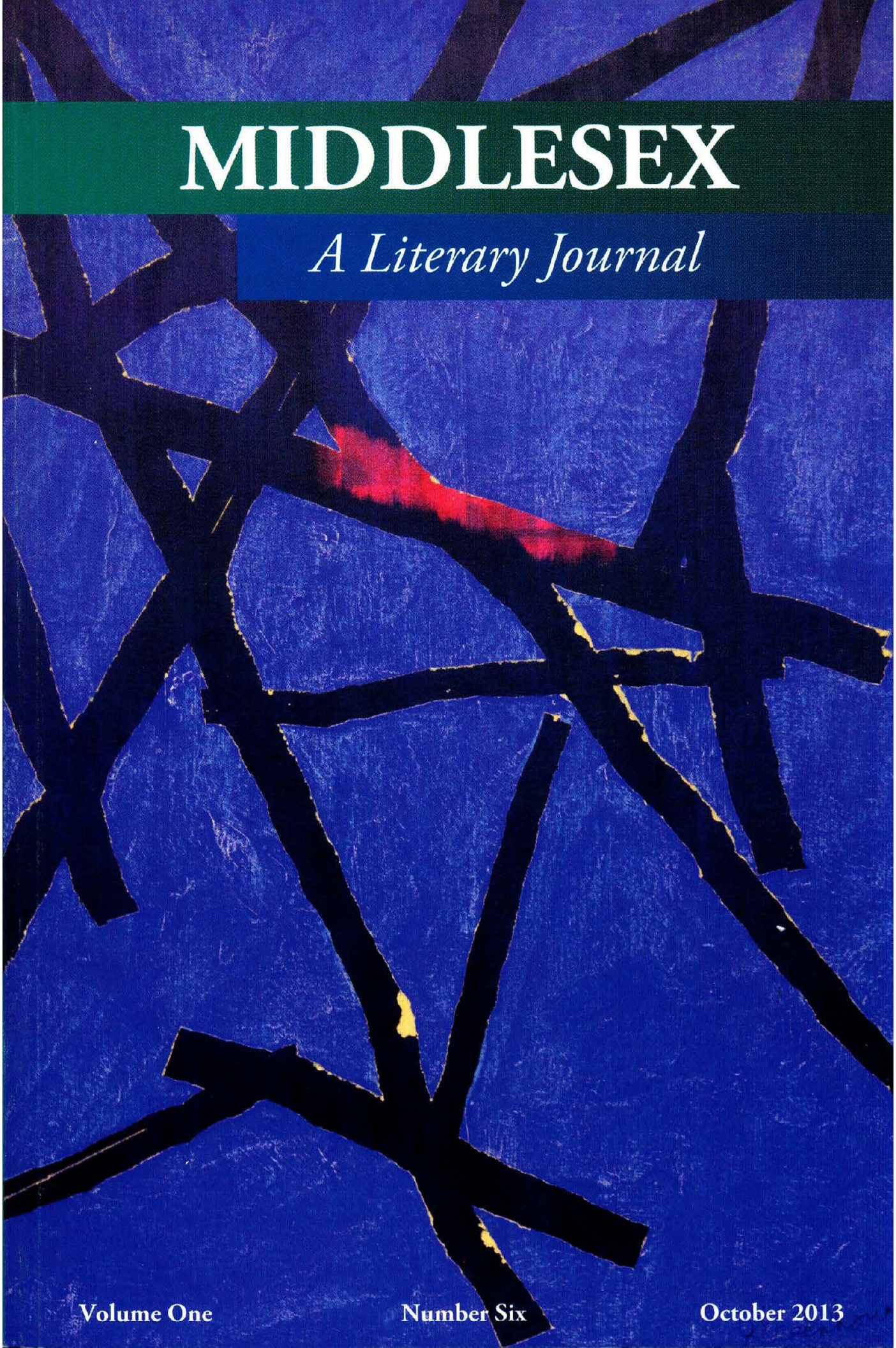

MIDDLESEX

A Literary Journal

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A publication of Middlesex County College, Edison, NJ
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MARK SAKI

(Curtain rises on a writer's study. MR. MELLOWKENT is writing at his desk)

FEMALE VOICE OFF STAGE:
Mr. Mellowkent

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Yes?

FEMALE VOICE OFF STAGE:
A Mr. Dwelf to see you.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Dwelf? I don't know a Mr. Dwelf. I've never heard of him.

FEMALE VOICE OFF STAGE:
He says it is very important.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Oh------send him in.

(MR. DWELF arrives carrying a briefcase and also a large book)

MR. DWELF:
My name is Dwelf, Mr. Mellowkent.

(MR. DWELF sits down in chair by MR. MELLOWKENT'S desk)

You are a literary man, the author of several well-known books and -

MR. MELLOWKENT:
You are right, and I am involved in a book at this very moment - rather busily involved.

MR. DWELF:
Exactly - time with you is a commodity of considerable importance. Even minutes are precious.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
(Looking at his watch)
Yes, indeed they are.

MR. DWELF:
That is why this book, called "Right Here"-- and I'm introducing it at a special price--is a book you must have. It is absolutely indispensable for the writer. And I show it to you as because it is no ordinary encyclopedia but rather an inexhaustible mine of concise information that--

MR. MELLOWKENT:
That may be, but right here at my elbow I have a row of reference books that supply me with all the information I'll ever need.

MR. DWELF:
Ah yes-- but here, here you have it all in one compact volume. No matter what the subject, "Right Here" gives you all the facts in the briefest and most enlightening form. Historical reference, for instance *(Turning to page in book);* career of John Huss. Here we are "Huss, John, celebrated religious reformer. Born 1369, burned at Constance 1415. The Emperor Sigismund University blamed."

And how about poultry-keeping ----that's a subject that might crop up in a novel about English country Life. Listen to this *(Refers to book)* "the Leghorn as egg-producer. Lack of maternal instinct in the Ṃinorca. Gapes in chickens, it causes and cures. Ducklings for the early market, how fattened." See it's all there. Nothing lacking.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Except the maternal instinct in the Minorca and that you could hardly be expected to supply.

MR. DWELF:
Sporting records, now, that's important too. How many men do you know who can just off-hand tell you what horse won the Derby in any particular year? That's just a little thing, but---

MR. MELLOWKENT:
My dear sir, there are at least four men in my club who can tell me what horse won in any given year, but also what horse ought to have won and why it didn't. If your book could provide a method for protecting one from information of that sort - now that would be an accomplishment.

MR. DWELF:
How about geography? That's a thing that a busy man, writing under pressure,. might easily slip over. Only the other day a well-known author made the Volga flow into the Black Sea instead of the Caspian. Now with this book--

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Right there *(Pointing to a book)* is a reliable up-to-date atlas-- and now I really must ask you to be going.

MR. DWELF:
An atlas gives merely the chart of the river's course, and indicates the principal towns that it passes. "Right Here" gives you the scenery, traffic, ferryboat charges, the prevalent types of fish, boatmen's slang terms and schedules for the principal river steamers. It also gives you-

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Have you read my most recent book, "The Cageless Linnet"?

MR. DWELF:
I don't read novels.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
Oh but you ought to read this one-- everyone ought to.

(MR. MELLOWKENT reaches for book)

It's published price is six shillings but you can have it for four and six. I know you'll like the passage in Chapter 5 where Emma is alone in a birch grove waiting for Harold Huntingdon--that is the man her family wants her to marry. She really wants to marry him too, but she doesn't discover it until Chapter 15. Listen: "Far as the eye could stretch rolled the mauve and purple billows of heather, lit up here and there with the glowing orange of day lilies and edged round with the delicate grays and silver and green of the young birch trees. Tiny blue and brown butterflies fluttered above the fronds of heather, reveling in the sunlight, and overhead the larks were singing as only larks can sing. It was a day when all nature-

MR. DWELF:
In "Right Here" you have full information on all branches of nature study--- forestry, insect life, bird migration, reclamation of waste lands. As I was saying, no man who has to deal with the varied interests of life--

MR. MELLOWKENT:
I wonder if you would care for one of my earliest books-- "The Reluctance of Lady Cullumpton."

(Looks for book)

Here it is. Some people consider it my best novel. Hmm-there are one or two spots on this cover so you'll only have to pay three- and nine pence for it. Let me read the opening to you-- "Beatrice Lady Cullumpton entered the long, dimly lit drawing-room, her eyes blazing with hope that she guessed to be groundless, her lips trembling with a fear that she could not disguise. In her hand she carried a small fan, a fragile toy of lace and satinwood. Something snapped as she entered the room; she had crushed the fan into a dozen pieces." There, what do you think of that for an opening? It tells you immediately that there's something afoot, doesn't it?

MR. DWELF:
I told you I don't read novels.

MR. MELLOWKENT:
But just think what a resource they are. On long winter evenings or perhaps when you are laid up with a sprained ankle--a thing that might happen to anyone, or if you were staying at a house-party with persistent wet weather and a stupid hostess and insufferably dull guests, you would just make an excuse that you had letters to write, go to your room, and for three-and-nine pence you could plunge into the society of Beatrice Lady Cullumpton and her set. Really no one ought to travel without one or two of my novels in their baggage as a stand-by. A friend of mine said only the other day that he would rather go to the tropics without quinine than go without a couple of Mellowkent novels in his kit bag. Perhaps sensation is more in your line. Let's see, I think I have a copy of "The Python's Kiss" somewhere here.

MR. DWELF:
I--I think I'd better be going now.

(MR. DWELF grabs briefcase and "Right Here" and departs quickly)

(MR. MELLOWKENT smiles as he watches MR. DWELF's exit, and then returns to writing.)

(CURTAIN)

GIRL
O. HENRY

SCENE 1

(As soon as house and stage are dark, spotlight focuses on side stairs leading up to stage). MR. HARTLEY climbs stairs while studying note in his hand. On stage, he again looks at note, looks at apartment door, and then rings doorbell).

VIVIENNE:
(Entering from rear of stage, opens door.)
Yes? Oh--Mr. Hartley, come in.

(MR. HARTLEY enters modestly furnished room)

MR. HARTLEY:
Vivenne, you never answered my last letter. I've had a terrible time finding you--and without a detective, I'd still be looking. Why did you keep me in suspense when you knew how much I wanted to see you and hear from you?

VIVIENNE:
Please sit down Mr. Hartley. *(They both sit down)* Mr. Hartley, I hardly know what to say. You've made a wonderful offer and I know that I would be contented with you. But I am a city girl and I don't know if I would be happy in that quiet suburban life.

MR. HARTLEY:
My dear, I've told you that you shall have everything that your heart desires. You can come to the city for the theaters, for shopping and to visit your friends whenever you wish. You know you can trust me, don't you?

VIVIENNE:
Oh yes! Completely! I know that you are a kind man and that the girl you get will be a lucky one. I learned all about you when I was at the Millers.

MR. HARTLEY:
Ah, I remember the evening I first saw you at the Millers. Mrs. Miller praised you all evening. That dinner was elegant. Please Vivienne, promise me you'll come. I want you. You'll never regret coming with me. No one else will ever give you as pleasant a home.

VIVIENNE:
(Sighing)
Oh I don't know what to do. I just don't know what to do.

MR. HARTLEY:
Tell me Vivienne-- is there another-- is there someone else?

VIVIENNE:
No--No---

MR. HARTLEY:
Then I have got to have you. No more dilly-dallying.

MR. HARTLEY:
Now. As soon as you can get ready.

VIVIENNE:
(Rises)
But Esther. I would never go to your home while Esther is still there.

MR. HARTLEY:
(Rises)
She Shall go! Why should I let that woman make my life miserable? Truthfully there has been trouble ever since I have known her. You are right, Vivienne, Esther must go before I can take you home. I have decided--I will turn her out.

VIVIENNE:
When will you do it?

MR. HARTLEY:
Tonight! I will turn her out tonight.

VIVIENNE:
Then my answer is "yes." Come for me whenever you wish.

MR. HARTLEY:
Promise me-- on your word of honor.

VIVIENNE:
On my word of honor.

MR. HARTLEY:
Tomorrow!

VIVIENNE:
Tomorrow!

SCENE II

(Front hall of the well-appointed Hartley home. MRS. HARTLEY and MR. HARTLEY enter from opposite directions.)

MRS. HARTLEY:
Hello dear. A good day?

(MR. HARTLEY and MRS. HARTLEY kiss)

Mother is here. She came for dinner but there is no dinner.

MR. HARTLEY:
I've something to tell you. I was going to do it later, but since your mother is here we may as well out with it.

(MR. HARTLEY whispers in MRS. HARTLEY's ear.)

MR. HARTLEY:

Oh mother! Guess what? Vivienne is coming to cook for us. She is the one who worked for the Millers. Now dear *(Looking at MR. HARTLEY)*, go right back to the kitchen and discharge Esther. She has been drunk all day--again.

(CURTAIN)

A Message from the People of Earth

(for my father)

"We are trying to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of Galactic Civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination and our goodwill in a vast and awesome universe."
—Words of President Jimmy Carter inscribed on the Voyager probe launched into space on June 16, 1977.

Who left Puccini
Off Voyager's golden disc?

Tosca's aria
Plunging down to Mars
A rusty dagger thrust
Through Scarpia's ribs.

Gianni Schicchi's Lauretta
Longing for her sweet father...
Raining down
On Jupiter's raging storm.

Butterfly's plaint unwinding,
Threading the asteroid belt,
Slipping through Saturn's rings,
Sighing for Pinkerton's ship
To pierce the dark horizon
With every silent moonrise.

Rodolfo all alone,
Pining for Mimi:
His remorse reaching back
Toward Venus, forever grasping
empty space and riding

A distant, fading orbit
Around
Cold
Dark
Pluto.

And if there is no one to hear,
No God to bear witness

To our heroic quest,
And
the adding of a final note:

"Dilegua, o notte!
Tramontate, stelle!
Tramontate, stelle!
All'alba vincerò!

Vincerò!
Vincerò!"

A curse, triumphal, hurled
Into the abyss, the barren forest
Where the lone tree fell.

The Acorn Sowers

Gather a thousand tree nuts
Into an old burlap sack.
Stow it in the back seat,
To sow them where you may,
And set a course for sunrise.
Roll down the window and hurl
A fistful to the wind wrapping round windows
As you hurtle, Johnny Appleseed,
Down dawn's highway.
Some will fall on rocky soil, some on thorns
Or scorched earth,
But some will root deep to burst blacktop,
Push past property lines, uproot posts,
Reach across a neighbor's fence,
Crack through concrete.
What will spring from what you've sown?
Hickory, spruce, chestnut, oak—
Some reach deep into city streets,
Broom-handle bats for stickball.
Some seed the brain's strange branching—
Textbook, yardstick, pencil—
Unfurling in scroll and diploma.
Some sing in a Stradivarius,
Soar in a model glider,
Crack rawhide in a Louisville Slugger.

Tree of knowledge, tree of life,
Budding into awareness,
Bearing divine fruit.
Forbidden, fallen, resurrected
In a crucifix.

When the Light No Longer Lingers

Where does the light behind the eyes go
when it leaves the body
no longer a body but an object in a room—
a coat rack, an end table, a chair piled high with clothes,
a rag doll with eyes gone cold and black?
Something vital leaves them dull,
never to come back,
a thing less animate than the machines
that whir and whistle on
even when the light no longer lingers.

A child, I hooked a rainbow
and brought it to the bank where it gasped and flailed
until the gills slowly ceased to flap,
the eye finally went dim and flat,
though I tried to make it swim again
in the backwater darkening pink.
I envisioned the light lift from its eye
and flow where it danced downstream,
in the dappled sunlight of the golden hour
that rides glistening rapids
above the flat black rocks.

A man, I hooked a body once
and pulled it onto the dock--
a duck hunter on a pram overrun
by spring rains and rapid runoff--
his body a log long submerged,
his clothing tattered trash bags,
hollow sockets where eyes had winked and wept,
black holes that could drag down
even the brightest stars...

Still, I searched for the soul's quick glint
stowed away to survive the full fathom five,
and found it in his pocket sealed in cellophane—
a message in a bottle, firefly in a jar:
a single photo of his son,
stringer raised high, with rainbows all aglow—
his bright eyes kindled by a new sun
rising without and within.

Catch and Release

I cast a fly into the darkness
Where the stream runs deep like blood
And hooked a salmon big as a child
From a time before the Flood.

I took pity and cradled it close
In the backwater clear and slow
Until it twitched to enter the run
And its spirit began to flow.

It looked at me with mournful eyes
But I held it by the tail
Until it turned itself into Jesus
Pulled down from the rusted nails.

He turned the stream to wine-dark red
His weight too much to bear
I staggered to hold him in my arms
And gulped a last breath of air.

Lest I drown, I let him go
And to a salmon he returned.
Resurrected, he leaped the falls
Above rapids that boiled and churned.

Another may eat of his flesh
And partake of that sacred meal.
I choose to troll my own depths:
Strange fish fill my creel.

Surface Lure

What will it tease to the surface?
What summon up from the dark?

