

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOMENT



**SELF AND OTHER**

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The poem "Bits and Pieces" and photo by Liz Coleman.  
The sculpture "L'Oiseau de feu sur l'arche," stands in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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# COMMUNITY COLLEGE MOMENT



Volume Fifteen  
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## Editors' Notes

In calling for submissions on the theme of *Self and Other*, we were motivated in part by *Oxford Dictionaries* declaring “selfie” the 2013 word of the year, acknowledging the digital proliferation of self-documentary photos. Since then, a man was fined \$4,000 in Pamplona, Spain, for snapping a selfie while running with the bulls, and New York State banned the taking of selfies with live tigers, behavior one might think would not be necessary to regulate. In this issue’s first essay, “Selfie: Handprints on the Cave Wall,” Sandy Brown Jensen defends the ubiquitous selfie, placing it within a history of self-portraiture that has social media self-chroniclers in the company of Rembrandt.

Not surprisingly, other contributors examine the self-other dynamic between teacher and student. Influential writing instructor Susan Naomi Bernstein upends any assumption that students are necessarily the other in this pairing with her essay, “Dr. King Did Not Negotiate: Stretching Language with Post-Secondary Writing,” which explores the importance and effectiveness of giving basic writing students room to be themselves and find their voices. D. Shane Combs shares his passionate, empathic approach to teaching in “Born In/Of Community College: Birthing a Pedagogy of Giving a Shit,” and the teacher-student relationship is further explored in micro fiction by Peter Eliopoulos and self-reflective essays by Kellie Charron and Abby Koenig.

How is the dance of self and other affected by time and proximity, or by familiarity, affection, heredity, history? Anna Kate Malliris celebrates an adoptive mother-daughter bond, while Philos Molina ponders relationships existing and possible among bus passengers, Brandy Stark considers ghostly visitations in Shakespeare’s plays, and Jean LeBlanc imagines an encounter between William James and Sigmund Freud. In her philosophical essay, “In Search of Kindness Lost,” Carolyn Lundquist explores the nature and importance of an undervalued form of love, and the responsibility each self has, not only to family and friends, but to those *other* others, strangers.

Rounding out this fifteenth volume of *The Community College Moment* are visual artworks, poems, book reviews, the tale of a man who traded wealth and slaves for one night of passion, the journal of a painter documenting his role in an Italian film project, “The True Story of Little Bo Peep,” and “A Sketch of the Necessity and Form of Faculty Leadership in the Needed Overhaul of Undergraduate Education.”

*Russell H. Shitabata and Ben Hill*  
*Community College Moment editors*

## ESSAYS



But little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth. For a crowd is not company; and faces are but a gallery of pictures . . .

– Francis Bacon



# Selfies: Handprints on the Cave Wall

*Sandy Brown Jensen*

I have a postcard from First Lady Michelle Obama that I really love. She and First Dog Bo are reclining on the East Lawn: she is holding her cell phone up in what is now the iconic pose of the selfie. She and Bo are both smiling at her cell phone, and I, for one, don't think, "Oh, Michelle's taking a selfie — she's so self-absorbed and narcissistic." I'm not saying there isn't plenty of evidence in the selfie movement that leads my thinking in that direction, but that here is a vernacular genre of spontaneous self-expression born of roots in self-portraiture and evolving technologies.

I reflect on Vincent Van Gogh, the Impressionist painter who did a whole series of self-portraits. When I look into the somewhat wild and lonely face that he portrays, I think less about his well-known history and more about the twin qualities of vision and loneliness, perhaps even bewilderment I see there. These are profoundly human emotions. And just as a little brush up on art history, I offer a reminder that Van Gogh did not receive any critical attention during his lifetime to make him think his art would become a class marker of the upper crust. Very much like today's millions of selfie takers, he felt alone, misunderstood, an unseen face among the masses of humans. A self-portrait, a selfie says, if only to oneself, "I exist. Here I am. This is my handprint on the cave wall of my time and my world."

I believe we are all desperate to be seen, to be acknowledged, and the selfies we take reflect the degree of maturity we have attained in our personal struggle to come to grips with that drive. Van Gogh painted himself with a ruthless honesty that inspires me to see in my own aging features the galactic pinwheels cartwheeling across the ordinary face of home.



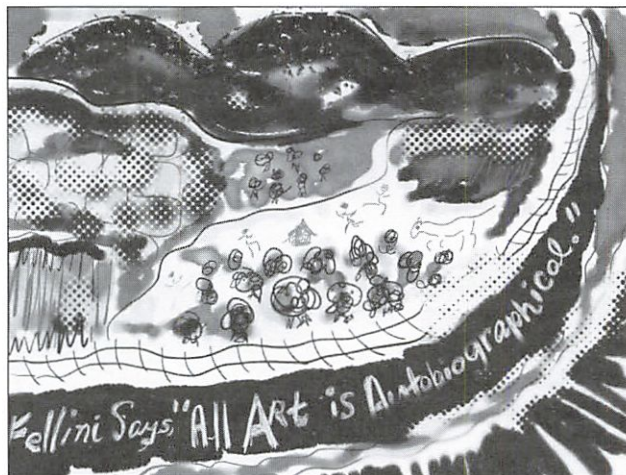
*Chuck Kennedy's photograph of First Lady Michelle Obama taking a selfie with First Dog Bo..*



I reflect, too, on Frida Kahlo. Injured as a young girl, she endured multiple surgeries and extended confinements throughout her life. In spite of being flat on her back in a hospital bed for months at a time, she was able to rig up a mirror and easel and find the drive to paint her own self-portrait using Surrealist techniques that put her own face front and center, surrounded often by the mechanisms of pain. Other Kahlo self-portraits connected her face to her Mexicanismo and German roots. Frida Kahlo's eyes staring into mine tell me about courage in the face of biological obstacles, about passion for life, for partner, for history. For reflecting humanity and soul deep beauty, there is no greater mirror to the world than Kahlo's selfies.

Self-portraits, and by extension, selfies, have a long and time-honored history as a vernacular genre, meaning "of the people." Technology just gives more people the tools for self-expression. Big noses, tongues out, duck kisses, rude gestures; worse, selfies taken with homeless people or with coffins at funerals — inappropriate by many if not most standards, selfies, like all attempts at art, record the moment that is receding rapidly into the past. Those goofy kids will become parents or professionals with complex life patterns and fates far from the feckless moment of that stupid selfie. There will be a future moment where that picture and all the unique others will fall into historical place for self, family, and archived history of a now faded past.

The selfie is a way of exploring how I am in the world. There is something in me that sees myself very differently than others do, and through photography, I can explore those shadows, those soul rooms of intimacy, memory, suffering, and sadness, as well as their bright opposites. The drive to self-portraiture is linked to the impulse to memoir, to the personal documentary video, to first person storytelling of all kinds. Teilhard de Chardin famously said, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience," and I think there is something in that, at least inasmuch as because I am in my body, I am the one person in the world I see the least of. What is



*Digital sketchbook of Sandy Brown Jensen. Creative Commons.*



this strange horse I ride called the human body? Yet, unlike a horse, my human body undergoes radical visual changes as I move through time, space, experience, DNA, and suffer the ungentle ravages of gravity.

In some ways, I don't feel quite real because I can feel myself, but I can't really see myself. The mirror image won't stand still and anyway is all backward, and I can't send it to my mother to reassure her that I'm still very much alive — the intent and destination of so many selfies. The self-portrait, the selfie does that — holds my image still — yet in reverse! Am I never to see myself as I really am? No matter how cheekily self-aware a selfie might be, they all have a quality of heart-breaking innocence about them. Rare is the mask that the camera or brush doesn't penetrate with its frank, lucid gaze.

Michelle Obama and the dog have an air of mutual grace and fun as she holds up the cell phone camera to snap the image. This summer day in the middle of her husband's second term is casual, so ephemeral. The portrait is so intimate. Then the whole world rushes onward: the dog will die, Michelle will grow old and die, and the selfie, the self-portrait of the two of them, happy and in tune with each other and the world, will remain for other sympathetic eyes looking back through time.

I am wary of critics who seem to confuse self-representation with self-regard. Before selfies came along to bend the popular conception of self-portraiture toward youthful narcissism, the general consensus was that self-portraits were, indeed, meant to bring the viewer into direct contact with the soul of the artist. If you go back to Rembrandt's self-portrait at London's Kenwood House, "Self-Portrait With Two Circles," it is hard not to think that it is a weight to grow old, that it happened to the bewilderment of the great Rembrandt, and it happens to you and me, too.

Why is it that critics, everyday, shall we say, vernacular critics, tend to a knee jerk pathologizing of the current selfie movement? One apologetic blogger even greets readers with, "Hi! I'm Diane Greco, and you are looking at my online exercise in narcissism,



*Self Portrait With Two Circles, Rembrandt. Creative Commons.*



*Selfcity.net screen shots showing a subset of selfies in the data set and some of the data filters that can be used by web visitors to analyze the data for themselves.*

vanity, exhibitionism, ambition, vanity, vanity, and, of course, vanity.” Greco’s Biblical language (“Vanity, vanity,” quoth the prophet, “all is vanity.” Eccles. 12:8) points an arrow straight back down the Puritan tradition that exhorts people to use photographs of themselves only to examine their own flaws and failures as a source for self-improvement and for attaining grace. Jessica Moore, photography collection curator at the Western Plains Cultural Centre, doesn’t mince words in her critical stance, “For me, The Selfie has been defeated by its ubiquity; their multitude and banal similarity has robbed them of any impact.” Moore, too, is in the grip of that Puritanism, that powerful force from the deep past that, in addition to critics crying narcissism, has spawned the Quantified Self Movement and the proliferation of productivity apps.

It is all too human to want to police the boundaries between (other people’s) public and private lives. Open the topic around any given water cooler, and those critical voice echoes of Jessica Moore, perhaps your own, come down hard on selfies everywhere. Selfie researcher Jill Walker Rettberg makes the same observation, “Society disciplines digital self-representations such as selfies through ridicule and pathologizing.” I am not beyond interrogating these voices, and the primary argument that comes most quickly to mind for most of my conversationalists is an objection at the sheer numbers of selfies, as if quantity implied lack of value, cheapness, and, yes, narcissism, vanity, exhibitionism, ambition, vanity, vanity, and, of course, vanity. Apparently the question really must be asked, “Does the quantity of selfies make any kind of meaningful difference to anything?”



To answer, I turn to the Selfiecity.net project, which quantitatively examined the differences in selfies from five different, international cities: Bangkok, Berlin, Moscow, New York, and Sao Paulo. This project is the brainchild of Dr. Lev Manovich, an expert on digital art and culture. Manovich is a Professor of Computer Science at The Graduate Center, CUNY, and the Director of the Software Studies Initiative. He and his cohorts investigate selfies using a variety of methods — artistic, quantitative, and theoretical. They have set for themselves some fascinating questions, such as, “How can the history of photography help to better understand selfies phenomena? How can we theoretically approach social media images in general?”

The current data set includes 3200 selfies. The web site includes data visualizations of, for example, the ratio of men to women in each city who post selfies on social media. It turns out that many more women post selfies than men. In Bangkok, 1.3% more women post than men; in Moscow, 4.6% more women post than men, a fascinating gender contrast. For another example, the data show people take fewer selfies than are being complained about around the water cooler: depending on the city, only 3-5% of images were actually selfies.

The data set can be analyzed by any visitor to the web site using a variety of filters. Different trends flow through the selfie culture of any given city — head tilts, smiles, poses, expressions — and those can be isolated for research, for deep thinking, for art history, or for investigation into the desire for self-representation.

In my view, selfies are very much both for communicating and for reflecting upon ourselves. Creating and sharing a selfie or a stream of selfies is either consciously or unconsciously a form of self-reflection and self-creation. The Solutreans of Southern France had the cave walls of Lascaux to leave red handprints as their eternal marks; we have the selfie to contribute to the great stream of human history.

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# Dr. King Did Not Negotiate: Stretching Language with Post-Secondary Writing

*Susan Naomi Bernstein*



## Introduction

The following story illustrates the non-controversial claim that post-secondary students learn to write for academic audiences through a combination of studying effective persuasive writing, and practicing to write persuasively on their own, with feedback from teachers, from their peers and elders and, as available, from the support of writing center tutors. However, for many critics of post-secondary education, this claim becomes controversial when applied to post-secondary writing courses labeled “basic,” “developmental,” or “remedial.” These critics argue for a counterclaim: that students enrolled in remediation cannot be helped in post-secondary environments and are best served in back-to-basics programs that focus on low-level skills, such as the mechanics of grammar and the construction of simple sentences or paragraphs.

Yet this counterclaim remains problematic because many of the students enrolled in courses with the “remedial” label are speakers of multiple languages and identify as Black or Latin@. Indeed the term “remediation” presents its own set of problems. “Remediation” defines the complex act of writing simplistically as a skill set that students ought to have acquired in past education. After they demonstrate their acquisition of this skill set, students can earn the label “college ready.” College ready writing, in this formulation, is equated with conformity to the ever-changing rules of “standard” academic English. Non-conformity to the rules takes on the moral equivalent of unruliness and of breaking the law, behavior not sanctioned in highly regulated systems of post-secondary education.

Remediation, then, is law enforcement, put in place by post-secondary institutions for judging students whose spoken and written language appears as outside the law, marginal to the concerns of the institution, and potentially troublesome and counterproductive to the appearance of institutional order. As such, the condition of many post-secondary institutions mirrors the criminal justice system’s new Jim Crow policies. Institutions place students of color, particularly Black and Latin@ students, into remedial English in numbers disproportionate to their presence in the population. Teachers become low-paid (and often part-time) middle managers tasked with keeping the students in line and invisible to the regular population of the institution. If students fail to conform to these draconian conditions, they face a long list of sanctions, as well as a complicated bureaucratic exit system that rivals any parole board.



For those of us that find ourselves held captive in this system as students or teachers, education as the practice of freedom can seem elusive. Even as self-styled “hero” teachers try to “save” students, such teachers inevitably reinforce the paradigm by locating the source of change in the body of the teacher. While teachers’ heroic efforts may inspire motivation over the short term for multilingual writers, students are better served by forging motivations and inspirations garnered from community experiences with classroom peers. For multilingual writers, such experiences are not easily or readily gained. Outside the classroom, students claim identities as workers, parents, and children, and conflicts arise over scarce and unequally distributed resources.

These conflicts can and do become barriers to learning that teachers working as lone individuals cannot and should not try to ameliorate by themselves. Instead the creation of community, of temporary alliances for the sake of striving for social justice, can offer students hands-on experience with working to change their own circumstances. In writing classes labeled remedial for learners of color identified as multilingual, past social justice struggles can offer lessons for the present. For these reasons, the following story centers on a post-secondary class in remedial writing that read, analyzed, and wrote about the works of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

### **In the Basement**

Our basement classroom was overheated, did not include outside windows, had limited and often non-existent Internet access, and featured yellow walls in need of a coat of paint. If we opened the door, we were distracted by the sounds of students talking, laughing, and preparing for classes outside in the hallway. If we closed the door, we were suffocated by heat. So the need to pay attention seemed even more urgent. At the beginning of this warm autumn term, we were studying “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” a speech that Martin Luther King, Jr. gave in 1967 at Riverside Church, two subway lines (with a transfer at Times Square) away from our school.

Our first argument began on the second day of class. We did not argue about grades or assignments or attendance or other matters of the syllabus. Instead we argued about word choice. I had written on the board: “Dr. King suggested that negotiating for peace was better than fighting.” This sentence was not a model of stylistic felicity, but I thought the sentence adequate enough for introducing a quotation, the lesson for the hour. I was about to be proven wrong.

A student immediately called me out on that word. “Dr. King did not *negotiate*. That word doesn’t get the point across. That’s the wrong word for his leadership.”

The student spoke with great dignity and passion. She sat up straight in her chair, challenging all of us to reconsider what I had just suggested. The chairs and the desks were attached to each other, and suddenly I noticed the small ugliness of this furniture, much



too small for full-grown adults and the contents of their book bags — and much too small for the contents of the students' thoughts, emerging all at once. They wondered why one word mattered so much that one of their peers would challenge the teacher. Could one word have that much impact on the meaning of the sentence? Well, yes — it could. So now what? What would be a better word?

Just then, a buzzing sound filtered into the classroom from the hallway. The conversation about word choice came to a halt as we tried to identify the sound. The buzz had a whiny edge, an edge that sucked in our attention. I didn't think it was a fire alarm. The fire alarms rang much louder, and the faculty fire marshals came to each room with evacuation orders. The marshals did not come, but the sound did not stop.

Okay, I said. I don't want us to go down in a blaze of glory. I'll go investigate. You all stay here and work out the word choice issue. Have someone go to the board and write down your choices. Discuss each one, and when I return we'll talk about what you chose and why.

It took only a moment to find out from the workers at the physical plant that the sound was a test of a new alarm system, and that there was no reason to worry. The test would be over soon. I walked back to the classroom, heaving a great sigh. There were too many distractions, and we had too much work to accomplish in a very short time. I imagined that the students would have forgotten about the word choice discussion during my absence, that they had begun other conversations that had nothing to do with writing.

Since we had just begun the second hour of the second day of class, I decided to forgive them in advance. All of the students were new to the college. They would need time to adjust to the new pace. They would have to take the writing exit test in the tenth week of the semester, and we would need to move quickly. We *had* been moving quickly. My infelicitous word choice, *negotiate*, had set off alarms. But those alarms were only metaphorical. The real alarm, as ever, came up at the wrong time. Our concentration was shot, and the teachable moment had vanished. We would need to begin again.

But as I approached the classroom door, I heard loud voices, and several mentions of Dr. King's name. I peeked in the rectangular pane of glass that ran the length of the classroom door. One student was at the board, writing furiously, as other students called out suggestions. I sat down on a bench in the hallway, and listened to the discussion echoing out from behind the door.

After a few moments, I reentered the room, and the students showed me the list of alternative words they had chosen to write on the board: *persuading*, *convincing*, *debating*. They explained the difficulty of choosing the best word, as I had asked. So we tried using each one in the sentence. The students settled on *convincing*. But they had needed to add more words to clarify the meaning. Their corrected sentence read: "Dr. King suggested

that convincing *people to speak up* for peace was better than fighting.” The sentence definitely become more inclusive, the students contended, and more direct. The first sentence implied that Dr. King carried the movement all alone. The second sentence stated that Dr. King worked with others to create change.

I could barely contain myself from shouting out with joy, and I needed to make connections immediately. So, I began, why did I leave you to work without me in the room? Because you had to find out about the noise, said one of the students. Well yes, that was the initial reason. But that noise turned out to be nothing, so I sat outside the room and listened to your discussion. What could be another reason I left you alone? You wanted us to do teamwork, asked one of the students. Well, yes, that’s part of it. Building community is crucial for this class to work. And I know I talked a lot about community on the first day. Even more than that, I wanted you to see what you could do on your own, without me here. I wanted you to understand what you already know how to do, and why *remedial* is the wrong name for this course.

But this *is* a remedial course, the students insisted. We need help. Granted, I said. Everyone needs help with writing. Writing is hard work. But I hope we won’t let the word “remedial” define who we are as a class. We can’t allow that word to have power over us. The questions on the writing test will seem very mundane and ordinary, but the issues behind the questions are so much deeper. And you come to the course with so much to say already. And it’s only the second day.

I recapitulated for the students the skills they had used to revise the new sentence on the board. You began by practicing word choice, and this also included work with dependent and independent clauses, verb usage, and sentence structure. But you did more than that. You also interpreted the text. You read beneath the surface of “Time to Break Silence,” and you analyzed the point of the speech. This is wonderful work for our second day, absolutely wonderful.

As they began their college education in the seemingly indefinite limbo of remediation, many of the writers found strong connections to King’s resonating call for the urgency of direct action. One writer was especially moved by King’s quotation from Omar Khayyam, and the explicit connection of this quotation to the bureaucratic constraints imposed on the writers by the college’s many requirements. Through multiple readings and interpretations of King’s work, the writers gradually discovered the benefits of writing as a process and as a practice.

Writing provided opportunities to pay attention to thoughts and ideas. Those thoughts and ideas, through the use of figurative language and extensive time for practice, could be transformed into sentences, paragraphs, and essays. This relationship to writing was very different from the institutionalized view of remediation. Indeed, the remedial writing class

was not only a constraint against moving forward with these writers' education, because it offered no credit toward graduation, while using up limited financial aid. At the same time, the course also was a punishment for failing a standardized writing test.

In 1967, many commentators vilified King's opposition to the Vietnam War, as expressed in "Time to Break Silence."<sup>4</sup> But, more than forty years later, historians, theologians, and others consider this speech to be prophetic. The writers who encountered "Beyond Vietnam" in our class had a similar response. King's connections to poverty and war seemed particularly fresh and compelling, and the use of language, if initially frustrating, remained intriguing. After much practice with reading and interpreting figurative language, these writers experimented with composing metaphors themselves.

