



THE FORUM

THE FORUM
VOLUME XXIV

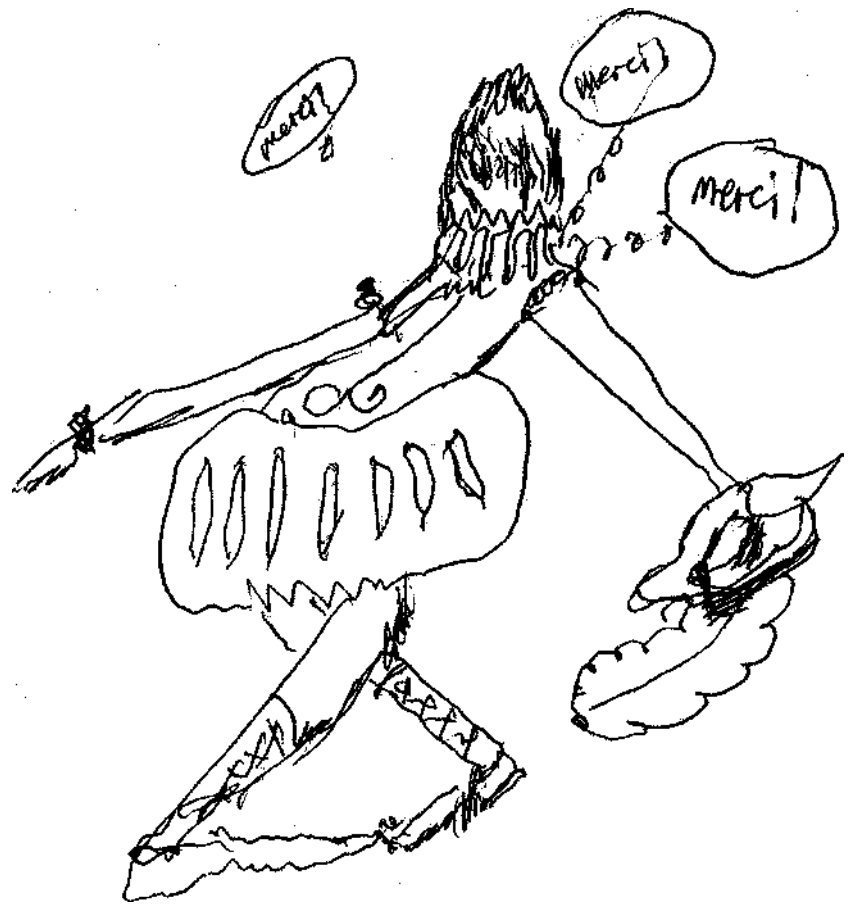
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FORUM LITERARY MAGAZINE
c/o Department of Communication
Loyola College
4501 North Charles Street
Baltimore, MD 21210



*Monseieur Montaigne, The Father of the Essay,
muses on a thesis.*



Montaigne takes a bow. (rear view)

EDITOR'S NOTE

"We need not decide that the rough beast of the cultural apocalypse is now slouching towards Bethlehem; nor need we despair so long as there are a few good writers to write good literature and a few good magazines to publish them."

-- George Core

It has been brought to my attention recently that many students at Loyola do not read *The Forum*. In fact, they do not know it exists. As the editor, this hurts, but not that badly considering what we are up against. The world, the little world of little magazines, is a bleak one, even if they are 'made cunningly.' The money is bad (none in my case) and the hours are plentiful. A national literary magazine considers breaking even a fantastic year. And, unless you are George Plimpton the social aspects are not all that appealing either. So why, one might ask, do we do it? Why do we publish *The Forum*!

Within the pages of this little magazine, you will find work written by your fellow students; students that are living and breathing around you. Their work merits this magazine. It is fresh, young, and well written. It deserves to be read, so I, and Loyola, are giving it to you. Read it.

And because this is an editor's note, I get to to thank people, and one person in particular. I would like to thank Dr. McGuiness, a man that has always believed in literary magazines, no matter their size.

-- Erin Jones

James would like to thank his cat, the citizens of Malta, J.F., and Jones. He would also like to assert that, after four years of maturing at Loyola College, he will still go by Jake. He would like to acknowledge that this unusual

soubriquest for James is the fault of his parents - not him - and that it makes more sense than "Jim," as the first two letters in Jake and "James" are the same - not the case with the proverbial "Jim." Furthermore, he would like to dedicate his contribution to this magazine to all the teachers at Loyola, particularly those who did not accept his fellowship proposal for last summer. This is not a scornful dedication because he had a fabulous summer anyway, except for a few matters that were not fabulous, but rather annoying. Dr. McGuiness - it was my pleasure to fail with you, and I would gladly fail again if it meant that we could work together.

--Jake Mosberg

CREDITS

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Shot on location at Loyola College in Baltimore, MD.

No animals were harmed in the making of this year's Forum, as opposed to past editions. All events that take place within are non-fictitious. They are meant to bear resemblance to real places, events and persons, dead and living. If anything within is found to be false, then the writer of said falsity will be maimed. Fiction is for people who can't deal with reality. That is why We are the Forum.

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UNTITLED

ANNIE CASSIIDY

*I will be free, even to the uttermost, as
I please, in words.*

-William Shakespeare

I. NICRIO—This is what we call a Super Jumble in our house. We have a huge book filled with hundreds of six-letter words that are scrambled and blank spaces to fill in the correct word. When we get bored, my four roommates and I sit around and try to figure out the correct order of the letters.

Once, the scrambled letters were arranged BUTNAR, making my roommate Tom and me laugh. The pseudo word sounded like an insult that would be used on a playground in an elementary school (You dropped the ball, you butnar!). After some thought, we realized that butnar was the word turban scrambled, yet Tom and I still refer to each other as butnar during various banters. We created a definition for an order of letters—we created a word. It was that easy.

Here's a word I just made up right now...wordsdrow. It is a palindrome and looks like a great last name that would be found in a Thomas Pynchon novel. I will make the word mean...car battery. Heck, if all this stuff is arbitrary...why not? Look at the words "ain't" and "yo." Yes, they are found in the dictionary. We have made them words by cramming two words together or stripping down large words. If I persisted with wordsdrow, or if Tom and I persisted with butnar, we could spread it through the entire United States. The words would become slang, eventually be put in the dictionary, and POOF...a word is born. —IRONIC.

II. Word is a word. This fact drives me to a point of insanity that I do not believe has a name yet. I learned, at an early age, that the only form of communication is through words or the absence of words

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(encapsulating facial expression and body language). There is nothing else. We put emotions, desires, needs, and objects into words—sometimes abstract (love, apathy), sometimes concrete (chair, lever). Onomatopoeia has allowed us to design even screams, coughs, and sighs into words.

Why, when I say or write "pen," you will think of a writing instrument that releases ink upon pressure of a hand, which is used in the task of writing. Why did we decide that the phonemes of /p/ /e/ /n/ would constitute that description. Sure, you can look at the etymology of complex words, but when the word is stripped to its roots, why is pen p-e-n? Word is a word. This is arbitrary. We have structured meaningless devices to relate and communicate meaning, yet on the contrary we have certain rules to put a language together that we all learn and use. The paradox of Saussure.

Ferdinand de Saussure formulated structuralism. He said that sounds are part of the forms of words with no direct value. Postmodern theory has its roots in this school of formal linguistics. "Structuralism opens out a formal area of inquiry—a non-dimensional space of abstraction ('thinking about thinking') and its exclusive reliance on the rules of reasoning to arrive at a general picture of the world." This idea of "thinking about thinking" involves a sort of meta-thinking that is recurrent in postmodern theories. Word is a word.

III. Etymologies can explain how a word developed. By seeing the root of the word, and where the root came from, one can get a better understanding for words, and how to use them successfully. For example, the word nightmare might seem to mean "horse night" to someone who didn't know the etymology. Upon research, one would figure out that the word mare is an Old English term for demon. "A mare was a demon, known as an incubus (male) or succubus (female) that descended on a sleeper, paralyzing and suffocating them, and had sexual relations with the sleeper." The word mare later came to mean anything frightening; add night, and you have a nightmare.

By learning the etymologies of words, writing can soar with meaning. References can be packed with history; scholars could study a text I write and find that I am a star and not just in the boxing ring. (Star first appears on record in the sense of fame in 1824: "Carter was at a loss for a star in the pugilistic hemisphere to produce him a crowded house." This quote refers to the boxing ring.)

IV. Silence—the absence of sound. The absence of words. A blank page, a serenely sleeping body, a reflection. Sometimes, I wish there was more of this and I find that people waste their voice on pointless, mindless chatter. Small talk bothers me. It seems so superficial. It is not as though I must talk to everyone about God's existence or the laws of thermodynamics, but I at least need more substance, and fewer complaints.

Everyday, I have noticed that I tell people that I am tired, that I don't want to go to class, that I am so busy, and I hear it maybe even more. I talk to my girlfriends for hours about last week's episode of the Sopranos. I hear people arguing relentlessly about which brand car has the most horsepower. I hear words of violence, sexism, racism.

Let us use our language to construct or deconstruct emotion. Let us discuss pressing matters that affect the world. Let us write short stories about creative characters. Let us tell good jokes. Let's stop the chatter.

This is a lot to ask, for even now I write more.

V. On va avoir un anana dans un an. Si les das una tarta de queso al pinguino, puedes ir al desfile. Take a moment to say these phrases in your best French and Spanish accents. The romance languages have a beautiful way of letting words roll out of your mouth, one gliding into the other as if your teeth were waltzing with your tongue. Now, let's take a look at the English translations:

On va avoir un anana dans un an.

One is going to eat a pineapple in one year.

Si les das una tarta de queso al pinguino, puedes ir al desfile.

If you give the penguin a cheesecake, you can go to the parade.

Discovering the meaning of these words suddenly takes away the romance of the language. When we put these acoustic images into a meaning to make sense of it in the English language, we no longer feel the dancing tongue and teeth—just the arbitrary statements.

VI. Have you ever read a poem or listened to a song, and felt that you identified with the lyrics, lines, phrase so much that you felt a connection

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only to find that the song or poem was about a totally different thing? It actually happened to me quite recently. There is a song by The Band entitled Weight. The chorus is, "Take a load off Fanny/Take a load for free/Take a load off Fanny/and put the load right on me." When I was younger, I thought they were saying, "Take a load off, Annie." I felt connected to that song because it was my name. Obviously, it wasn't. Still, I appreciated the song because it was sweet and about human compassion. However, I then found out that the song is filled with biblical references and is ultimately about Mary's voyage to Nazareth to give birth to Jesus. Now, any identification I had to that song is gone. I could no longer relate to the words. I don't listen to that song much anymore. It lost its appeal for me.

VII. While I was traveling through Thailand I read a lot of poetry to fill the gaps of ten-hour bus rides, solitary dinners, and jet-lagged nights. I was outside one day eating pineapple-fried rice and reading a book of Keats poems when I stumbled upon "This Living Hand":

*This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou wouldst wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calmed—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.*

I read it three times, dog-eared the page, drew four stars by the title, and put the book down to absorb. As I stared into space at the restaurant a million things could have happened. Maybe a girl with a red hat had walked by, maybe my drink had spilled, maybe someone had stolen my purse. I couldn't tell. I was floored and felt as though I had been punched in the gut—yet in a good way.

By putting sixty-five words in that certain order, Keats had invaded my mind so intensely that the reading became a physical experience. He had recorded, what I believe, multiple emotions: love, justice, sadness, guilt, and probably more that I have yet to identify. I imagine that we all feel this way when we read a poem, a line in a book, or lyrics to a song that finally hit home. It's the same feeling of a first

kiss, or a roller coaster ride. The question isn't how did the writer know? The question is how did the writer know to put the words that way? All great writers possess this subtle craft.

VIII. My thesaurus travels with me, pretty much, wherever I go. The thesaurus helps me understand words better than awkward definitions in the dictionary. Surreptitious is defined as, "done, gotten, made, etc. in a secret, stealthy way." However, I can just flip open my thesaurus and see that surreptitious is a lot like sneaky and covert. I understand better.