Some silver-finned hope
From a jewel-speckled school?
Or a bottom feeding fear
With an Angler's ancient fangs?
A joy that breeches
and suckles young in shallow seas?
Or a spiny pride
Easy to take offense, bristling with quills?
Writhing regrets,
breeding eels' slimy coils?
Or iridescent dreams that school and dart
Streaming toward the sun?
A sluggish blue-grey grudge,
A sodden log to snap a line?
Medusan jealousies
With tangled tentacles that sting?
Or deep desires
With venom-tipped tails?
A phosphorescent faith
flickering
up from eternal night?

Choose the surface lure wisely
For the depths come alive with eyes.
And though they spawn leviathans,
Yet it holds some power to conjure.

EPHEMEROPTERA

Mayflies, we would rise from the rapids,
burst the surface tension,
and unfurl dun wings to the honeysuckle breeze,
tiny sailboats taken flight
up dawn's shafts that pierce the mire.

Our time served underneath river rock,
Clinging for shelter against the ceaseless current,
Eluding the long fingernails of the deep freeze
And the silver strike of rapacious trout,
Groping through murk and flood,
Each seeking a sweet death in the other.

Emergent, we morph into the madness
Of a life distilled to a single day—
Large eyes to detect the other's heat,
to drink each other's light utterly.
Mouth parts vestigial, eating only ether,
forelegs elongated to clasp one another,
spin and spiral up sun shafts,
Paolo and Francesca fulfilled,
To mate mid-air, swoon in a death dance,
And charge the eternal streaming with the seedlings.

Poem Starting with a Line by Josephine Miles

The poem I keep forgetting to write is about the stars,
the lights overhead in the firmament that spoke
to Melville's navigators, obscured now in the glare
of street lamps, head lamps & porch lights
on a cloudless January night.

The poem I keep forgetting to write is about solitude
& stillness & a surfeit of quiet. Not
the shriek of police sirens, the crash
of the trashman collecting bottles, the rasp
of the neighbor's truck engine turning over at dawn.

The poem I keep forgetting to write is a dense canopy of leaves,
an abandoned bird's nest, a broken branch. It's not a cracked
fence plank, trash-strewn lot, crack den left to empty vials.
Not a police report, a headline, a hurricane-bloated ocean
washing across a barrier island to the bay. The poem
is not a Ferris wheel sucked by the undertow into the tides.

The poem I keep forgetting to write is about the scars.

Reading The (Bartender's) Bible

They call it the end of the road,
and there is a moment
when it all becomes clear,
or so they say. The end
of the road (Serves 1),
a cool drink in the afternoon,
waiting *she hath prepared*
her meat, she hath
mingled her wine
waiting still for that call
(3 measures gin) telling us
she's made it through (crème
de menthe, pastis) and now
it's time *come, eat of my bread*
and drink of the wine
which I have mingled
– I know you can feel it
stirring inside (stir together
over cracked ice). To wait
and mingle together, know
that for a moment
the road runs on (dress
with a sprig of mint),
her travels continue
(fill with club soda), *forsake*
all thoughtlessness,
and live and walk
and don't ask again
– is it really (unless
you want a shorter drink)
the end of the road?

How Matt Became Daredevil

He knew he was more
than the shirt-tail-tucked kid who'd stay after class
and pound erasers. Picked last for sports,
left to watch as the kids banged line drives deep
beyond the infield in summer. Pressed into lockers,
beat bloody in the back of the gym.
Maybe the radioactive liquid
that blinded Matt Murdock
in the comics would spill
from a passing truck,
heighten his senses,
and he'd then scale the walls
of his apartment house,
and chase the villains
across the city's rooftops.

The Dogs Play in the Rain

The dogs run through the yard
spraying mud with fast-moving paws.
They like it in the rain,
can sit for hours as it
soaks into their fur.

They love that spot
at the rear of the yard
where the water collects,
lake-like when it rains.
They splash in puddles,
digging and bobbing
at the surface, then track
mud into the house
and smell sour for hours as they dry.

This storm is biblical, a friend says,
which seems extreme,
but the rain's been beating
on the windows and roof for hours.
Lights flicker. The phone
cuts in and out.
And watch the dogs
out the kitchen window.

Is there a lesson,
the yard ignored for years,
rain rushing down the hill,
pooling in a temporary pond
by the shed? Later, we'll install a drain,
re-grade the yard,

but the water will still find
its place. Nature always wins.

The storm passes and we walk the dogs.
Even the thick northern red oaks
that shade the streets
were torn from storm-soaked sod,
their roots exposed, the sidewalk's
cement slabs fractured
and flipped like the branches
and stray sticks the dogs
will play with as we
rake up the storm's debris.

Striking Out

Dwight Gooden's been arrested
and I'm in a classroom
talking to students
about semi-colons.
There are three uses
for the semi-colon, more
than the number of innings
Doc pitched in his final game.
In his first game, he
struck out five. He didn't
win again until May,
but, then, he was unhittable.
He was nineteen. I was
twenty-one. I worked
a delivery route.
He worked the strike zone,
won the Cy Young. Nothing
but cocaine could stop him.
I went back to school,
got a degree. He
won a championship,
made millions throwing
curveballs that broke
into the zone
like they fell from a desk.
Independent clauses
can be linked with semi-colons.
Drug stops with a jail sentence.
Fastballs with a slow change.
The fan with the phenom.
Use commas in lists,
unless clarity is needed. Use

the fastball to brush the batter
back from the plate,
then make him chase
a curveball in the dirt.
Gooden painted the corners
like a master, rapid-fire
and fierce like Pollack, precise
like Rothko. I use words
to make my point, commas
to bring it home.
There are eight uses
for the comma; there were
eight shutouts pitched by Gooden
in his Cy Young season,
eight chances given
to the phenom pitcher
whose violent, rising fastball
punctuated the rare period
when his Mets ruled the city.
In my classroom,
miss a test and you only get
one chance to make it right.

The Battle of Marathon

Being unknown, now
I am known,
the runner from Uganda says.
Twenty-six and two tenth miles,
a surge at twenty three
for the gold. *I am happy now*
that I am a known athlete.

Pheidippides the messenger
ran from Marathon to Athens
to tell the Greek Assembly
of the Persians' defeat.
Ran and raced: like stubble,
in Browning's words,
two days, two nights did I burn.

Bill is training again.
Another New York race
in his sights. He'll be
fifty-one. I sit
on my deck, two months
shy of fifty, running shoes
in the closet.

I ran eighteen miles
once, pacing north
up the boulevard
on Long Beach Island,
ninety-five degrees
in October, walked some
and nearly vomited,

but finished
with a burst of speed.

Abebe Bikila won two golds
running barefoot.
Frank Shorter should have won
two. He won silver
in '76
with a broken ankle.
The man who beat him
was doping.

I stretch and my neck still hurts.
I ran two miles last month,
pulled the muscle
in my right calf.

Take a risk, see what happens,
Shorter says, *let's just find out.*

After the Storm

When we could no longer endure the oppressing darkness
the monotonous drone of the newscaster on the radio
we opened the shade even though
it was already past 9.
No hope of a welcoming sun for many hours yet.
And then we saw it
shining white like New Year's Eve
the house next door.
Someone said it must be a generator
or maybe a lone explorer,
massive flashlight in hand.
But already one of us had ventured outdoors, beckoning the others.
"Look—a moon—a full moon."
We stood then for several minutes outside the door
looking up at it
White and Full and Light.
And we breathed the moon that evening
like it was the air itself.
After a night of destruction
of floods washing the earth
and fire splitting the sky,
our curses were finally silenced.
For we loved the moon that night.

Praise the Air

Praise the air
The life-giving air that fills our lungs
So easily we hardly notice the intrusion.

Praise the babies
Who turn on their backs and smile
A smile so wide it holds the universe
balancing goodness on the lips like a tightrope walker.

Praise their slender fingers
Wrapped around the chain at your neck
A tense gravity of love.

Praise the grass
that bends at the skin of your toes
The wet green blades which shine in the sun
Their easy friendship caressed by the wind
The murmurings as they crack upon themselves
Heard only by the bugs which hide beneath a bed of black earth.

Praise the beads of lavender
that ride on a breeze in springtime
Their lives so brief and yet the scent
--oh the scent!—seeps into the soul
We feel it still beyond the seasons
Even into winter.

Praise the dreams
The immortal haze that finds us all sooner or later
The dreams that live in the air
in a baby's smile

the grass
the lavender scent.

Praise praise praise!
Forever until
we are too busy praising to even notice
the slime beneath our feet.

Dreaming of My Daughters

I dreamed of my daughters
Long-legged sitting at the table
Pushing back strands of their yellow hair
Which fall softly into their eyes blue like my mother's
I could hear their words in the silence as they read
The only sound in the room
The sweep of a page
Hands of the clock moving the minute the hour
And I knew my daughters
Their golden laughter in the dusk
Their fingers tender on my heart.
I knew them in their silences
The curve of the narrow lips, so much like my own
Their bold unspoken passions as they bounded in the door
Drenched in joy and sweat
They crunched cornflakes in the morning and
Apples in the evening and sometimes
Just stirred their cups
Sitting in the darkened theater they held fast for the fantasy
In the back of the van they nudged each other for a window seat
They squealed beneath the covers that settled like clouds.
And sometimes I could taste the salt in their tears and would comfort them
And sometimes they would twine their arms into mine and
Move us forward down the avenue as the hands of a clock
Move toward the minute the hour.
And I would drink their lives, the lives of these women now
Until the years seeped away, leaving behind
A swath of remembrance.

Only I have sons
And their laughter is golden in the dusk
Their fingers tender on my heart.

A Kind of Dying

Day drips from my hand in puddles of forgetfulness
trapped only momentarily between the lingering hours of darkness
and the gathering clouds which are loss.
I am bereft.
Was that the last time
I heard your voice so familiar
as it wrapped around my heart?
Your fingers like silk against my bare shoulder
the steady tapping of water in the porcelain sink
the bed hidden in a mountain of down
flowered pillows on the floor
and photographs of another time—
bridal smiles and boys in matching sweaters
posed for soccer leagues,
or heads tilted just so with bats in hand
one, grown now, mesmerized in the eyes of a child.
Half read books on the table,
a necklace with golden loops
rings of ruby and silver
a white blouse waiting on the chair.

And I wonder if this is a kind of dying.
If I am never to see these things again.
But strangely I am not worried or sad.
And before I can ponder the question
I realize I am no longer lost in clouds for
I waken
to a sun surprisingly bright.
So bright.

Sown on Stone

> *"[A]t some stage in their lives, many lichens*
> *break down into their component parts*
> *and then need to reassemble by finding*
> *their appropriate partners."*
> *—Annette Rumbelow*

lichen could thrive here, symbionts
of light and dark, out of direct sun.
Prometheus and Eagle viable,
even if iffy in the long run.
each sees an opportunity & takes it.
past & future, sleeping, hog the sheet
of words, one or another waking,
chilled, from common dreams.
nothing as it seems spells trouble.
everyone gets what nobody wants.
lichen could survive here. defeat
just means another country,
another stone, one more river to cross.
nothing conquers what conquers all.

HIBERNATION

eyes in everything. lidded.
at times transparent, snow-blue.
don't look back.

slumber would make it matter.
matter added to dream, added
by gnomes in the soul's cellar.

clear morning air. limbs new
to gravity. crowds disperse
from night's extravaganza.

taught not to stare, we miss
the continuity of sand
abandoning the hourglass.

the sense that no one sees the same
seizes me. that neither do I
provides little relief.

the closer I look, certainties
disintegrate, snow around crocuses.

I'd forgotten them.

Listen to the Mockingbird

are you all there? we'd ask as kids, meaning
more than we knew: have you got your grass-
hopper, your snake, your squirrel, your great-
grandpa, your rocks, your clouds, your trees?
all of us had, we thought, so what's with you?

we didn't know you could make sense with less
than everything. now myriads think they can.
they've emigrated, resolutely all there,
inaccessible to seven-league boots, edgily
content with title searches, deeds & grass.

these are not the instruments we played,
lute, flute & drum to awaken sagas.
we too have learned to walk like hippopotami,
to ostrich & to mole, but can still speak English
when, as Bogart said, our business demands it.

this is not the language that we hear from them.
their words echo those who happen to be dead,
the way the living happen to be black or yellow,
white or red. and just one word, one color at a time.
as if to sing in gem or uncut stone would be a crime.

The Weed Garden

it was knowledge killed the feast.
we learned to call real the not,
the false, the evil. so it became so.
in the beginning was the weird,
and it remained so,
surprising as a platypus.

the good is always easy to explain.
the sun, despite skin cancer.
the rain, despite flood.
love, despite itself.
death, though, remains
unsatisfying as a remedy.

so we keep speaking,
Adam to Eve, Eve to Adam.
figleaf fashions change,
but the talk stays small.
things happen just as we fear,
syllable piled on syllable.

even a vow of silence,
even a return to clay,
can't outrun the tortoise of chance,
can't free the dancer from the dance.
everything gets in the way.
everything is on the table.

The Method

from claustrophobic wings
to agoraphobic stage,
novices glide or stumble
always surprising
even when predictable.

nothing is average
till later, after the dance
with the devil, bugaloo
or do-si-do. nothing greater
than the sum of its parts.

wrestling an alligator
doesn't count. the devil
doesn't struggle. it's all
on you, stranger. not
on what you know.

Another Day Older

the radio, background to silence,
bristles with crises, box office revenues,
scandals in the voids between the stars.
silence bristles with arms, soft arms,
memories of eyes looking past long eyes,
rockin' to the radio. not even the blues
of Blind Willie Johnson, *Dark was the Night,*
Cold was the Ground, starward on Voyager
blue enough to shake those charms.

So Long

for Bob

how lonesome
-ly the after-
thought arrives

as if it had never
left, with just
that measure

of the blue
bird of happi-
ness, of the black

bird's bye bye

Una Storia Lunga

Aspetto che smetta
questo non umano di tempeste e di valanghe
di foreste in catene dietro rombi possenti
di anime rubate ai corpi tra fogli di catrame.

Il vento, il vento che spezza
canneti e braccia senza forti barriere,
brucia finanche colonie di farfalle sugli alberi
gridando in traiettorie di piombo
una viola liturgia al suo dio ideologo.
Spie luminose frementi segnalano che dighe rompono
nella valle che dorme e non ha modo di salire
su un tappeto che voli.

È tutto ciò che rimane.
Fardello schiacciato sospeso
a case oblique e a vie frantumate
disperazione
dei piccoli camminatori e dei bottegai in attesa –
il silenzio della tortura della zolla resa polvere
per sfruttamento o per fede non allineata
solitaria
il pianto del fiore pellegrino che brucia
al volo dei rettili spaziali
radice di solitudine dei vuoti discriminati.

Dico di una storia – lunga –
che i giorni ripetono sulla pietra del mattatoio
e incidono sulla lama dell'acciaio
e annodano ai canapi degli alberi sfrondati
impotenti.
Con la stessa assenza di fuoco delle stelle

che muoiono
nel ventre dei laboratori.

La morte semina soltanto tracce di paradiso
in ossa che diventano fossili di sabbia nei deserti
o scaglie di conchiglie sulle timpe.

A Long Story

I wait for the end of
these inhuman tempests and avalanches
and of forests in chains behind the powerful roar
of souls robbed from the bodies that lie between sheets of tar.

The wind, the wind that breaks
reeds and breaches weak barriers,
that even burns butterfly colonies on trees
screaming in falling trajectory
a violet liturgy to its ideological god
Luminous, quivering spies show which dykes break
in the valley which sleeps
and which has no way to board a flying carpet.

It's all that remains.
Crushed bundle suspended
in slanted houses and on streets shattered by desperation
of your strollers and of waiting shopkeepers
the silence of the torture of clumps of earth
rendered dust to be abused
or because of misaligned solitary faith
the weeping of the pilgrim flower
that burns to the flight of spatial reptiles
root of solitude of discriminating emptiness.

I tell of a story – long –
of the days that repent on the stone of the slaughterhouse
a story that the days etch on the blade of steel
and encrust, impotently, on the canopies of trimmed trees.
With the same absence of fire from the stars
that moan
in the innards of laboratories.

Death seeds only traces of heaven
in bones that become sand fossils in the deserts
or fragments of shells on rock fissures.

A Child's View of a Father

(for Frank Spano)

My father (my mother tells me) woke up in cold nights
And tucked me under tight blankets,
Caught the cold in the palm of his hands and shut it down,
Started the fireplace, and in those nights
When cold became blue like the blue outline on the frozen jetties at the shore,
Picked me up and lay me warmly on his bed
Between my mother and himself—oh, the warmth—
And in the early mornings he'd fry eggs
And make pancakes
As he sang me and mom awake—
And once or twice
When I wept from pain or fear of dark,
He wept with me,
And stroked my head with his gentle hand,
Singing my name as a lullaby.

My Father, who died soon after my birth, Speaks to me, in a dream

From behind a door,
my father's voice-
measured, organ deep: "The simple, grey nightingale sings
like your mother,
like spring rain," he says.
"Of the common oak,
feel its new buds as they
were your twins in flesh.
(No, neither you nor I can open the door of the room I'm in.)
Look at the starling,
measure its flight,
its happy wings
that oar the winds."

My Love Wakes

The sun, your lover,
wakes you with warm, gentle hands,
and you smile, roll over—
feel the cool floor
with your small feet
ready for the journey of the day.