- If society continues in this direction, any child that is born in the middle of this will be pulled in by the strong current of destruction and will be dragged to the tip of the waterfall, which will lead to a painful end and the future will drown.
- Brand new and upgraded appliances would attract any buyer to a home. Brand new and upgraded computers will attract students to the college.
- If we choose not to stop at the station of people in need, we will have to stop at the unemployment station and at some point we will need to spend even more and go back to their stop again and solve the problem. We better travel the road once; it will cost less.

### **Beyond the 300<sup>th</sup> Word**

The English department where these writers took the course required eight essays of 300 words in ten weeks, plus revisions. I had to teach them to ignore that rule because they would not pass the test if they stopped at word number three hundred. I taught this concept by presenting the writers with a study I had completed the year before. I wrote in the syllabus:

Students [that] did not pass the [test] consistently reported that they wrote only 1 ½ - 2 pages in their test booklet. This very short essay did not provide enough writing for the audience to estimate how well prepared the students were for exiting remediation. Students should write extensively and intensively until they reach the "stop sign" in the [test] booklet or the end of the blue book for the Exit Exam and all in-class essays. Aim for at least five well-developed paragraphs for a total essay of 500-600 words. Please note another reason for length: grammatical errors in a short essay stand out like a purple raincoat in a sea of yellow rain slickers.

To this end, we continued to practice more on developing length than focusing on grammar errors. Instead, the writers pushed themselves to write longer essays. The writers often pushed their chairs together to write in small groups. For some writers, the groups



helped immensely. When a writer would become stuck, other writers could suggest a way out. Other writers preferred to work alone, and I tried to consult with each of the writers at least once during class.

“But really, Miss,” a writer would say. “I really am done. I can’t write any more.” And you have how many pages? I would ask. Do you have more than three? “No,” the writer might respond. “I barely have two — or not quite two, a few lines short of two. But, Miss. There’s nothing more to say.” Did you include a metaphor? I would ask, or another figure of speech? Do you have only one example in a paragraph? Do you explain that example fully and completely? If you have more than one example, move the second and third examples into separate paragraphs, one example per paragraph. Then make sure that you analyze each example in detail.

### **Bullshit**

Around midterm, the writers insisted on abandoning the bluebooks I gave them because the bluebooks kept them from writing as much as they wanted to write. As the writers learned to develop their general ideas into more specific metaphors and analogies, they learned as well new processes for connecting meaningfully to writing for standardized tests, for bringing something of themselves to the writing. Most days, the classroom buzzed with cognitive dissonance as student worked to integrate new practices with what they already knew. One sweltering day in the basement classroom, we discussed bullshit. “Miss,” asked one of the writers, “can’t we just bullshit our way through the test?” Well no, I had said, you won’t pass if you write bullshit. Your persuasive voice needs to be strong. Otherwise the professors that score the test won’t take your writing seriously.

“But Miss,” another student clarified, “not any old bullshit. We mean *good* bullshit.” Just so long as it’s persuasive, I replied. But if it’s persuasive, someone else said, then it’s not bullshit. So *don’t* bullshit, I said, don’t even think about bullshitting. Make every word *mean* something. Use the metaphors and the analogies to help create that meaning. Include quotes or ideas from Dr. King *if* Dr. King’s ideas help support the evidence for your argument. Introduce every quote or idea, and then explain the quote or idea so that the reader knows how you interpret Dr. King’s work. You also need to show why Dr. King’s work is connected to the topic of your essay. But don’t just throw in any old thing to fill up space. “But why not,” someone asked. Well, I answered, why do you think not? “That’s also bullshit,” another student said, “and we have to write like college students now.”

### **Stretching Language**

As the test date approached, the writers often insisted on practicing writing for most of the three-hour class period. So we wrote. I wrote with them, and read my writing aloud



to them. I would sometimes watch them catching glimpses of my daily planner, where I took notes, and did all of the writing and planning for the course. They knew I was doing research with them, and often asked me about it. I read from my notes, and told the writers that I was intrigued by their work with language and metaphor — and with their persistence.

These writers had loud arguments with each other, and also with me. They came late to class, or missed class altogether, handed in writing after the deadlines, or did not hand in writing at all. We sat in circles, or we sat in rows. Writers wrote together in the classroom, taking turns exiting the classroom to consult with me in the hallway. Death, illness, and other emergencies interrupted our writing; however, as they learned to read to analyze the purposes of a text and to write to persuade their own audiences of a premise or a goal, they also learned to read for King's emotional tone, best described as pensive, powerful, and complex. Connecting their emotional tone to their own writing became yet another catalyst for writing.

Most significantly, the writers invented and practiced a term they called “stretching language.” They defined stretching language as a way to extend writing by using figurative language. To explain the definition, they cited King's speeches and their own experiments with metaphor and analogy. Figurative language would add more details for an example, or lend more support to strengthen an analysis. Stretching language also proved to be a visual metaphor for the actual visible improvements that many writers began to see in their essays. As their writing gained strength and length, these writers found that they were able to sustain their ideas beyond the constraints of a few paragraphs or a single page. They fought hard to accept themselves as writers that could exceed what a remedial placement had defined as their limitations. They seemed determined, as one person wrote, “[not to] fall for anything, but to stand [for] something.”

### **Exits**

After Thanksgiving, the writers in our class took the writing exit test. I waited outside the classroom while a proctor from testing services administered the test. But before the results were posted, and after the proctor left with tests in hand, the writers urged me back into the basement classroom. They wanted to talk about the test, about the questions, about their struggles and successes with writing.

I again took notes, and my daily planner includes a section from one writer's conclusion: “Without motivation, there would be no determination. Without determination there would be no frustration. Without frustration there would be no greatness.” Though exhausted from an hour of intense concentration, the writers gathered together to listen to this oral history. No doubt fresh challenges awaited all of us. But in that moment, we became mindful of the stakes. And all of us were paying attention.

## Postscript

In the end, sixty-one percent of the writers passed the writing exit test, more than ten percent higher than the average pass rate for the college. Of the eleven writers who passed this twelve-point test, two writers scored ten points out of a possible twelve, one writer scored seven points, and the rest scored eight points. One hundred percent of the writers who did not pass scored six points. One hundred percent of the eighteen writers raised their scores by at least one point.

Even as the test scores empirically indicated enough progress to circumvent the college's labyrinth of remediation, the test scores alone did not signify a triumph of social justice for this now-dispersed community of multi-lingual writers.

According to the test results, more than half of the students were college ready writers, which meant that the institution judged that the students possessed an adequate command of standard academic English skills. The institution, having identified worthy allies, could now remove these students from remedial isolation and into the English 101 general population. Yet for our temporary community, the difference was not topic sentences or comma splices, but practice with writing and critical engagement with Dr. Martin Luther King's persuasive speeches for social justice. Our work addressed how Dr. King had used topic sentences to organize his thoughts, and the care with which he chose words to appeal to his many different audiences and purposes. Dr. King, the students had argued, did not negotiate. He *persuaded, debated, convinced*, rhetorical acts that drew the attention and inspiration of these multilingual writers. From such promising beginnings, perhaps we find motivation for future challenges that certainly await us in and out of classrooms.

*In memory of Adam Vine (1977-2011)*

# Born In/Of Community College: Birthing a Pedagogy of Giving a Shit

D. Shane Combs



There is nobody but me. For the next ninety minutes, there will be nobody but me. I'm sitting in a comfortable chair, but I am not comfortable. The building that I'm in is predominately for Science classes. The doors are see-through, and the stairs and second floor make me feel more intimidated. The year is 2005; the place is Nash Community College in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and though a community college may seem ideal for a former high school dropout, until a few months prior, I had no idea what community colleges consisted of, didn't *really* know the difference between community colleges and universities, and had been told, by loving parents who never even made it to high school, that some families are born to go to college and some are not. Had I not met a friend in 2005 who read my writing and believed in my voice — who, in what I now know mirrors the one-on-one conference, taught me, over coffee, from diner to diner, about community colleges, about their accessibility, about the necessity that I take a summer course, English 111 — I would probably have lived the rest of my life as I had those first twenty-three years: wanting for an education that I believed excluded my family from birth. In 2005, I didn't know the term *introvert*, nor did I know the phrase *highly-sensitive person*; I only knew that I arrived at the building an hour and a half early and was too nervous to talk to anybody. All I could do was write:

*I don't belong here.*

I do.

*If the teacher calls on me, if she makes me talk, I'm going to get up and walk out.*

She will; I won't.

There are twenty years of fundamentalist religion that came before that moment at Nash Community College, there is my parents' struggle with alcoholism, there is our lack of knowledge about education. There is also a half-decade after, where I'll do creative writing and wander, where being an undergraduate is itself my life but I feel no greater direction or purpose. But, then, there are moments that I can plot out, like this one in 2005, that points to the purpose that will ultimately come, points to composition studies, points to a kind of learning that, through language, through writing, through a social epistemic rhetoric, would begin to help me construct a new identity.

My teaching philosophy — *the pedagogy of giving a shit* — might have first been uttered in a graduate class at a university, it may have been fostered by reading bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and a collection of essays edited by Susan Naomi Bernstein, it may have been



developed and practiced as an embedded mentor at the university, but the moments most still, most evident, in the formation of my teaching philosophy, either come when I was in the community college, like that year in 2005, or when I was focused on community colleges, taking a course at East Carolina University called Teaching Developmental Writing at the Two-Year College. Community College, for me, is like the terms *introvert* and *highly-sensitive person*; they are with me always, even though I feel them or experience them less at times. All of them are markers in my identity, shapers of past, shaping my future, and, without them, I'm not sure the following philosophy would ever have been reached, much less developed and put into practice.

It was that first English course at Nash Community College that opened up the academy to me. Previously I had attended and eventually dropped out of a Baptist Christian School, and all I knew of education was a style I now know as authoritarian with a bent toward conforming over questioning and confinement over creativity. This was not so in the English 111 classroom with Marbeth Holmes at Nash Community College. It was delightful liberty to me that I could write about any topic, no matter how secular, no matter how sad or depressing, if it fit the parameters of the assignment. The piece I most remember from that semester is one I wrote on country singer Gary Allan, who had released his first album after his wife's suicide, an album that featured such titles as "Life Ain't Always Beautiful" and "I Just Got Back from Hell." It doesn't shock me, coming up in a home where I silently surrendered to the sadness around me, be it my parents' struggle with alcohol or our greater struggle with religion, that I would pour myself onto the page, into a topic of sadness, of sadness and beauty, one where I claimed Allan did the most beautiful work of his career against the backdrop of working through unthinkable pain.

That relationship between beauty and pain, in some paradoxical fashion, would be the beginning of *the pedagogy of giving a shit* (POGAS) — understanding from childhood, that many of us find ourselves loving and loved by people and things that bring us pain. I watched my siblings rebel against my parents for a time, against the authoritarian school, but I, for the most part, went inside my imagination, took everything hyper-personally, performed the introverted and highly sensitive roles for which I didn't yet have a name. I now see similarities played out, this many years later, in my students. Some of the best reflection papers come from life events they might trade away even if it meant a less beautiful paper. Some of the best and most dedicated students we, as instructors, will see, are dedicated because of their anxiety, because they feel they are never good enough. In other words, there is an emotional give-and-take around us all the time, seldom mentioned, even more rarely valued. Yet, if we are to invite beauty, we are sometimes inviting pain. If we are to ask for dedication, we are sometimes calling on the most anxious to be more anxious. But I've yet to find a profession that doesn't take the best from us, whether physi-



cally, mentally, or emotionally, and as teachers we often feel the rise and fall of beauty and pain, of sadness and exhilaration, of that give-and-take of days where we feel like we've given more than we'll ever get back and days where we get back more than we can ever give. Many feel this push-and-pull but do not have a name for it, nor do they understand the value of giving it a name.

*The pedagogy of giving a shit.* The first time I uttered this phrase was in the spring of 2014, in response to "Basic Writing: In Search of a New Map," an essay written by Susan Naomi Bernstein. In the essay, Bernstein writes of a student named Helen who, after watching Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech on the first day of class, e-mailed to say, "My name is Helen, I sit in the front of your class I wore a bright orange shirt today, anyway I'm hoping that you will be the one to unleash the missing writer inside of me."<sup>1</sup>

My first response was of absolute pathos, recognizing a mingling of helplessness and desire in the student's writing. Thus, for this student to desire to be a writer, she must also acknowledge helplessness concerning her current state and, to acknowledge helplessness, she is also free to state her desire. Further complicating matters, in identifying herself as missing the writer in her, she also requires that the teacher become *the one* in order to bestow writing upon her. Now, to step outside of Helen's vantage point, we could further complicate the matter by saying that the student, unaware, is not wholly missing *her writer* (in that, through writing, she composed the e-mail we now discuss) and the teacher, in her best efforts, could never fully be *the one*. And if we dared go another step out, we could acknowledge that the banking model of education, the idea that students are empty containers to be filled, doesn't work, that the helpless/helper is a false dichotomy, set up in earnest by Helen, but set up to structure failure if maintained. And yet, does any of that matter? Perhaps and perhaps not. In *the pedagogy of giving a shit*, in that moment, all there is *is* the student and her wish, the student and her desire, the student and her reaction to the video, the student and her request. If, for a second or a week or half a semester, the teacher must play *the one* so the student can view herself finding herself as writer, the teacher plays the one, while empowering the student simultaneously. If, for a moment, the teacher must set up a model close to banking to bank on the ethos granted her by the student, the teacher will use her ethos for all its worth to point the student to the page, to resources, to the process that brings about the missing writer — *writing*.

*The pedagogy of giving a shit* is, above all, about two things: intimacy and identity. It is for the instructor to understand, particularly the instructor of a POGAS philosophy, that while the instructor may create a space welcoming of intimacy, it is the student who must engage that space. Bernstein provides the space and the speech (King's "I Have a Dream"), but it is the student who reaches out in e-mail. Identity, too, is a part of the speech. But that is King's identity. It is Helen who pushes for her writer's identity. Thus, the pedagogy

of giving a shit sees intimacy as an invitation and, when accepted, intimacy often becomes the student's breakthrough to greater identity.

These moments, few, fostered, and rarely occurring when we think they might, become the payoff for the emotional energy that goes into this way of teaching. In a single year of teaching and mentoring, I've seen these moments again and again and they are, just that, moments. One of the first came from a student who, without my prompting, told me that she had known what she wanted to do since second grade, but she had never known *why*. Passionately, for fifteen minutes beyond the ten we had scheduled for conferencing, she told me of her frustrations, how *because that's what my parents did for a living* was not a sufficient reason. Her voice rose with her ambitions and she left my office thanking me after she decided she was going to take the summer to find her *why*. Sitting there, having been silent for most of the talk, I felt like noted composition theorist, Donald Murray, knowing that she hadn't needed my words of wisdom, she had simply needed an intimate space and a person with a little bit of ethos and a lot of willingness to listen. Another student, in the same class, coming to me for the third time for her third and final project, snatched the paper out of my hand when she heard a typo in the first sentence. Against my urgings to continue our conference, she told me she was taking the paper back home.

"You deserve better," she said. "And I can do better."

Intimate moments are those that provide space for student growth, revelation, breakthroughs in identity. While many of the moments have come in one-to-one conferencing, it is hardly mandatory that they occur in one setting, and they rarely come where or when we are looking for them. Furthermore, for those who teach four or five sections, the reality of repeated conferencing with every student is unrealistic. For that reason, I believe we should focus on a phrase that I've put forth in academic conferences. While it is in no way a perfect summary, it gets at an idea that transcends the conference and moves to what we hope to accomplish, conferences or not. This phrase is *the intimacy of identifying* and it is in response to Neal Lerner's "The Teacher-Student Conference and the Desire for Intimacy." In his essay, Lerner highlights the history of the one-to-one conference, how it has risen and fallen from use, and how it is always coveted time but is rarely practical for teachers who are struggling with time as it is. Towards the close of "The Teacher-Student Conference and the Desire for Intimacy," Lerner urges the audience to "think critically about our teaching and learning goals, about conferencing discourse and the powerful messages that our words convey, about how classroom practices might be transformed in ways that would meet the goals we set for our one-to-one work"<sup>2</sup>. In other words, Lerner is saying that perhaps we need to find ways to use conferencing techniques even when we are not in the one-to-one conference. In this same fashion, he quotes Warner Taylor of Wisconsin-



Madison, all the way back from 1928. Taylor says, “There is too great a tendency to let the conduct of the conference drift with its tide, to let it take care of itself. As a matter of fact, no element in the course requires a more informed technique, a more deliberately planned procedure. It takes on the aspects of an art”<sup>3</sup> Thus, in one quote, we have a call for discourse not only on conferencing but how to make up the one-to-one time with other aspects of teaching. In the second quote, we are called on to think of conferencing as an art. Through this, I offer the phrase *intimacy of identifying* as a way to think of every moment as a possible breakthrough moment. In other words, if one is embodying *the pedagogy of giving a shit*, she is aware that these moments of intimacy, often relegated to the conference, can happen in class, before class, after class, or in a student email. It means, when time permits, allow for conferencing and encourage office hours, but understand that no amount of time-spent beats energy-spent. No one-to-one conferencing will matter if we are not making ourselves available every class, hearing every word, listening intently.

What I am suggesting, in an *intimacy of identifying*, is that if we don’t have maximum time, we learn to maximize the minimum. I am suggesting, with Lerner, that conferencing is an art and perhaps a literacy of conferencing — theories, discourse, and dialogue — are needed to help professors make the most of minimal time.<sup>4</sup> In her book *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Breñe Brown states that “connection begets connection.”<sup>5</sup> Thus a connection made in one conference or one personal conversation or one moment in class will often foster a continual connection, with or without a multitude of future, pre-planned conferences. And it is my belief, the belief of a POGAS philosophy, that when a student begins to unlock identity, doing so will unlock a new intimacy with writing and, perhaps, with the teacher. Just the same, when the student unlocks a level of intimacy with the writing or the teacher, the student will also unlock new levels of identity.

Concerning academic conferences, the first time I found myself presenting at a national conference was at the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) conference in Normal, Illinois in the summer of 2014. The only reason I had made it to the conference, got on a plane for the first time, and overcame a spectrum of anxieties known by introverts and highly sensitive people, is because of the encouragement and push of my mentor and the director of composition studies at East Carolina University, Dr. Tracy Ann Morse. There are three distinct parallels to the three people who have most changed my life when it comes to career and service: all three are women, all three live their service (in part, through composition), and all three have taught in the community college and/or in developmental English. From Marbeth Holmes in 2005, to Tracy Morse in 2013, to the person Tracy Morse most wanted me to meet at the CWPA conference, Susan Naomi Bernstein.

Not only does Susan Naomi Bernstein serve on the board for the Council on Basic Writing, but it is clear to anyone who knows her that she gives of herself, much of her public identity and her emotional energy, to work with basic writers. At the conference, all I knew about Susan was that she had edited *Teaching Developmental Writing*, and had stacked it with pathos-potent essays such as Marc Lamont Hill's "Wounded Healing," Adrienne Rich's "Teaching Language in Open Admissions," and June Jordan's "Nobody Mean More to Me than You" — essays that made me believe there was space in composition for people who engaged students holistically, using stories, language, and identity to make learning personal and affective. It had been this same collection of essays on basic writing that birthed the teaching philosophy I write about here. Finally, Tracy had drilled home, in priming me for my meeting, that Susan is also an *introvert*.

Tracy and I stood outside the doors that were flooded by conference goers finding seats or waiting hungrily in the dining hall. I had made it clear, as part of my agreement on attending, that I would not be eating meals at the conference. It's not that I didn't want to, but I knew even a little extra social stimulation like that could be the element that made the trip *just too much*. During the lunches and dinners, I took some downtime, some alone time, and built back the energy that was lost in the very social days of conferencing.

When Susan arrived, I knew from the moment I saw her that it would be a good meeting. She was smiling, friendly, and ready to chat. Tracy introduced us, left us to sit outside the dining hall, and headed in. One of the first things I'd learn from Susan is that she, too, had skipped lunch the day before and spent time in the "quiet room" set up by the CWPA. Susan and I began to talk as if we had known each other all our lives. Tracy would later say she worried about leaving us by ourselves but when she glanced back, we both were talking, waving our arms, moving our bodies in physical reaction to each other's words.

When I first told Susan about my teaching philosophy and how it evolved in response to her book *Teaching Developmental Writing*, I watched her face change as she grabbed a pen and asked if she could write it down. I hadn't expected the level of emotion, or reaction, until she told me something I did not know. She said the book had been dedicated to a friend of hers, Adam Vine, who had passed away. She said, in choosing each essay, she was trying to capture the spirit that Adam possessed and the work that he did. In capturing Adam's spirit, his service, that same energy had spoken to me, making me feel like I had a place in this field.

