my lively, obnoxious, teenage brother who carts AirSoft AK47's all over the house and clicks them until it drives me to distraction has a disease that kills. I am used to his treatments, his doctor's appointments, his pills; I am used to talking about the consistency of mucus or the quality of his cough or whether or not his meals have enough calories; I am used to hand sanitizer in every corner of the house, to flu shots, to hospitality hindered by health concerns and social plans disrupted because one of my friends has a cold and therefore can't come near our house. I have never viewed these things as strange.

But his body will degenerate. His lungs will deteriorate and lose their capacity, his digestive system will grow weak, each illness will leave more scars, and eventually he will suffocate in his own mucus. Dad said it isn't as simple as living and then dying. The road between the two is long, and it's an agonizingly gradual process for someone with cystic fibrosis. When he said that, I realized my whole family will be there for that process – we will all have to see it, and Andy will know that we are seeing it – someday, when it happens. And it will.

There are some things you can't think about every day.

Andy is glad I have bipolar disorder, and I don't blame him. He's glad that he has someone to share his disabled status in the family, someone else who gets reminded to take their medication, someone to tease, someone to laugh at because I might die young, too. I let him. He can laugh, tease, boast that cystic fibrosis is worse, and say whatever he wants about me, because I know what he really means. He cries on my lap even now when he hears Mom and Dad, voices tense, discussing whether to take him into the ER or wait until morning to call his doctor. He's young – as young as I was when the miscarriages started – and he doesn't know how to explain things, so I'm the only one who knows he isn't just crying for himself; he's crying because of what cystic fibrosis does to our family.

“Dad, how much of this does Andy know?”

My father looked at me, broken, his eyes red-rimmed. The hair at his temples and on his chin seemed grayer than it had a year ago. “How do you tell a kid that he’s middle-aged?”

I gritted my teeth; I didn’t want to cry anymore. “He’s going to find out sooner or later, and he should hear it from his parents or he’s going to be mad at you for the rest of his life for lying to him.”

“I don’t want to tell him too soon. You know how scared he is of dying, how much he thinks about things...It’s going to be very hard for him to know.”

“You need to tell him.”

“Would you want to know if you were him? Would you have wanted to know when you were his age that you were bipolar? That some of this stuff was going to happen?”

I didn’t have to hesitate. “Yes. Yes, I would have wanted to know,” I growled. “I wish I had. I wouldn’t have been so confused. I would have known what to do.”

Dad rubbed his hands over his face.

Death is present in my family – the deaths of as many unborn babies as living ones, Andy’s death, my death, the knowledge that children grow into, that their parents will not always be there, a knowledge my own parents are now facing with Grandpa’s cancer. Few deaths are quick. The miscarriages were quick, a mercy for the innocents involved. Cystic fibrosis kills slowly. Bipolar disorder, when it kills, kills just as slowly – the long agony of months of depression, stabbed with hot, bloody mania, devastation after devastation as you strangle not on mucus, but on chaos, inside where no one can see, until it crushes you and you turn to the pills you stashed in preparation for a moment like this, or the gun you keep under your bed...in case, just in case.

And then there is Joel – Jedidiah, the beloved of the Lord, the love of God alive in our midst. In the middle of miscarriages, genetic disorders, reluctant parents, a melting marriage, mental illness – the

dysfunction of a “good, moral, religious family” (there is no such thing; there are only real people) – we received a child who should not have been born, a child we did not deserve.

Lamentations, a poem of lament, was written by a prophet who saw too much sorrow and death. He wrote, *“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness, O God.”*

A few Sundays ago, I called home to wish Joel a happy fifth birthday, with a little knot in my stomach because I couldn’t be there to watch him cackle as he opened presents or spit all over his cake when he tried to blow out the candles.

“Hi, Joely! Happy birthday, buddy!”

“Thanks, Karyn. Karyn, it’s my birthday.” His diction is clearer every time I talk to him.

“I know it is! How old are you?”

“I’m five. And Karyn? Know what I got?”

“What did you get?”

“I got a bow-n-arrow!”

“Wow! Really?” I laughed. He had been telling me about the bow and arrow for weeks.

“Yeah, and, and, and, Karyn, guess what? I got uh, the, the cooker-thing, the cooker play-dough.

And it makes French fries!”

“That’s really cool. Did you know I’m going to be home from college soon?”

“Um, yeah, I knowed that already. Um, how many church-days is it ‘til you come home?”

“Two more church-days. Will you make me food with your play-dough when I come home to see you?”

“Yeah, and you have to bring me a present. If, Karyn – if it’s not too ‘spensive. But it if *is* too ‘spensive, then that’s okay. But if it’s not too ‘spensive, then you’d better!”

“Okay, I will. I’ll bring you a present when I come home.”

“Um, Karyn? I don’t want to talk anymore. I want to go play with my bow-n-arrow.”

“Oh, okay. I love you!”

I don’t think he heard me. I listened as he passed the phone off to Mom and then started hollering at Andy in the background.

Over the phone, Mom told me that a few weeks ago Dad and Joel had been out in the yard, playing football in the fallen leaves. She watched them through the front window for a while, tackling each other, chasing each other, laughing and shouting. When they came in, pieces of dead leaves were stuck to Dad’s ratty sweater and Joel’s fleece, their cheeks and noses were pink, and Dad was huffing like an old man – he’s closing in on fifty now and strangers think he is Joel’s grandpa. Joel heard Andy playing video games over the loud buzz of his physical therapy machine in the basement, and went down to play with him (on a controller which Joel has yet to realize is disconnected). Dad picked up Joel’s discarded jacket.

“I’m so glad, Kerry,” he said, “I’m so glad we had him.”

Justin Korn
Joy Passanante
English 493

Fragments

“Life is something that happens when you can’t get to sleep.”—Fran Lebowitz

And standing here I know this moment is poignant. My finger pressed brick red hard against the thin grey button—the source of power—and the faint green light still glowing the only glow, which paints my joker smile lime in the domed TV reflection. The simple block letters spell “Panasonic” but I read Panic. In the middle is a son. Panic son. Words that saw hope favorably rendered like the soon burgeoning sun spilling globs of eastern rays westward down the blue spine of Graham Peak. Everything solidifies into focus, smoke crystallized in midair. Bent slightly, all weight rests in the tip of my index digit pointing into forever—a motion always forward. I know if I move my finger, I would fall soundlessly through the floor, the foundation, the dirt, and into free floating space—but I let go. Reality is the sharp driveway gravel beneath green feet dusted brown. Still that word *power*. I let go and all that happens is I fall. Not through the floor but to it, my face bouncing off the Pergo wood. In that instant the illusions fade and the happiness ends.

Sleep.

I wake up. Two hours is all it takes to change. The pair of hours are enough to erase four straight sleepless nights. A theme of inconstancy has developed: three to four restless nights seeded with meager minutes of unconscious every forty-eight hours; up to six straight days followed by a ten hour crash; one week of five hour sleeps shortening to three the next, then to none. But what is constant, is poor quality and little quantity. The opaque veil of frantic haze, my

expected stage, has split apart like Broadway drapes. First, the spotlight strikes my eyes, blinding me with an actor's confidence—seen but not seeing—then, my stomach tightens as shapes blur into focus. Awakening me is the slow pendulum tick of the wooden wall clock coloring the quiet morning with regular rhythmic splashes. My left arm—locked and tingling—is trapped beneath my hips and I am increasingly aware of pain sprouting from the right of my jaw where my face is supported by my right forearm. I turn to my back and begin massaging movement into my shoulder. A chilled breeze blows through a cracked kitchen window, delivering the soft burble of Smith Creek. The curtain to the glass sliding door is pulled open and the morning orb has stretched the pointed A-frame's double across a frost glazed lawn and down the dusty driveway—drawn past sad wood posts, the single cord of braided barbed wire marking property, and into the neighbor's greening field. Small patches of vapor ascend like misty phantoms wherever light touches the damp weeds. Cougar Creek hills are lit down to the base and the first lucent bars are probably dancing on the waters of the Coeur d'Alene northfork. I rise to my feet, working tender circles with my twitching shoulder. Where my form touched the floor a faint ring of moisture is fading like the rain washed ghost of a chalk tracing. Thin straight arms of the clock point out the time. It is six a.m. and another beautiful day in this hellish paradise.

It would be hard to pinpoint when sleeping first became a problem. To think of it now only invites the premise it was always an issue, which might have personally gratifying merits, but is unlikely. There was certainly difficulty. Any dictionary will widely define insomnia as abnormal, habitual inability to fall or remain asleep for sufficient lengths of time. Severity of cases depends on consistency of occurrence. The mildest form lasts days to weeks; anyone turning circles in bed for a few days has met insomnia. It dominates a middle-ground as both

confrontable symptom and untraceable disorder. A point of contention exists as to whether insomnia can truly be classified, due to the grand array of other maladies which accompany. Generally, sleeplessness is initiated by previous medical conditions, but chronic insomnia has no specific known origins, often occurring as an unprovoked disease. Depression is the foremost, and almost guaranteed, side effect (sometimes considered the cause, actually). Other side effects include weight gain, weight loss, memory loss, intellectual impairment, physical impairment, heart disease, diabetes, and psychological disorders. Insomniacs say and do things they can't always remember. And *I* have been ever-conscious of my appearance, as if anyone could easily spot inner instability in my bleary eyes and ruffled hair. Though once, I read a research article conducted by the British Psychological Society, which reported the same curious concern among many insomnia sufferers. However, the study concluded that even chronic insomnia had little to nonexistent effects on outward image. For all purposes, an insomniac is unspottable. I would have more luck in deciding when sleeping ceased being a concern.

I can think back to age seven, sitting on the dark stair just above the landing. Between the slope of the stair and the ceiling formed by the second floor, graced by an ample dominion of elevation over the living room, I can steal a few opening minutes of *The Simpsons* before my eight o'clock bedtime curfew becomes enforced.

"Get to bed," my mother's voice rises sternly from beneath me. She has spotted my small foot swaying in the open space above. I can see her fully on the couch, her mouth a straight line, black hair sheared shoulder length—no cartoon compassion. I say nothing but pull my leg out of sight. I know she can still view my shadowed form from the waist down, my upper half blocked by the steps, but feel well hidden since she can't see my face.

“Justin Edward,” she counters, “do you want me to get your father?” She waits for movement, a reply. I have never understood the threat inherent by invocation of my middle name. I immediately access visions of my grandfather—the origin of that calling—a man with a temper like a broke-dick bulldog, a tendency to mumble, and a countenance hard as the California Redwoods he’s carved from. He was a straight-backed man—in memory always thin white hair ordered above wavy blue eyes, which shift steadily beneath lenses I’ve never seen removed—who warped with time and bent forward, but still appeared dignified and straight.

I resemble one relative particularly, if only by personality. The nearly mute mental image of my father’s father shuffling, brooding, shaking his limbs, hearing-aid intentionally turned low, is a reflection. It is a simple and often startling realization. The childish grunt and point, and subsequent, immediate reach across the table in lieu of *pass the salt*. Even the flat, unpandering nature of his voice mirrors my own. My father has stories of his father’s depression. Manic slumps which removed my grandfather’s ability to communicate and even his ability to function. “There were days when he wouldn’t (couldn’t) get out of bed. Just stayed there.” I inevitably connect my own occasional inability to find my feet firmly. The twisting inhumanity of the constantly wakeful state can be inexplicable. Time becomes a neutrality and its passage can only be judged in measurements of daylight and darkness. Background is intangible and only that directly ahead matters. A kind of ill prepared calm—veiled by struggling, sluggish concentration—or unperceived danger. Many sufferers of persistent insomnia describe objects blending together or moving in surreal ways, leading to lapses in judgment. A sleep deprived brain becomes less capable of responding correctly to an emotional situation, or even qualifying its response. Lack of sleep can even trigger psychosis and has been a common method of

interrogation, likening it to torture. On days when my grandfather couldn't find a way from the gloomy grove of his bed, was he sleeping?

“Did you hear me,” my mother calls, knowing full well I have. There is little danger of my father—snoring gently in an armchair with mouth agape, one hand up his shirt and resting on his chest—being awakened by my mother. Even in the unlikely scenario where my father is roused into coherence, he is no more convincing than her. The persuasive part of this argument blooms from the prospect of disobeying them both at once. “One...two...,” she pauses. I contemplate the count.

Silence

“Three...fo-o—,” she trails off as I move upstairs. In my room above the living space I can hear familiar animated voices, now and then interrupted by familiar laughs. Down the length of a few two-by-fours in the middle of the floor are small peepholes hollowed by ants or worms. Lying on my stomach, I can watch television slantwise as long as nobody turns off the power or stands in the way. But it's a strain to see through such tiny portholes and I'm tired after ten minutes.