Prayer for My Daughter

I

Live blessed in your fluid genes,
Ancestral dreams etched in Arabic wailings,
Healing of broken-winged swallows,
Hailing of both rat and eagle,
Of thorns and petal,
Murdered and murderer.

II

Trust in letting go,
In the hopelessness of a god lost
In his own perfect order: clouds,
Rain-ripe, cannot resist their moist pull,
And the Hudson cannot be deaf
To its Atlantic call.

I Wear My Mask to Bed

Destruction cradles you in her arms
The only love you will ever know
The only love you will ever want
She smells so sweet,
She chokes you in her fragrance

I wear my mask to bed
The colors have melted
Leaked together with time
Painted stroke by stroke,
By a mirage of artists

You are but a riddle
To your own mind
My dear, it is not so dark
The ambush is not real
It exists only in your melancholy

You are eternal autumn
Only so many leaves may fall
Only so many streams may dry
So I brought you to the Spring
But you turned away
Back to the land of earthéd stone
I do not belong here, you said
Leave me to my withered daisies

Does the sky long to be freed of his clouds?
Perhaps the rain falls too softly
Does the sun long to slip beneath the ground?
Perhaps it gets too bright to see

Elisabeth DiPasquale

What's in a Name?

Anthony Burgess's novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, is peppered with words and phrases of an exotic language referred to as "Nadsat," created by the author to enrich and strengthen the novel's tone and references. The language of Nadsat exists only in the rebellious youth of Burgess's society, and thus the provenience lies in the youth. In the world of *A Clockwork Orange*, there is an immense generational gap. The rebellious teenagers cease to respect and obey their elders, taking it a step further and targeting them as the most common victims of their violent, unprovoked crimes. They see adults and elderly as nuisances: pathetic, weak, and easy to manipulate and torture. This is demonstrated through Alex's choice in victims: "the doddery starry schoolmaster type veck," (7) "the starry ptitsa, very grey in the goloss," (63) whom he ends up killing, and the blatant disrespect and indifference that he shows his parents. Language being one of the strongest building blocks of any culture and society, having two different dialects (Nadsat for the youth, and then the "normal" adult dialect) strongly reflects two very different ways of life and values. Nadsat came to be, in this dystopian society, because the youth became separated from the adults in such a significant and powerful way that they desired to be set apart in their manners of speech, to match their manners of dress, action, beliefs, and other aspects of life. Nadsat symbolizes a borderline separate society that exists within this dystopian society, where youth are an entirely different species.

The existence of Nadsat provides many clues and hints to the reader regarding the context and tone of the novel. Through the language, the reader is able to pinpoint the mood of the scene and the emotional position of the characters. This is a prevalent case in two aspects, specifically with the main character, Alex, through the mere presence or absence of Nadsat, as well as the nature of the Nadsat word and how it sounds. Although it is undoubtedly habitual for him to speak Nadsat, he is still very careful to catch himself and only use it in the correct situations, or at least what he views to be the correct

situations. While addressing his fellow droogs, he speaks as follows, "Come, gloopy bastard as thou art. Think thou not on them. There'll be life like down here most likely, with some getting knifed and others doing the knifing. And now, with the nochy still molodoy, let us be on our way, O my brothers" (21). The reader can tell that Alex is comfortable in this situation, because he is not speaking in an uppity fashion, but at the same time assuming a quality of leadership in his speech, and through this language, the context and mood may be decoded simultaneously. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Alex drops Nadsat completely while he is addressing people he needs to be careful around, including correctional figures, his parents, and also victims before he attacks them, in order to draw them in. When he knocks on the woman's door before he rapes her, he says, "Pardon, madam, most sorry to disturb you, but my friend and me were out for a walk, and my friend has taken bad all of a sudden with a very troublesome turn, and he is out there on the road dead out and groaning. Would you have the goodness to let me use your telephone to telephone for an ambulance?"(24). Alex not only drops his slang language, but picks up a sophisticated, humble, and intelligent way of speaking. He wants something from this woman (to open the door), and in knowing that he will not receive what he wants if he speaks like a delinquent, he feels more tentative and careful. The situation is the same when he anxiously stumbles to correct himself, referring to P.R. Deltoid as "sir" in place of "brother." Once Alex gets what he wants, and feels secure in his situation, he is able to return to Nadsat and is comfortable appearing dangerous and frightening once again. Once the reader has caught on and become inured to Nadsat, it is simple to determine whether the word or phrase has a negative or positive connotation. For example, "britva" and "nozh" are the words for weapons, "tolchok" being hit, and they have a sharp sound to them. "Malenky" means little, "platties" are clothes, and "gloopy" is goofy and lame. All of these words sound innocent and harmless, with a babyish tone to them. Additionally, many of the words sound similar to the normal English term, and in this case the reader can figure it out even more quickly. Examples of these words include "nochy" for night, "moloko" for milk, and "millicents" for cops. *A Clockwork Orange* is a novel that hones in on a variety of real-life issues, within this created society, and the youth-based language of Nadsat greatly assists this cause, in its position as a tone-setter and decoder.

THE ARMOR OF ATHENA

The Gorgon head, the decapitated embodiment of punishing hideousness, lies on the breastplate of Athena, warning those who might benefit from her wisdom to keep their gaze on the features for which the poets called her Bright-Eyes. A cause to threaten, and to separate her gifts of protection and wisdom from the sight of men, lay also embedded in the goddess' character, and other female characters join her in wishing to see men's eyes downcast in their presence. The question arises of why the myths of diverse times and cultures express inclinations towards separating the vision of men from strong and wise women, who otherwise offer guidance.

Athena's beauty does not appear often in the literature, and accounts mention her handsomeness, or androgyny, rather than her feminine beauty (Hall 3). Statues of the goddess accentuate strong features, bordering on the masculine, and a body fit and unvoluptuous by classical standards, making the call for a strong separation between the mind and visual perception more curious.

Athena distracts male judgment from her origin, as Zeus' headache announces her arrival. In the initial moments of her tale, she holds the place of a female warrior, springing into the world armed and armored.[1] Through her armor, the goddess potentially creates the distance from physical threat, martial or marital, necessary for dispassionate thought and guidance.

The Greeks often portrayed Athena as fully clothed, her virgin form protected in battle and in peace, particularly after the fifth century B.C.E, when the threat of the Persians against the city that bears her name influenced artists to render her in full armor. Even on occasions when Athena removed her armor, Greeks generally showed her still in a full garment, and so, even with her guard down, costume obscured her

[1] Athena enters the world much like a hoofed animal, which spends not even its first day of life helpless. John Henry of American mythology also begins life with the tools of his trade in hand, and one may see a fear of these characters' essential natures and a need for control brewing in their birth narratives. In the contexts of their respective cultures, these characters, and the herd animals, have membership in abused yet essential groups, whose roles and identities men wish to limit, and whose natural strength men deem dangerous if not tamed.

form (Llewellyn-Jones 241).

The Greeks generally held that danger lay in viewing a virgin woman's body, raising the question of to whom it posed danger, and whom Athena's armor protected. The myths seem to answer this question in the story of Tiresias, who goes blind viewing the naked body of Athena (Llewellyn-Jones 244; Smith 65). At least ceremonially, mortal men responded to this threat, and in festivals requiring the cleaning of the statues, participants often veiled Athena, or women transported her form to the nearby riverside,[2] and warned men to stay clear on the day, lest they suffer the fate of the old soothsayer (Llewellyn-Jones 245).

Athena embodies both the consummate warrior and the virgin, possessing male and female heroic traits in the extremes. The myths stress her virginal quality, and do not explain it as a consequence of her lack of femininity, but as a choice. Rather than ignore her more feminine traits, the Greeks have the warrior goddess defend her vulnerability.

Giovanni Boccaccio, in his 14th century work *The Genealogy of the Pagan Gods*, using the gods' Roman names, tells the story of Vulcan (Hephaestos), and his desire for the wise warrior goddess. Vulcan wished to make a trade with Jupiter (Zeus) and offered his thunderbolts for the maidenhood of Minerva (Athena), and Jupiter agreed to the exchange. However, Jupiter allowed his daughter to defend herself if she wished, and she did, causing the thunderbolt maker's seed to fall to the ground and create a motherless birth like her own.

In myths concerning women warriors and powerful virgins, we find the characters aligning their physical and mental or spiritual identities, tending towards a denial of feminine characteristics in the balance. This tendency carries implications about men's cognitive dissonance regarding women's natures. These myths demonstrate the impact of this confusion on female characters bearing messages of guidance and wisdom, and on the male characters who receive the messages. The stories develop towards a solution which benefits the male and female characters in progressing beyond the distractions.

Comparing Athena with the stories of more recent virginal heroes lends clearer definition to the dynamic at play of women at once

[2] The indicated reading leaves unclear whether these statues in fact had garments to remove or if participants merely treated the statues as if naked, in the way a child may pretend to bathe and dress a doll with sewn-on and clearly irremovable clothes.

full of feminine traits, and closed to their sexuality. In modernity's most familiar virginity narrative, the immortal enters a living woman. For Mary, virginity stands as a fortress against the world of the living, but opened to God's intelligence and condescension to mortality. Her power resides in her vulnerability to God. The fruit of her womb also takes on the androgynous role of a gracefully gentle and intuitive leader, a sacrificial lamb, yet a lion. Although often viewed as a state of innocence and ignorance, in virginity Mary bore the King of Kings, who inherited a power beyond military might, yet possessed his own guiding vulnerability, expressed in his parables, and culminating in his martyrdom.

Joan of Arc provides another example of one who possessed the traditionally feminine traits of intuition and virginity within the masculine character of a warrior and leader (Lash 87), yet her martyrdom also shows physical vulnerability. In these prominent stories of powerful female virgins, their defense against the world of mortal men grants them the power to lead their people, while remaining closely connected to the immortal.

Other mythical traditions cast visions of warrior goddesses, and women bearing wisdom. Their tales handle feminine physique and characteristics varyingly, sometimes ignoring, sometimes confronting the threat these qualities pose to the women's own effectiveness. Germanic folklore has the Valkyries, powerful women on horseback, indistinguishable in ability and valor from male warriors. In other myth, Virgil describes Camilla as comparable in might to any male warrior, but the Greeks also have the Amazons, with breasts removed to allow for the straps of their quivers (Lash 86-87). The Aborigines of Australia have a tale of an island where women lived and created weapons superior to those men could make. The men stole the weapons through trickery involving distracting the women with the beauty of swans, birds never seen before on the women's island (Reed 35-38).

In the stories of the Amazons and the Aborigines, the women's femininity, and beauty in general, stand as obstacles to their physical or military superiority. Camilla's story and that of the Valkyries ignore femininity. In all these cases, female traits threaten to distract women from their own goals. These admittedly isolated aspects of broad mythical narratives do not concern the audience with the impact of beauty on the minds of men, but on the distraction or the interference

of feminine form, both of body and spirit, on the women themselves.

In cases of both virgins and warriors, women relinquish or seal off some part of their feminine identity in order to achieve protection or salvation. Celibacy or castration do not often appear as requirements for male heroes, but in order for these women to perform, even with childbirth itself as the feat, they often must surrender part of their sexuality.

The presence of Medusa's unseeable severed head warns men that if they view the physical form presented they will turn to stone, but it may possess a more revealing facet. In her book, *In the Wake of the Goddesses*, Tikva Frymer-Kensky explains that the significance of the Gorgon head reveals itself most tellingly when seen *"as the vagina dentata,"* the toothed vagina, vivid expression of male fear of females' independent and unknown territory. The head's presence potentially represented a threat of femininity, and the complete and natural feminine state turned monstrous by ignorance and denial, recalling the mental upset Athena's gestation brought Zeus, and the denial of Athena's own feminine birthright.

The myths tell that Athena's unique mode of birth came about because of a prophecy warning Zeus that the child he had with Metis would have more power than himself. As a solution, he ate the mother, leaving Athena born under the full influence of her father (Smith 65). Due to a man's fear of feminine power, Athena enters the world motherless. Her birth from a man's head bears the suggestion that Athena came into the world as a man's concept of a woman, rather than one complete and naturally born.

Through the symbol of the Gorgon head, Athena may reclaim her feminine identity originally denied her by Zeus' fear of her potential power. This symbol's representation on her armor implies that her sexual identity's completeness allows her to protect herself and her people more fully. The head may also serve the purpose of turning male eyes away from the physical form which may distract from the goddesses' guiding wisdom.

In some myths, like Athena's, women control the sight of female beauty and the conduit to wisdom, whether represented by a ritual totem, the fruit of knowledge or their own bodies. In stories of women who bear knowledge, the threat of the Gorgon remains, although the physical armor disappears, and a command for men to shut out the

temptation and distraction of their eyes repeats. Although male story tellers may place the responsibility on female characters in order to disown male fear of witnessing truth in full, and of admitting female power, it also opens the interpretation of women as gatekeepers to a wider understanding of these realms.

In the mythology of the New World, the Lakota tribe tells a tale of the gift of the pipe. A beautiful, naked woman brings this tool, integral to the discourse and the practice of all the society's rituals.[3] When she arrives bearing this gift she warns that no man may look at her until her invitation, and one man who tests this sees for the rest of his life as if with smoke-filled eyes (Walker 49).

Western literary tradition has early roots in stories of women guiding men towards a more complete human experience, and occasionally leading creatures into manhood. In Herbert Mason's translation of *Gilgamesh*, the prostitute who introduces Enkidu to human relationship and consciousness "took his hand and guided it" across her body to begin their love making (Mason 18). Before their encounter, Enkidu had lived the life of a wild animal. The key to Enkidu's initiation into manhood lay not in the woman's display of her body, but in her teaching its geography by touch as if leading the blind. From his guidance by a woman, the animal gains the consciousness of a man, and the divine and maddening ability to reflect on his own circumstance and meaning.

In Eden we begin with the fruit of knowledge gathered and offered by the first woman, leading to the creation of the concept of private parts to the human body. In seeing themselves as naked, Adam and Eve demonstrate the capability of self-reflection. Individuals have no cause for hiding without sight, and no possibility for secondary emotions like guilt, shame and embarrassment without reflection on their primary emotions. Knowledge and sight connect from the start of the narrative of mortal existence in the literature of the Abrahamic religions. In Genesis, the consequences of knowledge include a need to hide the human body from the eyes of both men and women.

In the world of the Greeks again, Sophocles has the King Oedipus destroy his own sight when he comes to recognize that he has carnally known his mother. All his wisdom as a leader and a solver of

[3] In a minor, yet provocative, parallel Athena invents wind instruments, necessary for Greek religious ceremonies (Smith 268; Bullfinch 156).

riddles could not protect him from this fate, seen from the beginning by the Delphic Oracle, a female figure. When this vision comes true, and the king accepts it as such, the eyes of a man become worse than useless, and bring only more perfect detail of his helplessness.

Along with the violence, strands of guidance and protection disappear and resurface, woven between these female characters' threats towards men. A warning repeats that the full brunt of knowledge's power combined in the two sexes weakens the dominion of men. The solutions waver wildly between erasure of the signs of femininity for fear of blindness and a blind faith in the leadership of women, but the theme of sight remains constant.

Pallas Athena guides Odysseus, whom she adores among mortal men. With her name of Bright-Eyes, her symbol of the owl, and her dominion of wisdom, the goddess sees for her followers, potentially making the vision of their own eyes a liability. She can make herself present in many places at once and pass on what her superior eyes see. Perhaps the threat displayed on her armor calls for mortals to close their own eyes, lest their inferior visions distract from the guidance of the goddesses' sight.

William Butler Yeats may help in illustrating this dynamic of guidance and sight. In "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," the poet invokes the goddess' name in a conversation between a man and a woman, and the male character then goes on to tell his female companion that:

> ...all beautiful women may
> Live in uncomposite blessedness,
> And lead us to the like—if they
> Banish every thought, unless
> The lineaments that please their view
> When long looking-glass is full
> Even from the foot-sole think it too (174)

This "uncomposite blessedness" conjures impressions of unified human endeavor, the adventure of relationship and one's guidance of another. The possible banishment of the female character's thought depending on that thought's alignment with her physically presented message seems to speak to the issue these heroines grapple with and solve through various defenses. In these myths, the question is raised of

whether the physical message agrees with the spiritual and intellectual message. The question once again appears of who requires defense from this dissonance between the viewer's perception and the female characters' wisdom.

The speaker in the poem calls the woman to view her own shape, and we have seen before the warrior women sometimes confronting their feminine shape and its effect on their abilities, while others appear secure in the marriage of their bodies and their intents.

The ancient wisdom of Athena's tale may instruct us that, in order to answer the questions which others may ask, one must sometimes hide their own physical shape, or else distract from the guidance offered by their essential thought. Ralph Waldo Emerson tells us, in his introduction to his essay "On Nature," that each person's condition draws a hieroglyphic answering the questions they would pose (9). Although examination of one's condition may answer one's own questions, and one may develop to a confidence about the agreement between their body's story and the story which their minds and spirits tell, the challenge of others' perceptions still lays ahead.