When I got home from that conference in Normal, Illinois, I pulled *Teaching Developmental Writing* from my bookcase and opened it to the preface. I skimmed words, sentences, then a page or two, until I found: "To the memory of Adam Vine (1977-2011),



2009 Tutor of the Year, empathic writing consultant and editor, and beloved friend: ‘Identify your passion, then find co-conspirators.’”<sup>6</sup>

*Empathic. The pedagogy of giving.*

Though I had never met Adam, he had inspired Susan, which inspired the texts she chose, which inspired me to believe there was a place for me in the field where Adam had served. This continuation of service, through service, *is the pedagogy of giving a shit*. It is being willing and able to touch the lives of students because we are still able to be touched, as students. It is an intimacy of identifying in the classroom because we recognize those moments that continue to shape our identities. It is Neal Lerner saying we need to create a discourse on the art of conferencing, on building a one-to-one intimacy that rivals the conference in other spaces. It is the beauty of the personal-to-public transformative in Adam’s words: “Identify your passions, then find co-conspirators.”<sup>7</sup>

So I reach out, in my first attempt at giving words to this teaching philosophy, to the first people who demonstrated these principles to me: composition instructors at the community college. In 2005, just before walking into English 111 for the first time, I sat in a comfortable chair and was not comfortable; I was alone, because I believed there was no place for me. These days I sometimes sit in chairs uncomfortable, stay up all night, work twelve to fourteen hours, but I am comfortable and rarely alone, because I am in service to the people around me. There is an ideal in our society of doing for self: writing *my* story, finding the best paying job for *me*, having the best material things *I* can have. But composition studies allow for and the POGAS philosophy demands that we do for others. In turn, that energy given, I have found, comes back to us. In teaching, in working with students on writing, on identity, on empowering themselves, I have found a place where I can give my emotional energy, give of that labor, and have it returned. *The pedagogy of giving a shit*, as I know it now, consists of intimacy and identity, of meeting students energy-for-energy, of not over-planning, over-expecting, staying in-moment, focusing on an intimacy of identifying that allows students voice and agency before, during, and after class, knowing any moment, permitted, could offer the same potential as the one-to-one conference.

I do not, in putting forth this pedagogy, seek to say who does or doesn’t care or how each teacher *should* care. I believe that my pedagogy was birthed, in part, by my particular personality and temperament, by my experiences in and out of ministry, by coming up nontraditional in the community college. What I have seen, however, is how some people respond to the pedagogy of giving a shit. People at two national conferences have responded to it, have wrestled with it, have stayed after panels to talk to me about it. Several members of my graduate cohort have used it to identify their teaching beliefs, telling me they already did some of these things but had no way of identifying what they were doing or giving it a name. Thus, this is my offering, to anyone, but especially to introverts and

those of highly sensitive temperament. We have to find space to have our voices heard and our methods shared. I have found ways to make this philosophy work. Now I want to find ways to do it better and smarter, to enlarge the conversation.

I have found my passion. Now I seek co-conspirators.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Naomi Bernstein. "Basic Writing: In Search of a New Map," in *Teaching Developmental Writing*, ed. Naomi Bernstein. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 90.
- <sup>2</sup> Neal Lerner. "The Teacher-Student Conference and the Desire for Intimacy" in *College English* 68(2005), 204.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 194.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid., 204.
- <sup>5</sup> Brene Brown. *The Gifts of Imperfection*. (Center City: Hazelton, 2010), 19.
- <sup>6</sup> Susan Naomi Bernstein, ed. *Teaching Developmental Writing*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013), v.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., v.

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# In Search of Kindness Lost

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Caroline Lundquist

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,  
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho  
lies dead by the side of the road.  
You must see how this could be you,  
how he too was someone  
who journeyed through the night with plans ...*

— Naomi Shihab Nye



“We have a great deal more kindness,” writes Emerson, “than is ever spoken” (341). The profound truth of those words struck me the first time I lost someone to suicide, some ten years ago. When a person commits suicide, Camus tells us, everyone casts about for the “cause.” Had he gone into debt? Was her lover unfaithful? But we do not look — we do not have the courage to look — where we ought to. To find the existential cause, remarks Camus, “one would have to know whether a friend of the desperate man had not that very day addressed him indifferently. He is the guilty one” (153). In an age that prefers biochemical explanations to existential ones, we deny or trivialize this explanation of cause, yet the suicide of even a mere acquaintance has a way of claiming us despite every attempt at rational evasion. The loss comes to us as a cataleptic impression — we are struck not just by the permanence of the death, but also by the permanence of all our failures to actualize whatever kindness might have made that death less inevitable. Camus speaks truly when he says that every suicide amounts to a confession that the world is too much; but we who have lost a loved one to suicide hear it as an anemic truth, for the world alone is too much for anyone to bear, absent some measure of human kindness.

We all have some sense of what it means to mourn the loss of erotic love. “Boy loses girl” is one panel of that quintessential Hollywood triptych, and with good reason. We know, too, what it is like to mourn the loss of *philia*; for even the most blameless sometimes bear witness to the end of a once valued friendship. These losses are familiar. We experience them more or less consciously and often enough to learn to reflect upon and, ideally, cope with them. But there is another type of lost love, and it is one so pervasive as to be, for most of us, indiscernible. It is so not by nature, but through an inculcated indifference symptomatic of both a self-centered attitude and a desire to deny a fundamental truth of our existence: namely, that the world is (by and large) not up to us, and that we are (by and large) not up to ourselves, but are instead radically vulnerable and interdependent beings.



I would like to explore this other kind of loss, the loss of love manifested in lost opportunities to embody kindness. It is a loss we may undergo daily whether by failing to be kind ourselves, or by failing to graciously welcome the kindness of others. It is a loss that we seldom deeply acknowledge in the moment of loss, but that brutally seizes us in those moments when — for example, through the death of another — we are forced to confront its irrecoverability. My hope is that by inquiring into this loss, and into our tendency to deny it as loss until too late, we will come to see the deep moral worth of kindness and to appreciate this mode of comportment as a natural, appropriate, and praiseworthy way of engaging others.

But what can it mean to speak of the loss of kindness as a loss of love? Our language falls short here. It is useful, perhaps, to consider kindness in relation to the five-part taxonomy of love that come to us from ancient Greek thought, by way of the Christian tradition. These five loves are *philia*, *eros*, *xenia*, *storge* and *agape*. Kindness is in one sense akin to *philia*; both entail feelings of positive regard for, and a willingness to intercede on behalf of, others. But whereas, for Aristotle at least, “a friend of all is a friend of none,” kindness is a generalized *philial* posture, or openness to friendship, and a goodwill that extends to others in general, in the sense of *concord* or *philanthropy*.<sup>1</sup> There is an erotic dimension to kindness, too, for kindness involves involuntary feelings, unpredictable responses from its recipients, and a higher degree of intimacy than we ordinarily extend to strangers and acquaintances. *Xenia*, or hospitality, also belongs to kindness, and if we can imagine an absolute hospitality, it will look, I think, something like the posture of kind agency. For kindness, like *xenia*, entails welcome, a tolerance for difference, a considerable degree of respect for its recipients, and (if not absolute reciprocity) at least mutual responsiveness. The very word *kindness*, in which we hear echoes of kinship, invokes *storge*, or familial love. Kindness involves, so often, extending the special consideration we are obliged to show to our dearest ones to *other* others as well.

Kindness is most obviously akin to *agapic* love. It is here worth noting that the word *agape* had a decidedly vague meaning before St. Jerome chose to translate it, where it appeared in numerous biblical passages, as *caritas*. He chose *caritas*, or *charity*, as it has come to us, in part because it lacked (or so he believed) any erotic connotation, and in part because it entailed a readiness to serve — a willingness to work for the good of others. The very mark of this love, which is at once neighborly and holy, is *voluntariness*. Whereas to undergo *eros* is to be struck by Cupid’s arrow (an involuntary, and at times unwelcome response to another), *agape* is intentional: a stable, positive regard for God and for humanity that we have some power to foster in ourselves. Kindness has something of the voluntary nature of *agape*, or that unsentimental efficacious love that, within the Christian tradition, each person owes to her neighbors in partial repayment of the debt incurred by God’s in-



finite grace. When Kant remarks that ‘all our kindnesses are but trifles in repayment of an infinite debt to humanity,’ he means to invoke something like this *agapic* love.<sup>2</sup>

We can embody kindness in the way we relate to those closest to us, and to acquaintances, and to strangers. Perhaps it is most useful to think of kindness as a possibility that is present, in various ways and to various extents, within all interpersonal relationships. The loss of an opportunity to embody kindness is then, too, a possibility within all of our relationships. With this in mind, I would suggest that the loss of love we ought most to mourn is not the loss of a loving experience cut short through the dissolution of a friendship or romance, nor even the loss of a loving experience brought about by the death of a beloved other. Not these, for I do believe, as Robert Louis Stevenson wrote, that “the soul of love is kindness” (35). The greatest loss of love possible, and the one most worth mourning, is the loss of kindness that we ought to have shown another but did not.

Kindness presupposes or begins with a special kind of acknowledgment. The agent who embodies kindness takes the time to notice the people around her, and is open to and curious about them. She has a desire to see others flourish and is not content merely to wish for others’ good but instead actively works to secure it. She is sensitive to others’ needs and carefully judges where and when intervention on another’s behalf is appropriate. She intervenes where help is needed and welcomed. She helps and gives with a special care for the dignity of her recipients. She expects nothing in return but is pleased to see her kindness reciprocated.

The embodiment of kindness entails a distinct approach to moral judgment. Through the eyes of kindness, acts of wrongdoing and flaws of character appear contingent, informed by the many constraints luck places on human activity and the development of character. Hence to embody kindness is to be slow to judge and to be more concerned with helping and cheering others than with morally assessing them. To embody kindness is to be willing to accommodate others’ idiosyncrasies, even to find them endearing, and to refrain from pointing out or reifying others’ defects. Kindness entails an active search for others’ positive character traits and praiseworthy acts, and when the kind agent publicizes her opinions of others she emphasizes these.

To embody kindness is also to be aware of the intimacies that it fosters, and to have the courage to foster them; to make oneself comfortable with some collapse of the boundaries between self and others, and to see one’s good as intertwined with the good of others. The agent who embodies kindness is aware of her own contingency and fragility, just as she is aware of human fragility generally. Thus, she graciously welcomes others’ gestures of kindness.

Latent in this sketch are several clues to our resistance to recognizing lost opportunities to embody kindness as losses worth mourning. We may point, to begin with, to the

fundamentally excessive nature of kindness. This excess has at least two dimensions. The first may be understood in terms of the conventional distinction within ethics between perfect (or strict) and imperfect (or meritorious) duties. Acts of kindness are excessive in the sense that we do not think of them as morally required, but instead as merely meritorious. Because we do not feel obligated to be kind, in the way we feel obligated, for example, to refrain from injuring others, we do not see the failure to actualize kindness as a moral failing in any rich sense. The ethical posture of the kind agent is excessive, then, because it entails a tendency to do more than decency requires. In addition, kindness is excessive inasmuch as it involves an engagement with those to whom we have no special moral obligations *in addition to* those to whom we do, where the latter category might include our children, parents, lovers, and close friends.<sup>3</sup> To embody kindness is to make oneself aware of, sensitive to the needs of, and willing to intervene on behalf of strangers and acquaintances as well as loved ones. Because we tend to feel no special obligation to these “other others,” we tend to think that the failure to actively seek their amelioration is at worst unpraiseworthy, but not — as would be the failure to actively contribute to the flourishing of a loved one — morally blameworthy.

Related to this first explanation is a second, and here it is useful to borrow an image from Kantian moral theory. Kant symbolically represents friendship — the ideal and paradigmatic interpersonal relationship — as a tension between *love* (the coming together or collapsing into one of two beings) and *respect* (the willful resistance to that same movement) (Kant MPV 137-138). He summarizes this view as follows:

When the laws of duty [...] concerning the external relationships of men to one another are under consideration, we regard ourselves as being in a moral (intelligible) world in which, by analogy with the physical world, the association of beings (on earth) is effected through attraction and repulsion. According to the principle of *mutual love* they are directed constantly to approach one another; by the principle of *respect* which they owe one another they are directed to keep themselves at a distance. Should one of these great moral forces sink, “so then would nothingness (immorality) with gaping throat drink up the whole realm of (moral) beings like a drop of water.” (449)<sup>4</sup>

Wed as he is to the ideal of autonomous agency, Kant worries that any momentary lapse in this tension — more precisely any failure to maintain a respectful distance from another person — undermines the dignity of the same, threatening in turn the relationship. We mustn’t become too intimate; we mustn’t appear too vulnerable or needy.<sup>5</sup> It should then be no surprise that Kant tends to denigrate kindness.<sup>6</sup> Even if we do not espouse the radical notion of autonomy generally attributed to Kant, most of us operate with a clear sense of boundaries between ourselves and others, and with some intuitive sense that to penetrate another’s boundaries — even in a gesture of helpfulness — is in



some way disrespectful. More so certainly, if our gesture is extended to someone with whom we have established no discernable degree of intimacy. If the world suggests to us a dearth of kindness we might find some comfort in this: we often fail to be kind because we are trying to be respectful, where respect entails maintaining a respectful distance from other, autonomous, purportedly self-sufficient agents. Contrast this rather ordinary tendency with the intentional posture of kindness above described; kind comportment entails a partial disintegration of the boundaries between self and other that lovingly eschews, playfully mocks, the ideal of absolute self-sufficiency.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the finest way to describe the attitude of kindness is to say that it is one of loving-respect, or respectful-love, which we embody through gracious gestures of loving advance tempered by respectful retreat. What I would not import from Kant is his decided preference for retreat. For so many stories of the failure to be kind are stories of those who erred on the side of too much distance. Consider, for example, the experience of the author Laird Hunt. After teaching a writing workshop in the Republic of Congo, Hunt heard a participant ask if there was any water available. This young man had a very long, hot trek ahead of him. Hunt had in his hand a bottle of water — the last one in the building. He thought to offer it to the young man, but for fear “of seeming patronizing or over-familiar,” he chose to hold back. In the year that followed, Hunt struggled to express his sense of failure. He writes:

What I repeatedly find I cannot express, when I launch my verbal shards into the air [is] the core of what I want to say about the moment. Which is something along the lines of “One hot day in another country, I had some water and someone else was thirsty and I did not give him what I so easily could have.”

But this itself is, as the author acknowledges, a circumlocution, and possibly an unforgivable one, for what it is too late to say: “I’m sorry I didn’t help you.”

And so if kindness is a dynamic tension between love and respect, it is one that must err on the side of love: better to risk enduring the awkwardness of too much intimacy than to risk enduring the loss of kindness.

We can learn something of the failure to actualize kindness from stories like Hunt’s. But we need also to understand our related inclination not to mourn such failures. In a bit called *Soldier on a Plane*, comedian Louis C.K. sheds light on this other tendency. The bit relates an experience he has had many times. From his first-class seat, he watches a parade of passengers filing dejectedly back to the coach section. Among them, he sees a soldier. Vaguely cognizant of what the life of military service involves — and despite his anything-but-conservative political views — he feels compelled to offer the soldier his seat: “it would be,” he reflects, “the right thing to do, it would be easy to do, and it would mean a lot to him.” He stays in his seat every time. But (and this observation is key) he feels *good* about



himself just for having had the thought: “oh, I’m such a sweet man. That is so nice of me. To think of doing that, and then totally never do it.”

C.K.’s observations yield three key insights. The first is that many of us consider ourselves kind, or kind enough, simply because we hope or wish for the happiness of others and refrain from actively impeding that happiness. But merely wishing for others’ happiness takes little effort and entails no risk. Acting for the sake of others is decidedly more challenging, and often less rewarding, but we must so act if we are to embody kindness. The second insight helps us to differentiate between the similar experiences of Hunt and C.K. Both thought to be kind to another person, and both failed to do so. But in one case a most unsettling remorse followed shortly after; in the other, apparently it did not. What most distinguishes the two stories is simply this: for C.K., there will be other flights; there will be other soldiers; there will be other, similar opportunities. The possibility of some future richly analogous gesture of kindness remains. For Hunt, the moment in the Congo was experienced by him as utterly singular, his loss irrecoverable. We mourn the loss of kindness when we are forced to confront its irrecoverability, as we do, most profoundly, when we lose someone to suicide. The third insight takes us to the very heart of the problem at hand: most of us simply have not developed the habits of thought and habits of feeling that would enable us to respond without an excess of hesitation to opportunities to show kindness.<sup>8</sup>

I cannot pursue the obvious parallels between kind agency and Levinasian subjectivity here, except to point to a fundamental problem with which both contend. The Levinasian subject is she who is capable of being interrupted and compelled by the face of the Other, and — as Claire Katz remarks — “The question of how one becomes a Levinasian subject [...] is a question that haunts Levinas’s project,” as it must our own (218). How does one inculcate kindness? What reflective beliefs, what stable affective states does kindness presuppose, and how can we foster them? Regarding beliefs, it only seems natural that we here appeal to judgments about human finitude, and inculcate through sustained reflection a heightened awareness of our mortality. It is not without reason, after all, that the suicide of a mere acquaintance seizes us so brutally. Think again of the meritorious nature of kindness. A meritorious act is done at our discretion, at the time of our choosing. But meritorious acts require recipients, and every recipient has a time of her own. When her time runs out, the time in which we can actualize kindness in relation to her is over, and so we come to see our own time in a new way. Our opportunities to do more than decency requires are finite, not only because we are finite, but also and especially because others are.

We might espouse, then, *Being-toward-death* as the stable ground for kindness. Such a posture might feasibly involve the habits of thought and of feeling required for kind agency, as is evinced, for example, by Werner Marx's phenomenological ethics. It is with good reason that in his effort to generate an ethics of compassion, Marx appeals to mortality. In order to become compassionate, he argues, we must first be shocked out of the selfish isolation that yields indifference. One form of existential shock arises through a heightened awareness of our own mortality, and is expressed in the moods of existential horror and forlornness (51). This unsettling moment reveals our "native security" to be a mere illusion, disclosing at the same time the universal kinship of mortality. Thus, through reflection on our mortality, we bring about an affective shift in our "attunement," through which others become for us "fellow men" and "helpers in a time of need" (51).<sup>9</sup>

There is much to appreciate in Marx's account, including and especially his emphasis on the affective dimensions of ethical comportment. Marx is right to ask, "Is it not primarily the indifference destitute of feeling [...] which hinders and blocks off all possibilities of friendly comportment?" (49). But I confess to finding something off-putting in his all-too-familiar turn to mortality as a ground for ethics. Must *Being-toward-death* figure so prominently in our attitudinal postures? Must it ground an attitude of kindness? I would like to suggest, briefly, two alternatives.

Hannah Arendt broke with Heidegger when, in her dissertation, she rejected his death-driven phenomenology. Appealing to Augustine, she writes, "it is memory and not the expectation (for instance, the expectation of death as in Heidegger's approach) [that] gives unity and wholeness to human existence" (192). Reflection on our own memories of kindness has, like reflection on the inevitability of our death, the power to foster in us the beliefs about the human situation and the habits of feeling that enable kindness. Unquestionably, one's sense of self depends on the narrative one composes to account for that self.<sup>10</sup> As Ricoeur says, "time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode" (52). If we wish to be kinder we ought to learn to construct our narratives in reverse, with a mind to remembering those moments in which another person's kindness enabled our past or present flourishing, or in which some absent kindness might have made all the difference. When we do, we may properly recognize the extent to which we rely on the help, care and compassion of others, and to appreciate in a new way the tremendous value of kindness.

Second, we can and ought to reflect on the irrecoverability of every lost opportunity for kindness. For C.K., there will no doubt be other flights, and other soldiers, and for us, there will be plenty of strangers in need of assistance, colleagues in need of support, students in need of a kind word; but each opportunity to embody kindness is singular and marks an existential turning point. Every discrete opportunity to embody kindness



is a moment of fecundity. When we choose not to be kind, we do not simply lose an opportunity, of which there will be countless analogous others. We lose in that moment a once-possible future in which we had been kinder; in which another — this irreplaceable Other — had benefitted from our kindness; in that moment we dissolve a once-possible world, a world that would have been — if only by a quantum — *kinder* than the one we have resigned ourselves to. I can think of no loss more worth mourning than the loss of a better world.

But even these ways of reflecting on the value of kindness may not suffice. After all, most of us already value kindness, yet often fail to make the effort required to actualize it. We must confess that when it comes to kindness, we are often at odds with ourselves, suffering, as it seems, from the very *akrasia* that lets Louis C.K. feel good about himself despite his perpetual failure to act. To inculcate kindness we must learn to take *pleasure* in it. Yet this is no easy task, because the pleasures of kindness are intrinsically mixed with pains. It is with good reason that we associate kindness with the saccharine sweetness of kindergarten classrooms and Hallmark movies. Kindness is poignant; it cuts through us with a pain not unlike that of Cupid's arrow. Phillip Hallie is right when he says that "painful joy can be a reliable reaction to excellence," and kindness is most certainly an excellence (3). We must learn to endure the pain of uncertainty that belongs to every proffered gesture of kindness. We must learn to endure the pain that comes of acknowledging our need for each other's help and care. So let us ask, with Hallie, "Why run away from what is excellent simply because it goes through you like a spear?" (3). We must learn to dwell in the bitter-sweetness of kindness; this is the purest, the most courageous, admission we can make of our fundamental interdependence.