Sometimes, when I am stuck up against a wall during writing, I flip through my thesaurus just to look at all the different words. On many occasions, one word sets off a long train of thought where I find my next poem, story, or essay. I see the word surreptitious and I start thinking about sneaky things I have done. I think about the time my sister stole a pack of gum and had to hide it from my mother. I then think of how, when we are young, we don't realize the consequences of stealing. Here's another essay, all because of surreptitious.

IX. The other day my roommate, Joe, walked into my bedroom, "Annie, you have been sitting at your desk for a long time. What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to conclude this paper, but I can't find the words to say exactly what I want to say." The writer's fear: A loss of words.

After learning the paradox of Saussure, I was frustrated that the words I have studied were arbitrary concoctions. This awareness seemed to devalue the beauty of our language. Then I realized that I must focus on the other side of the paradox. We have formulated thousands of words with twenty-six letters. We have formulated a language with pauses, stops. We agree that /p/e/n/ is a pen. We agree that /w/o/r/d/ is a word. We agree that repetition is power. We agree that there is a POW! in power. We agree that every concluding paragraph needs a big finish.

FRONTMAN OR EVERYMAN

GINA PETRIZIO

"People look at me and think it is a complete existence. What really fucks me up in the head is that basically I'm supposed to be endorsing this sort of pop star, 'Wow, lucky bastard, he's got it all' existence."

-Thom Yorke self interview(www.angelfire.com)

1982: *Meet Thom*

You sit in the antique classroom of Abington Elementary, nuzzled in the chilled Oxford fog that hangs in midair, like the spray from an enormous atomizer. Your last name, coming at the end of the alphabet, places you next to Thom Yorke, an introverted chap. The only sure thing you know about your fourteen-year-old peer is that he is last picked during recess and wrote his last essay about a guitar he received as a birthday gift. However, his sleepy left eye intrigues you, the way it creates the sense of apathy towards everything. Today you nearly fall asleep to the rhythmic sound of his pencil stroking the page and when the gentle dragging ceases you lean over to see what has been done. You expect a large portrait of the teacher, perhaps a sprawling landscape, huge buildings with many tiny windows, a large symbol at the very least. What you see are words, just words. Words written in every direction. The rain is incessant in London. It makes the classroom windows pulsate. Beats emerge out of the glass panels. Beats steady enough to write music to.

Thom: *Ok, this is an obvious question. Why did you want to be famous then?*

Thom: *Really we just started making tapes when we were younger. First*

me on my own, and then me and Jonny, and then with the others. And we'd play them to people, and they'd really like them and they'd take them home and actually play them at home and I was really into this. I mean, this is when we were all 15, 16 and it was the first time I found something that I really loved and I suppose I loved the attention, so I wanted to be famous, I wanted attention. What's wrong with that? But there is also something seriously fucking unhealthy about it.

Thom Yorke, self interview(www.anglefire.com)

1985: *See Thom get kicked*

Did you have fun at Collin's New Year party? I did. Well, except for Thom Yorke playing his brooding songs and what not. Honestly, I really don't see how he could expect to be famous when all he does is complain. What? No, I don't find his voice strangely captivating. God you're weird. Where do you get this stuff? Next thing you're going to tell me is that you are listening to the makeshift tapes he is handing out at recess.

2001: *See Thom get kicked*

Thom Yorke's voice is not mournfully soulful. Thom Yorke does not sing, he whines.

Diary of Musical Thoughts (<http://lphys.chem.utoronto/bruner/musicstuff.html>)

Radiohead's music is made for headphones- the big, plush ones that let you lean back, close your eyes and become one with the sound. Holding it together is the unnervingly beautiful voice of Thom Yorke.
(Music Press Magazine, January, 1998)

If Jennifer Anniston listens to it with her hunky husband, Brad Pitt, why shouldn't you? Radiohead. The next pop wave, an imported British craze. Introspection never sounded so good. With five albums to date, including *Ok Computer* and the Grammy award-winning album, *Kid A*, there is plenty of music to be had. Get a bumper sticker or a t-shirt. We even have the one with the little crying, squinty-eyed bear. It comes in black, yellow and blue. Great for stocking sniffers, party favors etc. To order have your credit card ready and call 1-800-METOO.

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Thom: *You haven't really answered the question. You've said 'Oh, I want to be loved. 'And that's not the real fucking reason, is it? I think you're a bit of a fucking prat.*

Thom: *Yeah, I agree. Um...other reasons to be famous. I think this discussion is so fucking lame. My favorite answer is 'Because that way more people get to hear what we do', but that would be a lie because I'm sure if you asked other members of the band they would agree, but that's not the only reason.*

1987: See Thom rise

Is it true that Thom is playing at Jericho's Tavern next week? They must be pretty desperate for billing, hu? I know, I know, you have said that a million times, but I just don't see his talent taking him too far. For God's sake, he's playing with the Greenwood brothers and Ed O'Brien. They call themselves On a Friday. Ya, I'm sure I'll be seeing that name in lights someday.

1996: See Thom rise

St. Catherine's Court- it even sounds elegant. It is theirs for a month. After the success of their first two albums, Pablo Honey and The Bends, the boys have moved up in the world, are getting larger. Their manager, realizing this growth spurt, gives them a studio with cathedral ceilings. The young men lug their equipment into the entrance hall and yell out into the open space, playfully testing the acoustics. Their voices resonate from the walls as they run up and down the spiral staircase, guitars on backs. This is their harbor- the place where OK Computer, an album that captures the eerie vastness of the castle, is constructed. Thom almost becomes a domestic man amongst the fireplaces and gardens. During the day, he paces the tall walls of ivy and at night the group huddle into the ballroom to record. Anti-materialist lyrics of drowning in a capitalist world meander through the old, aristocratic hallways, creating a paradox appropriate to the band.

Ambition makes you look pretty ugly, kicking, screaming Gucci little piggy....

Radiohead, Paranoid Android(OK Computer)

Thom comes to the U.S. in the wake of grunge. Amidst the flannel shirts and long hair of angst-ridden bands like Nirvana and Pearl

Jam, he enters subtly, by way of the west coast. He rolls down San Francisco and out of California, weaving his way past Seattle. Many hail him a diamond among the coarse, gray rock scene. He is said to have revitalized a stagnant, withered time in music. Conversely, there are rumors that he is just another ploy, another catchy phase of the same clichéd angst. The media is confused. It likes clean-cut definitions and now meets a man so complex that his identity eludes even him.

Thom: *I don't know if anybody else has this feeling. When your walking down the street and you catch your reflection in something like a car window or a shop window and you think 'Who's that?' You know: 'That's not me, that doesn't represent who I am.'*

1986: See Thom get popular

Do you think Thom has a date for the prom? Don't give me that look. Well, isn't a girl allowed to change her mind? Apparently Courtyard Studios signed Thom and the rest of the band. I guess I can see that. Oh, and they are supposed to be on the cover of Curfew Magazine next month. I just hope someone hasn't already asked him.

1993: See Thom get popular

Welcome to Live 105, your station for alternative music. I'm Tim Chase, coming to you from bustling San Francisco. Our first song on tonight's emerging bands segment is a group of men from Oxford, England. They have recently stunned England with this single, entitled Creep. We hope to hear more from them. So, enough talk, here's Radiohead. *When you were here before, I couldn't look you in the eye, you 're just like an angel, your skin makes me cry...*

All of my favorite artists are people who never seem to be involved in the industry and I found myself getting involved in it and I felt really ashamed to be there.

Thom Yorke, self interview

1987: See Thom back away

That is so weird. Ya, so he basically said no to me. He said he didn't like 'organized fun.' Honestly, I just don't get him. I mean, doesn't everyone want to go to the prom? Everyone is going to be there. He must be the most anti-social boy in the whole world.

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Kevin Hattrup

2000: See Thom back away

Two-year-old *Kid A* is a different child, understood by few. Thom Yorke's esoteric, electronic son is subject to harsh reviews. The voice of Kid A is a far cry from the human voice of its father. Free of guitar riffs, it seems to be adopted by Thom. However, if one delves deeper into Thom Yorke's past, a basis for this electronic breed emerges. Exeter University. Thom plays in a techno band that sounds like the long lost brother of Kid A. This is ten years after his mother gave him a Spanish guitar for his birthday. It took him a while to let go of the strings and, even in college, he could not wholly convert to electronic music. However, it seems that Kid A has revived his sense of ingenuity. Even the anti-capitalist artist, with lyrics such as, *Mobiles click and mobiles trip. Take the money and run, take the money and run...*, likes the feel of the smooth expensive machines. There is no way to reconcile this and, to know Radiohead is to accept this. Devices used in the album such as the Autotuner and the Palm Speaker that manipulate Thom's voice only add to his multiplicity of being.

Dear God, I thought that the post-electronica mainstream press could accept the influence of techno-based music on guitar bands as being commonplace, but I guess I was wrong. Even Eric bloody Clapton made an ambient album, so why is it so risky and inventive when Radiohead does it?

(www.anglefire.com)

Kid A is an album of sparkling paradox. It's a cacophonous yet tranquil, experimental yet familiar, foreign yet womb-like, spacious yet visceral, textured yet vaporous, awaking yet dream like forty-eight minutes. The harrowing sounds hit from unseen angles and emanate inhuman genius.

(Bret DiCresuenzo www.pitchforkmedia.com)

One is never sure what Thom Yorke is thinking, but it is this ambiguity that intrigues the public. In an industry that feeds on distinctly different personas, he, in his oddity, fits in. In his own reclusive, taciturn way, Thom Yorke has made a pop persona for himself. No matter how one feels about pop music, its essence is the fact that many relate to it and, to the disgust of many Radiohead followers, Thom falls into this

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category. In fact, dodging the cameras only further provokes the media.

UNCERTAINTY

CHRISTIE ROGERS

Fourteen years old, eighth grade, a cold snowy night in December. I am standing in St. Therese Church among my friends and many adoring family members. They all smile brightly, their cameras flashing at every moment as we stand seriously, proudly, reciting the well rehearsed "I will", "I do", "I believe." I walk in the slow moving line and nervously arrive in front of the bishop. My aunt Carol's hand rests on my right shoulder, supportive sponsor of her favorite niece and godchild. Simple questions, simple answers, state your confirmation name. The douse of Holy Water and Chrism, a sign of the cross, pin the dove on your shoulder and done. It sounds quite simple, but in the Catholic Church, it is an extremely important night, requiring a year of preparation and a life long commitment to one's religion. During the ceremony, I am confident. When I say, "I will, I do, I believe," I am sincere. Of course there is a Heaven and a Hell, of course God exists and created all things, and I am certain that the values and the beliefs of the Catholic Church are just and true. I have just received my fourth sacrament, Confirmation, and I have all the faith in the world to support my acceptance as an adult in the Church.

I was born a Catholic, baptized a Catholic, raised a Catholic, attended Catholic school, will probably raise my children as Catholics, and die a Catholic. Religion has always been a part of my life. As a family, we attended Mass weekly, said prayers before dinner, volunteered at the Parish festival every summer, and picked an angel off the tree during Christmas to buy a child a present. My parents believe that religion instills morals, a sense of self-worth, and a guideline for the right way to live your life. When I was in middle school, I believed blindly and my faith was unshaken. I did not fear death or mourn extendedly the

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loss of a loved one because I was certain that they were in Heaven: this perfect Utopia where everyone had wings. As I entered ninth grade and left the shelter of a Catholic school, I actually began to learn, not mimic, the repetitious rules that were implanted by my middle school teachers. Public high school was not the brain washing antics of prayers in the morning, at lunch, and before your leave. High school was not relating every crisis and issue to God, but rather to logic and reasoning.

At some point, I lost all the answers. I felt deceived because I discovered that Adam and Eve were not real, that Noah did not build the ark, and that all the other stories that I took as truth were in fact lies. I questioned everything that I had been taught in middle school and became angry with myself for being so trusting. My parents changed from all knowing role models to people that had mislead me and no longer had all the answers. My doubts in my faith were further embellished when differing opinions arose between my friends and me during friendly debates.