Science and poetry wove inseparably in Homer's day and perhaps will marry again in ours. Viewing the separation between male and female through our scientific understanding, the sperm, many times smaller than the egg, demonstrates that men begin life as the invaders of a vast fortress and a home they have never seen. Zeus' motherless creation of Athena, like the creation of Eve from Adam's bone, creates a fallacy subsequently manifested in the narratives, and displayed as mental strife, a need to obscure female sexuality, and threats of shame and blindness to curious men.

While these myths threaten the vision of men or relinquish women's nature, this violence and denial ensures the closing of the eyes to the physical. Once these female characters remove the physical distraction, they may lend their guidance to men, who then behold a less intimidating and more digestible reality. It appears that men must not see how high the wall stands before attempting to scale it, or else never begin to climb the possible heights of combined human sexuality and intelligence.

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Alicia Basilici

Odysseus and Company

Stately scholars have endeavored to reconcile James Joyce's *Ulysses* with Homer's *Odyssey* for the past generation. To begin the endeavor, one might imagine the opening sequence to any ordinary, animated fairytale. The camera reveals an old leather-bound book which magically opens. The first page holds a drawing that comes to life before the audience's eyes, and the camera slowly focuses on the subsequent action. Suddenly, the viewers no longer reside in the dark room with the leather-bound book, but rather live within the world of the text. The characters chaotically bustle about, as the world of the fairytale effectually closes in around the audience.

In such a way, *Ulysses* opens and comes alive. It encapsulates the reader into its alternative, yet eerily realistic universe. One first meets "stately, plump Buck Mulligan," as he makes his way up the stairs (Joyce 3). Then, the keen reader may notice a familiar face in this strange, new world. Indeed, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man's* Stephan Dedalus returns to guide the reader through the initial threshold of the novel. At this encounter, perhaps the reader thinks to him- or herself, "Fancy meeting you here, ol' Chap, and I see you're still up to your old tricks!" The industrious reader may even rejoice, as he or she does when encountering a long-lost friend on the street. After all, the last anyone heard of Stephan, he had gone "to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience" in Paris (*Portrait* 225). However, Stephan only accompanies the reader for a moment before he or she takes a different turn into the kitchen of Mr. Leopold Bloom.

At this juncture, the question as to what exactly constitutes a hero will naturally arise. Typically, when picturing a hero in one's mind, the thought can trail off into some variation of the Odyssean figure. A man endowed with cunning and great strength perhaps fits the bill. Of course, some other individuals may picture a Spiderman or Superman if asked to define a hero. Likewise, a feminist may slap the hero label on a Wonder Woman, or feel satisfied with Batgirl. These examples, admittedly, reflect superheroes, but the point still stands. No

one of sound mind and body would likely pick an ordinary man or woman and deem him or her a hero. In fact, the general rule reads that a hero must *do* something in order to achieve heroic status. The fireman rescues the cat from a burning building. The solider carries his comrade off the battlefield during open fire. The policeman takes down an armed robber. These people deserve the mark of heroism, for their feats mirror the feats of a Beowulf.

Nevertheless, James Joyce hands over Leopold Bloom for the world's consideration and aligns him with Odysseus. Curiously, Joyce morphed the sacker of cities, the liberator of Ithaka, and the brains behind the Trojan Horse, into a middle-aged ad-canvasser. Joyce's protagonist is inconsequential. He is an imperfect man and an outcast. He is also a cuckold, and yet he is laudable. In fact, by focusing on the differences between Homer's Odysseus and Joyce's Leopold Bloom, one discovers that Bloom truly represents a veritable hero.

Dear Nobody,

To begin, when Odysseus says to Polyphemus, "Cyclops you ask me for my famous name. I will tell you then…Nobody is my name," the hero is about to embark on one of his most celebrated exploitations (9. 364-66). Indeed, the Greek warrior has found himself trapped inside the foreboding cave of the cannibalistic Cyclops. In order to assure his victory, Odysseus needs to execute a verbal assault on the one-eyed beast. The most imperative step is to make sure his enemy will stand alone. Odysseus can barely overtake one Cyclops, never mind the entire population. As a result of his preemptive preparations, however, Odysseus successfully hijacks Polyphemus' vision. Afterwards, the other Cyclopes fail to respond to Polyphemus' frantic appeals for aid. In fact, they do not believe their comrade even faces imminent danger, thus Odysseus' scheme executes flawlessly (9.250-565). Two hurled boulders and an angry god later, the hero indeed escapes.

Nobody stood victorious against the son of Poseidon, and this deed has become unequivocally legendary. Beyond doubt, audiences and readers still hail Nobody for his heroic feats in the *Odyssey*, yet Leopold Bloom is just *nobody*. He is a middle-aged Jewish man living in Dublin at the turn of the century. He has not had sexual relations with his wife for around ten years, and to top it all off, he is apparently flatulent (Joyce 291). Joseph Campbell, a celebrated mythology and

literature scholar, describes Bloom as an "unaggressive gentle person, who solicits ads for a living…He is generally undistinguished" (87). However, as James Joyce's official biographer, Richard Ellman, explains "Joyce believed that one can find venerable distinction in every human soul" (361). He believed that the ordinary triumphs of the individual also deserved proper recognition. For this reason, Joyce "endowed an urban man of no importance with heroic consequence" (5). Through Bloom, Joyce demonstrated that human beings are flawed. However, despite these imperfections, individuals have the capacity to overcome the arduous challenges of everyday life. Indeed, Bloom has his share of imperfections, but he does not stand alone. He stands alongside every other breathing soul in the world. In short, Joyce created a man who mirrors every other man and called him a hero.

Perfectly, Imperfect

Odysseus, on the other hand, ranks high above the average man. In fact, Penelope's devious suitor, Antinoös, admits "There is no man among the lot of us who is such a one as Odysseus…" (21.93-4). Undeniably, the Homeric hero had unrivaled strength and ingenuity. In short, Odysseus might have been mortal, but he was also divinely exceptional. Leopold Bloom, alternatively, does not even have an athletic physique. However, "all human bodies are imperfect, limited in some way" (Ellman 436). Joyce did not set out to create a man with the godlike perfection of Odysseus. In fact, as Joyce wrote in a letter to his personal friend Frank Budgen, "My Ulysses is not a god, for he has all the defects of the ordinary man" (qtd. in Ellman 436). In stark contrast to the chiseled body of Odysseus, Leopold "must take up Sandow's exercises" (Joyce 435). Additionally, Bloom runs out of breath and develops a cramp on his feverish search for Stephan Dedalus (452). As laughable as this seems, Joyce purposefully made an Odysseus "who is far less athletic… a man who is not physically a fighter" (Ellman 360). Nevertheless, as a result of this endeavor, the reader may find it easier to identify with Bloom than with Odysseus. After all, if Joyce created a man who had a perfect physique, this character would hardly capture the truly ordinary essence of mankind. Arguably, few individuals identify with Odysseus on the same level because he has superhuman qualities. On the other hand, Leopold Bloom has an imperfect body to match his ordinary character, thus the reader relates to his strikingly

familiar experience.

Accordingly, starting with the first few paragraphs of 'Calypso,' it grows increasingly apparent that Joyce sought to convey the human experience through his protagonist. In one of the most recognized introductions of twentieth century literature, Joyce writes "Mr. Leopold Bloom ate with relish the inner organs of beasts and fowls" (55). As the saga progresses, English literary scholar Stuart Gilbert asserts the reader will soon realize that for Mr. Bloom, "basic appetites are rarely dormant" (175). Arguably, the desire for food most evidently drives the Joycean hero. One clearly experiences this while traveling with the famished Bloom on his quest to procure a lunch in 'Laistrygones.' At this point, Odysseus' banquet with the Phaiakians would serve Poldy well, for his meditation on food "gives you a case of indigestion" (Campbell 104). However, the instinct of hunger comes naturally to all living things, and Bloom, a living thing, is not an exception to this rule. Unlike Odysseus who starved for a month while resisting the temptation of Helios' Cattle, Bloom does not attempt any heroic feats of this magnitude (12.325-65). Joyce's hero feels hungry, and the sheer thought of food directs most of his reflections in this episode. When Bloom finds himself involved in conversation with Mrs. Breen, for instance, his mind continually wanders back to his pending lunch. As the hero muses while listening to his old flame speak, "I'm hungry…flakes of pastry…sugary flower… Rhubarb tart with liberal fillings" (Joyce 158). Even when Bloom recollects proposing to Molly, his thoughts include the poppy seed cake they shared at that moment (176). However, when an individual feels hungry, his or her thoughts may very well include a tasty undertone. Leopold Bloom is hardly remarkable in this regard, for the human body needs food for survival.

Consequently, Bloom noticeably bears the burden of a human body, which markedly separates him from Odysseus. Indeed, as *Ulysses'* original publisher, Sylvia Beach notes, "all the parts of the human body come into *Ulysses*" (90). Nevertheless, one may consider Beach's observation a gross understatement. For instance, candidly speaking, the reader can only imagine the heroic bowel movement that shot from Odysseus' arsenal after any one of his grand feasts. For better or worse, Homer neglects to interrupt his narrative to accommodate for his hero's digestion. Instead, Homer elevates his Odysseus to a level beyond the realm of petty human existence. His hero overrides nearly all his basic

human instincts with seamless ease. When Homer sent Odysseus into the woods on Aiaia, he was heroically searching for his lost men, not hunting for a tree to soil (10.244-310). In truth, as Richard Ellman asks, "What other hero defecates before our eyes like Leopold Bloom?" (6). Well, if Mr. Bloom explored the abandoned Aiaian forest after a helping of delicious pig's feet, he likely would have left his mark on the magical forest floor. However, even the most reserved individuals have found themselves "asquat on the cuckstool" from time to time (Joyce 68). It is part of the human experience, and Joyce wanted to paint a realistic portrait of this experience. Therefore, he included all the aspects of being human, from vulgar indiscretions to the remarkable conquests.

The Jew in the Carriage, The Elephant in the Room

Odysseus, as anyone who has become acquainted with the *Odyssey* will know, is the absent king of Ithaka. As a king of a particular land, one may argue he represents the pinnacle of his particular society. Likewise, Odysseus believes in the same gods, practices the same rituals, and supports the policies that his people follow. Therefore, King Odysseus will not experience any culturally fueled backlash from his kingdom, for he fits into their preconceived notion of what is acceptable. In other words, the character of Odysseus, as Ithaka's representative, reveals his society's collective culture. On the opposite side of this spectrum, the reader has to contend with Leopold Bloom, a social outcast as a result of his Jewish heritage.

Curiously, however, one cannot truly classify Bloom as a "Jew." Honestly, as seen in his over-zealous pork kidney consumption, he does not devotedly practice the faith. Most strikingly, however, Bloom has a dual descent. In fact, only his father links him to the Jewish religion. His mother, on the other hand, comes from a conventional Dublin Catholic background (Ellman 380). Unfortunately, W.B. Stanford, an Irish classical scholar, argues that Bloom's Jewish heritage increases his "sense of loneliness and intensifies Dublin's dislike for him" (135). In truth, Bloom's society focuses on what they consider his most distasteful trait, thus he remains a second-class citizen. However, this should not come as a surprise given the anti-Semitic climate of Dublin in 1904, when over ninety percent of the population practiced Catholicism (137). Undoubtedly, Bloom's alternative religion would have solidified his isolation.

Indeed, during the funeral procession in 'Hades,' the reader has his or her first opportunity to experience how Bloom stands on the outskirts of Dublin society. When Simon Dedalus jeers at the Jewish moneylender, for instance, the group bursts out into fits of laughter (Joyce 93). The men even go as far as admitting to have felt acrimony towards the Jewish population at some point or another (94). Clearly, the men completely disregard Bloom's presence in the carriage. Even when Martin Cunningham finally does awkwardly note the presiding Jew, he still fails to apologize. Instead, Cunningham simply brushes off the sentiment entirely by stating "Well, nearly all of us" (94). Then, the group commits another crime against civility by condemning suicides as "the greatest disgrace to have in a family" (96). Granted, most of the men in the carriage are unaware that Bloom's father died by his own hand. The very nature of a death by suicide may render the act a family secret. Nevertheless, as Professor of English at the University of California, John Henry Raleigh affirms "in gossipy communities like the Dublin of 1904, secrets of this magnitude were rarely kept safe" (588). Since Cunningham has to tell Mr. Powers to avoid the topic around Mr. Bloom, this emphasizes Bloom's detachment from Dublin society. After all, whether it is positive or negative gossip, it would still reveal one person's interest in another. However, the integral details of Bloom's life are not worth remembering for the Dubliners. They do not feel Bloom is interesting enough even to gossip about; they simply do not care. Therefore, Bloom's passage to the figurative underworld showcases his ability to maintain composure in the face of estrangement and racism as well as death.

During the course of Bloom's day these themes come into the spotlight once again, particularly in the 'Cyclops' episode. At this juncture, Bloom will have to rise above nationalism and anti-Semitism as he encounters the citizen. Indeed, when this ambiguous citizen asks Bloom to define a nation, he simply replies "A nation is the same people living in the same place" (331). Of course, the citizen antagonizes Bloom further to state his specific nation, to which Bloom replies "I was born here. Ireland" (331). In other words, Bloom feels the nation is no more significant than the place a person calls home. However, an individual can feel ostracized even within his own community, as Bloom adds "And I belong to a race too…that is hated and persecuted" (332). Still, Bloom will not rise against this persecution for "it's no use…

force, hatred, history all that. That's not life for men and women…it's the very opposite of that that is really life" (333). Bloom has no ill-will towards the men in the bar, and he takes on a seemingly apolitical standpoint in regards to the issue of race and nationality. In fact, one can perceive his moderation again in 'Eumaios' through his discourse with Stephan. Here, Bloom asks "It's all very fine to boast of mutual superiority but what about mutual equality?" (Joyce 643). In essence, Bloom does not believe one particular nation or people are any superior to another. As far as Bloom is concerned, superior nations or races do not exist. He believes there "is room for improvement all round," which deviates from the overall sentiment of an Irish nationalist (643). Simply put, according to Bloom, equality and continual rejuvenation are the key components of any successful nation.

Evidently, Bloom also feels strongly regarding equality, for he faces racism on a daily basis. Indeed, Bloom chiefly identifies with his race, Judaism. All things considered, it truly represents his most unusual aspect when compared to the population of Dublin. Furthermore, his Jewish affiliation explicitly caused his separation from society, thus it is the aspect that has forced him to cultivate a stronger sense of self. In summary, as a Jewish man in Catholic Dublin, Bloom had to toughen up in order to handle his everyday life. Naturally, he may not like the stigma associated with Judaism, yet it still represents a *unique* quality of Leopold Bloom. For this reason, he vehemently defends his race to the anti-Semitic citizen in 'Cyclops.' In this episode, Bloom ultimately conquers the bigot through his effective use of language. Honestly, the single-minded nationalist could not really argue against the fact that "Christ was a Jew like me" (Joyce 342). In fact, Jesus Christ was not only a Jewish man; he also walked around preaching the overall importance of loving thy neighbor as thyself. When coupled together with Bloom's testimony of equality, it forms a complete portrait of a heroic ideology. Arguably, it is rare not only to find an individual who truly believes in egalitarianism, but who also stands alone defending this belief to a crowd of elitists. Therefore, through his actions, Bloom begins to appear as a hero in 'Cyclops' for he defends both equality and love.

Mind over Matter

Readers of Homer's *Odyssey* know very well how Odysseus usurped the usurping suitors. It truly stands as one of the bloodiest

undertakings found in Greek mythology. However, while Penelope faithfully waited for her husband's return, Molly has an affair with her manager, Blazes Boylan. Nevertheless, Mr. Leopold Bloom does not participate in a massacre. He does not butcher Blazes Boylan like a pork kidney, nor does he even seek revenge. In fact, on the surface, Bloom seems to do nothing about the affair. Curiously, Joyce did not consider cuckold-hood to be incongruent with heroism. Michael Mason of University College London explains that "For Joyce... Bloom's cuckoldry was not...in any way incompatible with his being a figure to like and even admire" (171). After all, as a result of his marital discontent, Joyce's hero has the opportunity to utilize the coveted powers of the mind to overthrow his usurper. Simply put, he needs to sensibly think through the affair in order to accept it into his life.

As luck would have it, the power of Bloom's rational intellect is one of his most enviable assets. According to philosopher Baruch Spinoza, the greatest mental quality is objectivity, "the ability to see oneself and the world as they really are" (Raleigh 590). Indeed, Bloom presents a dispassionate view of the people and things he encounters throughout the day. For all the challenges Bloom endures, his key asset is his analytical command. Bloom has remarkable self-preservation skills, and this quality, referred to as *conatus*, also stands as Spinoza's primary virtue (590). In truth, the Dublin hero does not wallow in self-pity, but similar to the enduring Odysseus, Bloom moves onward, never stopping to dwell on one topic for a very long span of time. Raleigh notes that Bloom's mental and emotional properties seem impervious to external circumstances, "he is a self-generating machine...in perpetual motion" (595). In short, through the power of his intellect, Bloom survives.