I will end by speaking to an obvious objection. Perhaps I have overstated things; perhaps kindness is really a trifling virtue, impotent in the face of great suffering. What volume is there in a drop of kindness when measured against the overwhelming tide of human suffering, including that unbounded suffering born of a presumed worthlessness that too often impels people to end their lives? Consider one last story: the story of Don Ritchie. Don lived near The Gap, Australia's most notorious suicide spot. Over the course of 50-odd years, Don saved hundreds of people not by forcibly dragging them from the precipice, but by inviting them to his home for a cup of tea and a chat. If they came, he did not preach. He did not ask for their life stories. He did not try to dissuade them. He offered them tea. He offered them cookies. He offered them trifling conversation. And for most, it was all they needed.

However, I do not want to romanticize kindness. Many of the people who made their way to the Gap did so because they were suffering from incurable diseases, and did not want to die lingering deaths under the gaze of their loved ones. And so, sometimes people



rested for a moment with Don, thanked him most sincerely, and then made their way back to the ledge. I like to think that his kindness mattered, even in those cases. I like to think it matters that, in their penultimate moments, these people who had suffered so much were in the presence of someone who embodied kindness. I like to think that a world — our world — in which all of these people experienced a final moment of kindness is preferable to the world we would inhabit if not for Don's living the way he lived. Don understood, as must we, the tremendous worth of the fragile virtue of kindness. We have a great deal more kindness than is ever spoken, or shown, and I hope you will join me in hearing this as a truth worth overcoming.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Aristotle characterizes concord (*homonoia*), or oneness, as the goodwill and mutual affection that makes each citizen enter sympathetically into the concerns of his fellows and willingly exert himself on the whole community's behalf.
- <sup>2</sup> But here rational autonomy stands in for God as the source of the infinite debt, and, perhaps, the ultimate object of agapic love.
- <sup>3</sup> Though the etymological origins of the word "kindness" are disputed, the relation of "kin" and "kind" is intuitively appealing, since kindness often involves extending the same consideration we give to family to members of the larger community.
- <sup>4</sup> Kant is here adapting Albrecht von Haller's poem, *Concerning Eternity* (1736).
- <sup>5</sup> This latter belief ties to another quintessentially Kantian view, namely that we must never be in another's debt. In the *Lectures on Ethics*, he writes, "A right-thinking man will not accept kindnesses, let alone favors," lest he feel himself indebted, and so diminish his feelings of self-worth (222).
- <sup>6</sup> In *Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, for example, kindness is counted among the feminine or "adoptive" virtues (those that arise through feeling), as opposed to the masculine or "genuine" virtues (those that arise through reason). See especially p. 61.
- <sup>7</sup> But kindness is not an assault on others' boundaries. To suggest that others are in all situations in need of our help and encouragement would certainly be to overstate things. The supposed kindness lavished upon people with disabilities (and on pregnant women) by naïve do-gooders is so often experienced by recipients as humiliating, as actively undermining their autonomy, and failing to acknowledge their abilities. But I do not suggest that any degree of intervention is acceptable, or ought to count as kindness. Often the kindness we can do for another is to give her space to solve her problems in her own way. The determination of whether or not it would be kind to get involved in a particular situation requires the most excellent judgment. Kindness involves sensitivities to others' preferences, attentiveness to subtle bodily and facial cues. And, as I have said, it never hurts to ask whether or not someone wants our help. Often asking takes more moral courage than simply intervening, as it opens up the possibility of rejection, which is almost always painful.

- <sup>8</sup> This affective lack has several dimensions. We lack the necessary courage (in the Aristotelian sense of a willingness to endure pain for the sake of the good), the tendency to feel proper remorse at our failures to be kind, and the ability to feel adequate pleasure when we do choose to be kind, or when someone chooses to be kind to us.
- <sup>9</sup> In Marx's view this shift is essentially noetic; as William Hamrick writes: "For Marx, a sudden change in our emotional attunement can produce a radical transformation of understanding within us, and it is this transforming force that accounts for the way that the awareness of our own mortality can emerge from feeling" (35).
- <sup>10</sup> He continues, "and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition for temporal existence" (52, emphasis in original).

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# Great Caesar's Ghost

*Brandy Stark*



Current trends in humanities education emphasize learner participation both in the classroom and through the online environment (Greenhow et al 246). The rise of “digital literacy practices” has created new manners of incorporating literacy teaching and learning (Rowse and Burke 106). One of the most obvious ways of spreading information and creating new interest in academic subjects is through the Internet. Scholars suggest that online and digital reading “involves a different logic and set of practices” that utilizes a variety of communication modes (visual, sound, spacial) “working together without one being dominant” (Rowse and Burke 106). These elements certainly fit well with creative fields in Liberal Studies, including Humanities, Literature, and Art, where research combined with web technology allows for newly productive interactions with the information.

The project described by this paper is a website entitled Great Caesar's Ghost (<http://greatcaesarsghost.homestead.com/>) that I created to explore a rarely studied focus of Shakespeare: the history, ideology, and use of ghosts in his plays. The site is user friendly and designed for open public access. There is a navigation toolbar that lists the titles of pages contained within the site. Individual pages link back to the home page which offers an explanation of the project as a digital exploration of Shakespeare's ghosts for use as a teaching component in Humanities classes.

In addition to Shakespeare students, this project endeavors to appeal to a wider audience of readers interested in the paranormal as understood by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Ghosts are not simply random elements in Shakespeare's plays but serve to represent issues of shifting societal importance. Some of his most popular plays utilize ghostly figures to move the plot while adding an air of psychological nuance. Historical events also influenced Shakespeare's perspective. During his lifetime he dealt with economic crises, plague, shifting political leadership and instability in religious ideologies (Felton 96). The modern reader may identify with many of these same problems through Wall Street, AIDS and flu viruses, recent elections and the shift from religious to secular society.

To entice a greater understanding of Shakespeare, the site provides links to other websites that appear steadfast, reliable, and created with a scholarly understanding of the playwright. Additional information can be found under the historical background section listing writings, current events, and other topics that had great societal impact upon Elizabethan England. For example, the site references Shakespeare's reading of *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, published by Reginald Scot in 1584. Scot was a skeptic and wrote about



unfounded beliefs regarding the supernatural. Shakespeare also read Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popishe Impostures*, which presents more arguments against the Catholic Church, witchcraft and ghosts (Muir 232). These sources mocked the over-promotion of ghosts by Catholic scholars. Newer ideas involving ghosts indicated that most apparitions arose from mental issues such as melancholy, timidity, drunkenness and false reporting (Marshall 145). These literary sources, along with others circulating at the time, would certainly have had an impact on the way Shakespeare envisioned his spectral antagonists.

Additional historic background connects to the evolution of ghosts in the centuries prior to Shakespeare's writing (Felton 59). Ghost stories were plentiful enough that commonalities within these tales can be noted (84). During the Middle Ages the Catholic Church, as the dominant source of cultural influence, promoted the idea of the realm of Purgatory. Purgatory was a place where spirits destined for heaven worked off the remainder of their earthly sins. As it was neither Heaven nor Hell, Purgatory had strong ties to the mortal realm. Specters in these stories often reinforced church doctrine and encouraged the populace to maintain sanctified behaviors (96).

By Shakespeare's time these ideas had changed due to the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther challenged the use of Indulgences and the scriptural basis of Purgatory. This other-realm was entirely rejected by the newly-formed Church of England in 1563 (Marshall 145). This meant that Protestant cultures like England had to either explain the ghosts or sermonize against them. In taking elements of folklore derived from older Church teachings, the history of the angry specter from drama in the Middle Ages, and the literary skepticism of his then current sources, Shakespeare created ghosts that were new to the dramatic scene.

The crux of the website falls to three pages that focus on Shakespeare's use of ghosts in his plays, though the largest portion of content is devoted to *Julius Caesar*. To present a greater historic insight to Shakespeare's inspiration the website has a page dedicated to Plutarch. Plutarch was a first century Roman biographer whose works were translated into the English by Thomas North during Shakespeare's lifetime (Maus 1550). Scholars agree that Shakespeare utilized the Roman's depiction of the final days of Brutus to introduce the ghostly encounter. However, Plutarch identifies the ghost as an evil spirit, whereas Shakespeare endeavored to recast this scene into an alarming spectral interaction between Brutus and the departed Caesar.

The focal page of the website features *Julius Caesar*. To better identify with the play I have provided links to online audio and visual presentations, as well as to a web-hosted script. Taken from Shakespeare and presented here are the lines featuring Caesar's ghost

(4.3.275-85). A segment of a youtube.com video showing the ghost scene sits next to the text in order to allow viewers to interact with both text and dramatic enactments.

The video of Julius Caesar is an important part of this page. I selected a recently staged London production titled *Shakespeare — Julius Caesar 2012*. This production drew critical praise: “This, of all Shakespeare’s plays, badly needs a shot in the arm — and it receives a powerful one in this production” (Billington). Featuring an all-black British cast the play brings Julius Caesar into modern Africa, an area featured in recent years in mainstream media for its political entrenchment. I selected this particular rendition of the video for both its modernity and for its ability to show transcendence across ethnicities. I believe that this will allow for greater connection to general audiences, as well as to my own students who hail from a multitude of backgrounds.

Following the text and video the reader is invited to contemplate three potential interpretative frames for Shakespeare’s use of the ghost in this scene: folklore, psychology, or as metaphor for discomfort during times of shifting political power. Listed examples of folklore include the ghost’s vendetta, invocation to speak (Stoll 218), and stilted dialogue (Purkiss 143). Psychological elements can be found in Brutus’s lone witnessing of the ghosts, the recent emotional outbursts from the character earlier in the scene, and the mesmerized dialogue of repeated phrases between specter and man (Muir 239). The metaphor derives primarily from the symbolic Caesar who embodies political power, his death and release of this power, and the need to bring order through the appropriate resettlement of leadership. This suggests that Caesar’s true heir, and the only one able to wield Caesar’s power, is Octavius (later Augustus Caesar) and not the conspirators. Civil unrest will only end when power is properly restored to its rightful heir (Rosen xxi).

To expand the site to a more comprehensive framework of Shakespearean spirits I have included some examinations of the ghosts in *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and *Macbeth*. Though these plays take place in different times and countries, the spirits can be compared with that of Julius Caesar. These plays all show similarities as the ghosts are revenge-oriented in a manner similar to their counterparts of the Middle Ages. Character sanity is at question in *Macbeth*, *Richard III* and *Julius Caesar*. *Hamlet* presents the only known sane character dealing with ghosts since others before him see the shade. However, even the young prince descends into madness trying to bear the ghost’s request for vengeance against those who killed him (Rogers 88). As with the Julius Caesar page, each play’s page includes links to video, audio, and literary pages. Also provided is analysis of the role of the ghosts within the plays.

One element that I hope students and general readers learn about is Shakespeare’s use of his own “explanatory ambiguities” when writing about the appearance of spirits (Marshall 147). He presents enough story and dialogue to make the viewer question the reality



of the ghost. While aspects of facts frame the hauntings, the majority of the haunting activities focus on the guilty party alone seeing the specter. Shakespeare draws from a variety of sources to create his spectral figures. Shakespeare's entities have reason and purpose in their acts (Rogers 88). His attention to details, such as those found within this small study, is what makes his plays timeless and universal.

The closing pages of the website hearken back to the role of higher education and learner interaction. Diverse types of interactive online communication attract "new, non-traditional student groups" and reach a greater audience derived from the general public. The need for a "more action-oriented adaption approach" (Stensaker et al 417) comes in the form of an embedded PowerPoint presentation. This presentation is a summary of Great Caesar's Ghost derived from earlier research. Viewers are also encouraged to leave thoughts and comments in the guest book. They may also take a web poll for voting on the nature of Caesar's ghost and view a bibliography page for additional research suggestions.

The website has not yet had an official launch. At this time I have sent the link to selected coworkers, others with an interest in the paranormal, and a few friends. The website is technically published and accessible through cyberspace, but does not yet have many visitors based on the online odometer.

Reviews of the site appear to vary according to interest. One colleague with a doctorate in theater posted comments supportive of the research in the guest book. A second professor has requested to use the link for the online component to her literature classes. To date, only one person with paranormal interest has reviewed the site and had general positive comments about it (i.e., "it was very interesting"). Trying to get others of the same group to view the site has not proven fruitful. At least one person professed a dislike of Shakespeare as a reason not to visit the website.

As an educator it is my hope to utilize this website when I teach literature in the Humanities. This website has growth potential as more interactive materials become available either through the host site (homestead.com) or through other software developments. Perhaps it will bring a renewed interest to a scholar who comes across it and future collaborative works can ensue.

In the meantime Shakespeare's ghosts can claim a new residence in the world of online resources, and the bard can increase his access to the digital audience. May he continue to reach into the lives of students, educators, and the public throughout this new cyber age.

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# A Sketch of the Necessity and Form of Faculty Leadership in the Needed Overhaul of Undergraduate Education



*Dennis Gilbert*

Terry O'Banion, President Emeritus of the League for Innovation in the Community College, provided an important analysis in a Point of View column in the *Community College Week* of April 14, 2014. Specifically, he concluded that present and future needed reform movements in higher education “are in peril if we continue to ignore two of the intractable barriers we face: overhauling the traditional systems and structures we have inherited, and fully involving faculty in this effort.”

O'Banion emphasized the last point in a number of ways:

- “Faculty is the Key to Change. This proposition seems so obvious — given the central role of faculty in the education process and given their number — but we often fail to absorb this truth.”
- “... faculty are central to the success of the college and the success of students and they must be the key agents of any substantial change.”
- “We are approaching academic gridlock when teachers’ unions have to make their own case to be invited to the table and point out the need for respect of their roles and leadership.”
- “Members of the faculty hold the key to any substantial change; and they have the experience, the understanding, the motivation, and the power to create the change we need if we are to meet the goals of student success and completion.”

O'Banion's diagnosis and advice has considerable standing given his strategic leadership and engagement in the Learning College Movement, the last major national effort to transform community college education.

The limited success of the ambitious Learning College Movement provided ample evidence for the two propositions above. Strategically, this nation-wide effort relied heavily on capacity for change through the community college's centralized command structure. O'Banion's conclusion concerning the necessity of faculty leadership, especially for reform centered in the community college, represents significant data-informed strategic guidance.

This commentary elaborates on O'Banion's argument by briefly framing some of the nature of the education reform enterprise, the role of community colleges and community

college faculty, the goals of a faculty-led reform effort, and the successful alliances it can generate.

### **The Reform Enterprise and the Faculty Role**

In discussing the “complete overhaul” of college education, care is needed in choosing language to describe this transitional process. In this case, the word “classroom” can be productively used in a way that is consistent with interdependent, discrete learning environments that are themselves evolving. Assuming this meaning of classroom, there are three key questions regarding the enterprise of transforming undergraduate education, which we could call, respectively, the classroom innovation question, the whole classroom question, and the classroom ecology question:

1. If high quality universal student learning is taken as the goal, then reformed undergraduate education will require sustained research, innovation and implementation. By whom, where, and how will this be accomplished?
2. Since students in any class are significantly affected by factors outside their classrooms, these factors are actually part of the student’s learning environment for that class. How will the reality of this whole student learning environment be dealt with?
3. Since students are on pathways through many evolving classrooms, optimizing both overall education experiences and individual classroom experiences will involve improving connections and synergies among classes. How will optimizing these ecological interactions among classrooms be addressed?

Every vision of thorough education reform must come to terms with these questions. The first one bears directly on the necessity of faculty leadership and creating an effective structure of faculty responsibility. With due regard for developments coming from outside the academy — through publishers, education and technology vendors, consultants, and venture capital-led innovations — *most successful innovation will be created and sustainably implemented through the leadership of the vast network of teaching practitioners and scholars.* Ignoring this reality is costly, as illustrated by the failure of US K-12 education to keep up with global achievement levels.

A key element of successful K-12 education systems outside the US is increasingly shown to be a high degree of support for work and leadership by the bulk of teaching professionals. This is also a prerequisite for transforming undergraduate college education. In higher education, the need for faculty leadership is nuanced in ways that reveal key underlying dynamics. At research universities where subject matter scholarly research is a structural expectation and a passion of the faculty, undergraduate teaching is structurally a secondary faculty focus, and this is a major factor in inadequate reform. In contrast, at



community colleges, where the priority faculty focus is teaching and student learning, faculty scholarship and strategic leadership responsibility regarding teaching and learning is not fully supported.

### **The Crucial Role of Community Colleges and Faculty**

This situation in higher education suggests an option with extraordinary promise: if the architecture of decision-making and responsibility could be fundamentally changed in community colleges, given their primary teaching mission and role as a major gateway into higher education, the increased contribution of community colleges through its faculty would be enormous.

Other commentaries have included this observation and reached similar hopeful conclusions; for example, Timberly, *et al*, in the July-August 2007 *Change*, advocate:

Administrators and faculty alike need to create a far more complex and productive vision of the two-year college teacher/scholar than exists today. That vision ought to include time for inquiry, discovery, and collegial exchange – all the critical components of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Active faculty engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning is a necessity for the development and collaboration required for much needed systemic innovation, and also for its actual, genuine, understood, and therefore effective and sustainable, implementation. Most fundamental pedagogical reforms will involve deep discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge, an intersection of discipline and pedagogical understanding typically not learned in colleges of education or discipline departments.

The concept of discipline-specific pedagogical knowledge, coined by Lee Schulman in 1987, also frames the need for teaching and learning scholarship centralized within each discipline of the college, as well as disciplines connected in horizontal collaboration across colleges and universities.

### **Faculty-led Transformation**

The necessity for structural faculty leadership and engagement requires and enables deeper transformation than often considered. Following is a list of needed reforms, focused primarily on the community college, feasible through decentralized, but aligned, faculty-led efforts to overhaul and realize the promise of undergraduate education:

1. Establishing the scholarship of teaching and learning as a critical element of the community college mission.
2. Establishing structures of direct faculty collaboration among corresponding disciplines in community colleges, four-year colleges/universities, and high schools.
3. Establishing faculty leadership and management of the scholarship of teaching and

learning within each discipline.

4. Establishing faculty leadership and management of the scholarship of teaching and learning among the whole faculty concerning issues of integrative learning, multi-disciplinary discourse, and engagement with the local community.
5. Modifying the structure of incentive so advances in education efficiency in a discipline are utilized to support effective learning and the scholarship of teaching and learning in that discipline.
6. Shifting institutional support for assessment toward the scholarship of teaching and learning.
7. Focusing grant administration on supporting discipline faculty leadership and horizontal collaborations among disciplines in different institutions.
8. Ensuring that the teaching faculty, which is engaged in the scholarship of teaching and learning in addition to teaching, is predominantly permanent; and part-time positions are limited to those academically justifiable.
9. Establishing adequate public funding for public educational institutions consisting primarily through direct institutional funding and minimal tuition.
10. Establishing adequate financial aid so students are not left with unmanageable debt nor burdened by substantial employment to support their families during main college years.
11. Implementing community organizing strategies involving current first generation and non-traditional students to establish an inclusive culture of attending college.
12. Restructuring college work to be an environment that reflects and showcases the practice and consequences of ongoing and universal college and technical education.
13. Establishing secondary schooling in high schools, and earlier, that adequately prepares students to begin college level work upon entering college.

Most visions of reform do not include change of this magnitude, because they have made peace with low funding levels and the current architecture of diminished faculty responsibility. However, the structural position, expertise, and leadership of faculty members can make such reform efforts viable. Once demonstrated as being viable on a small scale, such reform efforts can then enlist strong allies in all sectors of the college community, including students and the communities and institutions served by universally accessible, effective, high quality post-secondary education. This is a primary path of the overhaul of undergraduate education holding real promise.

# ART



If we were not all so excessively interested in ourselves, life would be so uninteresting that none of us would be able to endure it.

– Arthur Schopenhaur



*Mirroring: The Self, Other and Environs*



**Kathryn Torvik**  
*mixed media collage • 11" x 14"*

Wyoming V: See Magic



JS Bird  
acrylic on paper • 22" x 30"



Wyoming VII: Flirt



JS Bird

acrylic on paper • each panel of diptych 40" x 26.5"



*Fragment of Table of Italy*



**Jerry Ross**  
*oil on canvas*

## POETRY & FICTION



Every time a man unburdens his heart to a stranger he  
reaffirms the love that unites humanity.

– Germaine Greer

## Dashiell Hammett, Age 57, Reads *Jane Eyre* in the Ashland Federal Correctional Institution, Ashland, Kentucky, 1951



*Jean LeBlanc*

All told, it's not so bad. Five months, easy labor mopping floors — his fellow inmates say a man can do that time without hardly changing socks. The prison farm provides good food, bacon and eggs. And the library! He's never read *Jane Eyre*, and though it's lights-out at ten, he devours her, in one evening discovering the dank of Lowood School — Jane's institution — then the haunted Thornfield, before the lights are cut. With the book beneath his pillow he thinks of tomorrow, one long hall to scrub, a chop for lunch, then more of Jane, already half in love with one who knows how to survive in this world, head down but eyes open, just smile when someone spits where you already mopped, just smile and mop again, a third time even, smile and nod, if that's all it takes to get back here, to get back home.