My best friend Miriam asked me, "Why are you so steadfastly pro-life"? I fumbled around with my thoughts and discovered that I could not completely answer her. I robotically repeated a list of responses: "It is a human making a decision that only God should make, it is done cruelly, it is against my religion, and it is murder." She fired right back at me; "What about a woman or a child who was raped or a drug addict that would be bringing a sickly child into the world? How are you sure of the actual existence of God or any type of higher being that is truly 'in control'?" After a few friendly debates, I started to rethink my ideas on abortion, and I realized that the answers that were spilling out of my mouth were not my thoughts at all. They were the thoughts of the church and of my parents, embedded in me after years of repetition. I stepped back and realized that I did not think it was fair for a young girl to be forced to have a baby if she were raped; that it seems crazy to force a drug addict mother to give birth if she plans to slowly kill the baby during the course of the pregnancy. Maybe there is not a God or a higher power that is controlling who lives and who dies and maybe our lives have nothing to do with religion and everything to do with biology and evolution after all.

The topic of Creationism was discussed in my freshman year Biology I class and again in my senior year Biology II class. Each time the story of Adam and Eve sounded almost laughable in contrast to the evidence of evolution. Although the Catholic Church supports evolution,

the fact that they still teach children this story of a man and woman coming from small moldings of dirt by the hands of a Creator shows the antiquity of the system. I struggled reconciling these two views because for many years I believed the story of Adam and Eve. Then in high school, I found that evolution was much more believable. That the church recognizes both theories on the creation of man presents a contrasting and confusing issue. Mrs. Kogut, my tenth grade English teacher, introduced me to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. I wrote many papers on finding my own enlightenment, questioning my beliefs, and avoiding blind conformity. In these papers, I questioned my religion, the very core of my existence at the time. I found that I could not support beliefs because I no longer truly believed all the doctrines of the Catholic Church. My strong faith began to weaken. By the end of sophomore year, I was no longer the person who had stood proudly in the pew of St. Therese church during eighth grade confirmation.

Seventeen years old, junior year, mid-May. It is Sunday morning, eleven o'clock mass with the family and as usual I sit to the right of my dad and to the left of my brothers. It is the customary repetition, Our Father, Lamb of God, one true Holy Catholic Church, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Amen. I don't even pay attention anymore, the words just flow automatically and the yawns are incessant. The air in the Church is hot and muggy from last night's rain. All the windows are flung open and the soft hum of fans can be heard when the organ music briefly pauses. I shift back and forth on the hard pew trying to fix my cotton skirt and find a comfortable position for the next fifteen minutes. Father Lang starts the homily and three words catch my attention and hold it fast: Stem-cell research. I stop fidgeting, sit erect, and focus my attention for the first time in thirty minutes. The priest nods and bellows, "It is a human taking another human life and that right only belongs to God." I sit back and think, "This life is only a cell and research on this cell could save lives." As a person planning to study biology and work on medical research, I am enraged. My teeth clench tightly and my hands stiffen. How can I sit here and support this? How can I listen when I totally disagree? At this point, I had doubted my relationship with the Church for a few years, but the stem-cell research homily distinctly challenged something that I planned to pursue in the future. Right then I knew that there were parts of my faith that I would never get back. No matter how many prayers I said, or how often I went to church, I would always be against many of the conservative views that the Catholic Church firmly

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stands by.

I might be a Catholic, but that does not imply that I support all Catholic views and ideals. Although I would never have an abortion, I am pro-choice because I do not feel the need to force my values and beliefs on others. The evidence of evolution challenges the story of Adam and Eve. I cannot find a balance to believe them both. I laugh at the archaic rule that only men can be priests in a world where men and women are considered equal, and now I fear death because I am not certain that there is something better to come. That there are hundreds of other religions with opposing beliefs to Catholicism makes me wonder who is right. How do people know that their beliefs are correct? How do Jews know that Jesus was just a prophet and yet Catholics know that he was the Savior and the Son of God? What is the benefit of not allowing priests to have families? If two men or two women love each other, who has the right to say that they cannot be married and raise a family without the punishment of sin? I no longer understand the need to worship in public. I believe that it is possible to have a private relationship with God without the outward signs of religious ceremony. The concept of reconciliation baffles me. The fact that a person can lead a hateful, sinful life, then simply feel "truly" sorry, confess to a priest, say a few prayers, and be forgiven does not seem fair or logical. Why does the Catholic Church find it so hard to change as the times change? More importantly, why do I still attend church, why do I still pray, and why do I still believe that my grandmother is in Heaven watching over me if I have all these doubts about my faith?

I still attend church, I still pray, and I still believe in Heaven because the rituals, the customs, the ceremonies, and the beliefs are still a part of me. They are the reason for my uncertainty and why I cannot simply brush off my faith and my religion. For as long as I can remember, my family went to church every week, went to confession once every few months, gave up something for Lent, said a prayer in church on Good Friday between twelve and three, and did not eat meat on Fridays during Lent. Every baby born was baptized, every second grader made their Communion and Reconciliation, every fourteen year old was Confirmed, and every death sent someone to "a better place." I had to say prayers before bed, before lunch, before dinner and I did all this automatically, ritualistically until I entered a public high school at age fourteen. Although I started to change my perspectives on my religion it was difficult to disassociate with the familiarity of it and I

continue to fall back on some of these rituals every year. As much as I doubt parts of my faith, I still find comfort in the balance that it provides, the spiritual basis of right and wrong that it dictates.

Even if I question every aspect of my religion and disagree with the majority of my original beliefs, I still hope for a resurgence of faith in the Catholic Church. I want to someday reach the point where I completely believe again. Like the faith I had when I was a child, the kind of faith that is unshaken, unquestioned, and pure. There is something assuring and comforting in the thought that it will not all end with death, that I am part of something larger, something more profound and meaningful than my own small existence. It seems incredibly ironic that I attend a Jesuit University while I struggle with all these conflicts with Catholicism and remain supportive of many liberal views. I suppose that I am still in search of my place in religion, but I am not yet ready to give up on my spirituality completely. Part of me anticipates that by attending a religious university, I will be led down a path towards understanding and acceptance of Catholicism. I hope that a Catholic college will surround me with people that still have unquestionable faith, and that their influence will guide me to a new understanding of my beliefs.

Although I doubt my religion and my faith, I still turn back to it hoping that someday it will prove true. I go to church, although not as regularly, I give up something for Lent every year, I do not eat meat on Fridays before Easter, I pray on occasion, and every once in a while, I confess my sins. My faith is a faith of uncertainty, a mixture of belief and criticism, of support and rejection. This is why I still follow many of the customs and why I still feel guilty if I miss church or eat meat on a Friday during Lent. I want to lose the criticism and rejection and focus on the belief and the support of the Church. I suppose that one might never really know that their faith is true and right in every aspect of the matter. Though it would be nice to believe that this significant part of my identity is not a façade, that I did not waste so many years of my life trusting and following a set of values and beliefs that in the end prove false. For the time being, I will cling to my uncertainty. As long as there is some part of me that wants to believe, that tries to believe then I still have a hint of faith inside. It is my own faith, my own way of believing, and maybe for some a faith of uncertainty is the best faith that they can attain.

RATED 'PG-13'

FOR MILD USE OF ADULT LANGUAGE

*God D1%n, Mother F^%\$#*g, Son of a B&%\$h*
or, emphatically,
Gosh Darn, Mother Flipping, Son of a Gun

TARA McDONNELL

Any good dictionary will define "shit" as, usually vulgar: excrement; an act of defecation; crap; damn; a worthless, offensive, or detestable person. Which of these meanings elucidates the heightened emotional reaction when "shit" is uttered? Or, might there be added connotations to "shit" too ambiguous to define? Why can a crudity, such as "shit," be so commonplace in certain situations and so uncouth in others? What makes the combination of letters, "s," "h," "i," "t," so vulgar, while its implications are so diverse? Who is to blame for establishing some words, like "poop" or "crap," to be more appropriate than others, even if all share the same meaning?

As a child, one typically giggled when accidentally hearing "damn" or "bitch." At that age, however, no children would dare repeat bad words, if they feared the committing of sins as much as the getting soap in their mouths. Yet, as an adolescent, in order to establish one's perceived maturity, the tainting of one's soul would be forfeited and profane words would be shouted at peers or whispered behind adults. As a big college student, a conversation without a "four-letter word" would be astonishing. Nonetheless, the candor found at colleges is, in the purest, Buddhist sense, impermanent. So-called adult languages would later be restricted to extreme cases, not only to avoid the corruption of young ears, but also to reveal an acquired self-control and refined maturity.

In colleges, curse words are not only most prevalent, but coarse language has practically evolved as the sole mode of communication. Although it may be incorrect to use the same words as a noun, verb, adjective, and adverb in a single sentence, college students avidly commend the combined application with curses. The alleged young

adults also tend to apply foul language to stories that would otherwise seem less interesting. "I got locked out of my room!" rarely sounds as remarkable as, "I got locked out of my fu*^ing room!", particularly if deriding an inanimate object detracts attention from one's own idiocy. To be more creative, one would even attempt to insert dirty words within others, thereby coining, "absofu*^inglutley." Hence, the more swear-words or ways in which a swearword is employed, the more damaging the insult or impressive the story.

Aside from college sanctuaries, there are extremities in which curses are tolerated. Essentially, cursing is excused when someone injures himself or herself. Following the stubbing of one's toe, crude expressions are often exclaimed either to displace some resulting pain and frustration, or to attract more sympathy from others. In these circumstances, or in response to sudden scares and surprises, no one will reproach loutishness. Likewise, when engaged in an intense argument, objectionable language is acceptable if it illustrates one's point most effectively. Otherwise, how threatening would, "You Flippin' Poophead, go to H-E-double hockey sticks!" sound to one's opponent?

Despite lasting restraints on certain words, there used to be much stricter attitudes about inappropriate language. People, even college students, would practically speak in two dialects. Courteous language would be used in the presence of all, and "locker room talk" would only be spoken with one's own gender. Any slip of the tongue before the opposite sex would cause total shame and embarrassment. With the rise of feminism, though, cursing became gender breaking rather than gender specific. To be like a man and accepted like a man, one would have to cuss like a man.

Curse words have become increasingly permissible. On some radio and television stations, "ass" and "bitch" are no longer represented by a piercing "bleep." Exactly how and when did this transpire? Have these words just been slipped to the public without even the slightest detection by those who put "parental advisory" stickers on everything? Or, what if media itself established the boorishness of some words via its infamous "bleep" and "censored?" Once again, we have reason to place all blame on our faceless media.

Maybe people are finally beginning to realize the peculiarity and foolishness of prohibiting certain synonyms of words from being expressed. Nevertheless, if vulgarisms do lose their vulgarity, the effectiveness of words might be lost as well, and language and to our

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lives. Let the whole fu*^ing world fill with potty mouths, just as long as acceptance of them remains hidden.

Anarchy Meets Capitalism



"Boots, Mando Panrick Posh Pink hair dye, three pre-ripped and zipped t-shirts and a Sex Pistols CD. That's \$177.72."

"Yeah, well you better take Discover."

OF GRACE AND SCARS

KAREN RIVERS

What the hell is that! I stick my head out the window of the moving bus, desperate for a last look and fumbling for my camera, as the giant thing recedes into the distance.

For god's sake, I think. That can't be a cow.

It's not a cow. It's a water buffalo.

A water buffalo is like a tank- barrel-shaped and battle-ship gray. The dull, deep shade of earth, it's built like a rhinoceros, but has a passive, bovine face and curving horns, the color of bone, and sharp. Stoic, impassive, dignified, threatening and graceful, tamed but with the body of a beast, this one stands at the soaking edge of a rice paddy, with a kid sprawled on its massive back. The boy holds his fishing rod with a lazy hand, and I think: I never even had a dog. The rice paddy looks, for all the world, like a lake, and I can only tell it's not because there's a woman wading in its center. Everything is damp and heavy. Everything is blue and green, thick and humid. Overwhelming.

I'm in Vietnam.

The buffalo is an inch high. Now it's a dot. Now it's nothing. On a bus en route to Halong Bay, I leave the capitol, Hanoi, behind. The bus- ancient, rickety, void of emergency exits or seat belts- is a godsend. Anything that moves me away from the city is a godsend. Two days in Hanoi and I almost lost my mind weaving through twisting, nameless streets clogged with the traffic of thousands upon thousands of bicycles, pedaled by people who are heedless of stop signs and right-of-ways and, above all, pedestrians. Hounded, every minute, by kids trying to sell me gum and men trying to sell me postcards, I have no patience, no compassion left.