I have a new book. It's about a boy and a badger. The boy is strange and quiet, almost mute. But he has a gentle hand for animals: mice scamper toward him from golden straw stacks in the barn, the horses stamp politely in his presence, and the chickens flock around him as if he were shedding bits of grain. His mother understands the odd habits; she speaks only kind words of encouragement. His father is not as sensitive, pushing the meek and frail child with chores or discipline. At the other end, the badger's mate has been trapped and killed. Forced to feed three cubs alone, she forages overtime. Before long she, too, walks into a biting metal tether. She's stuck for three days. By the time she has gained resolve to gnaw through her three trapped toes

and limped home to the den, all her still-warm kittens have starved. She licks her oozing wound and passes into weary sleep. Life is tough on the Canadian grasslands.

As nine o'clock sneaks in, my siblings are responding to their curfew. The badger-boy duo has formed when the boy—following and imitating a prairie chicken through the tall, waving strands—became lost. Out on the plain he cannot see his home and has no idea how far he clucked and flapped. He has never been more than a mile from the farmhouse. A large, dark storm looms over him, quickly bringing lightning and dense sheets of rain.

I know my sister's footfalls (short, even, deliberate) from my brother's (flat and straightforward); both are moving past my room and down the hallway. The light projects their shadows beneath my door as they pass—my sister to the bathroom, my brother to his own solitude. Locks click simultaneously. A faucet turns on, splashing onto the pages through the walls, mixing with the story downpour and drawing me briefly back into my room. Briefly.

As the boy begins to stumble, frightened, across a directionless shifting forest of grass, he wanders over a burrow. He wishes for a bed, a warm place to curl asleep with roof overhead. With no trees or structures in sight he takes refuge underground. The hollow is damp and dirty but bedded with soft, insulating reeds. He curls up scared, listening to the steady trickle of rainwater running down the angled entrance. It's then that the badger arrives home out of the storm. There is a pause; the boy leans quietly against the far dirt wall while the badger stands with one paw lifted gingerly. A flash illuminates the small den and the boy clearly sees the injured foot. He reaches his hand out slow. He is not timid but there is tension. The badger makes a soft growl, then—

“Lights out” my mother says, peeking her head into my room. Her vast brown eyes are tamarack roots tapped into her head. I am grown from those same colors. She brushes the wall

switch and night is as dark as the void after a sudden spark. My thumb is still in the crease, marking my page. I was too entwined with the story to hear her steps (free but carefully placed) moving upwards.

Evening sounds. Bats chittering back and forth in the eaves. The dog's nails scratching restlessly across hardwood. My room faces west with two ten-foot-tall rectangular windows, which appear squashed in at the top as the triangular house reaches its pinnacle. From outside, the sliding glass door centered beneath the two upper windows—a foot of separation running vertically between them—makes the house look like a wide-eyed, noseless, grinning head. I would be standing in the left eye. No moon and the hills are barely silhouetted against the blue-black sky. Our neighbor's lamp post dusts a gilded mist over the black needles of a nearby yellow pine. The sharp shape of trees.

I flop to my side on the mattress against the window's base. A thump like a house pet under car tires. The capability of darkness to mask the face of places familiar in brightness has always captivated me. Too many hours spent watching dimness settle on murk. Night exploration is my template for transcendence, the act which allows me to accept my sleeping habits as atrocious absolution; constant resurrection. Whether my exploration was that of nature or of the mind, the execution of discovery passes time. Ten o'clock and ten minutes past. I stand, cross the room, and pop the lights on.

When morning breaks, the badger and boy have been sharing the burrow for nearly two months. After losing her cubs and finding the strange mud caked child crouched in her den, the badger took the boy's survival as her motherly duty. One morning as they wind down a well worn game trail toward a waterhole, the wind bristles the reeds together and carries a musky smell. An animal smell. Domesticated. But it passes below them and dissipates into the wide

prairie. The badger waddles without limp and the boy follows behind, hardly recognizable beneath filthy, ratted hair and earth-brown dust coat. At water's edge they kneel together, lapping the surface. Something other than the wind rustles in the reeds and now they are both aware of it. Emerging from the grasses on the far side of the pond, slunk low and menacing, is a large black dog. The beast is the roving pet of a neighboring farm and known for its viciousness. Its coat is short, wiry, and shabby; the matted fur is slicked flat but bristling in clumps. If not for the hardy form and blood-red collar, the mutt could be wild. It snaps its mouth open and shut, revealing pointed, broken teeth. They engage as the dog rushes them. At first the bigger, more powerful canine is gaining advantage, utilizing height to flip the badger. But as the dog moves in for an underbelly attack, the boy latches on its rear leg, biting down. When the mutt rears back in pain, the badger's crushing jaws find its throat.

The house is rising with the sun and I can smell the morning smells. Coffee. The wet lawn. Soon my mother will knock on my door—thirty minutes before my siblings, my only chance at hot water in the morning. I was vaguely aware of my father leaving in the early hours when light was just showing. I had watched his taillights bumping down the driveway until trees took them out of sight. Downstairs the refrigerator opens. After showering I'll catch the bus and ride downriver. Never during the course of the night did I think of sleep. I'm not tired and I can't wait to read more. I glance at the time digitally stamped on the face of my alarm.

Six o'clock.

Perhaps that's where the difficulty started. One night with a good book in good comfort. But here at age thirteen, waking up against the stone hearth and the throb in my shoulder, the tide of evening trouble has swelled high without relent and refuses to crash, threatening with an ever grander wall. Regardless of my outer appearance—exceptional grades and well-fed manner—I

am bending and a crack has developed, like a branch slowly overloaded. Strange how trees can survive with branches pruned. Where a crack seems damaging, I find comfort in its oddity. If one of my limbs were clipped off, I like to think I could direct the energy it took to feed that piece, and apply it towards upwards growth, that I could admirably travel beyond previous standards by altering my potential and perception, just by reaching for light. But tonight I don't sleep. And tomorrow. And so on, and on, and on.

I'm crouched in the pantry inlet created between the washing machine and staircase, hiding. Across the room the tan pull-string curtain, rubber-backed and evil, leers at me. Feral sweat rolls between my eyes. A videogame demon told me my soul was trapped inside the console. I get it back if I win. Lost forever if I don't. What do you say to that? You say nothing and fight—or bolt. My lungs are trying to burst from my chest. Big panicked heaving. And in the chair in front of the TV, controller in hand, I jumped, nearly shrieked as that woven window rug tried to wrap around me. It just pulled away at the bottom and swooped towards me like clouds enveloping a mountain, but not nearly that peaceful. Not that I trust laundry any more than curtains. I sneak to the front entry while it's not watching; it flutters only slightly when I twist the door handle. Outside summer grass grows blue and the deck creaks like the creek. So much for it. The lawn all suited up with yellow buttons. Behind me, the porch torch burns out and blanched moon cobwebs cling to the pallid sphere, hanging as filaments which brush the ground and gently bleach the darkened world. No matter how I jump and flail before the motion sensitive eye, it can't see me—like I'm not here. God, I'm begging for concrete and there it is beneath me. What are you, silent highway, without that senseless river moan? The weaving road is the kind studded with granules of gravel—small pieces conglomerated into a larger scheme. I trip down the

embankment and roll into a ditch. Both feet are bleeding black in diaphanous light. I leave a dark trail of continually less distinct footprints as I cross walk the length of a fallen tree. Sparse raindrops slowly blot them out. Too damn quiet to be cold. Pavement, pay me. Nameless sway sweetly. Just killing time, just killing. Small grass and thistle seeds cling to my denim and I brush them to the ground. In that instant the illusions fade and the happiness ends.

Sleep.

The field across the highway is less than a quarter mile from the house. Its borders are formed by the road and the river. Still, not remembering the full details which led to a dew soaked nap there is disturbing. The mindset associated with prolonged periods of sleeplessness is foreign. A point of focus those lost in the thickets and meadows of nighttime reverie would not welcome. Yet, I have become naturalized through repetition, and foreign or not, it is the world I understand. Insomnia is staked to an assured (assumed) clarity, which exists only for the insomniac. The separation of executable fancy and legitimate fiction grows from self-faith. You can only try to trust your clinch on reality because you are alone, and honestly, you are the most likely person to lead yourself astray. Therefore, you need to be aware when you're fucking with your head. That thirteenth summer is pocked by small notches of clarity etched into an indifferent haze. Notches carved with a narcotic point.

It took many years before my parents regarded my insomnia as something more than energy and youthful exaggeration. The assumption was the phase would pass through me, or I around it. Though initially, my habits remained undetected because anyone else was dozing. I am bred of people who can fall asleep simply blinking. In addition, I perceived no flaw and, too, expected the cause was energetic. I never blamed them for disbelief. It would have been asking them to understand a universe which doesn't exist for anyone else. I rather they observe than

dissect. Nor would I have known how, or attempted to approach topic from their point of view. The members of my immediate family, if anything, are blessed with sleep abundance.

“Of course you’re sleeping,” my father once chuckled, “you’re just not remembering it. It’s not possible for *you*. *You’d* be run down all the time.” Behind my sunken and shot eyes I could only chuckle, too. Perhaps I didn’t hear him right. Or maybe I was microsleeping.

It *is* impossible to accomplish complete sleeplessness for sustained periods. The brain has an impressive grasp of compensation. Microsleeps often occur with sleep deprivation (insomnia, only sustained). In this event, unintended unconsciousness happens from anywhere between a second and several minutes. The sufferer is typically unaware anything has taken place; microsleeps can even manifest with eyes open. They are difficult to identify, as the quick-snap nature mimics momentary loss of concentration.

My father can’t stay awake through a one-and-a-half hour movie. Any movie. He once took me to a theater, going to the trouble of purchasing snacks and drinks, only to nod off holding a bucket of popcorn before the previews ended. And I want to hear someone say it again; *nobody has ever died from lack of sleep*. I think of Fatal Familial Insomnia, a disease which results in dementia and complete restlessness in the terminal stage, or I imagine white lab rats in buckets, prodded into wakefulness for so long they drop, pink eyes still staring. It also brings sleep debt to mind. If sleep could be viewed as currency, what is the average income? The picture is painted like a bank; the positive effects accrue like interest as the stash of adequate nights piles up. But deposit too much and you could land in a higher tax bracket, wherein the time wasted and pointless hoarding are disproportional to the advantage of oversleeping. Poor sleepers end up owing this institution. With the account overdrawn, there is a fee. This is why loans were invented. Buying time gives you the ability to spend it where you want. I wonder how

much I've borrowed, and when I find my father asleep with the remote, or nodding as the opening credits marquee across the screen, I know his vault is bursting with plaid-cased pillows and king size mattresses, with recliners and couches.

When my parents realized the show was real, their reaction was silent guilt. Nightly motion of feet in a sleeping house, the morning couch domination—awake before everyone else—and a tired, morose demeanor triggered their acceptance. Suddenly, answers to questions like, *Are you tired?* and *How do you feel?*, were empty, because the questions themselves were loaded. The first stage was constant inquiry.

“Are you sleeping?”

Sometimes.

“Is that an improvement?”

Sometimes.

“How much sleep *are* you getting?”

Some.

“*When* are you falling asleep?”

Times.

“Would you like some drugs to help?”

Sure.

Again he's rising to the top, branching above me. The spectre of my irrevocable future. That's his attitude overshadowing any desire for assistance I might have. He is there, fortifying stronger rings around my pulpy core, rooting deeper into the unsettled sandy loam. I own his disapproving stare and indifferent opinion. I want to languish in peace.

To date I've tried: Sleeping pills, painkillers, anti-anxiety medication, muscle relaxers, depression medication, antihistamines, cough syrup, alcohol, marijuana, Valerian root, Kava Kava, teas, dieting, work, exercise, meditation, hypnosis tapes, sex, masturbation, counting sheep, counting breaths, counting time away. But sleeping pills were the first. They were small and blue like those popular cockpills. After several weeks of use there was still the standard three to four hours, but the tabs left a residue of fatigue which crept like vines into my arms and feet, then left me exhausted. I couldn't push myself from the precipice of conscious and into the canyon of dreams. Plus, the doctor warned of potentially negative reproductive side effects. I could feel my testicles retract as he hissed "side effects." The other cures ensued to varying degrees and at varying times though the outcome was indistinguishable. Each failure to curb my bedtime unroutine was an apple plucked from limited harvest. The simple truth is, by the time my parents took interest, I already considered insomnia a manageable part of my life—if not intense and chaotic. I expect nothing of my nights by way of rest. Too many people act like experts on the subject. All have opinions and advice without proper experience of the depth and breadth. To them I am defective and misguided by apathy, but salvageable if only I would heed their lesson. I suppose their assumption of my ignorance is what bothers me; I am a lowly creature who refuses sound counsel. *See a doctor, take some meds.* And tonight I don't sleep. And tomorrow.