## William James and Sigmund Freud Walk to the Train Station, Worcester, Massachusetts, 1909

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*Jean LeBlanc*

*Might I ask you to hold this for me, please, and go on ahead?* he asks me in his noble, formal German. I willingly become his valet. I proceed slowly, pretend to examine a shoelace. I do not look back to where I know James struggles for a breath, waits for the *angina pectoris* to subside. This portmanteau called the *body* we lug around with us through life, all the while chasing the weightless things of the mind — the little we see of it in our dreams, knowing we must spend our lives coming to terms with its loss. *Dr. Freud*, he says, at my side once more. *My apologies, kind sir, for the delay.* How to tell him, it is no delay, holding for a moment a hero's worldly goods, while he steels himself for the final battle, shows us the way?



## Red Flower, Copper Bird

Peter Jensen

*Rondeau redoublé on the Chetco River*

A bright red flower floats in the sun,  
Its throat full of one sweet drop.  
Dark night gathered up a dew  
Of sugar and water from the stem  
Made for a pollinating bird.

Sun shines down, heats the flower,  
Evaporating a little liquid,  
Concentrating the sugar cup  
As brilliant red turns brighter yet,  
Its throat full of one sweet drop.

The flower radiates its red  
Like a pollen target in the sun.  
The bird hovers above and scouts  
Dangers as the flower resolves  
Its dark night gathering, a dew.

The bird buzzes into view.  
The bright red prize floats in air.  
Both bird and dewdrop primed to meet,  
But another hummer keeps him off  
That sugar water from the stem.

Two copper-colored, Rufous birds  
Fight mid-air and circle in flight  
Until one buzzes off, and then  
Our bird inserts his long, thin straw  
Made for a pollinating bird.

The bird and flower almost mate.  
He finds the hot dewdrop with his tongue,  
Gathers sweet nectar with a flick,  
And zooms away. For the rest of the day,  
That bright red flower floats in the sun.

# How Cranes Learned to Dance

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*Peter Jensen*

The Crane family members are some of the oldest birds. They remember some of the very ancient animals. They know their roots in the dinosaurs. They remember the days before animals could speak and before they could understand Raven's jokes and laugh with him. But Cranes never trusted Raven. He raided their nests for eggs. When Crane colts were small, Raven would kidnap them and eat them, too.

Some say that the image of Raven flying off with a Crane egg in his beak gave natives the idea of Raven the Transformer stealing the Sun to warm the world for all the animals.

So Cranes were the first among the birds to mistrust Raven. He was a smooth talker. Many of the animals could not see past his ironic stories and dry, strange laugh. Some of the birds — the Magpies and the Crows — even worshipped Raven. "He's just a more intelligent Crow," they would say, "One of us."

But the ancient Cranes knew he was an egg robber and a follower of the Wolves and the giant Bears. So when they saw Raven coming, Cranes would hurry to their nests in pairs and guard their eggs and colts by standing tall and stabbing at Raven with their spear beaks. Raven admitted that the Cranes were good fighters, and he flew over the nesting grounds hoping to find a nest where the parents had not been able to return quickly enough.

Raven was one of the most deadly oviraptors — egg thieves — and eaters of small Cranes. So the Cranes realized they would have to invent new ways to warn all Crane parents when Raven was around. Cranes could call loud calls, and these worked well. When one pair of parents spotted Raven, they would call out,

*"Ga-rill! Gah-rilly-rill!"*

And all the Cranes would take up the alarm, so even Raven had a hard time thinking with all that noise.



But shifty Raven was a very smart bird. He learned how to stuff moss in his ears to mute the cries of the Crane tribe, so they could not confuse him as he flew among their nests. Raven even told the Cranes, "With moss in my ears, your chorus of cries becomes softer, even enjoyable. It's very beautiful music!"

But the Cranes were not flattered or confused. One pair of Crane parents realized they would have to invent a new way to communicate. "Why don't we use our large wings and our long legs and our very expressive necks to send messages to each other?"

This is how the Cranes invented dance. Other Cranes could read their body messages over long distances, and bad news was spread by radiating waves of dancing across the whole nesting grounds.

Even Raven was impressed. He wished he had invented dancing. He tried to imitate the Cranes. He hopped around and jumped into the air, but his wife told him he looked silly. "You're a terrible land dancer!" she said. "You should stick to your flying tricks. There you are a great master of the air, a real wind dancer!"

So the Cranes learned to dance. And soon they realized that they didn't have to wait for a Raven to raid their homeland to dance. They could dance about everything.

So they danced for dawn. And they danced for love. They danced for joy, and, in the evening, they even danced for sorrow.

It was Cranes who taught people how to dance.

October 2014

*For George Constantine, Former USFWS Manager,  
Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Eastern Oregon*

# Now and Then

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Sentinels before me,  
Standing, turned to stone,  
Mother, father,  
Hushed now, harder to hear,  
They once told me  
Who I was.

Growing older,  
Birthdays become death days,  
Thanksgiving in ruins,  
August grown cold.

So I will not invoke  
The snowy slopes of childhood,  
Streets closed off  
For sledding at night.  
The way we children flew  
Wild under the lamplight.

Nor will I summon that girl of summer  
Who gazed bemused  
In the car's side mirror,  
Riding home from the lake,  
Her mother soft and silent,  
Smiling beside her.

I will not call out  
To the fallen years of youth,  
Poetry a path  
And lovers like matchsticks flaring,  
Lighting the way.

Give me just one day  
Without meaning or memory:  
A lock of Mother's hair,  
Father's face in a photograph  
Promising it's not too late  
To turn  
And run back.

*Clay Houchens*





## Inside Leviathan: The Others in the Bus

*Philos Molina*

If I had a choice, I would not ride the bus. And if I were a fortunate rider — which I am not — I would only travel on those rare days when the bus comes almost empty. Those are the only times when I can find a seat at the back of the bus, as noisy as it gets because of the endless roar of the diesel engine, and read. On those occasions, people sit far apart and they do not bother me with trivial conversations about plastic celebrities and banal anecdotes.

Today was not one those days. Soon after I got situated, a lady interrupted my reading of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* to tell me about her dog, a poodle, the poor creature, and her only companion on this planet. I was on Book I, Chapter VI, (Of the Interiour Beginnings of Voluntary Motions and Pleasure of the Sense, Pleasure of the Mind and Joy, Paine and Griefe), when she presumed that I could be interested about the dog's amusements. That is the section, by the way, where the English philosopher explains the nature of laughter as contempt ("Sudden Glory," he calls it) based on the observation of other people's imperfections and the hidden pleasure they sinfully provide. But it did not matter that I had completely ignored her since she boarded the bus. She assumed that I invited her to tell me about her scrawny dog. The harsh epithet should not be construed as an objective description of the canine. The bus happened to run over a hole and my eyes haphazardly went off the page and turned toward her direction for just a second. It was too late, of course. The praises of her dog, Valentino, came upon me like an artillery barrage in an open field. She told me how "Tino" — for that was the caniche's sobriquet — would wait for her every evening with joyful leaps and endless barks, even before she got to the driveway. Once inside, she added, the dog would wag until she kissed him and held him like a baby. She got next to me and showed me pictures she had stored in her telephone. Every picture was a chapter on the cuteness and joy the canine brought her every day. Fortunately, she got off the bus after a dozen photographs.

Please do not misunderstand me. I appreciate the fact that we have public transportation. I say this even though I live in a small and insignificant town and I have to take the bus very early and come back late every evening because there is only one bus with a very limited schedule. It saves the environment — so says the sign — and it saves me money. But I have to wait a long time after work because I finish early. I read, of course, but there is only so much reading a man can do while waiting under the little roof that shields his bald head from the cold rain. The other passengers, I suppose, are as miserable. They always look miserable. Rain does not make much of a difference.



Today I hoped for boarding the bus and sitting quietly, even if my clothes were retted and I had to read intricate philosophical arguments in the cold. I tried to finish Hobbes' chapter to no avail. This time there was no old lady to tell me about a decadent pet. Instead, a young couple sat in front of me. They did what any young couple would: they canoodled. Endlessly, I may add, or so it seemed during the long half hour of the bus ride. It was very distracting. At one point they looked at me as if I were a character out of place in their love scene. This was just a brief intermission and they resumed caressing, kissing and whispering, oblivious to the staring of passengers and the deafening din of the old engine. I only read a few lines.

I write these notes in the room that I rent in an empty house. And I am using Hobbes' tome to support the page on which I write.



## The True Story of Little Bo Peep

*Leslie Rubinstein*

This is a true story. Nonetheless, I have changed all the names to protect myself from memories more precise than my own. Since I have stolen every idea here, I think you will understand my need for protection even if everything I've lifted has been from reality. So if someone says silly things in this story, and you're someone, you don't have to identify yourself. Because it's not about you, it's about quirky country living in Cabbage Groove.

You see, I live on Petsleger Point. This is not a problem unless you use the phone to take care of business, which I do, and in which case I am inevitably asked for my address on Petsleger Point. That's the problem: people ask, but they don't listen. It seems that instead of hearing sounds exactly as they are, people think they hear what they already know.

For example, I remember my grandmother's late-life auditory skills; she otherwise had excellent hearing, especially if someone in the family said something under his breath. But she could never quite hear my husband's unusual name correctly.

"Hello, Larry," she would say.

"Oh, Grandma," I would respond, "His name is actually Rarry."

And the next time she saw him, she would say, "Hi, Harry."

He ended up being Barry, Kerry and Jerry by the time we were divorced.

So you can imagine that I already had difficulty with people's pronunciation problems when I ended up living on Petsleger Point. When asked on the phone, I would always say, slowly and clearly, "My address is 12321 Petsleger Point," and then I would wait for it; "Pats-slicker?" was the typical response, sometimes replaced by "Pitts-slugga?" or even "Pots-hugger?"

It's certainly an odd moniker. The unconfirmed neighborhood lore is that our road got its name from a bootlegger who had a still up in the woods during Prohibition. I sometimes envision that Petsleger might be a nice German beer; however, the only other place I have ever seen the name was on a package of Norwegian crackers that my brother once got on a plane.

But this is only relevant to the story because of Ian's butchering of the Petsleger pronunciation on the very same day he woke me up at 6:00 am on a lovely Saturday morning last summer, shouting, quite loudly, "Sit! Sit! Sit! Sit!"

I sleep with my window open, and it faces my neighbor Lucy's house. So when I heard this very early and unbecoming noise coming from Lucy's direction, it puzzled me somewhat because it definitely didn't sound like Lucy, and also because her dog, Tango, isn't the sort of dog that's willing to sit when you shout at him.

I don't mind puzzlement very much, so I rolled over and went back to sleep until the phone rang ten minutes later. It was Lucy. She was not home; she was in New Jersey. Ian, she explained, was housesitting for her, and he had a problem: there was a large flock of sheep walking around on her deck, and he was attempting to get them to sit down, which definitely explained why I was awakened so early. And which was particularly odd because Lucy doesn't have any sheep.

Since Lucy asked if I could help Ian out, naturally I got up and went next door. I found Ian staring in befuddlement at one wet and very bedraggled sheep, and I started to pepper him with questions. *How did he notice them?* Evidently it's hard to sleep when a flock of sheep is partying on your deck. *Why was this sheep so wet?* Well, instead of sitting down, the sheep all ran off the deck into Lucy's fountain and had a bath. *What did they look like?* Like an army of wet and very wooly, longhaired, unshaven feral sheep. *How many were there?* Fourteen. (*Fourteen?*) *So where were the rest of them?* Ian said, very calmly I thought, that they had headed over towards my place just a few minutes before I had arrived to help him.

As you might suspect, I very quickly backtracked in search of thirteen sheep wandering around on my land. I first checked my deck: no sheep. Then I looked down the creek and in the greenhouse: no sheep. Finally, I walked out to the unfenced garden beds we had planted just a few weeks before with tomatoes, potatoes, broccoli, kale and cabbage. But no sign of the sheep on Petsleger Point.

Not minding puzzlement very much (not to mention that puzzles are supposed to be good for people my age), I made tea and ate breakfast without thinking too much about the sheep. Then I gave Ian a call to check in.

The one wet sheep had taken off, and Ian had come up with a theory about the puzzle of the sheep. For the past few months, Tango the dog had been growling and yapping late every evening out at the end of Lucy's meadow. Ian even thought he had seen some dark shapes out there, when it was too dark to see. So Ian surmised that Tango was barking at this very herd of feral sheep, living just at the edge of civilization for weeks and weeks, disappearing back into the forest at the break of day. *Hmmm*. I didn't say much.

And that's when it happened. Ian told me he always enjoyed the unusual events he encountered whenever he housesat on Pets-shlepper Point. In fact, he thought Pets-shlepper Point was the most interesting place in Cabbage Groove. Despite the fact that I was on the phone, I cringed dramatically, and I tried very hard not to correct him, but it just burst out of me: "Ian, it's not Pets-shlepper Point, it's ...."

Unfortunately, Ian interrupted me, shouting loudly that he just saw another sheep passing by the window. I did not get to finish my sentence.

Later that morning I mentioned the sheep-puzzle to my brother, and he recalled that the new neighbor on Petsleger Point, Little Bo Peep, had just recently acquired a bunch of



sheep. *Hmmm*. I quickly found Little Bo Peep's number and left a phone message good-naturedly inquiring whether she was missing fourteen sheep. Lo and behold, an hour later she pulled up in her pickup truck, confirming that her new sheep had indeed escaped from her farm a few nights before. So much for Ian's feral sheep theory.

I walked around my place with Bo Peep, and then I walked around Lucy's place with Bo Peep, and we saw not a peep of any sheep. She said they might show up at dusk and return home, wagging their tails behind them. (Okay, I made that part up.)

Bo Peep said she would come back in the evening to look for her sheep again, and I went out to the garden to water. At which point I discovered something very, very interesting. All of the broccoli and kale were gone. Not just a little. All. The entire row of kale and thirty feet of broccoli. Well, not gone, but clearly munched down to their roots. *Hmmm*. Then I noticed that quite a few cabbages were, well, not there. And I began to think that somehow, early that morning, some sheep were having a lovely breakfast in my garden while I was having a lovely breakfast in my house, thinking about a flock of sheep.

Luckily, I am endowed with a job that allows me to buy broccoli and kale, and I'm not that fond of cabbage since it seems to enhance my natural tendency towards flatulence, so I found the whole thing quite amusing. Unfortunately, my friend Little Boy Blue, who had planted the garden with me, was significantly less amused, especially since Bo Peep was his former girlfriend. He had not been thrilled when she moved to Petsleger Point, and you can imagine how much less thrilled he was at having his garden invaded by Bo Peep's errant and badly behaved sheep.

I pointed out to Boy Blue that, really, we had planted too late for a summer crop and too early for the fall. So, in fact, the sheep were doing us a favor by munching the leaves and leaving the roots, delaying the plant growth and providing us with great start for a winter garden. I did not convince him, but my personal attitude is that being disgruntled is an enormous waste of time, so I just reframed the whole escapade as another aspect of quirky country living on Petsleger Point in Cabbage Groove.

Bo Peep did return a few times to look around for the sheep, and she managed to catch three of them. I heard that they were made into hamburgers, or rather "lamb-burgers," but as a vegetarian, I really didn't want to know. A few weeks later, nine or ten sheep were seen high up in the hills on Himalaya Road, a few miles from Petsleger Point, but they couldn't be reached through all the blackberry bramble. Perhaps Ian had actually been experiencing a kind of reverse *déjà vu*, seeing into the future with his theory of feral sheep hanging out at the edge of civilization.

By early fall, the kale and cabbage in the garden were looking good again, and although the broccoli suffered a bit, I did see some florets forming when I went out to dig potatoes, which sheep evidently don't like for breakfast.

I recently called the DMV in Cabbage Groove because my teenage son lost his driver's license. Normally I wouldn't handle this sort of thing for him, but he was studying in Europe, which makes it a bit difficult to get your Oregon driver's license replaced. The first shock was that I actually got a live person answering the phone at the DMV. Who knew? Of course, the fellow wanted me to verify my son's address, so I said, slowly and clearly, "12321 Petsleger Point."

"Oh, I know Pets-burger Point," he said. "I love Pets-burger Point! What a great place in Cabbage Groove!"

I was momentarily taken aback by his burger-related pronunciation — one that I had never heard in all the mispronunciations I had been exposed to — but I pulled myself together and just said, "Yes, yes, you're right; it's a great place out here on Pets-burger Point; it's a great place for quirky country living in Cabbage Groove."



## Withdrawal

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*Peter Eliopoulos*

The first to arrive, the last to leave, never missing class, and participating more than most. When I told the student to drop the class he couldn't pass — too many failed quizzes and missed assignments — Dana reluctantly agreed.

We parted in the hallway. I headed to my class, Dana to academic affairs. Fifteen minutes later Dana entered the room and took the usual seat, proudly announcing withdrawal from the class.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I enjoy the humor. Can I stay?"

"Open your books to the 'Howl' poem," I announced.

Glancing downward, I could see Dana was already on the page.



# LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE



I don't care what is written about me so long as it isn't true.

— Dorothy Parker



## Moving Outside the Dominant Literacy

Kellie Charron

*Authors Note: During my time with Mae, I was an Instructor and Academic Coach for a nonprofit educational organization that is responsible for both the evaluation and instruction of students with learning and language disabilities. Through weekly meetings and instructional sessions, we help individuals, from pre-K through adulthood, identify their learning strengths and find solutions to issues they may have with the learning process. I met with Mae for two hours a week, for 16 weeks, during the Spring semester. Her intake information implied that she was coming to the Center for help with writing skills and citation work, particularly pertaining to her Abnormal Psychology course.*

*A cane non magno saepe tenetur aper*, etched in striking cerulean swirls, is what catches my eye. Mae, a Community College 19-year old with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and a subtle learning disability that impacts her “written expression,” has appeared precisely on time for our first session. More vital to me than her various evaluations are these facts. She adores romance languages, Latin in particular and Publius Ovidius Naso (or Ovid, the author of the above phrase) is a singular, if atypical, inspiration. Her unreserved brilliance is a casual one, unselfconsciously flung out in bits of prose, or in the spurting of gripping — and irrelevant — information. In sotto voce she recites, from memory, an entire chapter of her *Abnormal Psychology* text. This phenomenon notwithstanding, Mae becomes most animated through the anonymous nature of virtual media: posting secrets, sculpting in an online arts forum, baring her thoughts on the tragedies of Somalian child soldiers via her Facebook page. Here is where she lives. From her MacBook — no matter her location, bodily, emotionally, or otherwise — she creates lived experiences. In the sixteen weeks we were together, I became an element of them, a witness to them. Mae, in essence, is an active designer of her own literacies.

Frequently during our subsequent sessions, Mae bemoaned static educational models. She did so while clearly possessing the knowledge, and I daresay *craftiness*, necessary to navigate them successfully. She’s refused to properly cite sources and substitutes “o” for “0” throughout her work — and her instructors now grudgingly accept both. She fought against the reflection of herself she believed I was seeing; what was plain, nonetheless, is that Mae has been seeking ways in which to inscribe herself safely into the world. She attends the local community college, but habitually criticized her fellow learners as “knee-jerk conformists.”

Despite her agoraphobia, we began our collaborations at the public library, the largest in the state. At odds with the physicality of her school’s Learning Center, and even the

Online Lab, from day one she insisted in our meeting at a neutral (unaffiliated? impartial?) space. Eclectic somehow falls short in describing the patrons of this establishment, yet she felt comfortable here — and, more specifically, at the armchairs abutting the Teen Room. Surrounded on all sides by the droning clicks of iPhones and computer keys, the lure of YA fiction, and work of a particular kind persistently engaged in, we were never alone. We sat side-by-side, to conceal what we performed perhaps; encased in our make-believe solitude, Mae perfectly embodied the line she'd had inked into her skin: *A cane non magno saepe tenetur aper*, or “A boar is often held by a not-so-large dog.” While in her institutional captivity, which some could argue included our armchairs, Mae became both David and Goliath (religious implications aside). She utilized the literacies she was most cognizant of to overcome — or side-step — the “monotonous” nature of her courses and their “cultish” attitudes, and yet also sought out my services herself; she was not forced to do so at the peril of a sinking GPA. This: our give-and-take. In one single breath, expounding upon the abhorrence of YouTube videos detailing the exploits of those Somalian child soldiers and the genius of Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*. In an equally single inhalation, responding with the issues at hand: overdue analyses and self-portraits for *Concepts of Identity*. Mae: adopting a soldier's bearing in eschewing structure and the rules of an institution. Me: affirming her bearing while insisting there are ways to recognize, adapt, absorb, find parallels within, the methodologies and pedagogies she disdains. To employ her virtual pursuits, channel what the act of sculpting means to her, not to overcome, but to marry her lived experiences with educational ones. To complete the assignments given to us, her in her courses and me in my responsibilities to her. At times of frustration, I would commandeer her MacBook and establish certain parallels myself, if only to prove a point.