"I already have those postcards," became a mantra, turning from a

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mumble into a scream, and always getting the same answer.

"No, no. You don't have these postcards. These are same same, but different."

I can't take any more. I am sick, even, of wide-eyed little boys with shoeshine kits, who would try, inexhaustibly, to convince me that they CAN shine my Tevas, I just have to let them try. And when, in



perfect English, the little hustlers ask me where I'm from, I say "America," in a halting tone, feeling brave, as if this twenty-year-old in 2001 does great service to her country by proudly admitting that she is from the U.S., the great enemy, the evil empire. I quickly come to realize that "America" does not make them think of war, it only makes them think of money. I'm a white girl with a fat wallet, and being an American only makes it fatter. The first day, after refusing a hundred outstretched hands, I see a boy, no older than six, carrying a baby in a tattered backpack, and my eyes flooded as I handed over some bills. A

few hours later, I realized that little boys are always given a baby to carry when they beg. I must have seen ten more pairs exactly like my little benefactors. It's as if someone worked out a sympathy equation: Little kid + baby + backpack = tears = cash. It's the same reason I saw four different beggars clutching cups in the nooks of arms amputated at the elbow, while their good hand hung by their side. It's all about presenta-



tion. It took two days, but I get it, and I'm on the verge of madness. I don't have a dollar, I don't need a shoeshine, I don't want gum or postcards or rickshaw rides or marijuana. I want silence.

I remind myself what the guidebook says: if you smile, they'll never leave you alone. Say no forcefully, stick a hand in their face, turn the other way. But I'm no good at it. My boyfriend's no help either. If anything, he's worse. Right now, Kevin's passed out, head leaning on my shoulder, and at the moment, I'm glad he's asleep. The bus has stopped and outside the window, a man with no legs is crawling on the

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ground, towels wrapped around his forearms to keep the asphalt from burning his skin. The day is painfully hot. A piece of cardboard is tied to his waist, dragging behind him. On the cardboard, a little boy is sleeping.

I wince and turn away, but the bus isn't moving. This is where we're getting off to catch the boat. I poke Kevin's side and we grab our backpacks. When we exit the bus and walk past the beggar, Kevin hands him 15,000 dong (about a dollar). I knew he would. The guy pauses, looks up, and smiles. He's squinting so hard in the sun, I doubt he can even see us. Kevin and I walk silently to the boat. We don't talk about it. In the past two days, we've seen worse. After awhile, there's not much more you can say. Already, cynically, I can't help thinking that it's probably not his kid: someone has paired them up to make them look more pathetic than they would look alone.

I look away, but I can still hear the heavy cardboard dragging across the asphalt.

The tour guide leads us down to the boat. The group is mostly European tourists, some Japanese and Americans, and a few scattered Vietnamese. Kevin and I shuffle on board, and collapse into the first seat we see. We're across from a Vietnamese couple. The woman, I notice, has perfect posture. She is adjusting a slim-fitting purple jacket that conservatively covers a black lace top underneath. She pins her long hair up, with a single deft movement, into a perfect twist at the nape of her neck. Her skin is flawless, her cheekbones wide, her eyes smiling. She must be- what? Twenty-five? Thirty?

Her boyfriend rests an arm lightly on the seat behind her. His hair is tousled, parted imperfectly down the center, but his T-shirt is tucked neatly into his jeans. His eyes follow the fluid movement of her hands as she fixes her hair. Silently, he listens as she titters away in Vietnamese. He has a sweet smile and his cheeks are full of scars. The marks are old, well-healed. Small, perfectly round circles- four or five on both cheeks- they are gentle indents, some a little pink, some the same tone as his skin. *What makes scars like that? Bad chicken pox? Measles?*

A whistle sounds and the boat slides into motion, easing out into Halong Bay. For the first time in days, things are quiet. No one begs me to buy gum or postcards, I am not bombarded by packs of bicycles in the throes of some perpetual rush hour, I don't have to haggle over the price of a Coke. The bay opens up and everything is sun and water and red fishing boats with towering masts. The entire bay is full of the rising

rocks. Mile after mile the same shape dominates on every side- craggy formations three stories high, all a dull, deep gray and thick with moss. The boat maneuvers between cliffs and red boats, sliding close to the entrances of caves, close to nets heaving with the weight of a thousand fish. I try, for now, to think about water. Not the shallow water of the rice paddy, not the humid heaviness of Hanoi. I think only of this water here- calm, consistent, emotionless depth.

Several times, I ease into short-lived sleep. Sometimes, I wake up and Kevin is asleep too. Sometimes, he's awake, and - whispering - he tells me I should go ahead and rest. Sometimes, I wake up and the woman is smiling at me. Sometimes she's sleeping too. Sometimes, without opening my eyes, I hear her speaking, quickly and without pause, to the silent, scarred man. She lilt, laughs quietly, brushes his hair back, kisses his cheeks swiftly, in a way that doesn't call attention. He mumbles a few words every now and then as she fusses over him, readjusts herself, brushes off her clothes, settling often into a more comfortable position- always with her legs crossed and hair in place, positioned to look in his eyes.

The two of them lean over to look out the window, and Kevin mumbles in my ear.

"Those are cigarette burns." He says it quickly and leans away.

At first, I'm at a loss. And then I understand. The perfectly round scars aren't pockmarks. They aren't from illness. They're from the burning tip of a cigarette.

My mouth goes dry. I look down. I don't want to be here. I'm sick of Vietnam. I'm sick of the suffering that's been shoved in my face. I'm sick of myself for always wanting to turn away.

Slowly, it's starting to rain. I waver between falling asleep for good and crying, when I'm stirred awake by a loud American accent. Two girls are coming down the aisle- tall, lanky blondes wearing mesh shorts and dirty basketball t-shirts. They look young. The girls pause to put on their sun block, resting the bottle on the couple's table.

"I'M VERY SORRY!" says one girl, screaming and slow. "DO YOU MIND IF I PUT THIS HERE?" She tries, awkwardly, to mime what she's saying.

The woman smiles, shakes her head, "No. No. Is okay. What is this?" she asks, picking up the bottle with her well-manicured hand, gently turning it over to read the label.

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"Sun tan lotion. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME?" The one girl asks, still loudly and slowly, as she rests her leg on the woman's seat and rubs huge handfuls of lotion onto her skin.

The woman laughs a little and shakes her head. She doesn't seem to notice the intrusive leg. With a genuine smile, she asks where they're from.

When they say the U.S., I see Kevin rub his temples and look down.

"WHERE ARE YOU FROM?" the younger girl asks, pointing.

"Hanoi. I live in Hanoi my whole life."

I imagine, for a moment, this woman - neatly pressed clothes, immaculate hair, perfect posture - emerging from the bustling streets of fruit vendors, beggars, and bicycles in the humid, monsoon-racked urban jungle that I just escaped. She is a creation of the city that made me a crying, sweating, screaming mess.

The boyfriend stays silent, looks down. But from the slight smile, the raise of his eyebrows, I know he understands what's being said. Probably, he understands better than she does. He doesn't even have to watch their mouths. The woman has to lean in, concentrate.

"What are your names?" she asks the girls, as one pulls her hair into a messy ponytail and rubs the lotion on her face.

My name is VAL-ER-IE. And this is my sister, NA-TASH-A." Valerie looks ready to spell them out, but the Vietnamese woman, her brow slightly crinkled, breaks in.

"Natasha? I thought that Russian name?" she asks, confused. The girls look shocked.

This time the boyfriend giggles a little and turns to look out the window at the rising walls of rock, like granite glaciers, dwarfing the fishing boats that speed through the final light of day creeping on toward night. He smiles at his beautiful, intelligent girlfriend. As she speaks with the two gawky Americans about their names, he slips his hand around hers.

I blush and turn my head. Can this really be the first time I've seen grace? True grace must be to walk through suffering with elegance and strength. To hold the hand of pain with a polished smile and a straight back, or to turn your scars, not from the world, but towards it, with a quiet laugh. This, right in front of me, was a poise I'd never seen. When gentle love come out of pain - that is the indelible beauty found in scars.

Eventually, the boat will turn back. We'll leave the water, the rocks, the fisherman, the dying day. We'll all return to where we came from - Japan, England, America, Hanoi. First, we'll leave the boat, the mossy, towering rocks, and return to the bus that will bump us back along the trail of rice paddies. We will ride past soaking fields, past water buffalo and little boys who rest on top of them. That earthen-colored gentle animal, stoic, impassive, dignified, and graceful, tamed but with the body of a beast, will recede into the distance.

Soon, I will leave Vietnam. Again, I'm sure, I will see suffering. I will see beauty, too. But only if I'm lucky will I ever see another road to grace.

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL

NATANIA BARRON

She had no head. In fact, she had no arms, and her legs were painfully truncated; but I remember her vividly, all the same. I was eight, maybe nine, but I was transfixed-these Greeks were strange people. Her skin was greying white, her form was rounded, her breasts heavy and full, her waist was thick, almost like a tree, dimpled; she wasn't beautiful, she was chubby. Upon a pedestal, too high for me to reach, she seemed a disfigured queen hovering above the elementary school crowd, her knobby limbs suggesting a kind of fluid elegance, a gentle demeanor. The tour guide sagely informed us that she was the ideal, the most perfect image of a woman the Greeks knew. I remember wondering what her face would have looked like, how she walked, what kind of clothes she wore and, for a moment, wishing I had lived then.

What struck me the most was that she looked like me, or rather, like the woman I was growing into. I had always felt and somehow knew, from early childhood, that chubby was not pretty. Chunky was what my mother used to describe me, which usually made me equate my size, shape, and demeanor to Chunk in *The Goonies*. She'd gently tell, me to suck in my stomach, stand up straight, and somehow, manage to make me constantly aware that I wasn't thin, that I wasn't perfect. My father was a health nut for a good part of my childhood, too, and for a while I was put on a diet where, he still contends, I looked the healthiest I've ever looked. I think I was five.

I remember being in the third grade, and standing in line at the door for recess, feeling completely oafish next to all the delicate girls in my class. Their waists were so tiny, I could probably wrap my hands around them, their bones so petite and fragile, like little ballerinas. I had always been very tall for my age; the doctors told me I'd be somewhere

around five foot nine by the time I finished growing. At night, I would pray to God, literally forsaking all the more important petitions, that I would wake up the next morning just like those girls: small. They all had boyfriends, and I was convinced that I didn't because I was some kind of monstrosity: ugly, awkward, fat. I would cry. I started to hate myself, the body I was in, the way I moved, everything about me. I couldn't love myself.

Puberty ushered in an awkwardness that gave way to complete agony; suddenly I was not only a "big girl" but one who looked like sixteen at the age of eleven. Standing outside getting the mail one day, two men in a car started hooting and hollering at me. It scared me to death; I started wearing big, loose t-shirts and baseball caps, obscuring my femininity. It was better that way, I figured. I could hide. There was comfort in that.

Bathing suits were-and still are- the bane of my existence. I felt that every time I put one on, I managed to accentuate everything I hated about my body; I thought I looked like an amorphous blob. Trying suits on in the mall would make me want to cry, to run out of the store, cursing all the skinny girls and their hold on the market. And my mother couldn't understand, my father couldn't understand, my sister couldn't understand: they were all beautiful, well proportioned, attractive people. I was the one that didn't fit. I was the chubby one, the awkward, the accident prone one.

In high school, my father tried to help, I think. Two things he said stuck in my head. He used to tell me about the Fifties, and how women back then were supposed to be curvy-apparently like me. There was Marilyn Monroe, a size 14, and Jayne Mansfield; they made men go ga-ga. That was fine, but the problem was that this was the Nineties, and as long as Kate Moss was strutting the runway, I was out of luck. Then, he would smile lovingly and tell me that I was just built like my great-grandmother. This was intended to make me feel better, belonging to something, some stocky line of women. The only picture I knew of my great-grandmother was black and white, and it hung in our stairwell. She was squat, to put it mildly, and looked like the picture of early-Sixties unhappiness; horn rimmed glasses, a round fleshy face, curly white hair, and a hideous dress with a geometric design enough to make you dizzy. Born in Odessa, Ukraine, she was from good, strong stock; a packhorse, I thought, that's what I'm built like. A Russian packhorse.