Thirteen days and it's the couch. I been watchin' the back of my hand. Kundera uprooted me so hard I swear I withered. Wasn't ready for vulnerability. The weight of existence. The light in being. Philosophy is heavy in the Czech Republic. And the man in all four bathroom mirrors looks guilty, as if he has something to hide. It's enough to suspect he may turn but I have nothing

to fight back with. Bound to get ugly. I could break his head against the toilet. The hairs on our face look as if they might run through one cheek, into the hollow of my mouth and emerge from the other side. Like an interwoven freeway connected to my brain. Travel for parasites. Several reproducible experiments have concluded this is not the case. I cup water in my hands and it forms a heart. It beats and shakes with my breathing. Have decided it is my own and I must name it something strong or it won't survive. I'm afraid to move and I tremble so much that some spills from my fingers into the sink. The heart recedes slightly as more slips slowly down the drain. So little left. No one should have to bear this responsibility. How did you get out of my chest? When all my heart is gone I'll be dead and vultures will carry me away from this bathroom. A note scrawled across the wall reads "go to SLeeP jACKass thEN." I wonder who wrote this? The felt pen behind my ear should tell me something but I'm drawing blanks. No reason to believe I could live through tonight. In that instant the illusions fade.

Sleep.

This isn't the first time I've woken up on the bathroom floor. My face is glued to the tiles with saliva and my beard is slimy from the same drool. Fat flakes of seasonal powder are spicing up the brown landscape outside the window. I pull myself up groggily and assure the time on a dolphin clock which quit ticking two years earlier. It's six a.m. and another beautiful day in this hellish paradise.

My sixteenth winter is woven with the worst sleep I've known. I developed unbreakable tolerance to the waking world which aggravated the problem even further. There is strong belief that insomnia, even among chronic victims, is reversible, and at the least, tamable. This sentiment is the basis of conditioned insomnia, that is, insomnia which has been created through repeated, improper bedtime preparation. It is believed factors such as eating habits, time which

one attempts to sleep, mental preoccupation, and activities like reading in bed, contribute to the worsening of the situation.

“What you watching?” my mother asks, snapping me out my stupor and causing my heart to lurch.

Huh?

“What’s so funny?”

I have been watching the same unmoving title screen of some movie for three hours. Apparently I’ve been laughing. Much of my waking life is spent in books. I revel in their ability to close and open doors. It is not always advisable to just go opening doors—or to shut them without a key. I didn’t bother to knock, and for my impudence Kundera snapped something essential, left me closed in world where the state of things is accepted and not battled. He knew I was susceptible and locked the tumblers when I stepped in. I can’t buck the feeling of broken. Like a worm unearthed, like an earth upended. As time moves toward Day fifteen, this is the longest I’ve ever been awake. And tonight I don’t sleep.

Something is written between the pages. Not *on* the pages but *within* them. These are the blank pages in the back. Where nothing should be. The words are vague and unclear. Made worse by their translucence. I’m afraid to show anyone because they could be meant solely for me.

Something is written as if scribed by spell. An elusive layer of text containing the true story. A message. What if this is the catalyst? No. None of it is conducive to logic. And how did I get here? Not here in a cosmic is-there-a-God sense. But here. I’m sitting in my car in a parking lot thirty miles from my house. I don’t remember driving here. Maybe this is what the turtle wanted from me. Sure the panda is the cuddliest of all bears but also the most sinister. Remember they

have claws and you do not. I use my car to loosely corral a group of seagulls eating garbage and one flies away with a Snickers wrapper. I snicker. A trumpet or maybe a sax bellows. Over the radio? In that instant the happiness ends.

Sleep.

I wake up in an empty Kmart lot. The car is parked sideways, taking up three spaces. My front bumper is four inches from a concrete encased lamp post and there are long skid marks ending under the back tires. In my hand is a crumpled sketch of a panda eating turtles. My signature is tagged to the lower left corner. When I turn the key, still hanging from the ignition, the engine fires up and the little green digits say it's 6:00 in this hellish paradise. I top one hundred—the rusty frame of my zippy red two-seater rattling apart—as I speed home on a flat stretch of the freeway. It's a ridiculous day in northern Idaho. The sun dominates the January morning and the road is parched and straight. Everything else is claimed beneath seven feet of snow, except the evergreens shaking loose the last storm's load and bending toward the sun.

“Where'd you go off to?” my father asks, a friendly curiosity in his voice.

For a drive.

“Yeah. Where to? It's a nice day for it?”

Towards Coeur d'Alene.

“Make it all the way to town?”

Pause

No, somewhere in the middle. Turned at Rose Lake junction. Towards St. Maries.

Pause

“Did you sleep okay?”

Nothing but knee-jerk reaction. A reflex I have honed as quick solution to any questions about my nights. My skills are so sharp I almost answer before he asks.

Fine.

I've never sought help of my own free will. I recognize the concern but don't want my family fretting over what I accept as my daily average. There is also the feeling of being set apart. I know it illusory to consider as *special*, and perhaps not the right word, but it is often how I've felt. It's as if something would be lost, something crucial to the fabric of my individuality would be taken away. In this sense, my parents act like new guests in an antique home, unsure of their surroundings' value and afraid that what they touch might shatter. They tread lightly, but make efforts to comprehend. The motions are uncomfortable for both parties.

"Okay," he says, "no panic son, you know we're here." He stands and squeezes past me out the front door. I listen to the sound of his gait—sure and direct—until it leaves the porch.

Was it there? At first yes. Then no. Did I see it or not? Was that thump and shudder my imagination? But still there it was. Brown. Furry. And collared. Recap. A flash from the road, a screech, a jarring knock. Nothing in the rearview but rubber smoke. I get out and walk around the car. Usual rust and dents. No cracks or fur or body. Autumn air is fresh at nineteen years old. I trace the black streaks on the cement back to their origins. One dips into the bowl of a pothole. The cold air and leafless cottonwoods are quiet. Though I can hear a clicking like fingernails tapping mahogany. A drop of dried blood on the road. Sch-sch-sch-sch. Sch-sch-sch-sch. Even and trotting. An animal is moving toward me. The jingle of cheap metal bits shaken together. Change in pockets. A chocolate lab is jogging down the vacant river highway. He emerges into the reach of my headlights. Something dangles gently between his jaws. He approaches me, tail

swinging and head up. Past the obstruction in his mouth he appears to be smiling a dog-jowled smile. He stops in my shadow. The purebred sits and drops a tumbleweed near my feet. I don't know where it could have come from in the surrounding damp, Bitterroot hills, but the dog is definitely proud. He stands and moves on. At the edge of dark he looks back. The eyes are wide and wet and his head is bowed almost shamefully. A tail wag and he is gone. Keysey and his Indian, nothing more than hallucination in the form of prose. In that moment the illusions fade. Sleep.

I wake up in my car. The Coeur d'Alene—river of my life—whispers gently below the turnout. I'm supposed to be somewhere. A family wedding. Time is cyclical, returning again and again. Why else are most clocks made round? Why do we count to twelve or twenty-four and begin again? The pattern is natural, but it is still expected that time be linear, moving from event to event, with no two exactly alike or repeatable. How do you shake something like coincidence? I am haunted by time returning, by continuation of coincidence. To quantify an idea (time) with numbers, ensures that its value is fixed, and thus copyable in exactness. And being aware of the possibility of recurrence is on par with the deed of actively seeking it. I pull my pocket watch from between the passenger's seat crease. The gold painted case springs open when I push the catch. It's another beautiful day.

My grandparents are at the wedding. My ever-shrinking grandmother makes a sight next to her daughters. Each one grows in height as age descends, but are exact replicas, as if they might fit inside one another like Russian dolls. I make it a point of respect to greet all the relatives. Faking interaction is a thing I've never done well. I can pretend, but my will is immediately lessened after one conversation. In a crowded room, I am looking for the exit. I

find my grandfather last—wedged into a corner. The same corner I had thought of hiding in upon arrival.

Hello Grandpa.

He nods. Extends his hand. I can't place the point at which I became taller than him but he cranes more than I remember. His fingers grip my own firmly.

How have you been?

“Good, good,” he trails. “I haven't been getting much sleep.” The words are so soft they bounce off me and settle, hovering above my shoes. Then he, too, moves on, smiling broad and heavy as he works through the clump of relatives. I believe he understands, reciprocates, the powerlessness to associate, and I am grateful. How would people like us go about befriending others? The eyes never leave the floor and the smile never leaves his face while trotting towards privacy. His have always been the steps of dog-tired resolve. No man is an island, but some men are deserts. Stinging sand blows into the vastness and life is a thing sprinkled sparingly like the dotted oases of dreams. Some men never find a way out of themselves. And tomorrow I don't sleep. And so on.

Twenty four hours is like a warm bath. I almost welcome it. Two nights is a walk in the park. Clichéd as a one night stand. I've never had a one night stand. Three nights, I can deal with it. A week: like ridin' a bicycle, you never forget. So what if I can't always remember where I've been or what I've done? So what if I'm cracked, where's the sense in branching out? Just grow, don't reach. I slacken. In that instant it's no longer about happiness or illusion. Happiness *is* the illusion.

Fuck sleep.

When the boy and badger met there was an undeniable connection. In more ways than can be articulated, it was imperative symbiosis. A need. Neither would have survived without the other. After a dead dog among the grasses of a stagnant pond, after a conquered moment of peril, how could common experience not bring two wayward objects closer? The boy is eventually discovered by a party searching the plains. As he and the badger are inseparable, the animal journeys home with the boy, remaining at the family house as a pet. In the conclusion, a visiting neighbor (coincidentally, the unaware owner of the deceased dog) mistakes the badger as wild and fires a rifle shot. The book ends with a teary-eyed boy and a badger teetering on the edge of life. There is a sequel which I've never bothered to read. I believe it would have taken away the artistry in ambiguity. It is more entertaining, perhaps even loftier, to infer than to be told. There is hope in surprise, and I possess the ability to surprise myself. What if insomnia is not my condition, but my need, my point of balance?

It doesn't matter where and when I wake up. The clock is always moving forward, if only in circles. I snap awake in total darkness, swimming in sweat. A pencil in my hand. Words on a loose sheet of paper. Night sounds? Morning sounds? And my finger flicking the snooze button. I pull a shirt over my tired limbs and transplant myself from the mattress to the floor. I glance back at the red numbers flashing. I push the door open and the artificial hallway sun rises. It is six a.m. and just one more beautiful day in this hellish paradise.

"He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."—Samuel Johnson

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Global Literatures
Final Project

E-i! Tena, Kia whakatane ake au i ahu

(now I shall make my self a man)

In this essay, I will be dealing with the book and film *Whale Rider*. Specifically, I will be examining the issue of Kahu / Paikea's gender in both mediums. In the interest of clarity, all references to Kahu will be the character from the book, and references to Paikea will be referencing the character from the film. For the title of this essay I chose the words that Muriwai uttered when she became the leader of her people. We can see this story unfold on pg 19 of *Whale Rider*. Muriwai, a relative of both Nanny Flowers and Kahu's mother, stands in a canoe about to be crushed against the rocks. She knows that if she doesn't act, all the people in the boat will perish. She knows that she must assume command. She utters a quick prayer and then acts, but rather than simply saying "alright boys now I am in charge" she says something quite unexpected, at least to a western mind. "E-i! Tena, Kia whakatane ake au i ahu" she says, "now I will make my self a man." This is a profound statement because it assumes that one *must* be a man to assume leadership. This statement also assumes that gender is something fluid, something beyond the possession of a physical sex and can be changed at will. What is even more fascinating is that Muriwai's gender change apparently worked (in a societal sense at the very least) because Muriwai did in fact assume command and lead her tribe to safety.

Later in the book, we find that Kahu is descended from the line of Muriwai, as is Nanny Flowers. I say this because I think a close reading of the text (I will deal with the film later) reveals that Kahu herself went through a similar "gendering" process to become

the leader of her people. In Kahu's case, this assumption of the male gender is less apparent because it is never explicitly stated and takes place over the course of the whole book. From the very beginning, Kahu's gender seems to be a contradiction, starting with the sign of her birth, the flying spear. We can't help but notice that a spear is often a phallic symbol. What then do we do with a female child who is represented by a spear? The mother whale in the book apparently thinks that Kahu is not only represented by a spear, she thinks that Kahu *is* a spear. The whale says, "This [meaning Kahu] is the last spear, the one which was to flower in the future (141)." The spear being referred to is of course the last of the mystical life-giving creation spears flung by the first Whale Rider (6). As a spear capable of creation, we could safely say that Kahu *is* a phallus of sorts, or at least she is in the mind of a mystical whale who, in the context of the story, is a reliable and knowledgeable source. Yet Kahu *is* a female, possessing the full package of feminine qualities (including physical sex we can suppose) to such a degree that Koro shuns her because she is not a boy. As the plot of the book unfolds, Kahu deals with being the chosen one, but being rejected by Koro because she is a woman and only a man can lead.

When all of this tension culminates during a mass stranding of whales, something very interesting takes place. Koro is leaving to get the whales off the beach when Nanny Flowers enters the scene and says essentially that if she deems it necessary, she (and Kahu) will *change into men like Muriwai did (113)*. This statement is obviously not a jest because later, after several failed attempts to save the whales, Koro says to Rawiri "Go tell your Nanny Flowers it is time for the women to act the men (118)." Koro seems to be accepting and acknowledging something about the power a dual gender holds. The

women (or dual genders) do come, and it is at this point that Kahu makes her dramatic ride that saves the whales and the tribe.