During each of our 16 weeks I recognized Mae's need to settle in, become attuned to the clicking of others, the lures of fiction, the patrons in various states of labor and rest, before submerging herself in a task. I too, admittedly, had my own opening-minutes-of-the-session ritual: to entrench myself, hesitantly in the first three weeks or so but more firmly from then on, in the oddities of her written expression, and in the encouragement, albeit learned, of her drawing on her virtual pursuits. “We've got to begin” was often our siren call, and we'd commence navigating realities literal, physical, and web-based, in order to ultimately locate a place within and among these realities in which to work.

Towards the end of our weeks together I was recast as more of a mentor than a supervisor, a guardian of sorts of the space next to the Teen Room. I was there for her when she slipped back into her lamentations. Brian Street made the case thirty years ago that those students who do not use the “dominant literacy” are “conceptualized” as lacking any literacy at all. Mae is an active designer of multiple literacies, who will never simply repro-



duce the “cult” of static educational models. She unquestionably redesigned mine, which was perhaps a rather stagnant behaviorist pedagogy; I now adhere to a more constructivist model of learning, where my students *and* I configure, and reconfigure, our learning processes depending on the situation at hand. Her near-visible, continuously firing synapses, and those lived-in experiences I spoke of earlier, have transformed the space I occupy with my students: now, we, together, occupy a space of shared proficiency. A mutually beloved novelist, Toni Morrison, recounts a conversation between an old blind black woman and some teenagers who wished to challenge her authority. After their initial encounter, the young people offered their new acquaintance a full articulation of the hopeful work they know language can do. To which the old woman observed: “Look. How lovely it is, this thing we have done — together.”

# A Lifetime of Regret and the Barbie Hotdog Stand

Abby Koenig



Just as I finished writing the descriptive essay prompt on the dry erase board, I heard a purposeful groan from the left front corner of the class: Melissa, no doubt.

"Miss K. what if we didn't have no toy as a kid?"

I turned around, annoyed.

"How can we be all descriptive about somthin' we ain't never had?"

"You didn't have any toys as a child?" I asked, tight-lipped.

She shook her head no, looking around the class to find solidarity from her comrades.

I immediately regretted choosing this subject. There were so many descriptive topics I could have asked the class to write about; why did I pick this one?

My first choice was to have them describe their bedrooms, but many of the students at the community college I teach at come from broken homes if they even have one at all. I didn't want them to have to ruminate over anything depressing; they all had it tough enough. But everyone had one beloved childhood toy, right?

Of course Melissa didn't. I don't know what it is about this particular student that makes me doubt every word that comes out of my mouth, but she does. She is a student in a developmental English class working towards an associate's degree. I have a master's and am working towards a Ph.D. She is a 19-year-old that couldn't test out of this course; I am her instructor, who worked hard to obtain the right to teach her. Yet with one look, she makes me second-guess all of my life choices.

She sat up straight and stared at me defiantly. Her pierced cheeks smiled artfully, head tilted to one side, challenging me. We had one of those typical student/teacher relationships: She hated everything about my teaching style and I was certain that her every action ultimately had to do with me. I mean ... it must have at least *something* to do with me. Right?

"Well then, make one up," I replied. She was not going to win this one.

In an unsurprising moment of doubt, I pondered how difficult it would be to describe a childhood toy. I've had many toys but could I write an essay about any of them, and if I could how would I make anyone "care," as I kept telling my students was a necessary part of any good essay?

I already knew that when they wrote the biography of my life, my Rosebud would be a Snoopy doll that I once barfed clam chowder on while my neighbor's house burned in a fire. That's dramatic; that gets people interested! But in thinking about how I would ap-

proach this subject as one of my students, the first toy to come to mind surprised even me: it was the Barbie Hotdog Stand.

Perhaps my mom had recently upped her anti-depressants because I distinctly remember being surprised when she turned off of the interstate into the Toys 'R Us parking lot on the way home from a visit to my Grandmother's house. This particular Toys 'R Us was a Mecca of my childhood happiness and one we only frequented during special occasions. If I am recalling correctly, I was given carte blanche to purchase whatever I wanted. It must have been my birthday ... or the Zoloft.

At this point in my life I was still an avid Barbie fan. At the time, Barbie had tons of accessories to choose from but the Hotdog Stand was presently king. And when I say, "king," obviously I mean they played an endless amount of commercials advertising it.

The Hotdog Stand was a Barbie-sized kiosk. It was plastic and in the shape of a flattened hotdog, perfectly covered with yellow mustard. It had a red and white striped roof that was adorned with enticing signage featuring all of the delicacies one could purchase, i.e. hotdogs. Depicted by the box's cover, Ken would work behind the stand while Barbie and her friend Midge could sit on the yellow barrels that made for seats, whiling away the day gossiping about stuff like the beach and hotdogs and Ken. How fun!

What enticed me most about this plastic wonder was its accoutrement. The Barbie Hotdog Stand came complete with "over 45 pieces." These additional included hotdogs, condiments, sodas in cans and cups, snacks, bags of chips, and a spatula, which one assumed was for flipping said hotdogs.

Even as a young person, I had a knack for getting the best bang for my buck, and 45 pieces of Barbie awesomeness just felt like a good deal.

When we got home, I busted out my loot and was shocked at my own discovery. The forty-five pieces were basically a load of crap. The stand was cumbersome. Barbie and Midge couldn't properly sit while Ken tried to serve them 'dogs, and you had to snap the multitude of wieners into the buns; if Barbie were on one of those no-carb diets this would be a benefit, but for me it was just a hassle. I was heartbroken. I had been given the opportunity to choose any toy I wanted in the entire world and this was what I came home with?

I would have to live with this mistake for the rest of my life.

The Barbie Hotdog Stand was the first misstep in my existence that would eventually lead to a lifetime of regret. Universities, college majors, boyfriends, apartments and jobs would consistently have me doubting my ability to make any major decisions for myself. Even minor choices I found myself lamenting; loafers or high-heels, chicken salad or French fries, bring a sweater or don't, watch *Grey's Anatomy* or be prudent and tune into *Nova*; relax because it's Sunday or get some work done. Everything I did I found myself wishing I had done the opposite.



One would assume this unpleasant sensitivity towards the unknown would subside as I got older and wiser but it persisted. I have second-guessed every major choice that I have been given the opportunity to make. Having more than one option is a nightmare for me. I keep a coin handy at all times in the event that I need it to make a decision for me. And then I can blame the coin for its mistake (which of course turns into my fault for even trusting the coin to begin with). Suffice it to say, this is not a fun way to live.

The obsessively remorseful are self-aware. We know that we do this, but accepting and embracing a choice, good or bad, is difficult to understand and even trickier to do. Sometimes I think that the choice I made may be the correct one, but I can never admit that to myself because what if it isn't? I would rather just assume that I am wrong from the start. It's less disappointing this way.

As I sat and read through my English class' descriptive essays about their favorite childhood toys, I was intrigued. When my students described the toys they best remembered not one of them used the word "regret." Rather, these students looked back on their youths with joy and nostalgia. Not one of them said they were "sorry they ever got that 'N Sync plush doll rather than doing something successful with their lives." Picking toys to play with didn't mean anything to them other than just that – a toy to play with.

Melissa's essay was about a much-admired doll that had silky black hair and a "gingham dress with a pocket for keeping stuff or whatever." She described the doll superbly in a perfectly written five-paragraph essay – the first one she had written that actually had five paragraphs like she learned in class. And in her concluding paragraph, she wrote about the difficulty she had giving this doll up to maturity and how heartfelt it made her to think about the doll again.

I loved her essay. Whether she completely made the story of her childhood toy up or not, I was happy with myself for making her do it. It was one of my best decisions yet.



## The Lord of the Coppers

Don Macnaughtan

*This story is part of the oral heritage of the Tsimshian people, who live on the northern coast of British Columbia. The story remained unwritten until 1916, when it was recorded by the ethnographer William Beynon in Kitkatla, BC. It is important to acknowledge that the story remains the property of the Tsimshian, part of their oral tradition and as such only entirely understandable within a Tsimshian cultural context. My retelling is only one version, intended to introduce this remarkable tale to a wider audience.*

This is the story of an uncanny metal object of incredible power, forged in the deadly fires of a distant land by legendary lords, that went on to accumulate ungodly power, to cost untold lives and wealth, to define a man and his legacy, to wreak havoc in the hearts of men, and to eventually end up in ... Seattle? It sounds like a first draft of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, but this is a true story. It is an extraordinary tale that remains largely unknown, hidden within the secret history of the tribes of the Northwest Coast.<sup>1</sup>

The story begins sometime around 1720, in a Chilkat Tlingit village in what is now Haines, Alaska. For centuries, the Tlingit people in this area had traded and raided for precious supplies of copper, which was found as nuggets in the upper reaches of the Copper River, in south-central Alaska. Copper gradually became a commodity more precious than gold, and acquired many of the same mystical and heroic properties. Sometime in the early 1700s, the Tlingit apparently worked out the technology to smelt copper.<sup>2</sup> Along the way, they developed the idea of creating special ritual objects which they called *tinneh* or *tlakwa*, and which we now call "Coppers." The Copper was made of a flat sheet of copper cut in the shape of a flared shield, with a T-shaped ridge beaten onto the lower portion. The shape perhaps reflects the trunk proportions of the human body, or possibly a filleted salmon. The size varied in height from six inches to three feet. The surfaces were decorated with clan crests and the distinctive Northwest Coast formline art.

Coppers soon became objects of power and veneration. They were a strategic nexus of intense values: tradition, power, prestige, honor, wealth, and storytelling. It is hard for contemporary Western sensibilities to understand what these objects meant, but Tolkien gives us a folkloric insight. When we think of Tolkien's Rings, and all the power, ambition, lust, and wealth they represented, we have some inkling; but we live outside the cultural psyche of the Tlingit and their neighbors, and much of the Copper's meaning is a mystery. Western anthropologists, economists, folklorists, and psychologists have all offered their own interpretations of the Copper, but in the end we can only observe and wonder. We can never truly understand.

But to return to our story: the chiefs of the Chilkat Tlingit decided to create one of the first known Coppers, and proceeded to imbue it with all the wealth, power, mystery, and authority they could imagine. The cost to their village was incredible: years of labor, and horrific poisoning from the arsenic released in their primitive kiln furnaces. As their people died around them, the chiefs labored to create this one special object, and invested in it their whole future. It acquired its own name: the Nahuhulk. Soon, the fame of the Nahuhulk was known all along the Coast, as far as Vancouver Island. The Nahuhulk began to travel south, sometimes through trade, sometimes in bloody wars. Each time it changed hands, it acquired more power and value. Everybody remembered the exact sequence of trade and blood, and everybody marveled at its extraordinary prestige.

Eventually, about 1780, the Nahuhulk settled in with the Stikine Tlingit people at Wrangell, Alaska. It now had maximum prestige and power, and all along the Coast people debated and wondered how it would next be traded. The cost would be huge, everybody agreed, and would surely devastate the buyer. One man, however, was determined to have the Nahuhulk, at any cost. His name was Wasaiks, head of the Killer Whale clan of the Tsimshian people, based at the village of Port Simpson (Lax-Kw'alaams), British Columbia.

The story of what followed became legendary amongst the peoples of the Northwest Coast. For 120 years, it was an entirely oral tradition. The story was finally recorded in 1916 by the Native ethnographer William Beynon from James Lewis, a resident of the Tsimshian village of Kitkatla (Beynon and Lewis 1987).

When the Tale was recorded, it was already over a century old, but the tale remained utterly vivid in the mind of the narrator James Lewis, even four or five generations later. Despite a length of almost 10,000 words, Lewis could remember incredible details, down to the nuances and expressions of the lengthy individual speeches scattered throughout the story. It is a tale of power, intrigue, lust, acquisition, political shenanigans, formalities, proper conduct, and pride, all encased in a cultural tradition so rich and intense that it is beyond our modern comprehension. Even more extraordinary, the story had passed down without the usual mechanisms of recording and writing. It remained so real to its narrator that it could have happened a week or a month ago.

Wisaiks decided he would bargain for the Nahuhulk. Its acquisition could cripple the tribe, but it would raise their prestige to unprecedented heights. Wisaiks could not act unilaterally; he had to recruit a band of brothers who would assist him in his quest. He had to persuade the other heads of the clans, and this was no easy task. But eventually, after much wrangling and discussion, the other headmen agreed to the plan. They would pool vast resources of blankets, chests, carvings, hides, food, and slaves, and make the long journey north to the Tlingit.



The price was incredible: ten canoes stuffed with goods, plus 20 slaves. This was the value of the Nahuhulk. The Tsimshian began their negotiations with the Tlingit, but the Nahuhulk was already wielding an evil power. It twisted the mind of Wisaiks, so that he became infatuated with the beautiful wife of the Tlingit chief. Recklessly, he promised her the ten canoe loads of goods and the 20 slaves for a night of passion.

The wife was wily; she went to her husband, and they agreed to the deal. The Tale justifies this course of action: This was but in accord with the ways of the olden people. It was a source of revenue for a chief; and if his wives brought him wealth in this manner they were considered lucky women.

This was indeed a lucky woman. She slept with Wisaiks, utterly bankrupted his tribe, and went back to her husband, no doubt to much celebration by the Tlingit.

Wisaiks' fellow chiefs were aghast. Years of effort had been wasted, and they were destitute. Wisaiks had paid all of the wealth he and his tribe had brought to satisfy his own desires, and they were now returning without even trying to bargain for the great copper shield. The entire *Ginaxangik* [Tsimshian] tribe was ashamed of their chief. But none rebuked him. Wisaiks had indeed reached his nadir.

Still, the Nahuhulk was not done with the Tsimshian yet. Its power was so great that they determined to try again. The honor and pride of the people were at stake, and nothing could stop their desire to possess the Copper. They returned home and began accumulating wealth again.

For two years the *Ginaxangik* gathered and stored a huge amount of wealth, some of which was of a personal kind, such as valuable supernatural powers which were the exclusive property of Wisaiks. It was with these that Wisaiks hoped to satisfy his Stikine brother when he again sailed north to Wrangel to purchase the Copper. The counselors who accompanied him were now in control of all the goods and slaves.

The tribe was gambling everything on a last effort. Wisaiks was even bidding his personal supernatural power to perform magic and to control the elements. When the Tsimshian arrived at Wrangel, they flung their supernatural powers ashore towards the Tlingit, who took them into their possession; then they settled down to bargain. This time there were no mistakes. After many days, the deal was struck. The Tlingit delivered the Nahuhulk to the Tsimshian, although this was ambiguously couched as a "gift" – a gift that cost a massive fortune. The name of the Port Simpson Tsimshian people was now the most famous, respected, and important from Alaska to the borders of Washington.

From that time on, the Nahuhulk remained in the hereditary possession of the Wisaiks lineage of the Killer Whale clan. It was brought forth at feasts, funerals, and ceremonies, and given the place of honor. It was also considered the property of the whole tribe. While

this copper shield remained in the care of the chief, it was actually controlled by the tribe. It was known from time to time to all of the Tsimshian in feasts.

Time passed, and the world changed profoundly for all the peoples of the Northwest coast. The Tlingit had to cope first with rapacious Russians, then aggressive Americans after the Civil War.<sup>3</sup> The Tsimshian suffered the attentions of ham-fisted Canadian government officials (who even banned their potlaches in 1916), as well as zealous missionaries and greedy traders. Disease and violence swept along the coast, bringing in their wake cultural disruption, population decline, alcoholism, and the loss of language and social relationships.<sup>4</sup> Through all this, the Nahuhulk remained in Port Simpson, passed down in the Wisaiks lineage. Hidden away from outsiders, it escaped the notice of artifact collectors, avaricious strangers, and confiscating officials.

In the end, it could not escape the changing times and the fortunes of fate. The end was mundane. It was not flung dramatically into the fires of Mount Doom, releasing its grip on the minds of men. Instead, it passed out of the hands of the heirs of Wisaiks, probably about 20 years ago. The circumstances are murky and sad, but it suffices to say that the once famous Copper now resides in the living room of a Puget Sound man. It once obsessed and convulsed a whole region, exercising an uncanny hold over its owners and those who lusted for it. Now, all its great power has leaked away, forgotten by almost everybody. Eventually it will be sold, this time valued in many thousands of dollars or yen or rubles, rather than hides and slaves. It may end up in a museum, or in a vault in New York, Qatar, or Moscow. It may even return to the Tsimshian. It may even regain its Power. Sometime in a distant future, it may once again be the focus of an epic struggle for power and identity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The full text of the story can be found in my online article “The Purchase of the Nahuhulk: A Tsimshian Tale of the Acquisition of a Great Copper.” <https://waikowhai3.wordpress.com/the-purchase-of-the-nahuhulk/>
- <sup>2</sup> Most copper on the Northwest Coast was from European sources, and can be metallurgically identified by the presence of zinc. However, a small number of artifacts are “native” copper, which is zinc-free. The artifact in this story has been tested, and appears to be made of native copper.
- <sup>3</sup> The US Army attacked the Tlingit at Sitka, Kake, and Wrangell in 1869, and the Navy actually shelled the Tlingit village of Angoon in 1882.
- <sup>4</sup> About 25% of Tsimshian people died in smallpox and other epidemics between 1860 and 1915.

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# Milan Journal 2014

Jerry Ross



This story is about my recent trip to Milan to work on an art project related to the upcoming 2015 Milan Expo (May to October 2015). I was in Milan from September 12 to October 14, 2014 working on a documentary film project called “The Table of Italy,” about the food, agronomy, and other artisan-based products of Italy. The film also focuses on sustainable, organic, and natural food production in Italy: cheese, wine, pasta, silk, salt, etc. My assigned task was to produce a painting of the final scene in the film, actors dressed “to the nines” sitting around a large table in the Villa San Carlo Borromeo just north of Milan in Senago. (*A fragment of the painting “Table of Italy” appears in the Art section of this issue.*)

I had tried to find a studio space via email before I left Eugene but only had one response from the Milanese painter Francesco Fontana. So shortly after my arrival I took the Metro to the Fare Pittura Atelier, Via Pisanello. Francesco offered me working space in his studio which was being used for art classes. This situation would have been a bit cramped so I decided against it, but it was nice to make contact with Francesco and to have this space as a fallback option.

Francesco Fontana is a well established Milanese painter who creates realistic cityscapes, landscapes, portraits, etc. in a traditional illustrationist manner (he started out doing music album covers). He now concentrates on giving workshops in oil and watercolor painting, drawing, etc. His work seems influenced by his Sicilian origin. I especially like his powerful sunset views of the sea and his semiabstract cityscapes.



As things turned out, I was able to paint right in my Airbnb room. This was fortunate, because now I did not have to take the subway each morning all the way to Francesco’s studio on the other side of town. So my daily routine began to be this: wake up and get dressed, take a short walk to a corner bar, have “un doppio cappuccino e un brioche”

(a double shot cappuccino and a croissant). Read the daily paper a bit (*Corriere della Sera*, Milan version) and then walk back to paint all day on the project. As luck had it, there was a lumber and hardware store within walking distance to my apartment. In another direction, only several blocks away, was an art supply store. My first task was to build a stretcher and then tack the canvas onto it, making sure everything was square and taut.

My very first night in Milan, Stefano Montaldo had some teacher friends over for dinner, and I was invited. Both teachers work for the American International School in Milan. Over wine and other goodies, we discussed faculty evaluations and professional development issues. Stefano, Mari, and Anna were interested in how we in the USA run faculty professional development, professional leaves, and teacher evaluations. So I shared Lane Community College's approach to these issues with my friends. They were especially interested in the peer-evaluation system and the union-run professional development program. Currently in Italy, the prime minister is trying to reform the educational system, as well as the entire labor system, to eliminate "jobs for life" and "no show" jobs with a more rational system allowing people to be fired from union positions but with some sort of unemployment insurance for those laid off. The national teachers union opposes teacher evaluations, and it seems like government reformers and unions are in a totally adversarial situation at present on that issue.

Italian teachers only have "formation" which is a type of professional development mandated in a top-down manner by the Italian government and it usually amounts to required attendance to lectures deemed irrelevant and boring. The Italian unions are actually national political entities that reach agreements with the Italian state on labor issues. Apparently, what we take for granted, the ability to form a local union, is not guaranteed by Italian law.

Shortly after arriving in Milan, Stefano Gorracci drove me to the Villa San Carlo Borromeo to see where the final scene was filmed. This elegant palace has been converted into a 5-star hotel. It features a permanent collection of important contemporary oil paintings.

Originally a palazzo for the wealthy and powerful Borromeo family, it is now run by a private foundation (Fondazione di Cultura Internazionale Armando Verdiglione, Università Internazionale del Secondo Rinascimento). The Villa is located on the outskirts of Milan. With its rooms, living rooms, balconies, decorated coffered ceilings, large Murano glass chandeliers, library, art gallery, museum, and its permanent collection of art from around the world, the Villa is quite some place.