However, the most taxing obstacle Bloom faces is his wife's pending infidelity. Indeed, Joyce presents his central hero as a magnificent "cuckold" (Ellman 6). A cuckold, or a man with an unfaithful wife, would not normally fit the heroic bill. Michael Mason reasons, "It is rather startling for cuckold-hood to figure so largely among the characteristics of a literary hero" (171). Certainly, it is unusual for Joyce not only to cuckold Leopold Bloom, but also to make him the central hero of *Ulysses*. In truth, before Joyce designed such a male protagonist, Gustave Flaubert cuckolded Charles Bovary in his novel *Madame Bovary*, yet the Madame prevails as the true star of his piece. Likewise, Leo Tolstoi cuckolded Alexis Karenin in *Anna Karenina*,

but again Anna endures as the work's central protagonist. *Ulysses*, on the other hand, chiefly focuses on a day in the life of Leopold Bloom. He is the main protagonist of Joyce's novel. He is the main focus, yet Joyce hands him the short end of the stick.

Additionally, both Flaubert and Tolstoi had their promiscuous heroines tragically fall, thus signaling the dire consequence of cuckolding their husbands. However, James Joyce does not follow the lead of Flaubert by having Molly ingest arsenic, nor does he have Molly throw herself in front of an oncoming train. Instead, the reader finds Molly and Leopold in their marital bed, both attempting to understand the other. She does not receive a dreadful punishment for her affair, Leopold simply forgives her. A cuckold is not usually someone to lionize as a hero, yet Joyce presents Bloom in this light. Therefore, the reader may question how this could properly function within the context of an epic undertaking such as *Ulysses*.

Life or Art

To begin, when writing his extraordinary novel, Joyce may have let his personal life leak into his art. Indeed, Joyce felt exceedingly jealous of his wife, Nora's, past lovers. On one occasion, he wrote to his brother, Stanislaus, "she *says* she didn't love him and simply went to pass the time" (qtd. in Beja 23). Through his word choice, one can sense his uncertainty regarding what Nora "says" and what his wife truly felt. Similarly, in 'Ithaka,' Bloom conjures up an inventory of Molly's indiscretions (Joyce 731). However, this list amounts to pure speculation. In fact, during Molly's soliloquy, she reveals this was her first affair (Joyce 748). In other words, just as Joyce speculated on Nora's true feelings, Bloom speculates on Molly's true actions. However, Nora seemed to revel in her husband's insecurity. In fact, she once condescendingly addressed a letter to Joyce with the salutation, "Dear Cuckold." In the letter she confesses, "it had become a material game to tease [him] about a subject so inexpressibly tender" (qtd. in Ellman 445). Joyce failed to find the humor in Nora's wry remarks.

Needless to say, the author's jealous inclinations were easily ignited. As soon as former acquaintance, Morris Cosgrave, insinuated that he had an affair with Nora, Joyce instantaneously questioned her fidelity. Shortly afterwards, he took to his pen and paper and impetuously wrote, "O Nora...I love you only...and you have broken

my faith in you...is Georgie even my son" (qtd. in Ellman 280). Similar to Mr. Bloom, Mr. Joyce then proceeded to walk around Dublin, "horrorstruck" (281). Joyce simply could not fully trust his beautiful wife.

However, the author may have been justified in questioning Nora's fidelity throughout their marriage. In one particular instance, a Venetian journalist, Prezioso, brazenly pursued Nora and visited the Joyce's daily. Nora subsequently relished in the attention, but Joyce failed to put an end to their relationship (Ellman 316). Instead, he masochistically allowed "the art to play out in real life" (291). Hence, the story of Leopold and Molly Bloom gestated in the womb of its creator. In the end, Bloom ultimately resigns to Molly's affair, yet Joyce could only endure Prezioso for so long. Similar to the style of Bloom in 'Cyclops,' yet dissimilar in regards to Bloom's ultimate resignation in 'Ithaka,' Joyce confronted Prezioso with a verbal punch in the stomach. In fact, witnesses of their verbal showdown claim tears ran down Prezioso's humiliated face (317). Be that as it may, Joyce wanted to create a man who has the self-control to internally conquer his inner-demons. Ergo, Bloom takes a higher road in regards to Molly's affair than Joyce, his creator.

Don't Call the Kettle Black

Certainly, one may recall the majority of mishaps encountered during Odysseus' adventure were not his fault. According to the great captain, *his distrustful crew* released Aeolus' winds that blew the ship off course (10. 25-55).Hermes told Odysseus to sleep with Circe to subdue her, which he does *for an entire year* (10. 280-467). The nymph, Kalypso, held the strapping Odysseus hostage for seven years, and despite his ingenuity, *he could not possibly escape* (5.10-20).Poseidon turned the Phaiakians ship into stone because of *his ridiculous vendetta* against Odysseus (13.140-80). Clearly, one cannot hold the hero accountable for any of these terrible occurrences. They all happened as a result of someone else's folly, but had little to do with the actions or inactions of Odysseus. However, Mr. Leopold Bloom does not go through life assigning blame, instead he introspectively considers his role in the problem. Likewise, the reader clearly observes this psychological venture as Bloom attempts to understand Molly's affair.

In order to come to terms with her imprudence, Bloom shines

the spotlight on his own actions. For instance, after losing track of Stephan in the 'Circe' episode, Bloom also loses touch with reality as his "Jungian personal unconscious leaks into his stream of consciousness" (Campbell 137). Simply put in laymen's terms, the personal unconscious includes all the urgencies, memories or desires that Bloom has inadvertently subdued in his conscious mind since childhood (137). As a result of their emergence, Bloom begins to hallucinate, going as far as to imagine he ran into the ghosts of his departed parents. Campbell suggests these images "join to act as an eternalized commentary on his feelings of guilt in entering the illicit realms of Nighttown" (137). This hypothesis of human guilt gains more support when Bloom interjects his subsequent arrest and trial into the fantasy. At this juncture, he even fantasizes the police have arrested him for being a lewd man, and that he faces a long line of angry witnesses on trial (Joyce 460-70). Similar to Campbell's analysis, Gilbert concurs that Bloom's "inchoate desires take form and realize themselves before him" (319). Seen from this angle, his hallucinatory trial in 'Circe' reflects a conscious attempt to discover his role in Molly's indiscretion.

After all, Bloom does not represent the ideal spouse. As Molly reveals in 'Penelope,' she suspects Bloom has carried on a number of liaisons throughout their marriage (Joyce 739-41). Then, in his 'Circe' flights of imagination, many of these women actually come forward to testify against Bloom. For instance, the Bloom's former maid, Mary Driscoll, claims Leopold's promiscuity resulted in her abandonment of the position (460). Then, Bloom implicates himself further by adding how he showered Driscoll with elaborate presents and "took [her] part when [she] was accused of pilfering" (461). To add to his miserable hallucination, Mrs. Barry claims Bloom wrote her dirty letters, and Mrs. Bellingham comes forward to accuse Bloom of imploring her "to commit adultery at the earliest possible opportunity" (466). This is followed by a whole slew of women also claiming that Bloom made similar advances on them (468). Of course, this entire scene reflects a mere hallucination, yet hallucinations transport the buried thoughts of the individual's subconscious into the conscious state. Stuart Gilbert clarifies Bloom's hallucinations further by adding they have "logic of their own... and reflect the amplification of some real circumstance" (319). Bloom knows that he has failed to put forth a one hundred percent effort in his marriage with Molly. His eye has wandered from

time to time, and in 'Circe' his guilt for behaving in such a manner reveals itself in these phantasms.

Of course, the reader witnesses Bloom's greatest *faux pas* through his correspondence with Martha Clifford. Clearly, he feels guilt over the relationship, for her vision appears in 'Circe' to accuse Bloom of being a "heartless flirt" (456). Despite the feelings of guilt, however, this affair showcases a sin of intention rather than a sin of actual commission (Gilbert 6). After all, Bloom realizes that nothing of substance will ever come of these letters. However, considering Clifford's appearance in 'Circe,' the reader senses that Bloom may recognize his correspondence does not help his crumbling marriage. Perhaps for this reason, Bloom keeps his secret relationship under the radar through his use of the pseudonym Henry Flower.

In essence, however, the entire enterprise with Clifford testifies to Bloom's inability to consummate his desires. In other words, he conjures up designs, yet fails to actually draw them on paper. Similarly, Jeri Johnson of Exeter College notes that Joyce, in his writing, focused on the "ways of doing things," yet failed to "get things done" (xix). Joyce admitted this folly to playwright and novelist, Samuel Beckett, when he declared, "I have discovered that I can do anything with language I want" (qtd. in Johnson xix). In the same way, Leopold Bloom fantasized about "ways to do things" with these ladies, yet does not physically do anything substantial (xix). Even following his infamously lewd display in 'Nausikaa,' Bloom ultimately concludes that Boylan "gets the plums and I the plum stones" (Joyce 373). In truth, Boylan consummated his affair, while Bloom's release simply masquerades as fulfillment. Likewise, his correspondence with Clifford will fail to amount to an actual scandal, "for he is faithful in his mild infidelity" (Gilbert 285). After all, Bloom's thoughts routinely revert back to Molly.

In fact, throughout 'Lotus-Eaters,' the image of Molly continually appears in his thoughts. For instance, after his unwelcomed conversation with Mr. M'Coy, Bloom cannot fathom how M'Coy could compare Molly's voice to the vocals of the amateur Mrs. M'Coy (Joyce 76). When Bloom visits the chemists, additionally, he struggles to remember the ingredients in Molly's face cream (85). If one considered even these two simple scenarios, then it grows increasingly apparent how important Molly is to Leopold. She stands as something both

tangible and influential, while his written affair with Clifford reflects sheer fancy. Arguably, this renders Bloom a rather tragic soul, especially when considering the very tangible, physical indiscretion of Molly and Boylan.

Compassionate Hero

Bloom's cuckoldry, however, manifests as a symptom of a larger condition which renders him heroic. This condition is his compassion. Indeed, if a man could be justified by works alone, then Bloom's compassion justifies him (Stanford 131). When Stephan Dedalus feels frightened after the thunder clap in 'Oxen of the Sun,' for example, Bloom comforts him by claiming it was merely "hubbub noise" and a "natural phenomenon" (395). In truth, he has no true tie to Stephan, yet when Bloom later notices that the boy has grown rather inebriated, he decides "I'll follow him and watch over him" (Campbell 133). This habit of feeling compassionate for others shines throughout Bloom's day. Even during the funeral procession, "Mr. Bloom is the one whose thoughts are the most in keeping with the occasion" (162). Indeed, he even worries about how Dignam's widow will handle his death, and if his family was well-provided for upon Dignam's demise (Joyce 102). Again, Bloom has no substantial tie to this family, yet he feels genuinely concerned for their well-being. Aristotle emphasized "a man becomes virtuous or evil ...by doing virtuous or evil deeds" (qtd. in Standford 125). If one considers the day mapped out in *Ulysses* to be an accurate portrayal of Bloom's day to day life, then he certainly lives in the best possible fashion. He helps strangers when he has the chance (Joyce 180). He even routinely puts himself in other people's shoes to better appreciate their personal struggles (161-2. 494). All things considered, Bloom has proven he is exponentially compassionate, and thus also has the capacity to forgive.

Unsurprisingly, when creating his hero, Joyce made a man who would not succumb to violence and bloodshed at the final hour. After all, Joyce believed "a wise and good man would naturally avoid it" (Standford 130). Instead, Joyce chose a compassionate hero, a man who could overcome his personal tragedy using solely his intellect. This man, Leopold Bloom, would slaughter the demons of his mind, but not the physical demon wreaking havoc on his home. In essence, Joyce "substituted a psychological victory... Bloom, by means

of abnegation, triumphs over the envy and hatred of the usurping Boylan" (130). Truly, he achieves a "humble peace of mind" through his acknowledgment of the futility of remonstration (130). In the end, a combination of compassion and perceptive intelligence render Bloom "indomitable and thus heroic" (Raleigh 595). After all, as seen in previous episodes, despair is not an inborn trait of Bloom. Therefore, he packs up his reservations, accepts his responsibility, and enters into the bedroom to ultimately forgive Molly.

Heroically Ordinary

At the end of the day, the reader will not likely encounter a real life Odysseus, but perhaps one may bump into a Leopold Bloom or a Stephan Dedalus roaming about town. Sadly, the fact of the matter is that extraordinary heroes simply do not exist in the real world. Joyce, along with everyone else over ten years old, knew this beyond a shadow of a doubt. Hence, he sought to create an extraordinary, ordinary man. In his *Ulysses*, Joyce "successfully attends to the most delicate nuances and subtle shades of character" (Johnson xxi). As a result, the fictional Leopold Bloom develops into a tangible person the reader only happened to meet in the text, but could have also met in line at an abattoir. Although Mr. Joyce concocted a central hero that one can easily define as "the defeated little man, consumed with ... feelings of inadequacy and inferiority," Joyce also remained faithful to genuine life (Raleigh 596). He created a man who had faults, yet those faults were not retrospectively damning or impossible to excuse because they were collective in their very nature.

Needless to say, the human race is a flawed race. Everyone comes equipped with both strengths and weaknesses. As unimpressive as Bloom may seem, he also "bears and transmits the best qualities of the mind" (Ellman 5). Indeed, despite his shortcomings, Bloom does not become hopelessly neurotic. Truly, he refuses to allow his faults or wild emotions to overtake him completely. Essentially, the case of Leopold Bloom boils down to the quintessential "triumph of mind over matter" (Raleigh 596). In short, his odyssey was an odyssey of the mind, not an odyssey of physical prowess.

Overall, Bloom has every reason to fall into a bleak depression. His wife has slept with another man and no one in his community particularly likes him as a result of their general distain for Jewish

people. Then, to top it off, he carries around the burden of prematurely losing both his father and son. However, despite the cards piled high against him, Bloom, in his way, continually tries for happiness. Indeed, Bloom's mark of heroism reveals itself when he forbids his individual shortcomings to effectively ruin his day. After all, even if he only finds it in a thick giblet soup, Joyce's hero truly endeavors to find happiness. Indeed, Leopold Bloom could have traveled the road of Simon Dedalus and drowned his sorrows in liquor. However, Bloom faces his challenging day, which feels markedly admirable in its own right. One may still wonder, however, if Leopold Bloom truly amounts to a hero in any sense of the word. Well, the answer quite simply is yes. Yes, he is a hero, yes.

In-Text References to Page Numbers:

Pg 161-2: Mr. Leopold Bloom imagines what it must be like to give birth / be a mother.

Pg 180: Mr. Leopold Bloom helps a blind-boy cross the street.

Pg 291: Mr. Leopold Bloom muffles his flatulent noises with the help of a passing train.

Pg 494: Mr. Leopold Bloom states "O, I so want to be a mother"

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Stacey Staum

OEDIPUS AND ADOPTION:
Exploring Identity, Individuation, and Remorse in the Oedipus myth

In the 420s BCE, Greek playwright Sophocles wrote down the pre-existing myth of King Oedipus in dramatic format. Since then, *Oedipus the King* has been the subject of countless studies in a variety of disciplines. Psychologists, historians, anthropologists, and literary critics are among the scholars who have analyzed *Oedipus the King*, extracting discipline-specific meanings relevant to their individual fields of study. While the themes of incest, fate versus free will, and religion versus reason are most commonly explored, only a handful of academics have considered the plight of Oedipus as an adoptee. Oedipus's discovery that he is adopted is the impetus that drives the plot in *Oedipus the King*, as the protagonist demonstrates identity-seeking behaviors typical of adoptees, inevitably resulting in his demise.

Throughout *Oedipus the King*, a sequence of events unfolds that lead to the eventual misfortune of the play's protagonist. While some circumstances are beyond the king's control, Oedipus's curiosity about his heritage ultimately leads to his own undoing. Oedipus must know the truth about his origins. As that truth becomes increasingly stark, Oedipus does not relent until he knows every detail, even as he is told repeatedly that he's better off not knowing the truth. Teirasias warns that "wisdom is a curse" (Sophocles 244); the shepherd implores Oedipus to stop asking questions, for "the words are awful" (Sophocles 267). Despite grave warnings, Oedipus, as an adopted individual, must know the truth about his past.

According to developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, identity-seeking is a part of maturation for all individuals. Erikson's Life Span Theory is an epigenetic principle, meaning that each period of growth occurs at a specific predetermined phase in human life, and successful completion of early stages predicts healthier development through later stages (Dunkel 13). According to Erikson, humans develop their identities in the adolescent years during a stage referred to as "identity versus role confusion" (Dunkel 15). This stage is important because

during these years, a healthy sense of self is developed or the individual will face distress from a lack of self-understanding. Psychologists who study the effects of adoption on the psyche believe that this stage of human development is particularly hard for adoptees. According to Passmore, et al., "Although all individuals have to deal with identity issues at some stage in their lives, the process of identity development may be longer and more complex for adoptees" (525). Adoptees struggle with identity issues because they must create a sense of self within the context of their adoptive families, while also rationalizing within that identity their natural heritage. The struggle of Oedipus is reflected in Erikson's theory. Once he learns that Polybus and Merope are not his natural parents, Oedipus must reconcile for himself what his true identity is. Oedipus does not hear that he was adopted and dismiss the new information. He must make sense of what he's learned by discovering the truth of his origins.