I would suggest that Kahu, to become the whale rider, took on both sexes, in essence becoming both male and female. For this to be true though, the idea of “a gender” can not be a mutually exclusive proposition. A strange idea to western minds, yet I believe this is the point the author is trying to make, and further, I believe this idea of gender duality is indeed possible within the social bounds of Maori culture, or at least Maori Culture as it was pre-colonization. In her 2000 thesis *Religion, Gender and Rank in Maori Society*, Adele Fletcher mentions two authorities on Maori culture, Mahuika and Hanson and Hanson, who found in their research that traditional Maori ideas of gender viewed the feminine as equal to the masculine. Mahuika is quoted as saying “Tapu [or sacredness] was held equally by men and women in Ngati Porou”(Fletcher 7). Mahuika apparently also found Maori to have generally egalitarian constructions of gender and tribal leadership (Fletcher 7).

Fletcher also mentions what I view as a possible reason behind the oppression the Feminine suffers in contemporary Maori society. Fletcher quotes the prominent Polynesian anthropologist Caroline Ralston as saying, “not only has the historical record been distorted by western gender ideologies, but also Polynesian ideologies and practices have actually changed as a result of western colonization” (Fletcher 8)

I believe the text of *Whale Rider* itself also points to this traditional egalitarian view of gender, and more importantly, gender duality. Going back to the example of Muriwai, we see that after her leadership role is assumed by “becoming a man,” she did not forfeit her femininity. Muriwai is still referred to as “she” in the story. Apparently

one can be both genders equally, and in perfect harmony. In fact, I would suggest that the idea of both genders co-existing in one leader in a harmonious, balanced relationship is exactly the point the author was trying to make. If we look at the first speech Koro gives during the whale stranding, the importance of oneness to the Maori becomes readily apparent.

*It is both, [meaning the whale] it is a reminder of the oneness that the world once had. It is the birth cord joining past and present, reality and fantasy. It is both. It is **both**” he thundered, “and if we have forgotten the communion then we have ceased to be Maori! (117)*

This passage expresses the sacred nature of oneness amongst Maori, essentially asserting that this oneness is what makes the Maori people Maori. If oneness is the essence of harmony, can we not then assume that in the ideal Maori world, this oneness extends to gender as well? Who else could then better return oneness to the tribe but Kahu, the embodiment of both the feminine and the masculine living in harmony.

While this theme of Kahu/ Paikea’s gender, and gender in general is quite strong in the book, I was surprised to see that it is very much subdued in the movie. There is little that suggests Paikea actually possesses the male gender as well as the female. In fact, all of the *direct* assertions of gender fluidity seem to have been scrubbed from the movie, from Koro’s call for the women to become men, down to the story of Muriwai, all were cut. There are, however, scenes that definitely *suggest* Paikea’s dominance over, and perhaps attainment of, masculinity. I am thinking specifically of the scene where Paikea beats a boy in a Taiaha fight. This scene is an addition to the movie and doesn’t appear in the book. If spears generally are phallic symbols as we have already

established, then the Taiaha is even doubly so as it is only used by men. With this symbolism in mind, there are some startling implications that emerge from Paikea's winning a Taiaha fight against a boy. It should also be noted that in the movie, it is not just any boy that Paikea beats, it is the best and most promising boy who is currently being groomed for leadership of the tribe.

By beating the young man at Taiaha, Paikea asserts her dominance over the male, and further, she proves that she is capable of controlling, and what's more using the phallus with greater proficiency and skill than a traditional male. I believe that this scene in the film was added as a nod to the gender issues represented in the text. Perhaps this is even the point that was being made in the text, that the feminine is powerful enough to control the phallus, and thus the Male. I would suggest that the book, and the movie to a lesser degree, both assert that for a harmonious gender relationship to exist, the phallus must be firmly in the control of the feminine. Going back to the example of Muriwai in the book, we see that after she "becomes a man" she assumes command of a canoe which is possibly also representative of the phallus. She then commands it with great skill and the tribe is saved. Further, if we examine relationship between Koro and Nanny Flowers, I believe that this concept of the feminine bringing balance and control to a harmonious gender relationship becomes more clear. In the novel, Koro and Nanny Flowers have just learned that Kahu was born and that she is a girl. Disappointed that Kahu is feminine, Koro stomps off to his boat and rows away. Nanny responds by getting in a motorboat and chasing after Koro, intending to bring him back. We are given a very telling few lines: "In the end, old Koro Apirana just gave up. Ha had no chance,

really, because Nanny Flowers simply tied his boat to hers and pulled him back to the beach, whether he like it or not" (15).

Koro attempted to isolate himself, but Nanny flowers wouldn't allow that to happen. In this scene, clearly we see the feminine asserting needed control over the masculine in order to "bring him back to the beach," or perhaps in other words, to bring him back to a state of harmony.

In the move, the question of Paikea's gender, and the idea of the feminine controlling the masculine to create harmony are not as readily apparent, nor are they expressed with as much clarity as they are in text. Beyond the constraints of time, one very obvious reason for this downplaying of gender issues in the film occurs to me. First let's look simply at the issue of Paikea's gender. The character of Paikea would not have been appealing to so broad an audience if her sexuality were something beyond the constraints of simply Female. Further, the story's central idea of general "oneness and unity" didn't require the vehicle of Paikea's gender to find expression. In the movie, the stranded whales and Koro's dialogue concerning them expressed this idea of the centrality of "general oneness" perfectly well without bringing Paikea's gender into question. My conclusion is that while interesting and very thought-provoking, Paikea's gender shifting was not a hinge-point element of the story, and as such was cut for reasons of time, market appeal, and plot cohesion.

As to the issue of the feminine controlling the masculine in order for harmony to return to the tribe, I feel that this relationship was indirectly expressed, or at least implied in the film in Paikea's Taiaha training and ultimate fight, and in the relationship between Nanny Flowers and Koro. I don't believe that this idea was *conspicuously* expressed in

the film for some of the same reasons that I feel Paikea's gender wasn't brought into question, namely that an assertion of that nature would, in all probability, do lasting damage to the film's market appeal. Indeed, if we are to believe that the Maori characters of the book *Once Were Warriors* represent a real section of contemporary Maori culture, than undoubtedly the presentation of such gender issues as the feminine asserting of control over the masculine might go beyond damaging market appeal. One can easily imagine a Jake Heke-type storming out of a theater, stoked into an abusive rage over the suggestion of such an idea. Perhaps this is just proof of the violent *imbalance* male dominated western society has brought to the Maori, and the need for feminine power to match, if not surpass, that of the masculine for harmony to return.

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Sydney Boyd

Gary Williams

ENGL 490

Senior Thesis

Locating Wollstonecraftian Femininity in Charlotte Dacre's *Zofloya*

In Charlotte Dacre's gothic novel *Zofloya, or the Moor* (1806), the protagonist, Victoria, is passionately sexual, truculent, and unrepentant. Many critics, perhaps startled by the novel's violence, have located it within a counter-feminist or anti-Wollstonecraftian tradition of women's writing. This essay will try to show otherwise: indeed, here we find Dacre as a necessary supplement intrinsic to the Wollstonecraftian project. Dacre shows that a shift in sexual power requires severity, and that to achieve revolution, violent acts are unavoidable. This is consistent with a message admittedly only implicit in Wollstonecraft, whose work separately offered a sophisticated response to the violence of the French Revolution and who elsewhere, and more famously, advocated a "revolution" in her culture's thinking about sexual difference (Wollstonecraft 192). It will be my claim that Dacre fulfills the Wollstonecraftian project in a precise way. As a female "philosopher" stepping into a decidedly masculinist tradition, Wollstonecraft was perhaps wise to separate her thoughts on the violence of revolution from her call for revolutionary change in female education. But "revolution" in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a word shot through with horror and violence, elements that, for political and personal reasons, Wollstonecraft had to leave implicit in the second *Vindication*. Unlike philosophical treatises, gothic novels offered much more latitude for women writers, given their status as "low" fiction and their association with potentially conservative writers like Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis. Thus, through the genre of the gothic novel, Dacre is the

delivery mechanism for the revolutionary feminine violence that Wollstonecraft could not express.

The French Revolution utterly transformed Wollstonecraft's understanding of social change. Barbara Taylor describes Wollstonecraft as an advocate for passivity before her entrance into France (147). After several failed attempts to enter France, Wollstonecraft finally arrived in 1792 (the same year *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was composed). Shortly after her arrival, it was clear she could no longer be a mere spectator of the rebellion: promptly, she was preparing policy proposals for the National Convention's education committee and "consorting regularly with leading members of the Convention" (148). By 1794, she was composing and sending England chapters of *An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution to England* (148). Here Wollstonecraft outlines an audacious commitment to revolution: she sent the chapters to press against the advice of Helen Maria Williams, who told her to burn the manuscript, and Wollstonecraft later admitted that if her manuscript had been found, "her life would not have been worth much" (148).

Wollstonecraft was a threatening figure to the English government after *Rights of Men* was published in 1790: as Taylor puts it, "her status shifted from literary lady to radical *philosophe*, an intellectual insurgent of the kind that so frightened and enraged political conservatives" (149). The publication of *An Historical and Moral View* could have produced consequences ranging from imprisonment to execution: indeed, Williams faced these punishments from the French and British governments because of her outspoken advocacy for revolution and had to escape to Switzerland in 1794. Despite the political sensitivity for British leftists during these times, Wollstonecraft "declared herself 'certainly...glad' to be in France during 'the most extraordinary event that has ever been recorded'" even as she was "slipping in

blood flowing across the cobbles of the Place de la Revolution” and “fainting at the news of friend’s beheadings” (Taylor 148). Wollstonecraft, from firsthand observation and from the fate of her friends, fully understood the political valences of violence and the necessary of violence for meaningful social change.

That said, Wollstonecraft’s most famous challenge to patriarchal authority concerned the rights of women. She was unafraid to describe her challenge to late eighteenth-century gender norms in terms borrowed from the Revolution in France:

That women at present are by ignorance rendered foolish or vicious, is, I think, not to be disputed; and, that the most salutary effects tending to improve mankind might be expected from a REVOLUTION in female manners, appears, at least, with a face of probability, to rise out of the observation. (192)

Still, the *Vindication* does not recommend female violence or the satisfaction of libidinal drives: one must consult her unpublished letters for her praise for sexual satisfaction. In a letter to William Godwin, Wollstonecraft writes:

Now by these presents let me assure you that you are not only in my heart, but my veins, this morning. I turn from you half abashed—yet you haunt me, and some look, word or touch thrills through my whole frame. (Wardle 33)

This shows that, at least in private, Wollstonecraft willingly embraces female sexual satisfaction. She admits that “when the heart and reason accord there is not flying from voluptuous sensations” (33). Although publicly Wollstonecraft was limited from expressing this inherent desire, it is clear from her letters to Godwin that she advocated it. Wollstonecraft wrote her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in the midst of careful government suppression and was forced to mute the violence implicit in this call for gender revolution to achieve equality. Unlike her letters to Godwin, the *Vindication* seems to be austere, disinvested in erotic satisfaction and

female pleasure. But these disavowed aspects of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*—female pleasure and female violence—return ferociously in Dacre's work a decade later.

While France was in a wild state of change, both the Whigs and Tories in England obdurately rejected the notion of revolution. Work by Gary Kelly and Ian Haywood has attuned us to the vexed relation of British women to Revolutionary violence in the 1790s. As the figure of woman became a “central thing to define,” female writers labored to “reinvent the meaning of ‘reason’ and ‘virtue’ and ‘sensibility’” (Kelly 8). Along with Wollstonecraft, the leaders of this movement were (among others) Helen Maria Williams, Mary Hays, and Elizabeth Hamilton. Despite the work of these writers, in the eyes of many in the British left women were still considered primarily a repository for virtues and vices, and their contributions to politics and theory remained subordinate. Wollstonecraft fought against this, writing to inspire women to overcome society's oppression. She wrote with “impassioned reasoning and glowing eloquence,” but her second *Vindication* “failed to overcome people's prejudices” (Kelly 113).

Haywood notes that the British Romantic era was profoundly affected by the French Revolution. The Romantic poets abandoned radical politics, writing instead about salvation in nature and the literary imagination, turning Romanticism into a “displacement or exorcism of the unbearable violence of history” (Haywood 60). This was most likely encouraged by the repressive measures of the British government, which instigated various strict restrictions on individual freedom. Fourteen years later, Dacre was not under the same restrictions and could thus express an idea of female violence freely. In this respect, Dacre delivers a Wollstonecraftian message that Wollstonecraft could leave only implicit—not for a lack of passion, but because Wollstonecraft was more constrained by circumstance.