Our documentary film “The Table of Italy” and the painting are scheduled for exhibit at the Villa San Carlo Borromeo for at least part of the Expo which runs from May 1 through October 31, 2015 in Milan.

For two weekends while I was in Milan, the Goracci family drove me down to Tuscany where Stefano’s family lives in Abbadia near Montepulciano. They would go down for better weather, just to get out of Milan, and also to work on business projects in and around the area. The first time down there, we worked on shoots for the film. We filmed the making of *pici* and a *crostatta marmelatta*, as well as silk production. The *pici* and *marmelatta* were filmed in an old Tuscan farmhouse, and the silk production was filmed in the old Fortezza of Montepulciano, now converted into a conference center for the local wine industry.



Villa San Carlo Borromeo

*Pici* is a thick, hand-rolled pasta, like a fat spaghetti. It originates in the province of Siena in Tuscany; in the Montepulciano area, it is also referred to as *pinci*. The dough is typically made from flour and water only.

One use for the “Table of Italy” painting had to do with the producer, Stefano Goracci, leveraging the painting as a means of contacting the American Consulate. His company is running tours of Chinese coming to the Expo. Could he do the same for Americans? Also, by initially talking about the painting, he could shift the conversation over to a possible additional project, a film about American food production and agriculture with the hope of Italy to USA sharing of technology and expertise.



Making the *pici*



Later, on a different day, we met the art director for the Villa Borromeo. Again we met at the Goracci apartment but this time the painting was used to start up a conversation about the film, its screening at the Villa, and a possible *mostra personale* to go with the film, maybe in the lobby of the theatre at the Villa. So far nothing has come of the latter idea, but this might materialize later if the film proves to be a success.

Twenty million people are expected for the Milan Expo, with six million tickets already sold, according to Alessandro Mancini, head of Expo ticketing and tourism, who spoke in New York Tuesday with Milan's mayor, Giuliano Pisapia. Seven to eight million visitors are expected to come from outside Italy, including a million from the U.S.

I have known Clarice Zdanski for many years. She is an artist and an art professor from Franklin University in Switzerland, living in Milan. She plays the flute in amateur orchestras in Milan. She is a painter with exhibits, and she takes her students to Umbria to study drawing, painting, and ceramics. We once had a two-person show together in 2004, in Milan at the Barrios Café.

During my stay, Clarice announced she was going to have one of her cheese parties. People were asked to bring some select Italian cheeses, wine, and food that go with cheese. I remembered pickles and fig jam as being among these items that go with cheese. And of course we had both white and red wines.

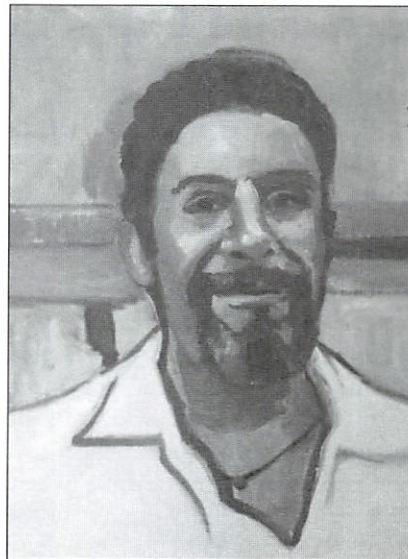
Someone brought a huge block of goat cheese that you had to eat with a spoon. The cheese was actually purchased in Milan but was from Bergamo. It was just amazing how fast this big block of cheese disappeared. Ninety percent of the conversation was about food.

The month in Milan flew by, and the next thing I realized I had to pack up and leave. In my spare time I had been working on a portrait of the local barista, Allesandro, who ran a book lending library from his café. He was the victim of my many attempts to



*Simonetta Romagnolo (in back) from the Consolato Americano looking at the finished painting.*

speaking Italian in the morning at the café. Just before I left town, I had time to drop off the portrait and Allesandro thanked me for the painting and told me that my Italian had improved greatly during my stay. I think Allesandro is correct, because if nothing else my one month in Milan was a language immersion experience and I was surprised during the last week how easy conversation had become. On the other hand, there were still those moments when all that came out of my mouth were strange garbled sounds, when the Italian just could not be found. I encourage anyone planning on attending the Expo to start studying Italian now! Make reservations soon, because available rooms and flights are being gobbled up quickly.



*The Barista, Allesandro*



## Exquisite Expectation

*Anna Kate Malliris*

We are identical and unrelated. She is the other to my self. We appear side by side; not a mirror image, not opposites, maybe likenesses. Nurture without nature, we see out into the world with different shades of sameness. The separation between self and other becomes at times stark, even sharp, especially in contrast to the closeness we have at times maintained.

My daughter came into my life through a distant gestation. She grew in the separateness from me; small, hairy and eager to enter the world. Handed to me in the coldness of an office, clothed in an undershirt and blanket, we were truly others in the sameness of the moment. I was a childless mother and she a motherless child. She felt foreign to my body as did I to hers; awkwardly closing the gap between us by finding that the crook in my arm aligned with the nape of her neck. I saw my own reflection in her blue eyes as her gaze crossed the vastness of space to find me. We studied each other. It is a sublime experience to be fully present in the awareness of both self and other, alone and separate from the world. As Maya Angelou said, "Listen to yourself and in that quietude you might hear the voice of G-d." Something truly divine was happening in this first encounter that has repeated time after time, whispering the voice of G-d in my ear, for the past 25 years.

Raising a child to whom one bears no biological connection offers a rich unfolding of the boundary between self and other; how two people can build strong connections of love, understanding, appreciation, and common destiny while experiencing, sometimes acutely, the separation that holds them as others. It is a process that allows the parent to guide the child's growth but never to control it, never to assume the outcome but to remain in a state of exquisite expectation, both wonderful and painful.

My daughter was five months old when I awoke from sleep with a start. I listened to the monitor in her room, but nothing. In the silence I felt urgency. I hurried downstairs, opened her door and watched in the moonlight as her chest moved down and up. Her skin was alabaster. Instinctively I flipped on the light. Her purple lips were agape as she turned to look at me, silent and distant. At the hospital, they took her from my arms without asking anything; she had gone away and I was left to follow. "How bad is it? How bad is it? Will someone tell me? How bad is it?" Asthma was part of the separateness that would define her other; not like myself in her unique challenge. She would be forever changed as her hearing slowly was lost to the mucus and infections that accompanied her asthma. She would be forever changed by the challenges that steeled her resolve as she learned to talk and read and navigate a world that can be hostile and unforgiving. And during the journey



that would change her, I too was changed. We found the boundaries of our sameness, felt the tearing of our differentness, and learned the gift of causing wonder in each other.

We are so alike: She is the only person who understands why I think the dog is perfect or who laughs at my stupid jokes. She is the only person who understands what my dad meant when he said “G-d is in the details” or who remembers the anguish of being on the phone with my mom as she told us my dad, her papa, was in the next room of a hospital 3,000 miles away, dying. And she is the only person, besides me, who knows to the core of her being that our shared experience has shaped us but that we are still fundamentally different.

It wasn't that she played piano that first made me aware of our differentness; I played piano too. It wasn't watching her march fearlessly to the piano to play her recital piece; I remember recitals although mine were not fearless. It wasn't even that she played so well. That first awareness of differentness came when the judge sat down with her and said that although she did not follow the dynamics dictated by the written music, he was amazed that she had found her own interpretation and that at such a young age she was feeling the soul of the music. In that moment I learned the limits of our sameness. I gave her a piano to play on, I took her to lessons with a teacher who would nurture her skills (and often argue with the musical license she took) and I made her practice. But I did not give her the ability to feel the soul of her music. That came from her otherness; an otherness I could access only in my memory of the 45 minutes spent with her *other* mother in that cold office in which I first met her, and in two 4x6 photographs of her biological mother and grandmother. Our sameness was suddenly finite and our differences immutable.

Our otherness would be woven throughout our shared journey, one that took us around the world, and just as we felt we had reached sameness, the differentness would savagely pull at the fabric of our lives leaving frayed edges seemingly beyond repair. The first time this happened, the emotion was raw and the tearing hurt deeply. It was a tender moment, snuggled together on her bed, trying to talk about the changes that were happening in her body and emotions. Neither of us feeling quite sure how to navigate these hormonally charged waters, I deferred to a book for the starting point. It seemed simple enough: “Some girl's breasts are large and some are small. It can help to look at your mom since you will likely have a similar body shape as her.” I remember feeling her head turn as it rested on my shoulder. She said “are your breasts big or small?” I chuckled as I said “small.” I felt her body relax as she once more turned away from the book and the unpleasant impending changes. There was a moment of silence, a deep breath, a pounding of fear just before the fabric was torn. “Oh, dear, your birth mother had large breasts so you will likely also have large breasts.” The tears of the pulling apart of my ‘other’ from her ‘self’ were immediate and inconsolable. “I want to be like you.” And, in this moment of ragged

separation, irreparable, I could only think “I want you to be like me but you are not, will not, cannot, fully, ever.”

Magically, in the chasm of jagged feelings grew some things unexpected and magical: wonder and expectation. Who could have guessed that a child of mine would find language to be the barrier through which she would have to struggle? Who could have imagined any person whose care was entrusted to me would have a heart so soft that children would follow her like a pied piper? And who would have known that I would forever be grateful that her other did not have the small breasts containing breast cancer to which my genetic daughter would be prone.

Watching her unfold into the person she is has been like spending the summer in my garden, tilling the soil, planting the starts with gentle care for the roots, watering, pruning carefully with thought to the final shape and growth of the plant, and then watching in wonder as it grows according to its destiny and my gentle shaping. My daughter is that bloom in the garden of my life: I knew she would have beautiful blue eyes and the most perfect sweetheart lips, but watching her unfold was a wonder without expectation. I never expected that she would think with the left side of her brain as I do but watched in amazement as the right side took over so she could create art and music. I never expected that she would be shy and analytical like me but watched in wonder as her deeply empathetic and emotional spirit formed and was captured in a shyness that I understood. She is the other to my self and I am the other to her self. We have moved closer in our shared experiences, we have torn apart in our differentness, and we have chosen repeatedly to look to each other with exquisite expectation as we continually unfold before each other. It is a gift, a freedom, to strive for the best of the plant and the gardener; to rejoice in the flower that unfolds and to breathe in its subtle fragrance with appreciation – to never look at the plant with assumptions about how it will grow but to truly marvel at its uniqueness.

# Is There Life After Teaching?

Demetri Lontos



*(The author, freshly retired after teaching English as a Second Language at Lane for 24 years, could find no interviewer to ask 'the hard questions'. He decides to let his alter-ego [A.E.] do the dirty work.)*

AE: *So, let's cut to the chase: Is there life after teaching?*

DL: Patience. What's the hurry? You remind me of many of my ESL students — always wanting to learn the language overnight. Listen, dude, it's a big, fat process, for student and teacher.

AE: *Point taken. OK, so it's a process. Can you give an example?*

DL: Years ago, before Lane, when dinosaurs roamed the earth, I was teaching young teachers in China. One day after a particularly baffling class a bright-eyed student came up to me and asked, "Could you give me the knowledge?" After a few seconds suppressing inner amusement, I gently explained that learning language was not a 'product' but a process. A process of assimilating pieces of that knowledge, and that takes time. I gave him extra credit for trying.

AE: *So back at Lane, when did you finally feel you got this process right?*

DL: On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, my last teaching day.

AE: *What? It took you 24 years to get it right? What were you doing until then?*

DL: Learning. Along with my students. I told you it was a process; every student is different, learns differently. You gotta figure out how to reach them.

AE: *You mean how to teach them, don't you?*

DL: Can't teach 'em if you don't reach 'em.

AE: *Hmmm. Well, can you point to a crowning achievement as an ESL teacher?*

DL: The day I got a letter from a former student who said he was now an English teacher in Mexico.

AE: *Wow! Clearly you did something right there?*

DL: No, he did. He was a good student, motivated, bright. I didn't give him the 'knowledge.' He put all the pieces together; my job was to make him believe he could do it.

AE: *Aren't we getting a little metaphysical here?*

DL: If you just want 'physical' go teach P.E. When you've got students from other cultures — vulnerable, unsure, trying to navigate a new country — you're really teaching them more than grammar and vocabulary. You're helping to give them a toehold in a whole new life.

AE: *That word 'helping' comes up a lot in teaching. How does one prepare for that?*



DL: You can't teach *helping* but you can develop those urges in you that start with: 'My students need to get something from me that I have to give them.' Then you go to mastery/prep/delivery of that something in such a way that it reaches most, if not all, of your students. And let's not forget *passion*.

AE: *Passion? Isn't that more for rock stars and poets?*

DL: Passion is the engine that drives the whole process, man! Without passion you might as well be delivering vowels on "Wheel of Fortune".

AE: *Is that why you retired — you ran out of passion?*

DL: Nope, just wanted to apply it to something else. Like writing plays, short stories, poems, maybe even a novel. It's like digging a hole at the tideline: time is filled now with different preps and materials. It's a whole new world — and it's very exciting. Also, the walk from the parking lot kept getting longer, so it was time for me to pass the baton to younger teachers.

AE: *Any words of wisdom for those younger teachers?*

DL: I wouldn't presume ... but if pushed I'd paraphrase Frank Sinatra: I did it my way, you find yours. It takes time to hone your strengths and, yes, patience, but it comes. You go to class thinking you're ready to rumble, only to find out you've got to be flexible, adapting to endless unscripted situations. Change that lesson plan, roll with the punches! You might have bronzed your plan yesterday, but this is today and — oh-oh — half the class is out with the flu! That and endurance: believing that no matter how difficult it is to reach a class, you can and will find the way to do it. A gentle, caring tone helps, backed by a no-nonsense 'You expect things from me but I also expect things from you' approach. Cuts both ways. Finally, while recharging at home with a glass of wine isn't a panacea, it *can* lighten some of the day's dark spots. Cheers!

AE: *Whoa! Let's not get ahead of ourselves here. So, in a word, how would you sum up your 24 years at Lane?*

DL: Rich. Rich in experiences with expectant students. Rich in relationships with wonderful, helpful colleagues. And a model community college to work in. Who wouldn't go away with a smile?

AE: *Any regrets?*

DL: That it took so long for the College to create a separate ESL department. We were educational orphans for too long. Also, more staff retreats would have been a good thing, to help enrich faculty interaction, exchange ideas, put on a human face to the names on the mailboxes.

AE: *What are you going to do now with all that free time?*

DL: Fill it. Gotta run now ... "Wheel of Fortune" is about to come on and I've got some vowels to deliver.

# Designing Art for Public Places, a New & Functional Art Class

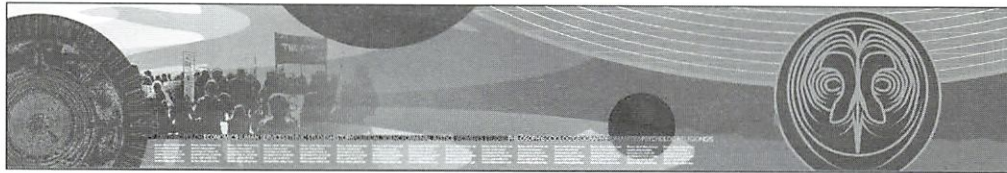
*Thomas Madison*



This magazine's front cover image is a photo detail of a large-scale mural designed and executed by students at Lane Community College. The mural was designed by students in a new course I created: Designing Art for Public Places, and it was executed by students in a subsequent mural course. Titled "The Owl of Minerva Takes Flight at Dusk," it wraps two large walls outside the Social Science office.

The idea of this functional design course rose out of the success of another large-scale mural project on campus. As an instructor in the Art and Applied Design Department who spends winters creating and maintaining commissioned murals in Saudi Arabia, I was engaged to design a mural facing Bristol Square, a large open quad on Lane's main campus. The work was laid out and painted with help from students in a class created for the purpose. The resulting public artwork, "The Lane Community College Cultural Diversity Mural," garnered attention and eventually a request from Social Science, "We have this wall ..."

This time I decided to bring students into the design process as well as execution. The act of designing art for public places not only contains its own set of unique problems but also carries a long and storied history of socio-political impact, from Michelangelo's David to Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial. The class is not limited to art students, as it is a place to bring the public into the world of public art. It allows students to be hands on with a real project while learning to think critically about the history and theory of art and the public. Students interview the client, gather areas of content, analyze, measure and photograph the public space offered and work individually and in teams to present ideas. These ideas are critiqued in class and then put into a presentable form to the client. After rounds of feedback, revisions and elimination, a final direction is arrived at and ultimately approved for execution during the mural class that follows. A current section of the course is designing a mural for the Science and Math building.



## REVIEWS



I've given up reading books. I find it takes my mind off myself.

– Oscar Levant



## Collin Brooke's *Lingua Fracta*: a Baedeker for New Media Rhetoric

Anne B. McGrail



*Lingua Fracta: Toward a Theory of New Media* is Collin Brooke's dense theoretical rumination on the continuities and ruptures of classical rhetoric in the wake of "the digital turn." This book provides a useful set of terms for teaching writing and other digital production in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. While it is not new, it teases out the contours and impact of discursive technologies on cultural production, and so lays the groundwork for uses of new media pedagogy in our classrooms.

To account for the major shifts in the purposes and effects of new media, Brooke glances back at the ancients and calls for a major revision, what he calls a "speculative amendment" to the classical canons of rhetoric (i.e., invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery) and the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and logic). By reinventing classical terms for contemporary purposes, Brooke reinvigorates the canons within rhetoric and writing studies (44). What he calls the "Five P's" comprise "proairesis," "pattern," "perspective," "persistence" and "performance." Each of these "p's" are relations rather than categories, Brooke emphasizes, and are dynamic rather than static or predictable.

Brooke privileges the "interface" as his object of inquiry, what he defines as an "imperfectly bounded encounter between users, technologies and contexts" (xiii). This Brooke contrasts with the familiar and static two-dimensional texts of "old media." In rejecting the "old media" text, Brooke also derogates methods of close reading used to understand them. As a lens for understanding the complexities of new media production, close reading is inadequate, Brooke claims, as two-dimensional as the page itself. The "5 p's" on the other hand help us articulate how new media organizes purposes, audiences, arguments in a dynamic ecology of users, interfaces, and futures. Each of his revised canons denotes a radically interactive and interdependent praxis, each new media production profoundly embedded in a social ecosystem that resists closure.

Brooke's revision of the canon of "invention" to "proairesis" provides an example. Classically, this canon of invention is straightforward — beginning with nothing, one generates ideas, words, text. But in new media the purpose of invention is less about *generation* than it is about *resistance to closure* (xvii). In new media contexts, agents of production and reception (which are not necessarily human) undertake a practice of considered choice and

decision-making about all available affordances — “proairesis.” Invention here is digital bricolage rather than solitary creation. Brooke’s turn away from an individual or decontextualized “creation” is pointedly anti-Romantic; one is always *entering* the ecology through an interface rather than *creating* on a blank page.

I welcome this language of interactivity and intentional choice when speaking about new media production, and I think it gives teachers fresh language for naming practices that students are increasingly engaging in. It also provides insights into how students and all digital citizens can become objects of decisions made for them by search engine optimization and deep data mining.<sup>1</sup> “Sorting through the strategies, practices and tactics available to us and even inventing new ones” (22) complements time-tested ideas like brainstorming. Seeing discursive technology as a set of practices that involves critical thinking and choice at every stage of production can move students into active engagement with knowledge production. Rather than fitting into singular categories, new media is best understood as “evolving combinations” that proliferate and collide, as when MySpace morphs into Facebook and then audiences move to Pinterest and Instagram. “Proairesis is a space for experimentation that is a counterpart to analysis and interpretation,” writes Brooke (85). Leading our students through this rational decision-making process as a means of invention could prove to be liberating for students — a countermeasure to staring at a blank page.

To account for the practice of “arrangement” in emergent, networked environments Brooke gives us “pattern.” “Pattern” is distinct from a two-dimensional arrangement in classical rhetoric. To illustrate, Brooke offers a fascinating list of intermediate forms between simple sequential arrangement and a “confused heap” of text without arrangement (96): cycles, counterpoints, mirror worlds, tangles, sieves, montages, neighborhoods, split/joins, missing links, feints. All of these forms organize the ecology that is interface without reducing arrangement to a linear sequence or an indecipherable mess. The notion of pattern, we begin to see in Brooke’s model, is intricately bound up with proairesis, as the audience too must make reasoned choices among multiple modes before getting to a single “text” to “read.”

Many traditional writing teachers might lament Brooke’s turn away from the canon of “style” for a more comprehensive concept of “perspective,” but style has always been about oscillating between form and content for optimum effect, and in this way “perspective” maintains that rhetorical purpose. To illustrate the dynamic of “perspective” in new media, Brooke builds on Richard Lanham’s distinction between looking *at* a text and looking *through* it. Brooke adds a new dimension, that of “*looking from*” to account for the positionality of users. The metaphor of the desktop, for instance, provides a case in point: do



we look “at” it or “through” it? For Brooke, the third dimension of looking *from* is essential for comprehending style and the multiple positions interfaces create for users.