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When I was fifteen or so, I discovered music; a perfect hobby, since I could hide behind my guitar. I was never popular, I wore dashikis- wanting desperately to be a Beatle- and garnered a personality that would make me unique. I was obsessed with being unique. I never drank, I never did drugs; I was a writer, and a musician, and an artist. Creativity was my screen. But I still wasn't happy with myself. I knew I wasn't right, that my form was somehow wrong; I was never obese, but I was never what I wanted to be. Vegetarianism and an exercise routine made me feel good physically, but the mirror always showed me I was more. Every little bulge, every bit of tightness, it was magnified. I had dreams about throwing up, about not eating, but I never succumbed.

So, no one was more surprised than me when my sister was the one who ended up with the eating disorder. I was in my sophomore year in college, in Maryland, and I remember my mother telling me. The world felt so askew. How could that be? I was the one with the image problem, I was the chunky one; that should have been my territory. For a moment, I was even jealous. How could this tall-I never grew past five four or so-elegant, blond haired, blue eyed, statuesque girl think she had anything to improve on? It frightened me. I was never brave enough to puke up my dinner; I never could go all day without eating. But my sister? How many people had told her she was beautiful? How many people asked her if she was a model? Countless. Standing next to her I'd always felt inferior, the doughty old sister. My sister told me how she hated herself, how she disgusted herself, how she was depressed, and wanted to die. Someone once had told her she was fat. Fat? My sister, fat? That one comment had spawned the whole problem. One person's perception had tossed her off the deep end.

I was only called fat once. I think I was in eighth grade, and the acne-ridden moron who used the phrase only sat behind me by virtue of our last names both being in the B section of the alphabet. He was trying to move my chair; it was Geography, and apparently I was obscuring his sight. The boys hadn't caught up to my height yet, and I was placed in the front of the row before this shrimp. He hooked his feet in the grate of my desk and moved it. With an "Umph!" he cried, "Move out of the way, fatso." Or something to that effect. I just remember the word fat being in the phrase, and wanting to die, right there. I felt the heat rise in my face, tears threatening to choke me. How could someone be so cruel? So I understood my sister, a little. I knew how that felt.

With my sister's diagnosis, I started questioning my mother's own

body image problems. My mother has never, and will never, perhaps, believe she is beautiful. Now nearly fifty, she looks back at old pictures, sighing wistfully about how she was once so lovely, and that she couldn't see it then, and that now it is all lost. I look at her and see such grace and enchanting loveliness; she will never know. But I confronted her, I wanted to know if she'd had an eating disorder. She admitted to throwing up when she felt she ate too much, when she was younger-but yet she refused to call it bulimia. Somehow she blamed herself for my sister's problems. I couldn't tell her she had nothing to do with it-we never had a role model who loved herself. She would always gripe about gaining two pounds here or there, about how ugly her body was getting as she got older; and I saw her as the most beautiful woman in the world. I couldn't blame her for wanting her daughters to be lovely, too.

There was one moment in high school where I did feel truly beautiful-my junior high school prom. My band was performing, one of my best friends was taking me, and I had the most amazing dress in the world. It was magenta, and iridescent, with hints of purple, and roses all along the straps. The dress was a princess's dress, foofy and delicate. My hair was long, and I curled it, keeping it down. I remember the look on peoples' faces when they saw me, jaws slack; this is the weird girl who reads Shakespeare for fun and wears John Lennon wire rims? It was me, but transformed. I stepped out on stage, and sang, my electric guitar jangling through the sound system. And I knew. I was me, and I was lovely.

When it came time for me to finally experience boys, I don't know if anything got better. It was almost worse, being looked at by someone-being scrutinized. I knew in my heart that their eyes weren't judgmental, but my own were. I became particularly fastidious during a two and a half year relationship with a man who couldn't care less if he'd worn deodorant, let alone what he looked like in the mirror. And I knew he loved me, thought I was beautiful-but I still felt that I had to be presented right, that I had to make up for all my flaws by being well put together, fashionable, fragrant. I mentioned to him once that I felt unhappy with myself. His response was the tepid, nonchalant: "Well, why don't you go to the gym or something?"

But then something remarkable happened. Someone slipped into my life, quite unexpectedly, and saw me for me. It was disconcerting at first. I remember, I couldn't look in his eyes, because he wasn't looking at me, he was looking into me, through me. It made me uncomfortable

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because no one had ever done that, no one had ever seen me. For the first time in my life, I opened myself to someone completely-baring all, for good or ill, yet confident that his love would never change. It was the most freeing, healing thing I'd ever experienced, because all this physical baggage, all this mental anguish didn't matter anything in the world to him. All that mattered was me.

I'd be lying to say that I've come out of this on the good side, that I stand in front of the mirror every day and smile, glad that I am who I am, proud that God chose to make me this way. Far from that. Every day is a challenge. Sometimes I don't understand why genetics chose me to be their little Russian packhorse, short and rounded. I breathe a sigh of relief, too, that I wasn't brought up in the age of Britney-that I saw that statue, that I knew, deep down, that beauty isn't about what people consider perfection.

What probably frightens me the most are pictures. About a year ago I went through my photo album, tracing my life in color and memories. And I realized something; I was a beautiful child. There was nothing wrong with me, I wasn't fat, I wasn't ugly-I was adorable, precocious, smart. It startled me. I had thought I was a monster. Then I saw pictures of myself in high school, when I had no self esteem, no boyfriend, no hope: I was pretty. Sure, I didn't look like everyone else, but I was healthy looking, happy. I remember seeing those pictures before, and shoving them away-I didn't want to see them then. But looking again, I realized my own eyes were those most judgmental, those most cruel. And there's something comforting in that, something I can embrace...knowing that I am, and have always been, my own work of art.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

KEVIN HIGGINS

Life is fueled by the unknown. Magicians, from Harry Houdini to David Blaine, have cashed in on this fact for centuries. We watch movies, read books, attend sports events, all in an effort to find out what we do not know. The most talked about movies and books are those which contain surprise endings that we cannot foresee. It is natural to try and predict endings, to trick our way out of the simple fact that we cannot predict the future, but no one likes hearing the end of a movie because it ruins it. Everything builds up to that end. Of course, the unknown does not just lie in the future, but in the present as well. An obvious example would be in objects of art, such as the *Mona Lisa*, which begs the question of who the young lady is in the painting. From paintings to poetry, art is filled with questions, and rarely offers any answers.

It called to me when I was a child. It spoke to me when I was an adolescent. It provoked me when I was a teenager. It will remain with me when I am an adult. *The Persistence of Memory* by Salvador Dali has had a place in my heart for as long as I can remember. One of my earliest memories is when I first saw this painting as a child visiting the New York Museum of Modern Art. I was there with my aunts and my cousins when I was seduced by this painting. Something about the work appealed to me, possibly the same thing that appealed to Julien Levy, who first purchased the painting for the small price of \$250 from the Pierre Colle Gallery in 1931. That event would lead to America's introduction to Dali, but my event would eventually lead to a deeper connection with my mom. Tracy Chevalier, author of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, fell in love with the title painting of her novel the first time she saw it in poster form at her sister's apartment at the age of nineteen. She purchased her own copy, hung it on the wall of her room, and has hung it

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in all rooms she's lived in since. However, the painting never became wallpaper because she never forgot about it. She continually asked herself why the girl in the painting had that look on her face. Eventually she went on to write a best-selling novel on just that subject I have gone on to write about in this essay.

Before leaving the museum that day, I purchased a poster and a small plaque of the painting that I planned to give my mom. I'm not sure why I decided to buy this gift for my mom; it could have been that my aunt told me it would be a good idea or I just thought that if I liked it, then she would as well. Whatever the reason, I returned home with my new treasure as a more cultured individual. My mom was shocked. Not only was she happy that I got her something, she was also happy because Salvador Dali is one of her favorite painters, and she had long been a fan of *The Persistence of Memory*. We have always shared our appreciation of the painting, and often would wonder about my picking that painting out of all the ones there. We share a common interest, not as a mother and son, but as two art connoisseurs. Perhaps it made her feel good to know that she had raised me well, in her image. Or maybe she just felt good, and needed not to question the experience.

As I have grown older, the poster has remained over my bed. When the sun is setting at the right time, the light will shine in my Window and illuminate the background to the point where I feel as if I am there on that beach. The sky lights up, and it allows me to think of warm and bright days. The painting has become a friend who can alter my mood when I am sad, distract me when I am frustrated, and offer me an outlet when I need to think. As I grow, so does my idea of what the painting means. At first it was just cool to me. Then it was something that I had in common with my mom. Later, I realized that I never really looked at it for what it really was. After I gazed upon the beautiful sunset and the placid ocean, and marveled at how the insects in the foreground are too occupied with time to notice it, I turned my attention to the figure in the center of the painting. What resembled nothing I had ever seen in reality or fantasy suddenly grabbed my attention. To this day I am unsure of what it is. What I do know is that it is a piece of cloth covering something only the imagination can see. In a later painting, *The Disintegration of the Persistence of Memory*, Dali painted the same scene. Where the phantom cloth is, a fish is depicted. When I look at this painting, the fish seems to fit. But when I look back at the original *Persistence*, there is no fish. I try as hard as I can to see it, but it does not fit in my eyes or in my

mind. I often wonder if this later painting was made solely to confuse me and my type even more.

Of course, I know I could always look up what others think is under that cloth in books, or even ask an art professor at my college what they think is there, but I don't think that is what Dali, or any other painter for that matter, wants people to do. Once you know, you can never go back to not knowing. There are many things I wish I could go back to not knowing: the pain of a broken heart or of a loved one lost, the recollection of missed opportunities. The word 'know' comes from the Old English *cnawan*; akin to Old High German *bichnan*, which means 'to recognize'. Everything can be known; you just have to make that effort to recognize it. You must recognize that you may not want an answer at all. Pieces of art, paintings in particular, are supposed to be what you make them to be. Perhaps my inability to answer this question is what I want. Perhaps I do not want to see. There will always be answers to questions, be they right or wrong. It is up to each person to decide what is right for them, an answer or no answer, and whether that answer is the one for them.

"We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding it than we do from learning the answer itself."

--Lloyd Alexander, Author

As for me, I prefer to have no answer to my question. I like to think that what's under that cloth cannot be painted. I like to think it is an idea. This way I can alter it whenever I choose. Right now, it's shame under that cloth. It's the shame the insects will eventually feel for missing the beauty around them and concentrating on the time that is so quickly melting away. This is the right answer for me right now, because time does not exist for me on a watch anymore. Time is a stream of continuous events, immeasurable events. In college, the conventional day, week, and month no longer exist. Time is measured as the amount of work a person can get done between classes. It's the amount a person misses their family and friends in between those few precious times they are able to go home. Maybe in the future the abstract will mean something else. Happiness. Regret. Hope.

"The man who has no imagination has no wings."

--Muhammad Ali

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That's the beauty of it. That's the beauty of art. Imagination, Interpretation, Vision. These are what make us human. These are what make us special. By using our imagination, we mold the things around us and see things that are only there if you look for them. To anyone else the object under that cloth could be something completely different from what I think it is. We experience things differently by seeing things differently. It is said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. This statement is made true in that no two people look at things the exact same way. There is always variation.

If we knew what other people were thinking, there would be no mysteries to life. Our questions would be answered, and life would be all the less interesting for it. We would all realize what was right and would all have less imagination, because there would be less of a need for creativity. If it was discovered that the haiku was the best form of poetry for one reason or another, then everyone would write haikus, and few people would experiment with the many other types of poetry. These other forms would be lost over time and we would know nothing else but the haiku. Poetry lovers would all suffer from such an event. There would be one clear-cut answer and no other possibilities. If there were no imagination or interpretation, we would no longer see things in different ways as we do now. All kinds of poetry are accepted as being equally appealing. The variation in the types of poetry only helps poetry as an art because it can appeal to everyone and no tastes are lost. There are so many possible ways of looking at so many different topics.

There are even things widely considered facts that are still questioned by people. Elvis is dead. Aliens have never made contact with humans. There is no such thing as Big Foot. We know these things, but there are some that would argue each of those statements. If subjects that are widely considered facts are disputable, then there must be much to say about those things that are opinion.