Dacre presents Victoria as the product of a bad early childhood education and as a cunning strategist. These traits collide into a coherent set of animal metaphors according to which she is an “untamable hyena” (49), fierce and unforgiving in her murderous rage. It is this rage which empowers Victoria. Hyenas, of course, are a curious choice of metaphor for Dacre, considering how they were alien to England and Italy alike. The image would have been familiar to British readers, however, from its association with Wollstonecraft. In the wake of the revelation of her domestic partnership with Godwin, Wollstonecraft herself was mockingly called a hermaphroditic “hyena in petticoats” (Craciun, *Fatal* 58). Victoria then becomes a metaphor for Wollstonecraftian feminism because of her wild, untamable nature.

Thus Dacre’s audacious dedication to violence is not aberrant in the context of the revolution, however much its direct expression was anomalous for a woman writer of the time. Following the revolutionary decade, domesticity was held in an even more fragile “haven from a social and political domain irretrievably divided and embattled” (Kelly 179). Femininity was even more decisively a refuge, and masculinity was supposed to be heroic and professionalized (Kelly 180). As the culture and literature was re-masculinized, women writers still flouting the “domestic” woman were “steadily appropriated, marginalized or subordinated” (Kelly 179).

Even violent women writers such as Lady Caroline Lamb, who famously murdered her parents, had to eliminate the scandal of this violence from her work so as to market herself as a writer (Craciun 21-46). As this trend developed, female authors who chose to adamantly rebel against the idealization of domesticity had to “learn new ways of resistance in the interstices of power-knowledge, new arts of writing in a double sense” (Kelly 179). Dacre did precisely this through a gothic novel, a form that allowed much more leeway than philosophical treatises. As Haywood points out:

Romantic literary texts were not silent on the issue of spectacular violence, but there is a distinction between the degree of candour and graphic detail in...the higher journalism, and the more 'composed' texts of mainstream Romantic authors. But it is certainly the case that Romantic popular print culture continued to be the main repository of an extraordinarily rich and disturbing repertoire of violent tropes and micro-narratives. (102)

Wollstonecraft was subject to the government's strict surveillance because she wrote intellectual prose; Dacre, working in the presumably less serious genre of Gothic fiction, gained more leeway and less scrutiny, staving off any criticism that might have come nevertheless by supplying her novel with a short paragraph of moral warning. Her audience was most likely upper-middle-class women who were not perceived to be political threats to England. But they were precisely the women who Wollstonecraft was addressing in her second *Vindication*. In reading *Zofloya* they simultaneously gained a Wollstonecraftian object-lesson and an un-Wollstonecraftian training in the necessity of Revolution to domestic felicity.

Dacre was not intimidated by the violence of revolution as so many of her earlier fellow Romantic writers were, and in this, she easily partook of the genre of the gothic. Haywood writes about the "base, cruel, and degenerate nature" of the "mobocracy," or those who rebelled against the monarchy (Haywood 71). The fate of the Princess de Lamballe is a cogent example of the "unbearable violence" to which Haywood refers. After refusing to take a republican oath, the "mobocracy" cut across her thighs before tearing her bowels and heart from her body, dragged her body through the streets for two days, and finally, (as a warning to the King and Queen of France) her head "was stuck on a pike" (71).

This violence inspired gothic writer Matthew Lewis, who almost certainly modeled the character of the Prioress in his novel *The Monk* (1796) after Princess Lamballe (Haywood 71). Lewis writes that the mob heeded nothing "but the gradification of their barbarous vengeance" (Lewis 356). When the mob seizes the Prioress, they tear her apart savagely, stifling her howls

and shrill cries for mercy, and drag her through the streets, “trampling her, and treating her with every species of cruelty which hate or vindictive fury could invent” (356). Even when she sinks onto the ground bathed in blood, the mob still “exercises their impotent rage on her lifeless body,” trampling her until she is “no more than a mass of flesh, unsightly, shapeless, and disgusting.” While Lewis portrays vindictive, unrestrained gore, the carnage produced by Dacre’s Victoria is more personal, controlled and strategic. Instead of participating in or inciting a mob, Victoria takes guerilla actions against the patriarchy and conventional representations of femininity. Dacre thus shows specifically how violence can be revolutionary, not something that needs to be purposeless or unrestrained. She also suggests how women might take erotic satisfaction from acts of violence, bringing together two suppressed strands of Wollstonecraft’s thought in a safer fictional context.

It is in perhaps the most violent scene of the novel that Victoria sets herself apart from Lewis’ mob and ultimately proves herself as a Wollstonecraftian feminist model. Writhing in unrequited love for Henriquez, Victoria cries aloud that she cannot find any means to pursue to obtain her desire:

How satisfy my destroying passion? –Shall all I have done be in vain then, and the sole object of my ardent wishes, the goal of my hopes, elude at last my wild pursuit? –no, it must not be! –Yet, that he were mine at last, I would not hesitate to plunge my soul in deepest perdition for his sake! (212)

She recognizes her passion is destructive, but she is willing to be condemned to hell to satisfy her desire. To satiate her passion, Victoria destroys the object of Henriquez’s love: Lilla. In a terrifying scene, Victoria vents fury upon Lilla verbally, calling her a viper and announcing her imminent murder as Lilla clings to her pathetically. Amid Lilla’s begging and pleading (even a reference to her being a poor orphan girl), Victoria remains controlled by her willful rage. In a dramatic scene, Lilla makes a pitiable attempt to escape after Victoria tries to stab her heart but

hits her shoulder instead. When Lilla tries to run away, Victoria's violent rage increases. Lilla's death is solidified when she announces Victoria's failure to achieve Henriquez's affection: "he loved me more than he did you!" (226). Grabbing Lilla by the hair, Victoria stabs her everywhere, "covering her fair body with innumerable wounds" before she hurls Lilla headlong down an abyss. This is a shocking depiction of a woman mad with desire, and it is precisely this which aligns Dacre with Wollstonecraft, and revolution with feminism.

Critics have explained Victoria in varied ways—non-sexual, androgynous, overtly masculine, and even queer—all of which deny her character as a model of simply and purely femininity. Diane Long Hoeveler interprets *Zofloya* as anti-feminist in her book *Gothic Feminism*, writing that Dacre hyperbolized the conventions of a mother's influence, and that the female sexual desire shown by Victoria is a synonym for madness (Hoeveler 126). *Zofloya* is riddled with what Hoeveler sees as gender clichés, and the ending of the novel chooses to blame the devil who is in league with a sexually demanding, voracious woman which, as Hoeveler feels, shows culture's intense dread of maternal or feminine sexuality (145,157). Alternately, Adriana Craciun explores an unsexed, unfemale Victoria in *Fatal Women of Romanticism*. By pointing out the downfall of the sexual Victoria and the naturally pious, asexual Lilla, Craciun argues that the proper woman can degenerate into an "unnatural body through physical and emotional violence" acting systematically dominant, assertive, and aggressive, destabilizing both the feminine and female as categories (131).

Dacre's contributions to the Wollstonecraftian project have not been understood in the critical work discussing the novel: indeed, the novel is not usually associated with the feminist movement burgeoning within Romantic-era literary culture. Wollstonecraft has generally been used by critics to prove *Zofloya* is anti-feminist. James Dunn goes as far as to call Victoria an

anti-heroine due to her “murderous rages,” and argues that her violence sets masculinity and femininity at opposition (311). While such claims seem consistent with twentieth-century models of different feminism, they obscure the connection between Victoria’s violence and Wollstonecraft’s version of feminism. Feminist thinkers in the British Romantic era focus on ideals of female sympathy and domesticity, as work by Nanora Sweet and Anne Mellor has suggested (Sweet’s *Felicia Hemans: Reimagining Poetry in the Nineteenth Century* and Mellor’s *Romanticism and Gender*). It is only recently that scholars such as Adriana Craciun have acknowledged the violence inherent in so many women’s texts from the period. It is thus imperative to make the connection between the revolutionary influences writers were functioning under and the subject of their text.

Critics have also explored the influence of parental example and education to excuse Victoria’s gender. Robert Miles argues a pervasive problem in *Zofloya*’s text is not only the absence of the nurturing mother, but also her sexuality (183). The role of parents, particularly the mother, is something easily connected to Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication* given her extensive writing on maternal education. Ranita Chatterjee’s connects Dacre’s *Zofloya* with Wollstonecraft, but with the assertion that Dacre was undermining Wollstonecraftian ideals like “strong nationhood” to “virtuous mothering” (75-76).

When we re-insert the already implicit revolutionary violence back into Wollstonecraft’s thought, as I believe we should, *Zofloya* seems much more the committed feminist novel, an attempt to find the feminist voice by going to necessary and transformative extremes. Wollstonecraft addresses revolutionary ideas about education, morality, and most importantly, sexuality in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Each of these themes appear in *Zofloya* also, with the difference that Dacre goes on to show the consequences of a true sexual

revolution that Wollstonecraft precisely demanded. Dacre made the consequences of this call for gender “revolution” explicit.

Indeed, *Zofloya* uncannily echoes *Vindication* throughout. Wollstonecraft, for instance, locates the beginnings of women’s education with the teachings of their mothers:

Women are told from their infancy, and taught by the example of their mothers, that a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of propriety, will obtain for them the protection of man; and should they be beautiful, every thing else is needless, for, at least, twenty years of their lives. (19)

Victoria’s relationship with Laurina is an exact obverse of this hideous norm. It is precisely Victoria’s lack of maternal education and example that the novel claims is the root of Victoria’s crimes. Victoria’s radical self-reliance, even as it is supported by Zofloya, stands in direct opposition to the version of bad femininity represented by her mother Laurina. Laurina, after all, cannot focus her passion into rage: as a result, she ends up the victim of domestic violence rather than the revolutionary perpetrator of it, which makes all the difference in Dacre’s bloody vision of female emancipation. At Laurina’s final hours—even after Ardolph has “cruelly beaten” her, drawing her blood and in turn, causing the injuries that lead to her death—she utters a “cry of horror” and sinks to the floor in shock when Leonardo stabs Ardolph, the perpetrator of all her life’s misery (Dacre 250). In Laurina’s failure to assume any form of authority as a parent or as a woman who is abused by Ardolph (both mentally and physically), she is ultimately a weak figure of femininity and a foil for Victoria’s more focused rage. In this way, Dacre renders untenable one of the apparent moral lessons of the novel: that a mother’s vices are necessarily repeated by impressionable daughters.

Dacre thus deploys the reverse side of Wollstonecraft’s writings on motherhood and education. Yet Victoria also needs protection from Berenza and alters her personality to have a

“soft temper” and “outward obedience” to gain it. She has little regard for the future when her beauty might fade, and she has learned that a “puerile kind of propriety” combined with physical attractiveness will indeed cause everything else to be needless. This is done, however, with a lack of sincerity, which causes Dacre’s novel to reflect Wollstonecraft in an ironic light. Dacre mocks women who might genuinely adopt submissive qualities and the supposed power of maternal education in Victoria’s wild, scheming independence. Thus, Dacre takes this main theme in Wollstonecraft’s work and builds on it through the exercise of measured irony.

However much Victoria wishes to frame her experience as a sequel of her mother’s, Wollstonecraft shows us the extent to which this is not so. In implicit conversation with Wollstonecraft, Dacre reveals feminist themes through reason and independence. Described as “a female of unexampled beauty, and of rare and singular endowments” whose relationship with her husband was fruitful and unrivaled, initially it seems nothing could disrupt Laurina’s happiness (Dacre 3). The fault that preceded Laurina’s tragic sins was self love: though she earnestly desired to be virtuous and yearned to have the fortitude to be preserved from the power of temptation, she “had not strength to fly from it” (11). She is overcome by Ardolph because she loses “her reason, her gratitude” and eventually, her honor. After the Marchese di Loredani is murdered, Laurina endeavors to fulfill her promise to her deceased husband, but her reason is overcome by Ardolph, the very man who murdered him. She becomes a “deluded wife,” allowing another person to manipulate her, and worse, think for her. Regardless of Laurina’s pathetic attempts to right her wrongs against Victoria as she swore at her husband’s deathbed, “as a wretch writhing with pain flies to the relief of opium, so did Laurina, from the pangs of conscience, to the soothing and intoxicating presence of him who destroyed her” (25). While

self love was her initial downfall, it is this lack of reason that solidifies Laurina's fate as a cursed woman.

Dacre also toys with the female models Wollstonecraft created in the juxtaposition of Victoria and Lilla. Victoria is compared to Lilla axiomatically. The difference between the coupling of Victoria and Laurina's characters and that of Lilla is Lilla's character is presented as positive and perfect while Laurina is always associated with guilt and sin. Lilla, the obstacle between Victoria and Henriquez, very much embodies the ideal of femininity that Wollstonecraft sought to displace, utterly "pure, innocent, free even from the smallest taint of a corrupt thought" with "fairy-like beauty" (Dacre 133). Lilla's mind is introduced as delicate and, because it is free of any corrupt thought, it is under-developed. She is often referred to as childlike or youthful, and the narrator foregoes her name occasionally, simply calling her "the lovely Innocent" (208). In contrast to Victoria's dark appearance, Lilla is small, "expressing a seraphic serenity of soul" and has an angelic countenance that is "slightly suffused with the palest hue of the virgin rose." Contrary to Victoria's black hair, she has long flaxen hair that floats over her shoulders—the very personification of innocence (133).