Brooke recognizes that the persistence of data, images and identities over time intensifies the canon of memory and in some way places it outside the user. But more than intensity, he claims, new media have produced a qualitative shift in uses of memory as pattern and persistence (151). Traditional texts required and invoked memory as a technology of focus. But discursive technologies are as much about *breaking* as facilitating focus, and thus memory understood merely as presence or absence of cognition misses descriptive power for how it is taken up in new media. Rather than disciplining users into proficiencies of focus and sustained attention, new media practices instill proficiency in surfing and “impulsive reading” (158). Whatever we may think of these skills, we may already recognize in our students the development of pragmatic reading practices “similar to skimming” (156) with “good enough” reading strategies (158). These are the essence of the new media canon of persistence. And like the persistence of vision responsible for our ability to fill in the gaps between rapidly presented frames in movies, for Brooke persistence of cognition fills in the spaces left by surfing (157).

The final canon Brooke reimagines for discursive technologies is that of “delivery,” which he recasts as an intransitive relation of practice and performance. As with persistence, this move from the transitive to the intransitive locates agency outside humans — thus “new media circulate” in our absence and presence. Like all of the other “P’s” of his framework, performance resists closure. The performative dimensions of new media are illustrated in the website poemsthatgo.org, in which animated letters in Flash players dance seemingly independent of their author.<sup>2</sup>

The heart of Brooke’s enterprise is informed by a disciplinary focus on production rather than hermeneutics; to him, simply explaining new media is “reactionary” (22). English studies relies on criticism of “stable, isolated and consistent” objects of inquiry — i.e., “texts.” “A rhetoric of new media, rather than examining the choices that have already been made by writers should prepare us as writers to make our own choices. Such rhetoric cannot be achieved through the reactive lens of critical/theoretical writing” (15). Such a statement underestimates the work of Derrida and other poststructuralists who demonstrated the profound *instability* of texts. Brooke’s revised canon and trivium needn’t oversimplify textual criticism and production in order to distinguish the ecology of practice involved in new media rhetoric. *Lingua Fracta* is itself an extended close reading of new and old media and cultural theories, enacting the interdependence of reading and writing, hermeneutics and production.

In a recent email exchange with a fellow composition instructor, I referred to Brooke’s book as a great starting place for explaining the sea change of new media rhetoric to



students. She doubted students could understand Brooke's dense theoretical language. But translating theory into practice is precisely what community college teachers do best: whether it's finding examples of persistence in their Facebook feeds or doing field work on search engine optimization and the pattern they see there, students need language to explain their experience in networked environments. And Brooke's "5 p's" and revised trivium of code, practice and culture may prove a Baedeker for the mirror world they inhabit online.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Tarleton Gillespie, "The Relevance of Algorithms" in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2014.
- <sup>2</sup> I discovered poemsthatgo.org through Cheryl E. Ball and Kristin L. Arola's new media textbook on multimodal literacy, *ix visualizing composition*. MacMillan Education, 2014.

*Lingua Fracta: Toward a Theory of New Media*, Collin Gifford Brooke. 2009, New Jersey: Hampton Press, ISBN-13: 978-1572738935

## Book Review

# The Shadow Hero

Russell H. Shitabata

Growing up in Hawai'i, I was fortunate insofar as I never wanted for role models or heroes that looked like me or my siblings. Even today, over 70 percent of the population is non-white. Every kid I knew wanted to be Kikaida or Kamen Rider V3, costumed android and cyborg superheroes in the *tokusatsu* tradition. Daytime television also served up the popular Go Rangers, which, decades later, would be co-opted in mainstream American television and turned into the mostly Caucasian if still somewhat multicultural Power Rangers. Also, if my sister and I were lucky enough to be allowed to stay up and watch my grandparents' programs, we could catch episodes lionizing the tattooed hero Toyama no Kin-san. Kin-san was a magistrate who would go undercover to ferret out misdeeds, but once he revealed his self-identifying shoulder tattoo, evil doers would shudder at their pending and inevitable punishment. It's true, of course, that except for KIKU, our sole Japanese broadcast station, Hawai'i's viewers were otherwise reliant on mainstream (and white) American fare, such as *Mannix*, *The Rockford Files*, *Cannon*, *Kung Fu*, *McMillan and Wife*, and *Columbo*, all of which my grandparents also loved, but even then local commercials in Hawai'i were populated with Asian and Polynesian faces.

Comic books were another matter entirely.

I don't think I came across my first comic book that focused in a positive way on an Asian character until I was around twelve or thirteen, and even that one I would eventually realize was just some odd variety of Christian recruitment literature. Many American comic books have had a dubious history when it comes to race and multiculturalism. I still have in my possession Issue No. 11 of *Freedom Fighters* (1977), in which a group of superheroes led by the heroic and patriotic Uncle Sam (dressed as you might imagine) have to stop a group of villainous and mystically powered Native Americans called the Renegades. Captured by the Freedom Fighters and served up to the police in the end, one of the Renegades says, "We should be freed also — we were merely furthering our cause — righting wrongs done years ago," to which the arresting officer replies, "Mister, your 'cause' seems to go only so far as your pocket!" Perhaps some might be tempted to say I'm reading too much into that, but then I also have Issue No. 6 of *Moon Knight* (1985). Here, Marc Spector serves as a superhero attired ostensibly in a white hood and a white costume (some say they're meant to be silver), struggling against tragic odds to save African Americans from the corruption and drugs perpetrated upon them by their own leaders: a drug addicted government agent and a fanged voodoo priestess. Thematically, this 1980s comic book



installment hearkens back to white supremacist threads found in D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*.

It is with the above background that I read Gene Luen Yang and Sonny Liew's *The Shadow Hero* (2014). Yang and Liew resurrect a little known 1940s comic published under the *Blazing Comics* label and created by Chu Hing, one of the first Asian Americans working in the American comic book industry. Chu Hing's *The Green Turtle* had a five issue run, and Yang and Liew contend that Chu tried to give us the first Asian American superhero. Apparently, the publishers of the series wanted the Green Turtle to be Caucasian, so much so that they inked the Green Turtle's skin with an especially vibrant pink in contrast against the skin of the comic's Japanese villains and Chinese victims. Chu, however, never gives his readers a clear shot of his hero's face, which Yang and Liew argue is the artist's attempt at rebellion against the white washing of his creation. To clarify such ambiguity, Yang and Liew give us the origin story that they feel Chu never could, constrained as he was by the racial politics of his time.

*The Shadow Hero* begins in China with the collapse of the Ch'ing Dynasty, after which four spirits — Dragon Phoenix, Tiger, and Tortoise — hold council to determine the future of China. While the first three spirits argue over how to resurrect the Chinese past, Tortoise walks away and finds a drunken and broken man on a ship departing for the United States. Tortoise and the man form a pact, whereby Tortoise gets to live in the man's shadow in return for a promise that is not revealed until later in the story. What's important for now is that the man straightens out his life once arriving in the States, marries a strong willed woman, and fathers a loyal son named Hank. At first, the good son wants nothing more than to be a shop owner like his beloved father. However, he's pushed into training for and pursuing a life in the caped crusader business by his tiger of a mom, who, upon finding herself rescued by a superhero called the Anchor of Justice, decides that if a *Gwailo* (Chinese slang for "foreigner") can be a superhero so can her Chinese son. Hank's early forays into the superhero business provide mixed results at best under the identity of The Golden Man of Bravery, but eventually the tragic murder of his father propels Hank to seek justice and battle the Chinese criminal underground in the fictive coastal city of San Incendio. In his pursuit of Mock Beak and Ten Grand (the murderer of his father and the leader of the Chinese underground, respectively), he makes a pact of his own with the same Tortoise spirit that his father did, and thus is eventually born the Green Turtle.

I don't want to reveal too much, as part of the pleasure of the piece lies in its turns and revelations. However, *The Shadow Hero's* most notable quality lies in introducing readers to a new metaphor for Asian American identity, that of the superhero. Hank's struggles to find his identity as a superhero, as well as to find acceptance within and without his community, can be taken as an analog for the struggles of first and second generation



Asian Americans to find their own identity within the racial stratification of America. Sorting out what is a Chinese identity and what is an American identity, and what new identity can be derived from a mixture of both, is played out by Hank sorting through his relationship with his father (which seems to represent older Chinese values) and his relationship with his mother (which appears to represent a willingness to try new things in an American context). He ultimately finds resolution in his evolving heroic identity, which goes from the Golden Man of Bravery to the Jade Tortoise to the Green Turtle. In the end, Yang and Liew remind us that even in its origins the superhero identity is an alien and immigrant identity as the Anchor of Justice ultimately reveals himself to be of other-worldly origins, not unlike arguably the most famous of superheroes, Superman.

Just as Comic Con is proving a cultural juggernaut, spawning outward from San Diego to cities across America, and right when comic book superheroes dominate the cinematic box office, *The Shadow Hero* couldn't be more timely in its publication. In providing a prequel to Chu Hing's *Green Turtle* series, Yang and Liew revive a little known piece of not just Asian American history but American history, perhaps suggesting that the formation of an Asian American identity is in and of itself a heroic act.

As a final note, according to a 1918 military registration card posted on the blog Chinese American Eyes,<sup>1</sup> *Green Turtle* creator Chu Hing was born in Hawai'i.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See <http://tinyurl.com/mx5gleo>

*The Shadow Hero*, Gene Luen Yang and Sonny Liew. 2014, New York, New York: First Second Books, ISBN-13: 978-1596436978

## Contributors

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**Kellie Charron** is an adjunct instructor with the English Department of the Community College of Rhode Island, teaching the College Writing course. She has also taught and tutored at the New England Institute of Technology, Northeastern University, Johnson and Wales University, and the Community College of Vermont. She is a Feature Editor and Sound Instruction Book Editor for *Academic Exchange Quarterly* and a Submission Reviewer for *College English*.

**Liz Coleman** has enjoyed a lifetime relationship with Lane Community College. In the mid '80s she worked as the Volunteer Tutor Coordinator for English as a Second Language and Adult Basic Education. In 1996 she was hired to create the Tutoring Services Program she continues to direct. Among other roles at the College, Liz coordinates the Faculty Connections program providing orientation for new faculty.

**D. Shane Combs** is a second-year Master's student at East Carolina University. He has taught composition, been an embedded mentor, presented on mentoring at the Council of Writing Program Administrators conference and the International Writing Center Association/National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. His article on mentoring co-written with Michelle Eble and Erin Frost will be published in *Composition Studies* in the fall of 2015.

**Peter Eliopoulos** is a published writer and poet. He performs his poetry in the Lowell area, as well as Boston and NYC. His writing has been featured on *The Tonight Show* with Jay Leno. He has also appeared on Nancy Grace's television show *Swift Justice*. He has previously taught at Middlesex Community College and currently teaches literature and composition at North Shore Community College. He is co-founder and director of the Jack Kerouac 5K Scholarship.

**Dennis Gilbert** teaches physics and was a faculty leader at Lane Community College during its participation in the Learning College Movement as one of twelve Vanguard Colleges. This spring his sabbatical involves investigating infrastructure needed to support a community college mission that includes widespread faculty participation in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

**Clay Houchens** is from Davidson, North Carolina and has lived in North Dakota, Virginia, California and Spain. She earned a master's degree from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and a doctorate from the University of Oregon, both in Spanish literature. Currently, she teaches Spanish at Lane Community College. Poetry is Clay's creative outlet.

**Peter Jensen** has taught writing and literature classes at Lane and Linn Benton Community Colleges. He is a prize-winning, published poet, a novelist, and an independent Shakespeare scholar, whose two books on Shakespeare are available at Lane's Library and at Amazon.com.

**Sandy Brown Jensen** is a Lane Community College writing instructor as well a Faculty Technology Specialist. She completed a 2012 Graduate Certificate in Digital Storytelling from the University of Colorado, Denver. You may see and subscribe to her digital stories on her blog, Mind on Fire: <https://blogs.lanecol.edu/mindonfire/>

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**Caroline Lundquist** is a part-time philosophy instructor at Lane Community College, currently in her third year. Her area of specialization is ethics and her teaching interests include ethics, ancient philosophy, critical thinking and feminist philosophy.

**Anne McGrail** received a National Endowment for the Humanities Digital Humanities Start-up grant in 2013. She became immersed in the "DIY" and maker ethos of digital humanities, and infuses all her courses with methods, tools and projects adapted from the dazzling resources available on the web. Her professional goal is to bring digital humanities to community colleges and vice versa.

**Don Macnaughtan** is reference librarian at Lane Community College. He grew up in Auckland, New Zealand. He is the author of *The Buffyverse Catalog: A Complete Guide to Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Angel in Print, Film, Television, Comics, Games and Other Media, 1992-2010*, (McFarland). He is also author of an upcoming bibliographic essay for Oxford University Press on the work of writer/director/producer Joss Whedon.

**Anna Kate Malliris** has been the assistant to the Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs at Lane Community College for 13 years. Her passions for 25 years have been raising her amazing daughter, sharing her parents' crepuscular years, enjoying sports and reading ravenously.

**Philos Molina** is originally from El Salvador (the one in Central America, not the one south of Chile, as many believe according to a survey of geographical knowledge in the USA). He works as an Enrollment Services advisor at Lane Community College and writes during breaks to learn English as a Second Language. He has a son, Elliot, 10, and a daughter, Xochitl, 24, who still roll their eyes whenever they read his stuff.

**Jerry Ross** was born in Buffalo, New York. Influenced by the I Macchiaioli and verismo schools of Italian painting, Ross has won art awards locally and abroad and has twice been an artist/scholar in residence at the American Academy in Rome.



**Leslie Rubinstein** has been a part-time instructor teaching developmental education and GED preparation at Lane Community College for the past 18 years. Her first stint in education involved teaching ballet to children in New Jersey. Before she moved to Oregon, she taught English as a Second Language in Japan and high school English in California. In the 1990's she helped start the now-defunct Blue Mountain School in Cottage Grove, and she spent 12 years on the South Lane School Board. Despite that, her 25 years in Oregon have been the most amusing time of her life.

**Russell H. Shitabata** holds a PhD in English from the University of Oregon and is co-editor of *The Community College Moment*. He has published entries on Milton Murayama and David Mura in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Asian American Literature* (2009). He co-authored an overview of Hawaii's literary traditions for the WLA's *Updating the Literary West* (1997). He is also an avid photographer and sometime videographer.

**Brandy Stark** is an instructor at St. Petersburg College, teaching both Humanities and Religious Studies over a variety of subjects. She holds a PhD in Leadership and Education with a Specialty in Higher Education from Barry University, and graduate degrees in Humanities (Tiffin University) and Religious Studies (University of South Florida). She is working on a third graduate degree in Liberal Studies from the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg.

**Kathryn Torvik** holds an MA in Art Therapy from Marylhurst University and enjoys many areas of the arts, especially collage and photography. She has worked at Lane Community College for nine years as a Student Advisor with Disability Resources — listening to, guiding, coaching, and assisting students.

## Community College Moment Call for Submissions

*The Community College Moment* invites academic and creative writing, visual art, and other original work relevant to the mission and environment of community colleges. Submissions should reflect scholarship, broadly defined, and should appeal on a local or national level to an educated, but not specialized, audience. Each issue of *The Moment* is thematically organized, all or in part, providing multiple perspectives on a topic. The next theme is “Mistakes, Missteps, and Mess-Ups.” Themes are intended to inspire but not to preclude or discourage submissions on any timely subject.

*The Community College Moment* is open to a variety of submission formats, including essays, research articles, conference papers, sabbatical reports, and reflections on innovative pedagogies (under 5000 words; languages other than English considered), fiction and poetry relevant to our audience, artwork including drawings, paintings, photographs, three-dimensional works or choreographic projects featured through photographs, and musical compositions. Works in progress and excerpted works are also considered, as well as collaborative, web-based and multimedia projects. We invite scholarly book and film reviews (under 1200 words).

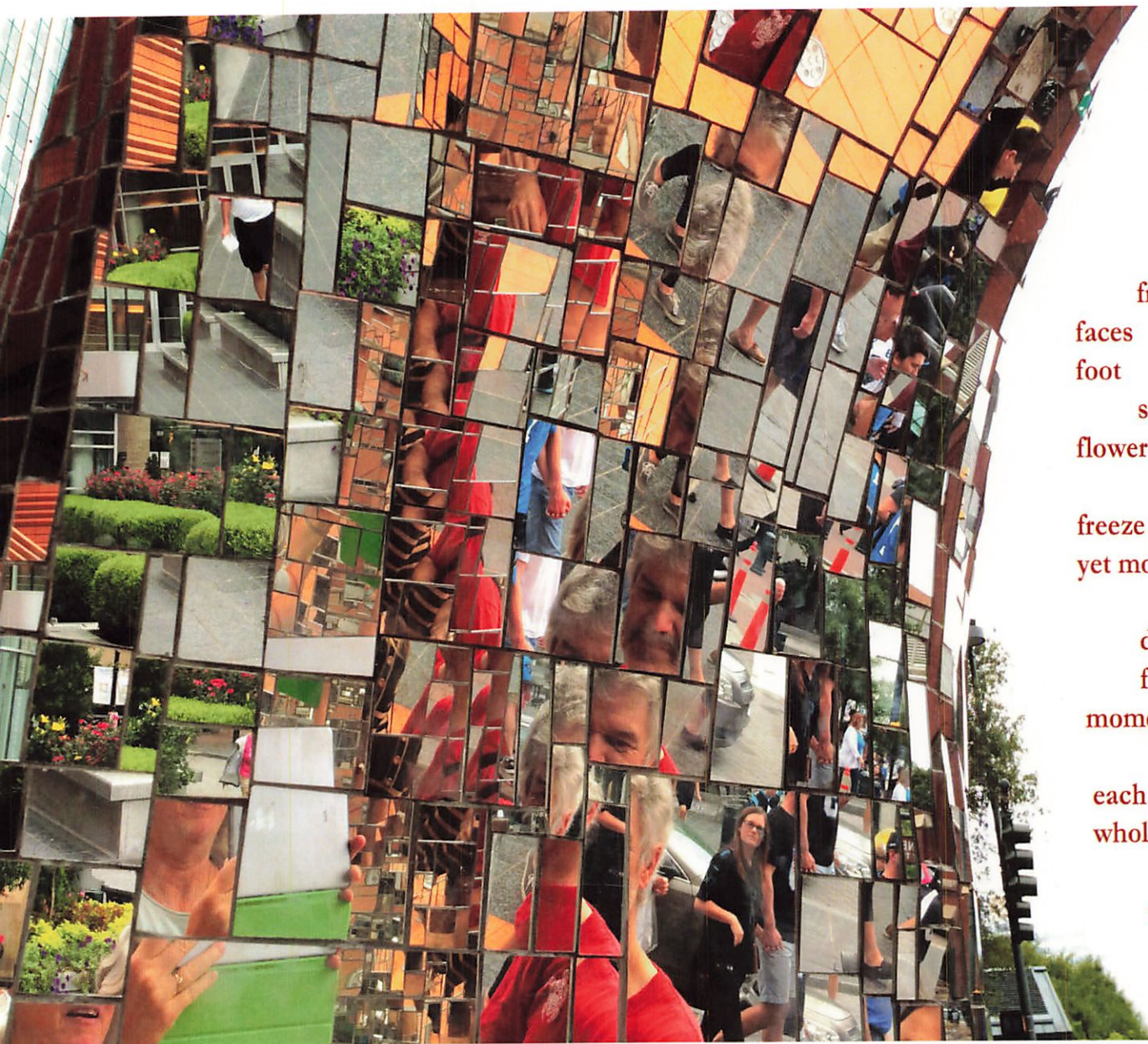
### 2015 Theme: Mistakes, Missteps, Mess-Ups

The theme for next year’s *Community College Moment* is “Mistakes, Missteps, and Mess-Ups.” When proposed by a review panelist, this first amused and then intrigued us. After all, we live in the age of the massive fail, oft a precursor to going viral. Mistakes, missteps, mess-ups, fiascos, oversights, blunders: we’re all familiar with them or we wouldn’t be human. We often think about them in relation to control or the loss of control, as the term misstep implies. The moment when we’ve made a mess-up of some presentation or teaching plan, our hearts may race, and panic may initially set in. And yet, famously vital to learning, mistakes are often seen as not only serendipitous but even necessary. Sometimes such failures make all the difference. We may try to avoid regrets, redactions, apologies, or disgrace, but would we really undo the errors that perhaps define us? We ask for your submissions by November 9, 2015. For more information, please go to: <http://www.lanecc.edu/ccmoment/submission-information>



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fragments of  
faces  
foot

steps  
flower beds

freeze framed  
yet moving

dizzying  
focused  
momentary

each part  
whole

changing

*poem and photo by Liz Coleman*