One example where it is best to not know is death. Would many of us really want to know how we are going to leave this planet, be it for another place or not? I do not think so. If one knew how they would die, they would try all they could to avoid that death, and would miss out on that life that they would so desperately try and save. It is basically the same principle with a book; if you already know the ending, it takes away from the entire book. And, of course, there's religion. A vast majority of the people on this planet believe in something of a higher power. Why? There are as many reasons for this as there are people who believe,

but I think that people are drawn to it because they don't know. They like to think they do, but they do not. Nobody knows for sure. If there were one clear answer for that question, then people's hearts would not be in it, just their minds. It would take away from the strength of people's beliefs. We would know, instead of believing. There would be no need for our hearts in religious subjects because our minds would take over. We would reason religious things instead of molding them. This would destroy religion, as we know it. Religion belongs in our hearts, not our minds.

The unknown makes life interesting. It makes life worth living. Not knowing what is under that cloth has helped me see all the possibilities and has allowed me to arrive at a conclusion that is best for me. I see that painting in a way that I am sure no one else does, and that makes it all the more special. Imagination is born from the depths of the unknown, flourishes in the minds of those who question, and dies in the mind of those who accept answers instead of creating their own. We each have our own cloths. What's under yours?

NEVER QUITE

JAKE MOSBERG

Webster's New World Thesaurus- absence

absence, sounds like absinthe, the drug I did not try at the jazz club in the crypt of the church on the outskirts of the city. The rumor went-

At the bar, they sell... absinthe! "You know, the drug all the writers used.... They used it to... Write!" he explained. And he went on... "You're a writer. You should try it." It could have been the key to great success: "Published at 21! Critical and popular success, book tours (make it out to Virginia, please), cocktail parties, admiration, praise, essays that make sweeping generalizations (but it's okay, I am a famous writer and, therefore, an authority) and all published in the *New Yorker*, calls from those who forgot, future book deals, movie deals, a beautiful woman, the artist's luxury towards the reckless life (drunkenness, drugs, not just one beautiful woman), and awards and speeches that try to convey the meaninglessness of the award (for the greater good do I commit myself to this endeavor), and thanks- I would like to thank the drug absinthe." We will never be *there*. It was never quite *here*.

n. 1. [the state of being elsewhere] I am elsewhere. How is this? How can I be elsewhere? Someone else could say that I am elsewhere, but not to me, to someone else, perhaps someone that was looking for me. But I can never be elsewhere, forever doomed to be *here*, and not *there* (the grass is greener on the other side= *there* is better than *here*, but like I said). Nowadays, we can, thankfully, convey our elsewhere-ness... "Hi, this is the narrator, I'm not *here* at the moment, but leave me a message..." As though there were another "us" that could stand in for the "real us" to announce our not being *here*, but *there* (Or rather, our *here* not being where the caller thought/hoped it would be). The "us" that can

enjoy the *there* but never the *here*.

Nonattendance

My attendance was noted, but Virginia's was not. She's not *there* that day, not in English class. Where was she!?! What was her *here*? The love of my life not present for our meeting place, our Paris, our balcony, our Troy, our garden of possibility. My contentedness on being present in English class depended on her presence. Her absence meant my *here* was meaningless. That was why I went to English class, For Her! When she is absent, my *here* should be elsewhere.

But what was her *here*, and why was it different on this particular day, different from my *here*? Every week day, English class brought together our *here*'s. Now her *here* was my *there*, and her *there*, my *here*. But what was there? She could have been sick, thus not attending my *here*. Though... perhaps she was in love with someone else, and off to another *there* with the someone else, a better *there* than any *here* I could ever offer her- and that's what I wanted: for us to share *here*. Alas, her *here* was stolen from my *here* into someone else's *here*. And all *there*.

Nonappearance

All the places we must appear, else we find ourselves in times of trouble. We must appear *there*, but are *here*. We must make our *here* equal to *there*, thus destroying the *there*, and making it our *here*, and thus we appear, hopefully on time.

Nonresidence

Why all these "non's?" Such negative connotations to our word? Absence is not all bad. What about the absence of the plague? Or the absence of people with bad personalities? Or the absence of absence? If I am never absent from the "great thing that should never be missed," then all is marvelous. I have an absence of an absence. Therefore my *here* is protected. If we keep the badness away with the "non's," keep the evil *there*, then *here* is okay, the grass is, in fact, greener *here*.

Loss

I lose. I lose time. I lose my friend. I lose my mind. I lose my pen. And I need the pen, now, now, or I will lose my mind trying to remember, trying to remember where I put my pen so that I can write down my friend's phone number; otherwise, I will lose my friend, and then I will have lost time.

A mistake. Loss is not absence. But there is more, for loss does not exist. Nothing is lost; it's *here* is just not known. The pen's *here* may not be known, but it is not lost; I am just trying to find *there*, to its

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unknown *here*. The mind's *here* may be known, but not grasped, thus we say it is lost; though on the contrary, the mind shifts somewhere within itself, within its thoughts, its chaos over the conflict of recapturing the past, capturing the future while living in the present (but verily, my friends, it keeps going and going). I lose my friend. Even if I learn his *here*, I cannot go *there*. I am not welcome in his *here*. It is not loss, even if I forget, even if he moves on. It has nothing to do with ignorance, only how close he will allow my *here* to his *here*. No, he is *there*, and my *here* will never be *there*. I lose time. No, my *here* becomes too involved. All the *there's* I want for my *here* cannot fit. I want to find the pen and want to write down my friend's phone number. However, I must be *here*, finding the pen, before I can be *there* writing down the phone number. But it takes too long to find the pen's *here*, and I forget the number (though it is not lost, only I cannot find its *here* in my mind). It takes too long *here*, thus I cannot go *there*. Nothing is lost.

And again- verily, my friends, nothing is lost. Nothing!

Truancy

Derivative of truant. I have no experience with this word. I had a vague idea of its meaning before all this *here* and *there* business began, but the word has no empirical value to me. It is absent from my experience, all my *here's*. In English class, when we surely discussed this word, its meaning, my mind was elsewhere (inattentive). On Virginia. On three o' clock. On the table in front of me. And thus I did not know "truancy" for the SATs. Had I known, gotten a better score, I could be elsewhere, doing greater things because of higher scores, higher knowledge, higher *here's*. Ah, the what if of my *here*: a series of potentialities, all of which become impossible, nonexistent *there's*. But not my *here*, not the *here* that is surely, verily, without question, a result of my not knowing the meaning of "truancy" when I was *there* and it mattered, it mattered so much.

Vacancy

She worked days. I worked nights. For months and months. The relationship will never work. Too many wants for the *here's* (I must find the pen before...) The relationship will never work, not without similar *here's*. But before the end, we take off one day and one night and head to the beach on a Friday night. We search for a vacancy, an absence that we can fill. Along the strip, the main road through Southern Delaware and on into Maryland, the City by the Ocean, just looking for a sign that reads, "Vacancy," and no... "no." And we do! Even at the height of

escapism (Mid-July- the water is warming, the jelly-fish scarce, and the sand becomes the city street of a great metropolis), we find a room and share. Together we have a vacancy and together make a presence. If not for us, the vacancy would remain. Together we fill the void, become part of the flow of society. The money we make with our conflicting occupations will go to filling the vacant room and into the hands of the motel owner, the night clerk who will not listen to my plea to let us check out later than ten in the morning, the maid who will clean up after us, and we will become part of the great swoop of capitalism - whoooooosh. We are not just producers and consumers, but individuals making economic strides to further the progress of all. We are not absent! We are *here*, together, and thus the vacancy is gone, thus one more night of our *here*, until a forever of *there's*.

Inattentiveness

I do not listen to people. Because my mind is absent? All those things I have missed, those declarations in classrooms, from politicians, from family, from girlfriends, from television commercials... all that I have neglected while caught in my own thoughts. It is *here* that I am *there*. Though I am *here*, my mind is *there*, and I do not listen to you. Or rather, your *there* is not connecting to my *here*. See, now the fault is yours. I am not inattentive. It is not that my attention span is short. It is not that I do not care about what you are saying, or that I am so self-absorbed with my own existence and thoughts that I can't devote to you five minutes of my time. It's your *there*... it just isn't *here* with me.

Nonexistence

Pure absence. There is not *here* nor *there*, for there is nothing. We transcend spatial placement because there is nothing that exists to take up space, to have a *here*, an observable *there*. Where is the dragon? Where is the Great American Novel? Where is the war to end all wars? Are they absent? No. They do not exist, so they cannot be absent. And yet they are eternally absent. This primordial nature denotes the absence of an absence (the greatest "non" of all). The forever *here* of Virginia and me, the success of the relationship between "she" and me, the moment of recollection with the phone number, the time I tried absinthe: they do not and did not exist. They never had a *here*. At best, they are/were potential *there's*.

Absenteeism

This is the end of the essay. Verily, my friends, there is an absence. The *here* of the narrator is not known; he is absent to you, you

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who have devoted your *here* to the reading of this work. So who is he, and where is his *here*; surely, you will be granted that much. Yes, he was *there* to love Virginia and to lose his pen and to lose a phone number and to not completely understand "truancy" and to not try absinthe and to fill a vacancy with "she." But now he is *here*, writing the end of this essay, not *there* anymore, absent from *there*, from Virginia and English class, from a jazz club (with Virginia, just imagine, what a hell of a *there*), from "she," from the prospect of "truancy" and the trying of absinthe. And he has lost, lost phone numbers, lost time, lost touch with Virginia and "she," lost friends, lost pens (so many pens!). But not *here*. No, all that is past, past and *there*. Now, he is absent, and safe, safe from loss (verily, my friends, nothing is lost!), filling the vacancy of *here*, appearing at the right *here's*, and attentive to the sense data of *here* (and to you and your *there*, all of you that are *here*, I promise that my mind is *here* and I listen and take inward), and cognizant of the meaning of truancy, and attending, not not attending, but attending, surely to something, at least something, something *here* in existence.

And the future, the narrator has this absenteeism forever, forever absent from the future. A *there* that has yet to be a *here*, a *here* that he always reaches within time, but never know is he *there*. For instance, the ending of this essay is *there*, for he has not reached the ending; it is not *here*. But he warns you: the ending is absent. There is no ending. A final irony in all this *here* and *there*, as we approach that *there*, hope against hope to make it our *here*, this ending, because this work has gone on for so long, the work of the present, you're *here* of reading so to reach the *there* of the final period. But an absence of an ending? Because *there*

CYCLE RECIPES ON POTATOES

BRITTANY KANE

One potato, two potatoes
Three potatoes, four
Five potatoes, six potatoes
Seven potatoes, more.
-Nursery Rhyme

Potatoes are the synthesis of what can be pleasant and what can be unpleasant, creating a history of hodgepodge: long vines with blossoms; fat tubers (the potatoes); scrunched eyes peering through flaky skin; a drawing in a child's hand of a potato monster with a million eyes. Thomas Hughes, a founder of the Potato Museum in Washington D.C., found an approach to the potato: "We're serious but not solemn about potatoes here. The potato has lots of eyes, but no mouth. That's where I come in."

Potatoes have moved up in the hierarchy of vegetables. (Who ever would have thought potatoes were vegetables anyway?) First, they were not accepted in Europe because the general populace thought them to be poisonous; now they exemplify Irish tradition. With the creation in 1952 of Mr. Potato Head; a bag of parts, a potato, and directions to construct a funny man, this famous veggie has had fifty years of smiles. I played with Mr. Potato Head in my youth; I have never come to like spuds.

As a crop, no one needs to look far for a vegetable that grows in almost any type of soil and is abundant. As the fourth most important crop in the world—after wheat, rice and corn—the potato supplies a large quantity of needed nutrition into the bodies of many. Potatoes and a counterpart, lettuce, are the two most popular fresh vegetables in the United States with Idaho as the Queen state of potatoes.

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Potatoes at morning
Potatoes at noon
And if I were to rise at midnight,
Potatoes I'd get.