Contrary to Lilla, Victoria's mind is described as strong and resolute, "capable of attempting any thing undismayed by consequences" (76). When Victoria kills Lilla, it is thus also a representation of revolution and reason overcoming domesticity and weakness. Wollstonecraft aligns herself with this triumph of reason over domesticity in her *Vindication*: "In the name of reason, and even common sense, what can save such beings from contempt; even though they be soft and fair?" (Wollstonecraft 62). When reason is stifled by sensibility, as it is in Lilla's character, Wollstonecraft warns that conflicts will arise. She writes that "when sensibility is nurtured at the expense of the understanding, such weak beings must be restrained by arbitrary

means, and be subjected to continual conflicts” (82). Victoria is thus acting as a vessel of reason in Wollstonecraft’s warning when she submits Lilla to contempt and conflict, even to the point of her violent death.

Of course Wollstonecraft would never have advocated the killing of the weak and defenseless; however, violence in *Zofloya* is indeed described as reason and strength overcoming passivity and ignorance, and in this way Dacre is mirroring *A Vindication*. Her three murders, understood thematically rather than as plot points, find her “murdering” the very problems that Wollstonecraft sought to displace in her *Vindication*: her victims are fragile and defenseless—the old feeble Signora, the tiny and innocent Lilla, and the ailing Berenza (who is rendered helpless and blinded by his love for Victoria). Victoria also shows no remorse when others are murdered in front of her. When Victoria caresses Lilla congenially in front of Berenza and Henriquez, she does so “as the murderer might be tempted to fondle the beauty of the babe, whose life he intended to take” (143). Thus Victoria is referred to as “he,” which implies that while Victoria is a murderer, she is male. In light of cultural feminine domicility and sympathy, Dacre shows how a woman could not be described as feminine when involved directly with something as serious as murder, or rather, the desire to murder. In abstraction, Dacre compares Victoria to a man to allow her full desire to be expressed. This reference reflects other literature in the wake of the French Revolution, for example William Blake’s proverb from hell: “Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires” (Faustino 157). Following Dacre, Blake shows the continuity of themes represented by fulfillment of desire, but most specifically, its association with hell.

Like Victoria’s association with *Zofloya*, the promotion of acting on desires is a satirical proverb of hell. Victoria’s pursuit of fulfillment of her desire is portrayed in various personality traits, most of which are solely negative:

“Hers was not that innocent vivacity which springs at once from the *purity* and *sanity* of the heart; it was the wild and frightful mirth of a tyrant, who condemns his subjects to the torture, that he may laugh at their agonies; it was the brilliant glare of the terrible volcano, pregnant even in its beauty with destruction!” (143)

This depicts Victoria as inhuman and without conscience; her wrath knows no bounds. The comparison to both a tyrant and a volcano is significant considering the gender Dacre conveys metaphorically. The sarcastic implications of Victoria as a tyrant are political, but also specifically male. Contrarily, the reference to a pregnant volcano is especially female, but imagines a femininity both obscured and frightening, yet still aligned with nature. The metaphor shows a repressed violence proper to womankind, beautiful yet terrible. The rhetoric is therefore profoundly Wollstonecraftian, insofar as it makes explicit the link between political and sexual oppression (this being the hallmark of Wollstonecraft’s work according to Jan Wellington [44]). As with Wollstonecraft’s writing on the revolution, the issue of violence is in *Zofloya* reasonable and strategic.

Victoria personifies the sort of radical commitment to one’s goals that, for the Jacobins in France, had seemed necessary to transform culture. She believes that “nothing is impossible to those who are willing” (Dacre 54). Near the beginning of Victoria’s acquaintance with Zofloya, she explains that her “heart knows not to shrink,” and that indeed, she is of a “firm and persevering spirit” (152). The narrator focuses especially on Victoria’s intellect, describing her as “firm-minded” and her mind as “supremely elastic” (61, 65). Dacre takes pains, however, to ensure that this radical willfulness is not separable from the subject’s embeddedness in culture as a whole, most pointedly in the idea, attributed to a suddenly wavering Victoria, “that mind might not *always* prove omnipotent over matter” (64). Here, she plays Victoria’s willfulness off of a clichéd expression (“mind over matter”) at a moment when Victoria doubts herself. This

implicitly suggests that, foremost, superhuman commitment is not possible or necessary, that social alliances are pivotal to the maintenance of one's commitment (i.e. that Zofloya's arrival helps her overcome these doubts), and, not least, that the commitment to revolutionary change is never separable from the very familiar language of everyday life. Thus *Zofloya* becomes less a Gothic novel about superhuman accomplishment and more a guide to revolutionary subjectivity.

Victoria's passion inevitably always results in her reason overcoming the weakness of emotion to achieve her goal. At the moment when "the most deadly hatred against those who had thus dared to dupe and to betray her, took possession of her swelling heart," we read that:

Her passion vented itself in a violent paroxysm of tears; but becoming suddenly ashamed of yielding, as she thought it, to a weakness so ignoble, and angry with herself that the ill treatment of any one should have power to excite in her either grief or lamentation, she checked a rising gush within herself. (45)

While this passage partakes of the conventionally feminine and Romantic language of sensibility—a violent paroxysm of tears and a display of weakness—Victoria reformulates these tropes, basically by repressing their chief markers and crystallizing them into decidedly insensible rage. Thus focused rage becomes, in this novel, the alternative solution to the inequalities endemic to femininity in the early nineteenth century. She resents that anyone could have the influence to cause her sorrow. While rage is seldom affiliated with reason, here it seems to conquer emotion and feeling, enabling her to fulfill her yearning for the control she covets so aggressively. As we have seen, she channels this rage into specific acts of violence for strategic political and erotic purposes.

After Zofloya has revealed that his plan to fulfill her wishes requires Berenza to die, Victoria recoils slightly. Despite how ardently she desires his death, she shrinks from outright murder: "but, by these means, to take his life! –it is not that I hesitate, however!" (155). Contrary to her assertion that she does not hesitate, this is precisely what she is doing. Instinctively, she

realizes it is a weakness to give in to the emotion of feeling or guilt, and Zofloya uses her reason to his advantage. At this moment, although her character is not saintly, she has not committed any grievous murders: conventionally, this moment of hesitation would mark the beginning of her turn toward socially-sanctioned and ultimately conservative forms of “redemption.” Zofloya intervenes at this moment, providing support for her revolutionary commitment, and, rooting his intervention in the pragmatic and calculating logic of utilitarianism, snaps it away with logic: “In depriving him of life,” he argues, “you would do him far less wrong” (155).

From this moment, Victoria’s desire is violently unleashed, yet, even now, she is physically attractive. Her countenance is described as not repellent, but rather beautifully fierce (76). Once she has defined her conquest, and ultimately her happiness, she views Berenza as an obstacle. Ruthless, she pursues her desires and “death, death alone, could satisfy her thirsting soul” (177). Berenza’s innocent breath and “convulsive catchings” brought on by Victoria’s small doses of poison produce “no reproach in her remorseless bosom” (169). Even after Victoria’s first brutal killing of the defenseless Signora, she feels “neither shocked nor alarmed at the frightful outrage committed” (176). This is an entirely different Victoria than the woman who fainted at the sight of Berenza’s blood, unable to conquer the “weakness of nature” (83). Bitterly, she reflects on her past as a waste: “she regretted that she had suffered till now, the existence of aught between her and her desired happiness” (177). Here, there is no mark of the hesitancy Victoria previously exhibited.

The change in her character is significantly Wollstonecraftian. Essentially, far from an explosion of meaningless violence, here Victoria’s reason finally supports her emotion and feelings. Once she locates her desire for Henriquez and avers it is something that will ultimately fulfill her, she has unstoppable determination, resorting to severe truculence in order to obtain

the object of her passion. She is full of action, not passivity. This is a Wollstonecraftian characteristic: feminine emotion is set aside in favor of reason, education, and power. In view of Wollstonecraft's "revolution," she writes:

Let an enlightened nation then try what effect reason would have to bring them back to nature, and their duty and allowing them to share the advantages of education and government with man, see whether they will become better as they grow wiser and become free. (Wollstonecraft 167)

Here, Wollstonecraft clearly stipulates that reason will bring wisdom and freedom for women and the opportunity to participate as equals with men in education and government. Victoria's character, full of reason and yearning for equality, is thus a Wollstonecraftian model. Other female characters in *Zofloya* who do not possess the same reason and passionate drive to obtain their desire meet their demise—Laurina and Lilla specifically—and thus, this shows Dacre's support of the idea of an independent, strong-minded female. Those women who did not fulfill the criteria Wollstonecraft outlined were not chosen to be the heroines of the novel. Victoria, too, meets her end when Satan casts her into hell, but this is done with sarcasm. The end of the novel, for example, is a moral paragraph admonishing the behaviour of Victoria—to whom Dacre dedicated most of the novel. Dacre did not build the character of Victoria so extensively only to show an example of what women should not be. Victoria pursues her happiness before all else, and while this may be selfish, it is also what Wollstonecraft advocated for women.

Desire for equality and respect is shown when Victoria first begins to hate Berenza when he asks her to be his wife (126). Instead of evoking humble gratitude, Berenza effectively insults Victoria's self-worth. When Berenza asks Victoria to be his mistress, Dacre writes Victoria's pride acts as the preservation of pride, and "her vanity easily led her to believe that Berenza thought marriage a degrading and unnecessary tie to love like his" (29). Briefly before this statement, Victoria's mind is described as "boldy organized" and as having "wild and

unrestrained sentiments” that prevent her from being offended by Berenza’s proposition (29). By stating these characteristics, Dacre negates her claim that it is Victoria’s pride at work. Instead, it makes pride a guise for a desire of intellectual equality. Victoria values herself enough to have confidence she is desirable and eligible, and so when Berenza merely asked her to be his mistress, she could only assume it was because he didn’t believe in marriage. Thus, it is not her pride that upsets her when she finds he, until that point, did not deem her worthy to be his wife; it is the acknowledgement that he did not respect her as an equal.

The quest for equality is reflected in the different presentations of Victoria—her character development and how others wished to develop her. Her parents neglected to mold her character in childhood, and her father makes a deathbed attempt, which fails due to her mother’s lack of good example. Victoria is “more prone to evil than to good” and only a strong curb of wisdom and example could have altered this, something Laurina neglected to provide (28). After swearing to protect and cherish her daughter, to preserve her from evil and the contamination of bad example by request of her dying husband, Laurina exemplifies the flagrant violation of this sacred oath with flagitious disregard for the dying commands received (20, 28). Beyond this showing a mother’s failing, the idea of Victoria being “evil” is a synonym for her instead breaching the expectations for women in society by using her intellect to fulfill her need to be recognized and respected.

After her parents failed to instill in Victoria any propriety (based on societal norms), Berenza begins a long effort to mold Victoria into his ideal woman. Berenza based his life on investigating character and increasing his knowledge of the human heart (27). Appalled by the behavior of Ardolph and Laurina, Berenza focuses his attentions on the unfortunate Victoria. He describes her as misguided, and had he seen no dishonor in her, he would have at this early point

made her his wife, relying on the power “he believed himself to possess over the human mind for modeling her afterwards, so as perfectly to assimilate to his wishes” (27). At this point, Victoria is seventeen and still malleable. He scorns her wild and imperious character, feeling that he would render her noble, firm and dignified, softening her fiery spirit and checking her bold nature; however, Berenza underestimates Victoria. Dacre writes: “But Victoria was a girl of no common feelings—her ideas wildly wandered, and to every circumstance and situation she gave rather the vivid colouring of her own heated imagination, than that of truth” (28).

The character of Victoria thus finds its antecedent in the female ideal that Wollstonecraft adamantly supports in *A Vindication*. Outlining the accepted form of femininity at this time, Wollstonecraft points to all things women are expected to be that Victoria is not: having a softness of temper, outward obedience, and sweet attractive grace all taught by the example of their mothers (Wollstonecraft 19). She asserts that a fondness for pleasure has taken the place of ambition and other nobler passions that “open and enlarge the soul,” which has led women to be only objects of desire that will wilt when they are no longer beautiful (10). Victoria is full of ambition and the noble passion for equality, only flattered by being an object of desire, and lives in the moment not considering some day she may lose the power she holds because her youthful attractiveness has faded.

When Victoria finally captures Berenza’s love, finds her passion consumed in Henriquez, and then poisons Berenza, I find all Wollstonecraft advocated for on behalf of women, but with a violent edge in place that Wollstonecraft avoided, even in her revolutionary times. Dacre seems to support the idea of a woman who can become the friend, rather than the humble dependent, of her husband, and she conjectures: “it is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason” (29, 21). In this way, Wollstonecraft condemns

Berenza's complete character in the way he wishes to manipulate Victoria according to his will and in that he wishes to manipulate her at all in any way she does not wish for herself. Dacre took these ideals and expanded on them, showing Berenza's death as a consequence of trying to rid Victoria of any inclination of being content in her own personality and pursuing her own passion.