Erikson asserts that the healthy identity maintains continuity throughout the life span because identity-formation is the result of a continuous chain of events. Erikson states that ego identity "is the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (94). According to Erikson's theory, if the consistency of a person's ego becomes disjointed, a person's identity-formation can be compromised. Adoptees struggle in particular with this issue because of the inherent disconnection between their genetic selves and the environments from which they emerge. According to Passmore, "as the children grow older, they eventually come to the realization that being chosen by one set of parents means having been abandoned by another set" (170). As adoptees begin to understand the implications of their adoption, the sense of self becomes a more complex issue. *Oedipus the King* begins at the precise moment at which his identity becomes disjointed, and the cutting of his family tree causes him tremendous stress. Dissatisfied with the notion that he was simply adopted, Oedipus seeks knowledge about his natural parents in order to reconcile the rift that has just broken his sense of continuity.

Neo-Eriksonians have taken the ideas of Erikson's Life Span Theory and developed them further into a field called narrative psychology. Narrative psychology is utilized frequently in

psychotherapy; as a patient describes life experiences, clarity emerges not only for the listener, but also for the speaker, as he must process and then capture in words how he sees himself (Adler and McAdams 183). Once again, adoptees struggle to create genuine identities when such basic characters and plotlines are missing from their personal narratives. Healthy identity formation can occur when the life story is complete and consistent, which is referred to as "internal consistency of narrative" by Neo-Eriksonians (Korff and Grotevant 398). When an adoptee is unable to develop a coherent narrative, identity issues can begin to appear. In *Oedipus the King*, when Oedipus learns that Polybus and Merope are not his biological parents, his narrative becomes convoluted and severed, causing an immediate crisis of identity. Oedipus then needs to reconstruct his personal narrative in order to understand himself, to his own inevitable detriment.

Psychologist Carl Jung also addresses the concept of self in his studies of the unconscious mind. According to Jung's theory, self-realization occurs as the product of individuation, or the process by which individuals discover meaning in their lives. Individuation generally occurs in the second half of life, and frequently follows a personal or collective crisis that has forced the individual to reevaluate his role in the world at large; as a result, the individual learns who he is as a person and develops a more comprehensive sense of self (Schmidt 596). To Jung, the self includes all conscious and unconscious aspects of the individual's potential; the term "self" captures both the qualities people know they possess as well as the traits they possess of which they are not yet aware (Plaut 78). Successful individuation requires the individual to incorporate the unconscious personal and social elements found in the psyche into a conscious narrative; the "self" matures as a result. Individuation is never complete and serves as a continuous, repetitive task of maturity throughout the adult life (Schmidt 599). Jung's complex theory of individuation lays an important groundwork for understanding Oedipus's ultimate struggle with his identity.

Oedipus fails to mature when faced with individuation as a result of the crisis of learning the truth. As is common during adulthood, Oedipus is forced to reexamine his sense of self following the crisis of the newfound knowledge of his adoption. As the king of Thebes, the story begins with Oedipus genuinely seeking a solution for the collective crisis of the plague. Upon hearing that Polybus and Merope are not his

natural parents, Oedipus recklessly investigates his secret origins. Instead of handling the issue privately, he publically seeks out his heritage; doing so causes his quest to become both a personal crisis for Oedipus himself and an exacerbation of the collective crisis faced by the Theban people. When Oedipus learns that he has killed his father and married his mother, his sense of self changes. He is no longer the clever foreigner who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. He is not king, husband, and father. He is now a patricidal foðl, who has married his own mother and sired his own siblings. Jung might say that these elements of Oedipus's self always existed in his psyche; only now that he is faced with the crisis of his adoption must Oedipus incorporate these parts of himself into his self-concept. As these new truths become a conscious part of Oedipus's understanding of himself, individuation must occur. The task of individuation is quite a daunting one for Oedipus, as he is faced with an overwhelming crisis of self. Oedipus fails in terms of his individuation when he gouges out his eyes and abandons his children. If Oedipus had emerged from the crisis with more self-awareness and understanding, regardless of how difficult that task might have been, he would have successfully undergone individuation. Oedipus failed to incorporate his new sense of self in a meaningful and healthy way.

Oedipus's search for truth is the factor that would ultimately cause his own self-destruction. Hamish Canham studied what he refers to as "the problem of the truth" in the Oedipus myth (12). Instead of investigating the identity crisis of the adoptee that results from lack of knowledge about one's past, Canham studied the effects that knowledge of the truth have on the mind of the adopted individual, and specifically the effects of the truth on Oedipus as an adoptee. While Canham's analysis encompasses many of the problems encountered by adoptees, he specifically examines incest and abuse within the Oedipus myth.

The threat of incest can be an underlying concern for adopted individuals and is demonstrated in the story of Oedipus. Canham explains the paradox of sexual relationships for the adoptee by quoting psychologist V. Hamilton. Hamilton states that "no blood-tie bars the sterile parents from incestuous relations; no relationship in the world outside the family is free of threat of incest" (Canham 9). Ironically, the only relationship in the world that has absolutely no potential for incest is one ***within*** the adopted family, as this family is the only one who is surely not blood-related! Incest for the adoptee thus becomes

a gray area, as it was for Oedipus. His intention was not to sleep with his mother, and yet, simply because he was an adoptee, this became his circumstance.

Canham also addresses the issue of physical and sexual abuse experienced by Oedipus. In reference to Laios' piercing of Oedipus's feet, Canham writes, "Any baby left alone is likely to die in a short space of time, and therefore this physical mutilation is an additional act of sadism" (11). Canham calls the child's mutilation into question here and cites this as physical abuse on Laios' part. Canham then questions whether or not Jocasta subconsciously knew that her husband Oedipus was really her child. Canham refers to the fact that "Jocasta did not question sleeping with a man young enough to be her son with a marked deformity in his feet, which so closely resembled what had been done to her own son" (11). Despite the many obvious signs that Oedipus could be her own son, such as his age, his appearance, and his obvious limp, Jocasta proceeded to engage in a sexual relationship with the mysterious foreigner. By her own admission, Jocasta tells Oedipus that Laios was "tall, strong – built something like you" (Sophocles 256). Given his age and physical description, perhaps Jocasta should have thought twice about her relationship with Oedipus. Canham posits that the real problem in the Oedipus story emerges because she has "turned a blind eye" (11) to what should have been either quite obvious or at the very least given her pause. Once Oedipus knows the truth about his adoption, he must face the fact that he was left to die and abused physically and sexually by his biological parents. Oedipus's insistence that he learn the truth of his origins destroyed his sense of self and revealed a truth he could not handle.

While adoption experiences can be positive for all parties of the adoption triad, the psychological consequences can be difficult for adoptees, and Oedipus is certainly no exception. Oedipus took on many roles over the course of his life: solver of riddles, murderer, king, husband, father, and son. Perhaps his most important role in terms of his tragedy was that of an adoptee. Once Oedipus learns that he was adopted, he needs to know the truth so that he might complete his personal narrative. His insistence to unearth his identity is the fundamental catalyst that causes his demise. Oedipus could have learned that he killed King Laios and been exiled; he could have taken his family to Corinth, and would have been anointed their new king. Oedipus

doesn't go because he has to know the truth about himself, despite grave warnings to leave the issue alone. The search for truth in *Oedipus the King*, as a result of learning of his adoption, is the ultimate cause of Oedipus's own undoing.

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In the Offing

> . . . 'the offing' is the part of the sea that can be seen from land, excluding those parts that are near the shore. . . . All of the 18th century citations of 'in the offing' refer to the offing as a physical place. It wasn't until the mid-19th century, in America, that our presently understood figurative meaning began to be used. (**http://www.phrases.org.uk**)

Presbyopia, far-sightedness: the further the clearer, one's own immediate space so much one's own or so given over so as not much to matter, the offing's beckoning stronger. Blake writes to Thomas Butts:

> I hear a voice you cannot hear, that says I must not stay,
> I see a hand you cannot see, that beckons me away. (Keynes 813)

--a function of the ocular power, as in

> Off-shore, by islands hidden in the blood
> jewels & miracles, I, Maximus
> a metal hot from boiling water, tell you . . . (Olson 1)

Perspective, as a species of far-sightedness, may come at the cost of the immediate in its relation to a vanishing point (one's own 'offing,' mortality, or whatever situation things so seen assume in such relation that they had not had the ad- or disad-vantage of previously).

In my *curriculum of the soul* fascicle, *Perspective*, I cited Kenneth Clark on the invention of that duplicitous strategy of representation:

> A contemporary biographer of Brunellesco tells us how he made a painting of the *Piazza* of San Giovanni, diminishing all the lines in accordance with his mathematical rules; and then, in order to establish the position of the spectator, he made a hole in his picture at the vanishing point. The spectator looked through this hole from the back and saw the picture reflected in a mirror which was placed at the exact distance of Brunellesco's original point of view. Thus perspective achieved *certezze*.

> But there was one element in landscape which could not be brought under control: the sky. The continual flux of change in the sky can only be suggested from memory, not determined by mathematics; and Brunellesco, perfectly realizing the limitations of his own approach, did not attempt to paint the sky behind his *Piazza*, but put instead a piece of polished silver. (qtd. in Zimmerman, *Perspective* 2)

It struck me, looking back at that passage from a distance considerably greater than that across a *piazza*, that Brunellesco's insistence on the exact distance of his original point of view derived from a fidelity to what Robert Creeley, in "From Type to Prototype," diagnosed as "*opposites*, that rule which has plotted the range of man's values backwards of 3000 years" (qtd. in Butterick 77). When polar oppositions influence values, he says, "the whole thing begins to shake: the more evil, the more good; damn earth to get to heaven--to get to, at last, that most savage of all such examples, life/death" (qtd. in Butterick 78).

Again, presbyopia: the further the clearer--but only as a function of Blake's "Corporeal or Vegetative Eye" (Keynes 617). On the other hand, the kind of *further* the Institute of Further Studies proposes accumulates beyond the Heraclitean silver sky behind the painted *piazza*, that *flat* earth lessoned to resemble life, but life frozen and abstracted. Even the mirrored particularity of Brunellesco's sky--impossible to represent as adequately as the gridded mundane shell--reminds us that, as Creeley says,

> it's no longer a question of *opposition*, of a balance of good & evil, or whatever; instead, it's a matter, altogether, of what *space* the given field constitutes and what force, what other forces relate to the same field by virtue of their presence in it. (qtd. in Butterick 78)

I find this analogous to Emanuel Swedenborg's observation that

> . . . all progressions in the spiritual world are effected by changes in the state of the interiors. . . Hence, those are near each other who are in a similar state, and those are far apart whose state is dissimilar; and spaces in heaven are nothing but external states corresponding to internal ones. (qtd. in Corbin 13)

--here, in his *Heaven and Its Wonders, also Hell and the Intermediate State, from Things, Heard and Seen*, Swedenborg transcends the moral oppositions that Creeley says spawn the good vs. evil / Heaven vs. Hell paradigm in favor of what, Creeley says,

> [a] man, as prime, makes use of conjecture to know, to find what other forces push the relevance of this prime he is, to know why he is thus held. That is, we can take it, no point, no mass, exists but by virtue of *other* such mass, being that which makes its *coherence* relevant.
> (qtd. in Butterick 79)

Creeley's emphasis on *mass* as determinative of coherence displaces Brunellesco's insistence on the exact distance of his original point of view as, literally, *encompassing* the field, opening it, instead, to dimensions of significance reminiscent of the pharaoh as larger than his subjects--a collagist species of perspective, based on one's own Archimedean leverage: "meanings of different distances for things removed," I called it (Zimmerman, *Perspective* 20).

Further, Heinrich Zimmer, in *The King and The Corpse: Tales of the Soul's Conquest of Evil*, proposes that

> Whatever a human being brings into direct contact with himself out of the mass of whirling atoms of possibilities fuses into a pattern with his own being. In so far as he admits that a thing concerns him, it does concern him, and if related to his deepest aims and desires, his fears and the cloudy fabric of his thoughts, it can become an important part of his destiny. And finally, if he senses it as striking at the roots of his life, that very fact itself is his point of vulnerability. But on the other hand, and by the same token, in so far as one can break loose from one's passions and ideas and thereby become free of oneself, one is released automatically from all things that appear to be accidental. (15)

However, even Brunellesco's sky appears accidental only if we see, as Blake says, "with, not thro' the Eye" (Keynes 753), for "to the eyes of the man of imagination, Nature is Imagination itself" (Keynes 793). Above (and behind) that mirrored sky, incarnadine at sunset, each "Cloud,

Meteor & Star, / Are Men Seen Afar" (805). Henry Corbin presents Avicenna's formulation of the same vision *in the offing*: "behind this world there is Heaven, an Earth, sea, animals, plants and celestial men; . . . the spiritual entities that subsist there are equivalent to human beings, but this does not mean that they are terrestrial" (qtd. in Corbin 12). A kid watching a game through a knothole in a stadium wall sees these.

As an instance and application of these principles, I offer a poem by Jack Clarke and my response to it from *blue horitals*, a collaboration to which his widow, Cass, generously invited me by providing a pre-publication section of Jack's *In the Analogy*, which Stephen Ellis published in 1997. So: Jack's:

> **Cleros-Sphota***
> Tiresias was blinded by the wrong question,
> Oedipus, too, too easily right, boringly sage
> in a place that poo-poo'd Cassandra's attempt
> to jog their thinking, what got us all going
> professionally in what wasn't one, a mystery
> that alone might strengthen what is taken
> for granted or lost to the above glibness,
> allowing the echo of other fine solutions
> to make light of the distances Evil traverses
> to get to us, or so one supposes who knows
> the difference between heartbreak & lost love,
> Lawrence comes to mind as one who's undergone
> the harrowing, wouldn't lose him to Pound—
> taking off together into the wild blue yonder.
>
> Sept 18 1991
>
> *A lot of Zeus *noos.*

> "If the subject is Cassandra it is interesting to
> note that she differs, for instance, from the tragic
> heroine of Aeschylus or Euripides is not
> delivering her prophecies in ecstatic verse, but
> standing in a dignified pose and drawing a lot."
> H. W. Parke, "Dodona," *The Oracles of Zeus*

"The original monuments of perception
are the play of light
through the wall's membrane"
Edward Dorn, *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*

"The image or persona, what is seen in the world
'outside' or in the mind's world 'inside', no longer
is a show of that world only, an epiphany, but is
a seed, a generative point of the inner and outer."
Robert Duncan, "The H. D. Book," *TriQuarterly*, 1968

"In this tele-topological mode, as the punctum regains its
primary importance as light and suddenly becomes prime
matter, transparence becomes a substance, a new material
which is not exactly space/time and which is not properly
analyzed, or filed, until one has attained a degree of
unsuspected purity."
Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*

[N.B.: *Cleros means inheritance, or legacy*]. My correspondence:

Pratibha*
After the ball is over, after the Krell
leave the machine enabling themselves
to return their true heritage, my crystal set
picks up Your Hit Parade, original
live broadcasts I have to shush
even the air to hear, even the blood
to my brain, that seashell. Though I have
no answer, can't finish life's sentences
yet, can't grasp the equal as opposite,
the bow still threads this feathered shaft
through bright axe-heads to restore
the boss' daughter, who must've known
all along she'd go home with the one
who brought her, humming their song

* "Because the whole sentence meaning is
inherently present in the mind of each person,
it is quite possible for the *pratibha* of the *sphota*

to be grasped by the listener even before the
whole sentence has been uttered."
Harold G. Coward, *The Sphota Theory of Language*

In *Perspective*, I had earlier registered a sense of such priority with an epigraph from Kepler:

ut oculus ad colores-
auris ad sonos,
ita mens hominis
non ad quaevis sed ad
quanta intelligenda
condita est

—which I translated as:

as eye to color,
ear to sound,
so the mind of man is
conducted, not
to what it seeks but to
intelligible measures (1)

Kepler would have loved circular orbits, as his nested model of the Platonic solids in *Mysterium Cosmographicum* attests, but found himself drawn from circle to oval to ellipse. Given his theological predilections, this must initially have felt like alchemy gone wrong, but as Paul Kugler says in *The Alchemy of Discourse*, "[t]he true 'opus contra naturam' was the transmutation within the alchemist himself of the natural perspective into the imaginal perspective. Transforming the literal naturalistic ego into an 'imaginal ego' capable of 'seeing through' the material world imaginatively" (108).

Finally, as it turns out, a poem I wrote in a Brooklyn bar, waiting for a poet to begin his advertized reading (which, owing to the apparent insufficiency of an audience of one, he declined to do), records this kind of Keplerian acknowledgment of the second (invisible) focus of an orbit as necessary to what Jack might see as part of "The Strengthening Method of World Completion" (Clarke, *From Feathers to Iron* n.p.):

the turnout
a string of skulls through which
to the coccyx' horn the slow crawl up
from Vermiana resonates

as Gœthe saw a sheep skull cracked in
three rings in the Jewish cemetery *di Venezia*
& speculated that from vertebræ the head arose

but the curious flipper hand & wing
or that we hear by snakebite jaw hinge homologue
tiniest bones in the body keys transposed

tumble ram bones & the Piltdown hoax into their own niche
as in a Peter Pan neoteny we leapfrog
three-brained on two beautiful feet to roam

competently juvenile listening
always how the First Ones climbed up wobbling from
Earth autochthonous & once dead never again grew old

but in the fittest lines immortal sing
what selectivity Elysium
might specify as origin, made of stone

flaked fractured polished hewn
to approximate the coming generation
notching totemic millennia on brothers' bones

right from the beginning
as to whom
to build on

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Daniel Zimmerman

Uncrumpling the Map: Using E-Prime for Invention and Clarity in Writing

Abstract

E-Prime—writing and, for some, speaking English without any forms of the verb "to be"—began as a proposal in the field of general semantics, an epistemological discipline inquiring into how signs convey meaning. Some advocates tout it as utopian—a panacea, a pen parrying the swords of error. Some detractors dismiss it as a gimmick at best, a nuking of gnats at worst and, in any case, quixotic, ill-conceived and silly. It does involve a learning curve—for some, akin to "the death of a thousand cuts," especially when used at first for composition This paper, however, will focus primarily on the pragmatics of the technique for revising prose—on how teachers can use it to help students discover and convey meaning. It will show how E-Prime allows its practitioners to discover how to avoid misleading identifications and predications to which the verb "to be" often imperceptibly conduces.