My grandmother grew up with all kinds of potato dishes; the recipe holders are jammed full on high countertops in her kitchen (a practice I am beginning to take on). In distinct cursive script, she has written explicit directions, such as Bellchamber's Derry Stew (potatoes, carrots, white onions, turnips, thyme, sausage, lamb crops, and a dash of parsley), to prepare dishes from her home. Potatoes are prepared in a variety of ways: mashed, boiled, fried, French fried, hashed, and baked. She once told me, while we prepared her beef stew, a tale about her great-uncle who had been born and raised on the Emerald Isle but soon left it. He worked as a chauffeur, and Sunday was his day off. He would come over to my grandmother's for lunch every Sunday. She chuckled remembering her youth. All her great-uncle would ask from her mother was two boiled potatoes and a cup of tea every Sunday after mass. My grandmother asked one day, "Why is that all you ever eat?" He replied that he brought his love of potatoes with him from Ireland and every now and again he needed the taste of home: a link to his garden's past.

Although the potato has become a staple of diets, the Church of Europe once frowned upon the vegetable. The Spanish took the first plant back to Europe after a voyage to the New World. Reaching the Peruvian Andes in the early 1500s, the Spaniards found Incas growing potatoes and called them *batata*. The English changed it to the word *potato*. The Church shunned the potato because there was no mention of the crop in the Bible, and thus, it must be poisonous to mind, body and spirit. It eventually settled into the Continent and the potato nurtured many of the poor with its abundance. Sir John Hawkins, an English slave trader and sea dog, is believed to have introduced the potato to Ireland in 1565.

Whenever I have a meal at my grandmother's house, she seems to forget that I do not favor potatoes. My preference for other vegetables floats conveniently out of her mind so that she can try to force a helping of mashed potatoes onto my ordered plate. Once I asked, "Why do you try to force potatoes upon me?" She cocked her head while holding a large metal spoon topped with whipped potato. "Because you are Irish. If you do not like potatoes, then you are not Irish enough." There was an

unpleasant sting as the comment trailed over my thoughts. I love Ireland: the blarney, Gaelic, green scape...but not the potatoes. I am as hesitant to like them as the plant itself was to take root in Ireland because of the Church's myth. Sir Walter Raleigh put the fears to rest by eliminating the "poisonous potato" rumor by planting some on his own property in Ireland. After this incident, the potato flourished in the moist temperate nature of the Isle. At one point in Irish history, a third of the population survived almost entirely on the ingenious vegetable, which supplied ninety percent of the population's diet: potatoes for lunch, brunch and dinner, with an extra helping on the side.

The plant was cheap, plentiful, easy to grow, and most importantly, it tolerated the Irish soil, and so the country stuck with the multi-eyed potato. Its difficulty in being transported led to its migration within Ireland; it spread rapidly across the landscape. The English did not hold a very high view of the potato. They thought that the potato was the main cause of Irish backwardness: growing the vegetable did not require much labor and so bred indolence into the country. (Obviously, the English did not find tardiness a pleasant attribute.)

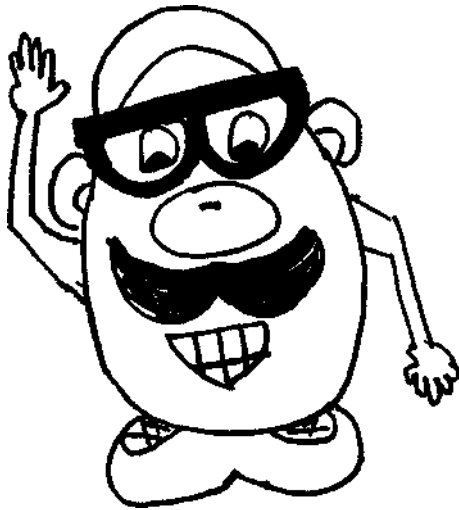
Now and then you will find men
If the land was full from north to south
And a double price for their produce
That poverty's still in their mouth.

-The Charity Seed

The Irish Potato Famine began in 1845. The words "Irish" and "potato" are culled together in numerous groupings, and this is one of them. A family peers outside of their thatched cottage to look upon a pile of rotting potatoes from their garden, all meals which could have been. The devastation that swept across the Emerald Isle was a travesty, which led to many fleeing to America with hopes of food and shelter. Times of troubles led to journal entries gargling in helplessness. The potato was choking the country with its disease, and all anyone could write was of despair. The Irish Potato Famine captures the evictions that occurred in massive scales during the famine, with the formal dispossession of some 250,000 persons from 1849 to 1854 alone. The famine weakened the network within the community, and there was little resistance to watching one's home be pounded to the ground with all the necessities and pleasures of life on display in the yard. The Irish wakes were altered

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during this devastation. Instead of resting in the wake house until the funeral procession, the



Kevin Hattrup

bodies were taken out of the home and were immediately buried. For the 4.7 million people in 1845, the potato was the predominant item in the diet; a pile of rotting potatoes spelled ill good. A fellow Irishmen James Joyce, in his book *Ulysses*, captured hunger: "Underfed she looks too. Potatoes and marge, marge and potatoes. It's after they feel it. Proof of pudding. Undermines the Constitution."

A flocking of immigrants on crowded ships in third class steerage, engulfed the Americas at acute points: New York City, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland. Each Irish immigrant brought pangs of hunger and the memory of the potato. Life is a cycle; the potato made its way back to where it had originated. I somehow found potatoes in a dish of mine at one dinner outing. Sitting in an Irish pub, four of my closest friends and I, tune out the rambunctious gaiety and talk amongst ourselves as streaks of setting light burn and highlight our eyes. I decide to try something different for a meal; perhaps I want to be spontaneous for a change, and so I choose a salmon wrapped in cabbage with potatoes and some sort of sauce. Lord, it is awful! Mainly it is the sauce, and my saving grace turns out to be a helping of Shepherd's Pie that is swamped with potatoes. I too, could not escape the cycle.

Nothin' can bring
A more fabulous feelin'—
Our senses are soarin'
Our taste buds are reelin'
With powerful passions
Too big for concealin'
For Irish Potatoes—the pride of a meal!

The Irish diet no longer has the potato at its base: it is now a side dish and a helping of tradition's past. Food does not play a part in making a nation, but it does make its history. The famine has long passed, and the Irish now have as many potato farmers as there are computer engineers on their little Isle. The potato completed its cycle to find its way back to its original home. Maybe this dislike of potatoes, too, is a cycle. I may never be a fan of potatoes; boiled, mashed, hashed or otherwise, but perhaps I can wear potato blossoms in my hair as Marie Antoinette did, while sitting at a windowsill counting my potatoes in a row—one potato, two potatoes—waiting for my voyage back home.

LIVING COLOR

CHRISTINE LAROSE

My head is turned west; I am entranced by what I see. Sitting in a boat in the middle of a lake that my family has visited since I was young, I am not concerned with my direct surroundings, but rather with the glorious sunset in the distance. The hum of the motors, the gentle lapping of the waves, the laughing conversation of my companions—all could not veer my attention away from the beauty of this sight. The pines that surround the lake are transformed from their natural greenery to a stark black silhouette, a row of jagged peaks against the luminous sky. Above this dark shoreline, the sky stretches away in a series of vibrant hues—red, orange, yellow, violet—until it finally fades into the sapphire of oncoming night high above our heads. Such intensity of color is rarely seen, and it commands my full attention.

The sunset upon my lake is imprinted forever upon my memory. I do not remember what was going on at my life at the time, or even who vacationed with me. Only the view stands out in my mind. Perhaps it is not a singular memory, instead a composite of the many sunsets over the lake that I have witnessed throughout my life. Although the memories surrounding it are vague, the colors of the sunset will never diminish or fade from my mind.

While scrolling through the collection of an art gallery online, I came to a painting that nearly leapt off the screen at me. The painting stood out against the rest much the same way the sunset over the lake stands out against my other memories. Although a computer cannot fully convey a piece of art's intensity, this painting captured my complete attention. "Houses of Parliament: Effect of Sunlight in the Fog," by Claude Monet surely captures the powerful effect of light on a gloomy

world. The Houses of Parliament are an indistinct region of intermingled hues of blue, green, and black. Land and architecture blend into one within the murky fog. A single tower with three zigzagging pinnacles stands out, silhouetted against a brightening sky. A splash of vibrant yellow and orange, the tone of ripened tropical fruit, lights up the sky and reflects its warmth onto shimmering water below. The physical subject of this painting is insignificant in comparison to the composition of colors that are used to depict it. The contrast of the yellow and orange tones against the deep blue is what first drew my eye. The brightness makes the gloom even deeper, while the shadows accentuate the light.

I wondered what it was about the colors that made this painting have such an impact on me. Were they conveying some hidden meaning? Colors have been used throughout time to symbolize qualities. Black and white set against one another traditionally symbolize good and evil, or right and wrong: fairytale villains, such as the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* and Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*, tend to appear dressed in dark, menacing clothing, since black is so closely associated with evil. Green has multiple meanings in everyday speech: to say someone is "green with envy" describes that person's jealousy of another, while to call someone "green" may mean he or she is inexperienced or naive. Red is commonly associated with passion, as in the song "Lady in Red."

What then do the colors in "Houses of Parliament" mean, if anything? The first colors I noticed in the painting were the blue of the buildings along with the yellow and orange of the sky and reflecting water. On a color-wheel, orange-yellow is opposite of blue; these are complementary colors. According to chemist Michel-Eugene Chevreul's law of simultaneous contrast of colors, placement of such opposite colors next to one another causes the eye to see them as even more dissimilar. Large areas of complementary colors side by side, therefore, have the effect of making each other appear more intense. Since blue conveys sadness while yellow and orange both convey warmth, perhaps the contrast emphasizes the presence of a range of emotions, from joy to sorrow, in the world.

Whatever the individual hues may mean, the painting displays a general intensity of color. The colors are far more vivid than those ordinarily seen in real life. Often art intensifies color beyond the normal realm, especially when dealing with dreamlike experiences. In the movie *What Dreams May Come*, a man dies and the afterlife is depicted as a

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living, changing, painting. The landscape of his new world is full of colorful images and scenic vistas that sprout forth from his memories, desires, and dreams. The colors are even more vivid in his afterlife than in his life, because they spring from his emotions and match their strength. *The Wizard of Oz* differentiates between dream and reality by showing Dorothy's real world in black and white, while Oz is filled with vibrant color. The vividness of this magical land reveals to Dorothy what she is searching for in her own life, the realization of how wonderful her home truly is, which she cannot see under normal circumstances. The images from these two films are rooted in my memory: they are both beautiful and meaningful.

The most vivid colors I have seen in my life have primarily been in artwork, movies, or synthetic materials. As beautiful as a necklace of true flowers may be, its colors will never match the intensity of the plastic variety of leis sold at chain party stores. Such brilliance does not occur naturally, except in rare moments such as the sunsets over my lake. Ironically, the word "vivid" is rooted in the Latin word "vivere," which means "to live." Since artistic representations are often more vivid, are they more full of life than true life itself? These colors seem to capture an inner intensity of life that we are normally not perceptive enough to see.

Brilliant colors have the power to draw attention and inspire. Author Tracy Chevalier credits the vivid colors in Vermeer's painting "Girl with a Pearl Earring" as a major factor in her attraction to it. Inspired by the painting, Chevalier wrote an entire novel surrounding the fictional character, Griet, whom she invented as the identity of the girl featured in the painting. For Chevalier, the painting conveyed much more life than a singular image of some unknown young woman. A whole world of dramatic characters, emotions, sights, and sounds sprang forth from Chevalier's impression of a single painting. Just as the vivid colors in "Girl with a Pearl Earring" caught Chevalier's attention, it was the vivid hues of "Houses of Parliament" that drew me to it. Their vibrancy allows the contrasting colors to play more than just the role of illustrating structural forms in the scenery; they convey an atmosphere of warmth and enthusiasm, overpowering the indifference of a cold and dreary world.

The color in a painting may be an outward expression of the artist's personality. Painter Vincent Van Gogh once said that the color in one of his paintings was for the purpose of "suggesting some emotion of

an ardent temperament." Perhaps we are drawn to these intensely colored "impressions" of scenes because we long for that same intensity to shine through in our own world. The bold colors give the sense of a daring life, of passion. Our everyday routines pale in comparison. The vivid colors entice us with the intensity that it seems life should have. We are drawn to the life that brilliant colors evoke in our imaginations much as we are drawn to dramatic movies or soap operas—in order to live vicariously through them.