When addressing the sexual character of women, Wollstonecraft warns about the consequences of ignorance women are kept in "under the specious name of innocence" (19). The potential for violence and revolution is built into Victoria's character represented by her need to be free to pursue desire. Jan Wellington writes that "Wollstonecraft expresses her conviction that humans kept in ignorance and deprived of the resources of reason will eventually react with excessive passion" (44). It is here that Dacre completes the idea of gender revolution Wollstonecraft began and also intended. In Wollstonecraft's view, women are suffocated, as Victoria might have been had she not asserted her reason to overcome society's restrictions. Wollstonecraft visibly supports a female revolution in view of the ignorance under which women are kept. She also writes that "if women are to be excluded, without having a voice, from a participation of the natural rights of mankind" then tyranny will "ever undermine morality" (5). Again, Dacre shadows this assertion: Victoria is barred from having a voice, and her violence results from the suppression of her intellect and opinion.

Through violence, Wollstonecraft's revolutionary gender reform for women is thus realized by Dacre. *Zofloya* more than echoes *Vindication*—it is a direct continuation of the proposed upheaval of societal gender roles Wollstonecraft advocated, one which, through the safe medium of a gothic novel, Dacre could carry forward. Victoria, intoxicated by the thrill of erotic fulfillment, is a feminist ideal in her absolute adherence to achieving her desire. So

obsessed in obtaining the goal of her passion, her zeal thus becomes insatiable to the point of her losing her very soul, going well beyond Wollstonecraft advocating women assert themselves. Victoria refuses to take the shape of society's ideal female and seeks with utmost ferocity what she desires. Dacre claims and insists on gory violence to bring to light the repressed truth of Wollstonecraft's feminist theories. Extending the revolution seen in France and England to that of gender reform requires violence. Dacre shows how violence and feminism cannot be separated if this reform is to be achieved.

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Final Paper

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I, Other, and Abject; Or, Three's Company: Voyeurism as an Exploration of the Abject in Select
Works of Poe and Hawthorne

In *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Leslie Fiedler identifies the American Gothic as a Faustian bargain wherein its proponents “choose to be damned,” and where damnation means “a commitment to the vagaries of the unconscious; an abandonment of the comforts of social life...of humanity itself; a deliberate plunge into insanity; and acceptance of eternal torment for the soul” (114). The conflation of what seems to be a dichotomization of the American dream and Faustian nightmare is the point at which Fiedler argues that these gothic texts are meant to “confront the horrifying image” of themselves (127). His conflation of dream and nightmare is also the cue from which I can make my attempt at articulating this confrontation as one of a search for what Julia Kristeva deems “the abject.” For Kristeva, the abject is a kind of absent object that must remain absent, or abjected, in order for the onlooker to continue on in a “normal” or “sane” manner of living. The abject, then, may always already exist without the recognition of the seer, but it becomes at once *abjected* upon the acknowledgement of and reaction to it by the voyeur. This being so, the use of voyeurism becomes an interesting point of contact through which to engage gothic texts. With an aim of investigating the authors’ exploration of the abject, focusing attention on the multiple and varied uses of voyeurism in gothic texts can yield yet another explanation for the very purpose, import, and effect of the characteristics that constitute the writing of the Gothic tradition. I argue that select works of

Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne, particularly “Imp of the Perverse,” “The Man of the Crowd,” “The Haunted Mind,” and “Night Sketches,” seem to reveal an active pursuit to locate, or “confront,” the abject, or “horrifying image of [one]self”—an enduring and prevailing, yet largely undiscussed, preoccupation of gothic authors and their works.

Before I begin with an explication of the texts themselves, it is necessary to untangle the parameters of the abject for a better understanding of the theoretical basis of the discussion. To contextualize Kristeva’s at-times abstract articulation of the abject, I turn to Fiedler. His idea of the gothic as America “confront[ing] the horrifying image of itself” is in itself the perfect image to use to understand the complexity of Kristeva’s ideas in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. To start, the search for the abject must first include a conversation about the Freudian, and more recently, Lacanian conception of the subject-object relationship. Cursorily, the subject of any given relationship identifies the object in relation to itself and self-identifies through that very relationship as well. In other words, the “I” identifies the “Other” as such—apart from itself—but in so doing identifies itself by way of the “Other” and thus recognizes the “I” within the “Other” even as it can be opposed to it. This relationship—explained by way of a child recognizing her image in a mirror as both “Other” and “I”—was deemed by Lacan the “mirror stage” and was initially said to occur only in early childhood maturation, but was later revisited and revised to be viewed as an integral and recurring negotiation of self-identification throughout one’s life. It is easier to understand, then, if we, as the subjects, identify our relationships with others, with objects, as looking into a mirror. We understand that the object is something that is not ourselves, but we can see ourselves reflected back by that other, that object, whether it is a result of similarity to it or difference from it.

So far, then, we should have a clearer connection between Fiedler's mirror image and Lacan's mirror stage, but not yet that of the abject. In order to better articulate the difference between the object and the abject, I finally turn to Kristeva. The difference is somewhat nuanced, but distinct nevertheless. She suggests that "there are lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects" and "[s]uch lives are based on *exclusion*" (6). Therefore, just as the subject-object relationship is defined by desire—the subject's desire for the object—the relationship to the abject is "articulated by *negation* and its modalities, *transgression*, *denial*, and *repudiation*" (6). The subject-abject relationship as made through denial or negation is further complicated in Kristeva's assertion that abjection is "a kind of *narcissistic crisis*" insofar as narcissism "appears as a regression to a position set back from the other, a return to a self-contemplative, conservative, self-sufficient haven" (14). This crisis arises as a result of the subject's impulse to reject that which exists within oneself; and, consequently, "the abject appears to uphold 'I' within the Other" (15). It is at this stage in the process of self-exploration in which I see the gothic texts operating. The stage thereafter, that of *abjectification*, which occurs as "the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has always already been lost," does not necessarily seem to manifest itself within the chosen texts (15).

To further elaborate on Kristeva's abject, here I offer two concrete examples. Kristeva employs the image of a corpse to represent the ultimate material manifestation of abjection. She writes that "corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death....It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect itself as from an object" (4-5). A corpse, then, is abject insofar as it collapses the boundary of life and death—collapses the boundary between "I" and Other.

A sense of abjection occurs, however, only in the subject's reaction or response to that which is called abject. Similarly, Kristeva gives another passing example that may be useful in explaining the material manifestation of abjection, that of a pile of children's shoes or dolls. This object, placed within the context of a Nazi concentration camp—Auschwitz—is no longer an object easily identified or desired, but becomes abjected when associated with the horror of the Holocaust. As Kristeva puts it, “The abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death, which in any case, kills me, interferes with what, in my living universe, is supposed to save me from death: childhood, science, among other things” (4). In this case, the space of or reason for abjection of the crime is enhanced by the correlation between, and resultant tainting of, an image in two very different circumstances.

Now, to move in the direction of how the particular gothic texts chosen for discussion here function as explorations of the abject, a connection between literature, the abject, and the act of voyeurism is needed. According to Kristeva, “the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject...it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject” (5). In other words and as previously mentioned, the abject can be explained, if at all, in terms of the subject's futile attempt to locate that which is harrowingly absent or horrifyingly lost *within one's own self*. Since the abject is that which one thrusts aside in order to live, it is, therefore in a sense, an absent object. Kristeva concludes that “[i]ts signifier, then, is none but literature” (5). With literature serving as our signifier for the abject, or absent object, what remains to be discussed is the means by which literature enacts the search for or construction of it therein. Kristeva asserts, “[e]lusive, fleeting, and baffling as it is, that non-object can be grasped only as a sign. It is

through the intermediary of a *representation*, hence a *seeing*, that it holds together,” and thus introduces the import of voyeurism to an understanding of the abject (46). She writes:

“Voyeurism is a structural necessity in the constitution of object relation, showing up every time the object shifts toward the abject....Voyeurism accompanies the writing of abjection” (46). As such, voyeurism becomes the frame through which the search for or acknowledgment of the abject is pursued in literature, particularly in gothic texts.

Though most American gothic texts are, as Eric Savoy suggests in “The Rise of American Gothic,” “committed to representing that fearful ‘uncanny’ as it reappears in arresting figures that partake generally of the ‘monstrous’” (171), the voyeuristic texts seem to be less an attempt to recreate the abject through characterization and plot but, rather, more an exercise in unveiling, locating, or exploring its very existence by way of narrative and observation. Further, two of the four texts I plan to discuss seem to make an attempt to articulate the very concept that Kristeva outlines in her essay—the abject. Therefore, the first two texts which can be categorized as theoretical or conceptual exploratory essays—Hawthorne’s “The Haunted Mind” and Poe’s “The Imp of the Perverse”—will be treated as such. In concert with Kristeva’s elaboration of the abject, I will use these texts as provisional insight into and framework through which to view Hawthorne and Poe’s other voyeuristic stories chosen for this discussion—“Night Sketches” and “The Man of the Crowd”—with the intention of revealing to what extent they serve as exercises in locating, exploring, or confronting the abject, or horrifying image of oneself, through the multiple, overlapping layers of voyeurism.

Hawthorne’s “The Haunted Mind” begins straight away with the creation of multiple layers of voyeurism. First, we have the narrator, who is serving as the *liaison voyeur*, if you will, to the “you,” who is being addressed and framed as the voyeur. The narrator is casting the scene

before the reader's eyes in an overt and explicit way, requiring that the reader take notice, take ownership, over the scene. He says, "By unclosing your eyes," "you find yourself" and "You question with yourself" (104). The narrator seems to be inculcating the reader into his own observations rather than merely illustrating the scene, which creates an almost passive narrative while it necessitates an accepting and active reader. Moreover, the scene in which the voyeur finds herself is no ordinary observable setting. It is none other than one's own mind—one's own haunted mind. This setting fits perfectly in line with Kristeva's "narcissistic crisis" that arises in the search for the abject. "Your" mind, as directed and enacted by the narrator-voyeur, even wanders to "how the dead are lying in their cold shrouds and narrow coffins, through the drear winter of the grave" which is illustrated to parallel "your" speculation "on the luxury of wearing out a whole existence in bed...content with the sluggish ecstasy of inaction" (106). This is a clear effort to not only make uncanny the parallel drawn between lying asleep in bed and lying dead in a coffin, but to collapse those very boundaries—the boundaries of life and death.

The narrator of "The Haunted Mind" goes further, too, in his conflation of boundaries. He moves from the above collapse between seemingly external factors—those that we locate "over there," that are abject—and re-locates them within our very selves:

In the depths of every heart, there is a tomb and a dungeon, though the lights, the music, and revelry above may cause us to forget their existence, and the buried ones, or prisoners whom they hide. But sometimes, and oftenest at midnight, those dark receptacles are flung wide open. In an hour like this, when the mind has a passive sensibility, but no active strength; when the imagination is a mirror, imparting vividness to all ideas, without the power of selecting or controlling them. (106)

Here, the narrator seems to be articulating exactly the search for the abject—a search that must locate that which is rejected within oneself. He seems to be arguing that the abject, that which resides in some dark and shrouded place within the heart, can only be explored in a somewhat unwilling and passive situation when the mind has “no active strength” to shove it aside. When the mind, the imagination, turns into its own mirror to reveal the denial, rejection, the abject unable to select or filter what one might find there.

Later, the narrator blurs the distinction between life and death again in personifying Fatality as a live demon “to whom you subjected yourself by some error at the outset of life” (107). This death, this Fatality, invades the life of the narrator-voyeur as well as “you,” the reader-voyeur, when “the mockery of [Fatality’s] living eye, the pointed finger, [is] touching the sore place in your heart” (107). This passage is particularly interesting and pertinent to the discussion of the abject. Not only is death very clearly and blatantly infecting life and the outside rendered within, but the “I” is once again made to reside within the Other as one in the same. It is Fatality’s “eye” that is at once a voyeur into “your” mind, “your” heart even as it is also “I.” It is also no great surprise that this entire voyeuristic observation of the mind takes place not only within the haunted, sleepy mind, but also within a dark and shadowy chamber, revealing “this indistinct horror of the mind, blending itself with the darkness of the chamber” (107). Here, as “darkness has swallowed the reality,” this sleep, this wakefulness, this death, this life seems to have become an exploration of what is categorized as not-reality, as abject (107).

Poe’s narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” seems to be exploring a very similar kind of space as that of Hawthorne’s narrator in “The Haunted Mind.” Instead, though, of delving into that space as a voyeur for the entirety of the essay—unveiling and illustrating its existence within oneself—the narrator of “The Imp of the Perverse” considers the implications of negating the

existence of the abject. The narrator explains that “we all” have been a certain sort of anti-voyeur, of not-lookers, of the abject and in so doing essentially charges us all with the crime of abjectifying the abject. He remarks that “we have all overlooked it. We have suffered its existence to escape our senses....We saw no *need* of the impulse—for the propensity. We could not perceive its necessity....We could not have understood in what manner it might be made to further the objects of humanity, either temporal or eternal” (202). Here, I believe the narrator is not only somewhat condemning the total refusal of the abject, but taking a step toward ameliorating its existence and usefulness. His argument seems to be that the recognition of the abject, that is to de-abject the abject (or to not abjectify the absent object when confronted with it), has the potential to open the mind and intellect to myriad options for understanding life.