When personal computers came into general use about twenty years ago, many composition teachers saw their capacity to cut and paste as a way to encourage multiple revisions of essays. The advent of Twitter has iceberged that Titanic ambition. Students seem to have confused "less is more" with Ockham's Razor, forgetting Einstein's caveat to "make things simple—but not too simple." The average teen today sends upwards of 3000 tweets per month, each vying with next for banality. Revision has become abbreviation.

Twenty years ago, I too began to stress revision, but in a special way, asking students to revise every sentence that relied on forms of the verb "to be" (by far the most common verb in the language) by paraphrasing their ideas for greater clarity and impact without it. This form of English, called E-Prime, originated in the 1950s with D. David Bourland, Jr., of the International Society for General Semantics; many who use it produce increasingly readable prose.

Composition teachers have long recommended limiting forms of "to be." Colleen Donnelly, for example, in *Linguistics for Writers*, says:

> You can . . . make your prose more active by deleting structures consisting of a pronoun + a form of the "to be" verb, such as "it was," "it were," "they were," "that was," "that is," and "that were." . . . [T]hese structures . . . quite commonly generate passive constructions. Cross out the pronoun + "to be" verb and restructure the sentence around the true subject and verb.
>
> It was then that I discovered the true solution to the problem.
> ~~It was~~ then ~~that~~ I discovered the true solution to the problem.
> Then I discovered the true solution to the problem.
>
> Sometimes you will have to identify the action verb that has **been** (*sic*) buried or deleted by this weak verb construction. Simply re-structure the sentence around the true active verb.
>
> There were five regional representatives at the meeting.
> ~~There were~~ five regional representatives (attended) the meeting.
> Five regional representatives attended the meeting.
>
> Rewriting passive sentences as active sentences creates more vivid prose that conveys the writer's intended meaning more precisely. (Donnelly 47)

Like many who recommend avoiding "be," Donnelly often ignores her own advice. Similarly, asked about quick ways to improve writing, journalist Constance Hale, author of *Vex, Hex, Smash, Smooch*, recommends "[f]irst, read more and write more. The other thing you can do **is** (*sic*) change static verbs into dynamic verbs, and make the dynamic verbs better. If you only had one thing, that would **be** (*sic*) it" (qtd. in Williams). Let's paraphrase her in E-Prime: Journalist Constance Hale, author of *Vex, Hex, Smash, Smooch*, recommends that, beyond reading and writing more, ~~*The other thing*~~ you can ~~*do is*~~ also change static verbs into dynamic verbs, and make the dynamic verbs better. ~~*If you only had one thing, that would be it.*~~ That one thing will improve your writing most (Williams). Consider a few more examples that show the kinds of choices E-Prime can elicit:

There **were** five warheads in the missile.

The missile contained five warheads.	(literal)
The missile had five warheads packed inside.	(literal)
Five warheads hibernated in the missile.	(metaphorical)

Bob **is** a Conservative.

Bob belongs to the Conservative party.	(literal)
Bob champions largely conservative ideas.	(literal)
Bob advocates Neanderthal politics.	(metaphorical)

It **was** four o'clock before I realized that I **was** late.

At four o'clock, I realized that I would arrive late.	(literal)
At four o'clock, I knew I would miss my wedding.	(literal & terminal)
At four, the clock announced my lateness.	(metaphorical)

Having assigned a paper on writing, I found the following sentence in a student's essay: "Writing ***is*** discovery"—an optimistic bumper sticker for an English professor (Zimmerman 342). "What does 'is' mean?" I asked. After a moment of bafflement, the student replied, "I guess ***I*** mean it helps you get ideas." "Why," I persisted, "didn't you say so in the first place?" I pointed out that a reader (a different ***"I"***) could take the original sentence and *mis*-paraphrase it in any number of ways, and that the student could avert that sort of potential error by a simple expedient: choosing alternative verbs—

produces
allows
Writing ***is*** discovery.
uses
requires

—and then interrogating each of those choices with various "reporter's questions":

produces	when? how?
allows	how?
Writing **is** discovery.	
uses	how?
requires	when? why?

One could write a paragraph answering any of those questions, and need not choose only one verb, but could develop the bumper sticker into an essay about the mutual relationships between writing and discovery. For example, discovery could result from writing, as in the first cases, or lead to writing, as in the second—if discovery might mean the kind of mutual revelation of evidence that prosecution and defense engage in before a trial. In other words, writing and discovery could combine in a feedback loop. The reporter's questions, by the way—*who, what, when, where, why* and *how*—all derive from the same Indo-European root, often written **HWA* (abbreviated in American English to "Huh?"). The scarcity of this locution in a reader's mind provides an often reliable index of a writer's clarity.

E-Prime encourages the exploration of ideas from various perspectives and, as with the reporter's questions, it helps to make the methods of exploration explicit. For example, Writing at Dartmouth suggests that a tagmemic approach can focus responses to those questions.

> Tagmemics involves seeing your topic:
> 1. As a particle (as a thing in itself)
> 2. As a wave (as a thing changing over time)
> 3. As part of a field (as a thing in its context)
>
> ("Invention")

This interrogative version of E-Prime offers not only a way to study oneself through one's own writing, but to do so in a very specific way. A simple instruction to paraphrase confusing or vague sentences does not provide a clear procedure, as if a chemistry professor said to synthesize a compound without indicating how to do it. E-Prime not only makes clarity more likely, it also produces at least as many—perhaps more—errors than a simple instruction to revise without "be" forms. This produces two advantages. First, it establishes a method common to the entire class, so students can more easily relate to and learn from the errors (and improvements) of their peers. Second, the more controlled nature of E-Prime revision narrows the causes for errors, making them easier to specify. Neil Postman, NYU professor of communications and author of *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, found that increasing exposure to media—television in particular—left people less able to detect contradictions, an ability he regarded as fundamental

to thought (100). Students often commit such errors, and do so even more frequently when misapplying E-Prime—for example, by changing transitivity when merely eliminating *is, was,* or *were* as auxiliary verbs, and not noticing the resulting contradictions. In addition, they create grammatical errors they otherwise would not, thus revealing an ignorance of the structure of English heretofore masked by cramming their ideas into a few tried and true, safe sentence patterns. Worse still, they often think they have eliminated all forms of "to be"—until they sit with me and I find them scattered throughout their papers. Their selective blindness astonishes both them and me. Clearly, teaching them the many forms of the verb (and they do need to *learn* them) does not suffice. As British philosopher Peter Winch has observed about thinking, "Learning to infer is not just a matter of being taught about explicit logical relations between propositions; it is learning *to do* something" (57)—or, in E-Prime: As British philosopher Peter Winch has argued, learning to infer requires more than mastering explicit logical relations between propositions; it involves learning to *do* something (57).

Test Cases

Do this: take two identical (or coextensive) maps (even of a different type: road map vs. topological, for example). Crumple one; place it on the other. One point on the crumpled map will lie directly above its counterpart on the flat map. A version of the Brouwer fixed point theorem in topology, the crumpled map analogy illuminates a difficulty in communication.

Imagine what a writer wants to communicate—the flat map of a territory—as x, and the writing—the crumpled map used to do so—as x'. Readers will usually find a point on the crumpled map hovering above what they imagine as the flat map of the writer's intention. To interpret that intention accurately, they should flatten the crumpled map while keeping the two points aligned, so that x' approaches x asymptotically, as closely as possible, with the same compass orientation. The problem of interpretation involves getting the orientation of the maps to match—with 359 chances out of 360 to skew it wrong. Getting it right involves the elimination of 359 degrees of noise, which can come in the form of ignorance, stereotyping, ambiguity, presumption, guessing, oversimplification, and various other kinds of distortion. If E-Prime creates or reveals any noise—as it sometimes does—at least its

increased specificity makes the writer the more likely (and more explicit) source of the noise than the reader.

A powerful way to increase the opportunity for accurate uncrumpling, E-Prime provides the reader with time-factored models of intentional content by eliminating reliance on the static, 'eternal' verb ***to be*** in all its forms and providing dynamic alternative models based on active verbs. It limits the range of skew. For example, in a version of the famous quantum physics-analogy of Schrödinger's Cat, locked invisibly in a box, to ask whether the cat "is" alive or dead confuses the issue by eliciting a *merely* instantaneous answer. We might better ask whether the cat *continues to live* or *has died.* Putting it that way underscores the time-dependency of observation that Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle enunciates, and which the cat analogy tests. *Continues to live* implies a salient situation longer than an instant, one that would require continuous verification; *has died* appears to require only a single, instantaneous verification. At any given instant, however, one cannot determine the status of the cat—which illustrates the point of the thought experiment. In fact, at any given instant, the cat *must* appear dead, and we cannot distinguish the reality or virtuality of that condition without waiting for the *next* instant, and so on—as with the matter of determining whether the cat continues to live. The use of "is" in the question masks the qualitatively different observational expectations regarding the determination of life or death. Posing the question tagmemically (as part of a field) in E-Prime establishes a dynamic, durational perspective more fully disclosing the situation which the feline analogy contemplates, and demonstrates that time and tense do not always denote identical entities. An example from law may further help to illustrate this map/territory relationship:

> When Jonathan Frieman of San Rafael, Calif., was pulled over for driving alone in the carpool lane, he argued to the officer that, actually, he did have a passenger.
> He waved his corporation papers at the officer, he told NBCBayArea.com, saying that corporations are people under California law.
> Frieman doesn't actually believe this. For 10 years, Frieman says he had been trying to get pulled over to get ticketed and to take his argument to court—that corporations and people are not the same. Mission accomplished in October,

> when he was slapped with a fine—a minimum of $481. (Raferty)

Frieman's attempt at *reductio ad absurdum* to challenge the Supreme Court's assertion that a corporation "is" a person has little chance of success; the court will likely hold that his clever gambit violates the intent of the HOV lane law, and it will probably choose to ignore the basis of his challenge altogether. However, should the court address the issue of personhood and also find against Frieman, it would have to argue that a corporation "is" sometimes a person, but sometimes not. Frieman might bring up the spectre of Schrödinger's Cat, asking the judge, "When, your honor, are *you* a person—and when are you not?" If a person always remains a person, and if the corporation qualifies as a person, then the corporation must always remain a person—entitled, perhaps, to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." By that logic, to dissolve a corporation by revoking its charter for anything other than a capital crime might constitute murder. By thus problematizing the definition of "person," Frieman illustrates how the law, *via* the legislature and the court, tries—illegitimately—to make the territory conform to the map. A writer has the opposite responsibility: the map should conform to the territory, not *vice versa—and* writers should help readers to avoid confusing maps with territories.

The linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf offered several examples of the sometimes dire consequences of mistaking the map for the territory due to the "is" of predication. In one case, workers left "empty" gasoline drums (actually filled with vapor more dangerous than the liquid gasoline) in the hot sun, where they exploded. To them, "the drums *are* empty" meant "the drums *are* safe"—a not uncommon cascade that creates a secondary map even further removed from, yet still equated with, the territory (Whorf 135). Those workers ignored the physical evidence of vapor literally under (and in) their noses, according greater reality and importance to their verbal "map" of the situation. In another case, "[a] huge iron kettle of boiling varnish was observed to be overheated, nearing the temperature at which it would ignite. The operator moved it off the fire and ran it on its wheels to a distance, but did not cover it. In a minute or so the varnish ignited" (136). In this instance, the cascade ran from "the kettle *is off* the fire" to "off *is/means* safe" to "the kettle *is safe*," though convection in the kettle continued

to heat the varnish. Even later, the workers had not recognized the linguistic origin of their errors.

In two decades of using E-Prime with more than 2,500 students, I have often wondered why many have difficulty converting their sentences into E-Prime, since they already write about half of their sentences in 'native' E-Prime without any particular effort. I have taught most of these students in Individualized classes, going over their papers with them one-on-one and asking them about this problem. Their responses lead me to conclude that they feel more confident about the 'native' E-Prime sentences because they say more specifically what they mean. The sentences that rely on "be" forms often betray either reticent uncertainty (especially in the use of passive constructions) or overconfident bluster in the form of synecdoche ("A is B," where B represents either an inadequate part of A or a larger, indefinite whole of which A forms only a part). In such cases, the unexamined sentence—like the unexamined life, not worth living—proves moribund. E-Prime can resurrect it by careful, tagmemic attention that allows students to feel as confident about their revisions as they do about their own 'native' E-Prime sentences. When they use those sentences as stylistic models to avoid awkwardness, no one notices the E-Prime—just the force and clarity of the writing. One of my former students wrote, at the end of the semester, that

> I would have to say that your way of teaching us how to eliminate these words helped me to think more critically and really look into every word I put down on paper. I feel I learned how to concentrate much more on how I write along with becoming a better writer from when I first started this class in September. (Mokrzycki)

Another student said, several months after completing two courses with me, that

> [u]sing E-Prime over the course of two semesters has made me view the method of writing in a very different light. It provides more layers of complexity, more meat and more meaning. E-Prime pointed out how often I used empty "to be" forms to communicate. It also taught me to think about what I really want to say and demanded that I find the most accurate and concise way to say it. Indeed, I realize that my

> voice as a writer only began when I started with the E-Prime revisions. (Levi)

Readers often complain that, in translating from one language to another, we lose some essential character of the text. With the same language translation of E-Prime, however, writers can find more essential characteristics of their own ideas, as this student and many others have done.

Avoiding False Dilemmas

Proponents of E-Prime object especially to the kinds of overstatement and false equivalence inherent in the "is of identity" (He *is* a Liberal) and the "is of predication" (The peach *is* delicious). Philosopher Roy Sorensen notes the dangers in their (sometimes less than witty) blurring:

> The word *is* is ambiguous between the *is* of predication as in "Cicero is eloquent" and the *is* of identity as in "Cicero is Tully." This is the basis for the deductive graffiti found in university lavatories: Homer is blind. Love is blind. Therefore, Homer is love. These premises treat the *is* of predication as if it were the *is* of identity. . . . Bertrand Russell characterized the ambiguity of *is* as a disgrace to the human race. (Sorensen 38-39)

Further complicating the matter, Willard Van Orman Quine held the view "that when names occur as complements to the verb 'is', they serve as general terms (predicates) complementing the 'is' of predication. 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is not an *identity* statement . . .; it attributes the property of *being Phosphorus* to Hesperus (Fara 4). Even with the 'is' of predication considered less ambiguously, confusion may arise. In "Pragmatism and Binding," Stephen Neale cites examples of such complication:

> by uttering 'I'm tired', John meant that he was tired;
> by uttering 'I'm tired', John meant that we were to leave. . . .
> The epistemic situations of the speaker and hearer are fundamentally asymmetric: the speaker knows what he means whereas the hearer has to work it out. (179)

In such cases, the hearer must work out what Paul Grice has called the "conversational implicature" that the speaker intends (Neale, "Paul Grice" 2ff). While Gordian knots like these perhaps legitimately bedevil philosophers and linguists, they need not—though they sometimes do—trouble practitioners of E-Prime.

E-Prime developed within the philosophico-linguistic context of general semantics, and James D. French, a University of California, Berkeley, computer programmer, offers a set of ten objections to the technique—some quite cogent in terms of that context. But I do not teach computer programming or general semantics; I teach writing, and a few of his objections, not necessarily grounded in the context of general semantics, seem specious. For example, he objects that E-Prime "deliberately eliminates a whole class of statements from the language, resulting in fewer alternatives" (French). However, while E-Prime eliminates many potential statements from the language *as a whole*, it has the opposite effect for individual sentences, since it encourages multiple paraphrases until the writer finds the best one(s). He further objects that

> [t]he range of perfectly acceptable "to be" statements covers a vast expanse, and includes asymmetrical relations, *e.g.*, "Mt. McKinley is higher in elevation than Mt. Shasta"; negation, "The map is not the territory"; location, "Oakland is on the west coast"; auxiliary, "It is raining," "I am going to the store," *etc.*; and possibly many other unidentified forms, e.g., "I am aware of that." These forms must be sacrificed when adopting E-Prime, at considerable cost for no proven benefit. (French)

But the acceptability of such statements does not preclude more meaningful formulations, *e.g.*, "At 20,237 feet, Mt. McKinley's height exceeds Mt. Shasta's by 6,058 feet;" "The map does not 'equal' the territory, though it may coincide with a coextensive map which may also register different features of that territory;" "Oakland, on the west coast, lies east of San Francisco and south of Berkeley;" "Because of the rain, we will delay the game until Saturday;" "I will go to the store in five minutes; do you need anything?" and "Professor Smith covered that topic last week, when you missed her class; how did you find out about it?" Reformulated sentences such as these in E-Prime can make

it less onerous to divine conversational implicatures. They also serve to intercept and answer two 'slacker' questions that French's examples might provoke: "So what?" and "Who cares?" How French has determined E-Prime's lack of "proven benefit" with respect to writing (as opposed to with respect to general semantics), I cannot tell—but these examples obviate his objections and demonstrate the benefits of the technique for writing.