I am, it should be mentioned, equating the narrator’s “imp of the perverse” with the propulsion toward the action that occurs *instead of* abjection. His explanation that “the assurance of the wrong or error of any action is often the one unconquerable *force* which impels us, and alone impels us to its prosecution” sounds very much like the process of abjection. But, the narrator argues, “a glance will show the fallacy of [the] idea”—the idea being that that which is abject should be abjected. Rather, he seems to be arguing that it should be indulged. Herein, the narrator assumes the role of voyeur, and by association the reader as well, with his employ of “a glance.” This narrator’s “glance” is not unlike that of the suspended narration of “The Haunted Mind” which appeals to the search within, of one’s own heart and mind. This narrator declares that “[n]o one who trustingly consults and thoroughly questions his own soul, will be disposed to deny the entire radicalness of the propensity in question....There is no answer, except that we feel *perverse*, using the word with no comprehension of the principle” (204). Just as Kristeva

explores the parameters that constitute the abject, it seems that our narrator is exploring the implications of indulging the impulse, allowing the propulsion to bend toward horror.

Using the example of standing on a precipice that abuts an abyss, the narrator explains the delight in the horror of a potential fall:

It is merely the idea of what would be our sensations during the sweeping precipitancy of a fall from such a height. And this fall—this rushing annihilation—for the very reason that it involves that one most ghastly and loathsome of all the most ghastly and loathsome images of death and suffering which have ever presented themselves to our imagination—for this very cause do we now the most vividly desire it. (205).

Perversion, then, seems to be distinguished through the voyeuristic observation of the above scene by the narrator as the impulse indulged by actively and willingly confronting the abject, thereby circumventing abjection or the process of abjection. He explains, “[t]o indulge for a moment, in any attempt *at thought*, is to be inevitably lost; for reflection but urges us to forbear, and *therefore* it is, I say, that we *cannot*” (205). For all intents and purposes, the narrator seems to be urging our recognition of this impulse and at the same time cautioning our relegation to it. After this somewhat lengthy explanation of the impulse of the perverse, the narrator reveals himself to be a case in point of such indulgence, and effectively places the reader in the position of voyeur to the consequences of his perversity—the events that occur, perhaps, during his state of self-abjection. Kristeva points out that in such states

The narrative yields to a *crying-out theme* that, when it tends to coincide with incandescent states of a boundary-subjectivity that I have called abjection, is the crying-out theme of suffering-horror. In other words, the theme of suffering-

horror is the ultimate evidence of such states of abjection within a narrative representation. (141)

Kristeva's theme of suffering-horror provides a convenient explanation for the somewhat out-of-place conclusion of "The Imp of the Perverse." A tale that begins with an extraordinarily philosophical and coherent argument, albeit radical, ends with a narrative that seems to undercut the validity of that argument by destroying, to a large extent, the ethos of the narrator. It could be argued, then, that the narrator undergoes this sense of suffering-horror preceding the "crying out" of his confession. Insofar as this is accurate, we can conclude that this particular narrator, while simultaneously encouraging and cautioning our dealings with the abject along with his own effort to circumvent the process of abjection, proffers himself as an illustrative example of this certain state of abjection—a state in which one indulges in perversity and seems to become abject themselves.

Having covered the more conceptual essays to serve as frameworks to complement and further illuminate Kristeva's *Essay on Abjection*, the remaining two stories can be read as cases in point of employing voyeurism to tow the line between locating or uncovering the abject and resisting the impulse to surrender to abjectification as well as indulge in perversion. The first of these is Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Night Sketches." The narrator of this tale, or sketch, tells of the amusement engendered by viewing events "mistily presented through windows" (225). Already, at the outset, the narrator is framing himself as a voyeur who enjoys, perhaps even prefers, perceiving the world through somewhat obstructed windows without being seen by those he is observing. Until, that is, it gets dark and

a gloomy sense of unreality depresses [his] spirits, and impels [him] to venture out, before the clock shall strike bedtime, to satisfy [him]self that the world is not

entirely made up of such shadowy materials, as have busied [him] throughout the day. A dreamer may dwell so long among fantasies, that the things without him will seem as unreal as those within. (226)

This passage is ambiguous and obscure in a few ways, all of which support a reading in favor of exploring the abject. First, it is a “gloomy sense of unreality” that impels the narrator to leave his comfortable spot next to the hearth and behind the window and forge out into the night, the darkness, in search of proof that the world has clearer truths than the “shadowy materials” with which he is amused during the daylight. Just as in the aforementioned essays, the narrator-voyeurs delve into the darkness of the night or the mind or both to illuminate their qualms with or questions about the world. Here, too, is a sense that this work can only be done in the darkness, as the daylight either casts only shadows of truths or allows our own selective restriction of acknowledgement, which does not seem to include recognition of the abject. We see, also, the same conflation of outside and inside and, by default, of the “I” and Other as well, though both are chalked up to seeming “unreal.”

Even as the narrator ventures outside of his comfortable home to uncover some sense of reality that he deems unavailable to him within, as soon as he steps foot outside he finds himself sandwiched between death and nothingness:

I look upward, and discern no sky, not even an unfathomable void, but only a black, impenetrable nothingness, as though heaven and all its lights were blotted from the system of the universe. It is as if Nature were dead, and the world had put on black, and the clouds were weeping for her. With their tears upon my cheek, I turn my eyes earthward, but find little consolation here below. (226)

The narrator sees himself plopped between nothingness in the sky and little consolation from the earth. Moreover, he imagines that Nature herself has died and likens his dark surroundings to a funeral where the clouds are mourning her death. Faced with what sounds a bit like nihilism, or perhaps even the abject if he were to dwell a bit longer in contemplation of the death of life itself, the narrator is drawn away by a lamp burning in the distance. This sudden notice of light (or lack thereof) occurs again and again throughout the sketch and distracts the narrator-voyeur from fully acknowledging what could be deemed as the abject. For instance, he sees that

Beyond lies...a concoction of mud and liquid filth, ankle-deep, leg-deep, neck-deep,—in a word, of unknown bottom,—on which the lamp-light does not even glimmer, but which I have occasionally watched, in the gradual growth of its horrors, from morn till nightfall. Should I flounder into its depths....Pshaw! I will linger not another instant at arm's length from these dim terrors, which grow more obscurely formidable, the longer I delay to grapple with them. (227)

The narrator-voyeur is here confronted with the horror of the abject, though still “at arm’s length,” and seems to consciously decide not to proceed to be engulfed within its throws. He also re-attributes the ever-present or ever-apparent sense of the abject to the darkness. That is, as the darkness grows, so too does the impetus to search out the abject.

Toward the end of the sketch, after the narrator-voyeur declares it is not his “nature to be other than a looker-on in life,” we, as readers and on-lookers of the narrator’s on-looking, continue “still onward...into the darkness” (229, 230). Here, we, along with our narrator-voyeur, have “reached the utmost limits of the town, where the last lamp struggles feebly with the darkness” (230). Perhaps the narrator is suggesting one of two things at this point in the culmination of the sketch. First, that, as much as we might try, we cannot transcend or collapse

boundaries because we, serving always as a light struggling feebly with the darkness, cannot revel therein. Or, second, that both the limits as well as the lights are illusory and, then perhaps, so too is the object itself. The narrator encourages us to “[l]isten awhile to its voice of mystery; and fancy will magnify it, till you start, and smile at the illusion” (230). (This brings one to wonder where the distinction between ambiguity and illusion is drawn.) Finally, the narrator of “Night Sketches” employs a “gaze” as well onto a “solitary figure” who “passes fearlessly into the unknown gloom, whither [he] will not follow” (231). This suggests that it is in fact possible to transcend boundaries, but the outcome of such endeavors is left uninvestigated.

Finally, the very same type of scene is set in Edgar Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” as we are introduced to in Hawthorne’s “Night Sketches.” In “The Man of the Crowd” a man sits in a coffee house, acting as an onlooker of the city and the people through a window after nightfall. As a preface to our voyeuristic adventure, the narrator describes a condition whereby men “die with despair of heart...on account of the hideousness of mysteries which will not suffer *themselves* to be revealed” and later confesses that he “derived positive pleasure even from many of the legitimate sources of pain...[and] felt a calm but inquisitive interest in every thing” (229). As we encounter along with him as reader-voyeurs, our narrator-voyeur becomes altogether inquisitively interested in what he perceives as a certain man’s secret that he posits as refusing to be revealed. As the day passes on, the narrator “gave up...all care of things within...and became absorbed in contemplation of the scene without” (230). Similar to the narrator of “Night Sketches,” our voyeur in “The Man of the Crowd” remarks, “As the night deepened, so deepened to me the interest of the scene” (232). Here, again, we have not only a heightened interest in investigative voyeurism as the night grows darker, but also the want of entry from “within” to

“without,” endeavoring to uphold the “I” in the Other. The narrator eventually focuses in, as mentioned above, on one man within the crowd of the scene without.

Our voyeuristic narrator becomes so enthralled with this one particular man, that he is impelled to leave his station behind the window and go outside with the sole purpose of following the man who made him exclaim to himself, “How wild a history...is written within that bosom!” (233). The voyeur that is our narrator follows this one man around without being detected (or at least he believes himself not to have been detected) for a number of hours in hopes of discovering one of those hideous mysteries of the heart that refuses to be revealed (229). The narrator seems to be trying to resist abjection when he says,

As I endeavored, during the brief minute of my original survey, to form some analysis of the meaning conveyed, there arose confusedly and paradoxically within my mind, the ideas of vast mental power, of caution, of penuriousness, of avarice, of coolness, of malice, of blood-thirstiness, of triumph, of merriment, of excessive terror, of intense—of supreme despair. (233)

As our narrator divulges his impulse to endorse abjection as a result of encountering this man, he is also attempting to resist doing so. As a result, he relegates himself to becoming the man’s shadow which, in and of itself, positions our narrator-voyeur as what can be identified as the man’s double. In posing as this man’s voyeur, our narrator is consequently self-identifying with and through the Other—the voyeur and the man he observes become transposed.

Even as our narrator-voyeur perceives the man he observes as having a “wild history” which he equates with something abject, some hideous and unrevealable secret buried within himself, he gives up the search or obsession with unraveling the mystery and “as the shades of the second evening came on, [he] grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the

wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face” (237). The fact that the voyeur’s gaze was not returned, suggests not necessarily something about the observed, but perhaps more about the on-looker. That the narrator concludes this man’s heart “*es lässt sich nicht lesen*” (does not permit itself to be read) could reveal more about the narrator’s own unwillingness to be read, or confront the hideous image of himself, than it does about the man he has been observing. In this sense, the narrator-voyeur of this tale seems to have been interested in unveiling the abject, but never made the move from self-identifying with Other, or upholding the “I” within the Other. Instead of confronting the hideousness *within*, the narrator-voyeur, not unlike that of Hawthorne’s sketch, kept the abject at arm’s length—in the scene without.

These gothic sketches and essays seem to be tip-toeing, but not necessarily transgressing, the boundary between exploring the abject and taking part in abjection. Even as the narrator-voyeurs of these texts take great pains to investigate the existence of the abject, they are just as careful not to resign themselves to partaking in the process of abjection itself. Moreover, the multi-layered use of voyeurism in these texts—the voyeurism of the narrator as well as the imposed voyeurism of the reader by the very act of reading—is arguably a way in which to alert readers of both the existence of the abject as well as an indictment of our collective participation in the process of abjection. Where, though, does that leave us as reader-voyeurs, or the narrator-voyeurs, or even authors for that matter? What are the implications of such texts and what is meant to be engendered in readers of them? As Eric Savoy explains,

The abject signifies a domain of impossibility and uninhabitability, associated with betwixt-and-between conditions where death keeps invading life, into which the normative American subject must cast the irrational, the desire unacceptable

to consciousness, and locate it “over there” in some frightening incarnation of the always inaccessible Real. (170)

To be sure, these texts attempt to sustain their stay in that “betwixt-and-between” condition, but do more work than locating it “over there” or abjectifying the abject. However, it seems that the unsatisfying culmination of each endeavor is something “always inaccessible.” Savoy also suggests that “[t]he abject is less a specifiable ‘thing’ than a location for throwing off the psyches *and* a culture’s most basic drives, the ones most in need of repression” (170). There is in these select gothic sketches and essays, however, a distinct intention to *not* throw off these repressions, but to re-locate them, or re-evaluate them, as exactly what they seem to be—a mirror image of oneself. These texts seem to be at once acknowledging the existence of the abject as something in need of illumination, not of repression, as well as problematizing the possibility of that acknowledgement. Likewise, the efficacy, success, or implication of those attempts is left unvisited or, perhaps, unable to be seen through to fruition.

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