Dr. Risa Kaparo, director of Inquiry, a chapter of the Association for the Integration of the Whole Person, says of E-Prime that

> [t]he benefits of this more precise use of language prove many-fold. It addresses the problems inherent in the "is" of identification that plague our thought processes by simply eliminating those problems. It addresses the problems of the "is" of predication that lead us to project our own perceptions on something "out there," by simply eliminating that option of describing "reality." (297)

Measures of Effectiveness

D. David Bourland, Jr., developed a "Crispness Index" by dividing the number of ('native') E-Prime sentences in a text by the total number of sentences. His son, R. T. Bourland, wrote a program called Crisp-E to automate such calculations. They offer a few examples in a paper they co-authored, from highly crisp works like *The Aeneid* (0.746), *Beowulf* (0.640), and *Moby Dick* (0.593) to the less crispy *Frankenstein* (0.454) and *The Canterbury Tales* (0.443) (Bourland and Bourland 219-221). D. D. Bourland, Jr., notes that "[f]ive political documents had Crispness Indexes that ranged from the Communist Manifesto's 0.55 to Aristotle's *Politics* with 0.18" (Bourland, "E-Prime" 202). While these numbers may not reflect the literary or political value of such works, the Crispness Index offers a benchmark for students to examine how their writing changes as they revise in E-Prime. They can also use the readability (grade level) calculator built into programs like MS Word to track whether their changes simplify or complicate their prose, with the goal of making their writing both 'crisper' and more readable.

Two more subjective measures rely on tutorial conferences with students. First, we discuss the degree to which E-Primed sentences

'mine' ideas and structures in the rest of the student's paragraph to increase coherence. This also sometimes involves modifying or borrowing from adjacent sentences to ensure a good 'fit' for the revised sentence. The second technique examines how the student incorporates paraphrases of "be"-based sentences from a source. Again, this often involves 'mining' the original text for replacement verbs that place the paraphrased idea in its contextual field. In these cases, the student brings the original source document to the tutorial session, and we read the paragraph together and discuss how best to achieve maximum accuracy in the paraphrase.

Conclusion

E-Prime ~~is not going to~~ will not save the world. It may, however, save some students from deceiving themselves and others about the world. "I am that I am," said God. "I think; therefore, I am," said Descartes." "I yam what I yam," said Popeye. These statements illuminate little. Mainly, they conceal. They obfuscate. They tautologize. They jump the shark. Sentences relying on "be" forms operate like the Wizard of Oz; E-Prime, like Toto, reveals the man behind the curtain. At that point, the real adventure begins—an adventure that helps to reverse the damage done by the tornado of "teaching to the test" spawned by No Child Left Behind, which relies largely on easy-to-test identifications: "***Is*** this true or false?" "Who ***was*** the King of France in 1632?" The dwarfing of learning to such kibbles of data anticipates the now ubiquitous tweet. Such data rarely rise even to the level of information, much less to the level of knowledge—which, as Peter Winch reminds us, requires that we *do* something with it. E-Prime, in conjunction with the strategies outlined here—interrogation of various alternative formulations with reporter's questions plus tagmemic, perspectival explorations for *invention*; use of the Crispness Index along with readability scoring and 'mining' both one's own and sources' paragraphs for *clarity*—gives writers a powerful tool kit to create accurate, useful maps of their ideas. In an age stressfully accelerated by 'surfing,' it slows down both writer and reader, allowing words their full and buoyant exercise in the great cetacean range of thought.

Appendix: Examples of Revision from Student Writing

1. Original:
   The poets ***claim*** in The Winter Sundays ***is*** the author ***is*** comparing him and his father's struggle of living life having only each other to survive. Some of the poems evidence that ***supports*** the poets claim ***are*** when the poet describes how his father hands ached from working in the cold weather. Also the poet says no one ever thanked him meaning that no one truly appreciated the sacrifices his father made. Another important part which ***is*** having only each other to survive ***is*** when the poet said that his father would call him and that he would take care of him by polishing his shoes.

   [*Note*: nothing in the poem suggests that the poet and his father had "only each other to survive"]

   Revision ('mining' the original for alternative verbs):
   In "Those Winter Sundays," poet Robert Hayden ***claims*** that his father deserved greater respect than he showed him as a child. He ***supports*** his claim by describing him rising "in the blueblack cold / . . . with cracked hands that ached / from labor in the weekday weather [to make] / banked fires blaze," and how he "polished [his son's] good shoes as well." Despite his kindness, "[n]o one ever thanked him" (34).

2. Original (from the Purdue Online Writing Lab):
   Schools should ***be*** for education. At present, they ***are*** only tangentially so. They have attempted to serve an all-encompassing social function, trying ***to be*** all things to all people. In the process they have failed miserably at what they ***were*** originally formed to accomplish.

   Revision (tighter and *be*-free):
   Example paraphrase of the essay's conclusion:
   Roger Sipher concludes his essay by insisting that schools have failed to fulfill their primary duty of education because they try to fill multiple social functions (para. 17).
   ("Sample essay")

3. Original (from David F. Maas):
   School-age children may exhibit some of the same signs as younger

children, but may also display more overt signs of anger, worry, or sadness. Others may act like "they *don't care*" and put on an air of indifference while some kids will blatantly deny their parents ***are*** divorcing. Sometimes kids in this age try ***to be*** "extra good," as if they could behave perfectly, then ***maybe*** their parents won't separate. This stems from the all too common belief that children have that divorce ***is*** somehow their fault. It***'s*** usually a good idea to let them know that divorce ***is*** "grownup business" and ***is*** certainly not their doing. In contrast to the child who ***is*** working overtime to "***be*** good," ***are*** some kids who start to become overtly oppositional, aggressive, or even hostile to a parent, perhaps blaming one of them for divorce. Some children ***are*** subtler in their resentment, and may display aggressive behaviors, such as spilling things, losing things, and frequently forgetting things.

Revision (includes attribution; focuses on action as opposed to stasis): Alan L. Frankel, in his article, "The Effects of Divorce on a Child," states that school-age children, exhibiting similar signs as younger children, sometimes get *irritated*, anxious, or sad, while others acting like nothing matters have an air of indifference. Others *repress* their feelings, entering into a state of self-denial, in some cases attempting to behave perfectly in an effort to stop their parents from separating. Such behavior derives from the common belief among children that they have actually caused the divorce. Parents enlightening them should ensure that they know the real causes for their divorce. In contrast to the above, some children become contrary, hostile, continually spilling, losing, and forgetting things. (2) (Maas)

4. Original: Source text: Amnesty International (2005), The death penalty. Retrieved on September 15, 2007, from **http:/asiapacfic.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGACT500082005?open&of=ENG-2AS**
The death penalty ***is*** the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment. It violates the right to life. It ***is*** irrevocable and can ***be*** inflicted on the innocent. It has never ***been*** shown to deter crime more effectively than other punishments [emphasis mine].

   Revision (incorporates contextual information about the source): Amnesty International (2005) describes the death penalty as "the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment" as it deprives

us of a basic human right—the right to life. An irreversible act, the death sentence can claim innocent lives. Furthermore, research has not shown that executions serve as a more effective deterrent compared to alternative sentences. (Ho 149)

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Anthony DiRenzo

Hungry Hearts:

A Review of Dante's *La Vita Nuova*
Translated by Emanuel di Pasquale and Bruno Alemanni (Xenos Books, 2012)

Hannibal Lecter, a fugitive from justice, settles in Florence. Disguised as a curator, the exiled serial killer becomes fascinated by another exile, Dante Alighieri. One day, Lecter attends an opera based on Dante's *Vita Nuova*. As the singers playing Dante and Beatrice gaze into each other's eyes, a female acquaintance asks whether it is possible for man to become obsessed with a woman after a single encounter. Lecter, who pines for his own Beatrice, the angelic FBI agent Clarice Stallings, weighs the question. "Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for her and find nourishment in the very sight of her? I think so," Lecter replies. "But would she see through the bars of his plight and ache for him?"

This scene from Ridley Scott's *Hannibal* (2001) testifies to the power of *La Vita Nuova*. Even a cannibal like Lecter, who feasts on his enemies like Ugolino in the Inferno, is touched by its wisdom. We are driven by urges that can never be fully fathomed or controlled; but by struggling to understand and articulate our animal desires, we become more fully human. Because the postmodern academy does not take these ideas seriously, however, ordinary people are denied Dante's insight. Fortunately, Sicilian American poet Emanuel di Pasquale and independent scholar Bruno Alemanni have published a new translation of the *Vita Nuova* (Xenos Books 2012). Rendered in everyday English, with useful footnotes and an elegant afterword, their edition makes Dante's early masterpiece relevant and accessible to contemporary readers.

Written while Dante was in his twenties, the *Vita Nuova* is a stranger work than the *Divine Comedy*. A mixture of poetry, memoir, psychoanalysis, and criticism, the book chronicles Dante's love for Beatrice Portinari, the daughter of a prominent banker. The two meet as

children at a May Day party, encounter each other again as teens, and are separated when Beatrice dies in her early twenties. This loss changes Dante's life and inspires his poetry.

Di Pasquale and Alemanni restore the shock and novelty of this familiar story by making Dante a flesh-and-blood contemporary, not a marble bust in a library. Dante was no ascetic. Love and lust, he believed, as an initiate in the cult of courtly love, are not opposed but form a continuum. The "love that moves the sun and the other stars" extends from the highest heaven to the lowest rutting beast. Passages in the *Paradiso* are ripe with sex. As Dante and Beatrice ascend to the Empyrean, the sight of her glory arouses him. The first glimpse of this beatific vision, however, appears in the Vita Nuova, a far more corporeal work, even at its most hallucinatory. "Everybody's got a hungry heart," sings modern troubadour Bruce Springsteen. Dante takes this fact literally. In one vision, Love feeds his burning heart to a naked Beatrice.

Di Pasquale and Alemanni's new translation perfectly balances poetics and somatics, capturing both Dante's hothouse eroticism and his tough-minded critique of romantic excess. It is also one of the few translations to do justice to the book's sly humor. When Dante first sees Beatrice, his vital and animate spirits, dwelling respectively in the heart and the brain, marvel at this revelation; in contrast, the animal spirit (lodged in the liver) gripes. Like all lovesick poets, Dante is about to lose his appetite and suffer cramps! Di Pasquale allows sarcasm to form a counterpoint to longing. We laugh at Dante as he practices his sighs, endures the taunts of Beatrice's girlfriends, and employs a decoy to keep his true love secret. Dante may chew up the scenery but offstage is always the voice of his cynical friend Guido Cavalcanti, who plays Mercutio to Dante's Romeo.

Dante's true love affair, however, is with language. The *Vita Nuova* is a Valentine to the vernacular. Despite its erudition and mysticism, it is composed not in polished Latin but rough Tuscan. Unlike most translations, which are ornate and artificial, Di Pasquale and Alemanni's remains demotic, without sacrificing the beauty of Dante's poetry. Take, for example, the opening line to the *canzone*: *"Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore."* Most translators render this "Ladies who

have intelligence or knowledge of love." Di Pasquale and Alemanni's version reads "You ladies who are versed in love," which better captures the music and meaning of the original. Di Pasquale and Alemanni are equally skillful with the book's prose. Like Hemingway, they make the most of common words, whether showing Dante's drawing angels on tablets or observing pilgrims pass through Florence. They also make the abstract concrete. Dante's academic asides daunt most translators. Dante Gabriel Rossetti ceded these passages to his brother William. David Slavitt completely eliminated them. Di Pasquale and Alemanni, however, make them sing. They treat Dante's commentary not as a lecture but as a confession and a manifesto.

As students of Wilhelm Reich and Norman O. Brown, di Pasquale and Alemanni understand and respect Dante's erotic philosophy. Centuries before the sexual revolution, Dante imagined a new civilization based on carnal affirmation. As A. N. Wilson explains in *Dante in Love*: "He was certain that love was going to bring about great changes in his lifetime—changes to the Church, changes to the way that society is ordered—as well as changes in the relations between men and women. To this extent, Dante and Beatrice are to be seen as subversives, as revolutionaries, in the sphere of human or secular love."

This gospel of desire is badly needed in an age of leather bars and cyberporn. If Dante's times considered sex a curse or a sin, a catastrophe to be avoided or appeased though numerology and astrology, our times define sex as a twitch or a complex: a random product of Darwinian adaptation or a digital illusion generated by algorithms. Scribes use institutional power and abstract discourse to denigrate erotic love, while skeptics deny the possibility of agency and enlightenment because both spring from biology. Dominated by materialists and technocrats, the postmodern academy urges us to abandon love and poetry and to embrace the post-human future.

Popular culture, however, suggests that even robots need Dante. In a *Star Trek: Voyager* episode called "Latent Image," the ship's Doctor (a computer generated holograph played by the Italian American actor Robert Picardo) takes another step in his difficult evolution towards humanity by reading the opening to the *Vita Nuova*: "In that book,

which is my memory, on the first page of the chapter that is the day when I first met you appear the words, 'Here begins a new life.'"

Who wrote the Book of Love? After seven centuries, the answer to the Montone's classic question remains Dante Alighieri. Read Emanuel di Pasquale and Bruno Alemanni's translation and you will exclaim: *"Vide cor meum!"* Behold my heart.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Emanuel di Pasquale is Poet-in Residence, Professor of English at Middlesex County College, and Editor-in-Chief of this journal. Born in Sicily in 1943, DiPasquale came to America as a teenager. His published translations include Silvio Ramat's *Sharing a Trip: Selected Poems* (Bordighera Press, 2001), winner of the Raiziss/de Palchi Fellowship. In 1998 he won the Bordighera Poetry Prize for his translation of Joe Salerno's *Song of the Tulip Tree.* DiPasquale has published twelve books of his own poetry, the latest being *Cartwheel to the Moon* (2003), *Europa* (2006), *Writing Anew: New and Selected Poems* (2007), and *Siciliana*, a bilingual (Italian/American) collection of poems with illustrations by Rocco Cafiso (Bordighera Press, 2009). His translation of Dante's *La Vita Nuova / The New Life* (with Bruno Alemanni) appeared this year from Xenos Books, and he has two more books coming out this year. He lives by the ocean in Long Branch, NJ.

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Paige B. L'Hommedieu is a longtime friend and supporter of Middlesex County College, having served on the Middlesex County College Foundation's Board of Directors for eight years. The L'Hommedieu family has supported and continues to support scholarship funding for Middlesex County College students.

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Stacey Staum graduated from Middlesex County College in 2012 with an Associate degree in Liberal Arts-English. While attending Middlesex County College, she won the Highest Academic Achievement in Liberal Arts-English and was inducted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. She will graduate from Rutgers University in October 2013 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, having majored in English and minored in Business and Technical Writing. She has completed her Business Writing Certification through the Rutgers University Writing Program. Her essay was awarded the 2013 Edna Herzberg Prize for Best Essay through the Rutgers University English Department.

Shirley Russak Wachtel, Professor of English at Middlesex County College, is the author of a memoir, *My Mother's Shoes*, the story of a mother and daughter through World War II into the next century. In addition, she is the author of several children's books, including an interactive mystery series, and a poetry collection, *In The Mellow Light*. She is also the co-author of a successful college reading series. Wachtel has published in a variety of venues including *The New York Times*, and has worked as a freelancer for Courier-Life Publications, a columnist for *The Brooklyn Times*, and a feature writer for *The Staten Island Advance*. She has received awards from Writers Digest, The New Jersey Library Association, The Newark Public Library, and Townsend Press. Wachtel frequently conducts presentations and readings throughout the Tri-state area.

Daniel Zimmerman, Professor of English at Middlesex County College, served as Associate Editor of the issue of *Anonym* that published Ezra Pound's last canto, and as editor of *The Western Gate, Brittannia,* and *College English Notes*. In 1997, he invented an anagrammatical poetic form, Isotopes, His works include *See All the People*, illustrated by Richard Sturm (Toronto: Open Studio, 1976), the trans-temporal *Blue Horitals* with John Clarke (Oasii: Amman, Jordan, 1997), *ISOTOPES* (London: frAme, 2001), and *ISOTOPES2* (Chicago: **http://www.beardofbees.com/pubs/Isotopes2.pdf**, 2007). His book *Post-Avant* (2002) won the Editor's Choice Award from Pavement Saw Press in Ohio. In fall 2012, he enjoyed a sabbatical from Middlesex County College; he wrote "Uncrumpling the Map" as part of a yearlong McGraw Mid-Career Fellowship at Princeton University.

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