When I first moved into my college dorm, I found how much I took the value of color for granted. At home my walls had always been painted or covered with wallpaper and decorated with posters, photographs, and souvenirs I had acquired over the years. The walls of my new college bedroom were bare and white. Having underestimated the actual amount of wall space I would have, I had hardly brought anything with which to decorate. My part of the room seemed gloomy and uninhabited with all that empty whiteness, so I quickly searched for things to hang on my walls. I took pictures out of albums and taped them to the wall, splurged on several prints of bright scenery at a poster sale, and even hung up a few random things, such as large deep blue piece of fabric and a bright red fan my sister had bought while in Spain. The vivid colors instantly breathed life into my surroundings; their vibrancy revealed the latent vitality this room possessed. As I settled in to my newly adorned room, life and color simultaneously diffused to fill the emptiness.

THE SMELL OF SMOKE AND KEROSENE

CATHERINE RUSSELL

2/8/2002

Looking back, everything is yellow. The memories that I never thought would be so important are fuzzy at the edges, like someone poured water over the pictures in my mind and the colors all ran together. They're full of tiny holes where I can't put my finger on exact details. There, it's more of a feeling. The only way to describe that feeling is yellow; it's soft, warm, and safe, like putting on your favorite sweater right after it comes out of the dryer. That's how I will always remember him.

2/8/2001

I'm sitting outside in the middle of winter, freezing. My dad just called, Ronny's dead. My sister Lorraine and I are at the picnic bench on the front porch. The spotlight on the roof shines a circle of light onto the grass. It's like a green lake that fades into the black at its edges. The street runs parallel to our house, so even the occasional headlights from the passing cars don't interrupt us. It's so quiet. The only noise is our voices, and our crying. A box of Kleenex and a six pack of Yuengling lay between us. I look at my fingers wrapped around the neck of the bottle, and they are red and shaking. My mind is thick, and we are both rambling.

"When I come back from college, he won't be here to see me. He won't be down in the trailer where I can go and talk, or borrow a movie." I half scream, half sob. Countless memories flash through my mind, elusive and fleeting.

Russell
2/8/1991

Mommy has to go out for a little while. I'm going to stay with RonRon while she is gone. He lives in the trailer at the bottom of the hill behind our house. It's white and it has blue stripes across it. Me and Mommy drive down the hill in the red car, and then I get out. I don't like walking down the hill on my own because it's scary. The big trees behind my house are like the one we have in the living room at Christmas. They have sharp needles that scratch, and if you touch them, your hands get all sticky, and they smell like Daddy's pancakes for the rest of the day. In the day time, it's fun to play in the trees because you can collect the pine cones and make pictures with them. The trees are so tall, and no one can see you if you stay under the leaves. I know that someone could hide in the trees and jump out and take me away. When I do go down on my own, I make Mommy watch from the window, and I run as fast as I can. I run so fast sometimes I almost trip, but RonRon always waits at the door for me.

2/8/1998



It's 3:30. School got out an hour ago, but I waited so that none of my friends would see me leave. I see Uncle Ronny in the blue truck parked out front, waiting for me. The truck has lost its shine. It's now a dull blue, with brown rust surrounding the wheels. People call that cancer because it slowly eats away at the body, each day spreading imperceptibly until it eventually overcomes the whole vehicle. Kind of like how Uncle Ronny is slowly breaking down. His knees have been operated on so many times that the skin doesn't grow any more except in a thin layer, with mounds of

Gerald Tobin

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skin surrounding them. It looks like an eyeball with its lids glued open.

Drugs ravage his system too; Percacet after Percacet, pot, maybe heroin. No one in the family is sure exactly what he's on, but we know when he's high. His blue eyes glaze over, his voice gets thick, and he moves slowly, like his limbs are weighed down. But who can blame him? He's seen things that I can't even imagine; things that even the thought of make me sick. He was seventeen, only three years older than me, when he went to Vietnam. Scared, in a new, hostile environment where anyone could be the enemy, he was given a gun and expected to use it or die, so he used it. Some people are able to live through the experience and live an outwardly normal life. For Uncle Ron, however, it is too much. He is now dependent on his sister to live, and his ex-wife turned his daughter, his reason for living, against him years ago. I remember a time when my image of him wasn't clouded by thoughts of him popping pills, and I long to be ignorant again.

2/8/1991

I walk up the steps to the trailer, but they're not like the steps at home. These are made of wood, and they have cracks in them, and the bottom step is almost falling off. I see RonRon through the door. He opens the door and gives me a hug. It smells like the gas that he uses in the heater, which sits in the center of the room and warms the whole trailer. It used to make me cough, but I like the smell now. The windows are covered by old blankets tacked up to the wall because he doesn't like curtains. My favorite thing in the whole room is the orange thing that we put our feet on when we sit on the couch. It's shaped like a mushroom, and it's just the right size for me to sit on.

"So, what do you want to watch today, Bugger Boo?" he asks

"The Greatest Show on Earth." That's my favorite movie. It has elephants and clowns, and it's all about the circus.

I cuddle up in RonRon's bed and he covers me with his green, fuzzy electric blanket. It's so warm, and I wiggle my toes under the covers. RonRon goes into the kitchen and gets the York peppermint patties from the bottom drawer of the fridge, where he keeps them just for me. I fall asleep, and when I wake up Mommy is carrying me out to the car. I'm still wrapped in the green blanket, and over her shoulder I see RonRon waving from the door.

2/8/1998

I can see the soles of his Converse sneakers pressed against the glass of the window, his feet crossed at the ankles. Thank God none of my friends are here to see him stretched out asleep across the worn blue upholstered bench seat. I open the door, gripping the silver handle, and his feet flop on the seat, bouncing as they hit the cushioning. He jerks up, startled. He looks at me blankly for a moment, shakes his head to clear it of sleep, and swings his legs under the steering wheel. I throw my book bag onto the seat and climb up into the truck. He leans over to turn up the heat, and asks,

"Did you buckle your seatbelt?" Everyday he asks, so I reach across my chest and grab the buckle. Click.

"Yup," I say. "How was your day?"

"I went to the gas station to pick up kerosene, and the damn attendant couldn't figure out how to work the computer. It's bullshit, why can't people train their employees anymore? If I were working a job, I'd be damn sure that I knew how to do it the right way."

"Well that's not a problem, because you don't have a job," I think to myself. Then I feel guilty.

"How was your test?" he asks.

As I respond, I glance over at him. He's wearing jeans that are probably twenty years old. They're more white than blue, and the knees are so worn, you can almost see his skin through them. The tee-shirt he has on is at least as old as me. It is bright red with cracked and peeling white block letters across the middle that spell out DAILY NEWS. Today's *Daily News* is on the bench between us, and I can see the ink on his hands as they grasp the black steering wheel. His favorite flannel jacket is covering the tee shirt. It's light grey and blue plaid, and it has cigarette burn holes along the pockets. My mom buys him a new jacket every Christmas, but he keeps on wearing this one.

We head down the long curving driveway of the school, and I open one of my books, pretending to study. I don't want anyone who might be staying late for practice to see my face. We bounce up and down over ruts in the road, but my neck stays bent, and by the time we get to the street, it aches from resisting the natural movement.

My eyes wander around the truck. There are seven empty Diet Pepsi cans at my feet. Ever since Uncle Ron stopped drinking about five years ago, he's been addicted to Diet Pepsi. He never drives without one held between his knees. The speakers on the dashboard are pushed in,

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but they are a good place to hold his cigarettes. One Marlboro Red after another. He doesn't even take a single drag from half of them, but he needs to hold one at all times. He lights one, and it burns slowly, the tobacco curling inside the paper while smoke fills the car. The stale smell is trapped inside the upholstery, the windshield, his clothes, my clothes, our lungs. That's how he's smelled for as long as I can remember: cigarettes mixed with kerosene. The dust particles from the seats get caught in the sunlight that filters through the windows and in the smoke, and they hang suspended in the air for a second. We don't really talk, but occasionally he'll turn to me and laugh, and I see the lines around his eyes and the big gap on his bottom jaw where his teeth rotted out. We are on our road, which is nicknamed Rollercoaster Road because it has so many hills. Uncle Ron speeds up, and I can feel it as the tires lift off the ground and then touch down a second later. As I get out of the car, I say, "Thanks for the ride."

Just like every other day for the past four years, he says "Anytime, Darlin'. Call me if you need anything."

He waits to see that I get in the house and then drives down the hill.

2/8/2001

"Maybe it's better this way, you know?" Lorraine says. "When you come back from school, you will be a totally different person. The things about him that made you laugh will piss you off, and you'll feel sorry for him."

I look at her; her face is so much like my own. Her cheeks are red from the cold, tears, and beer, but underneath the red by her eyes it's all white. "You're not a little girl anymore, Katie. We both know that Ronny had problems and that everyone else in the world saw him as a bum. But he was a good man. He would have done anything for any of us, but especially for you. You were always his favorite, his buddy."

I remember now how he would drive me anywhere I wanted to go, how he went into Philadelphia to get me a case of Canada Dry vanilla soda because the stores around here don't carry it. How he let me learn to drive in his truck and didn't even yell when I backed it into the basketball pole. How he always carried my book bag for me. How he taught me how to play chess, how to dive, how to compute square roots, how to make the perfect sandwich. Then I remember how lately he was slurring his words, how he walked hunched over, constantly grabbing his side in

pain, how he never smiled anymore, and how lately, he barely ever left the trailer.

"It's better that he's gone," Lorraine says. "He was in so much pain. Sometimes our bodies just wear out." I see skin-less knees and blackened teeth.

My mom comes outside in her long blue nightgown with the furry teddy bear face on the front. "Come inside girls," she says.

"In a minute," we answer.

We're not going back in yet. I can picture her, sitting at the kitchen table with her sister, both at opposite ends of the table. Smoking their cigarettes, their lips curled around the filter, breathing deep, the smoke curling up around, through their hair, and out of their noses and mouths. The tears are dried on her face, but some moisture still clings to the cracks and lines in her skin. I can't be with her right now; I have nothing to offer.

Lorraine and I get up, but we move away from the door towards the hill, and we look down at the trailer. His light is still on, and the truck is there waiting for him to get in and ride to school to pick me up. We head down the hill, in the dark and cold, not wanting to believe he's really gone.

2/8/2002

I know now that Lorraine was right. I couldn't have returned home from Loyola and seen him in the same light. Before he died, I could feel my perception of him changing. I was seeing him more and more as a lazy drug addict instead of my favorite uncle. Soon, my memories of him would have been painful instead of happy.

In many ways, his death was the end of my childhood. I had lost other people that I loved and was as close to them as I was to him. But, I can trace my whole life by time spent with Ronny. He was a significant part of the yellow time, where I was happy and safe and naive. He is in my memory, forever suspended in time like the dust caught in the sunlight. When I think of him I am back in the trailer, snuggled beneath that green blanket or riding in the truck, as we fly over those hills, totally free for a moment. I am so grateful that I can remember him, looking at me and smiling his toothless grin, laughing and saying, "Have a good night, Darlin'."

LIFE'S MASTERPIECE

NICHOLAS SCOTT

Subconsciously our minds are obsessed with sounds, noises, beats, and music. We hear things and they stick in our minds or are easily forgotten. We listen to a song and tap our foot to the beat. Everyday some song pops into our mind that does not want to leave, and it keeps us humming, singing, or thinking. What is it that draws us to these songs and moves our bodies? Why are we people who without music, seem lost or empty? Music is the center of our lives. We are caught listening, critiquing, sometimes playing, and writing music at many different times throughout the day. Without music to sing our life's song, we would be deadened by spoken words. Music gives life and molds life. Music is alive.

It was seven o'clock Tuesday morning when the radio magically turned on startling me out of my slumber. "I never set my alarm that early," I pondered to myself, half-awake, half-asleep. I lay there motionless, staring at the ceiling with the first beams of sunlight slowly sneaking their way through the seams of my shade. It took me the duration of "8-6-7-5-3-0-9" to realize that it was Tuesday and I had class at eight. Good thing my brain did not totally shut down and allow me to turn off my alarm and wander back to sleep. I slowly sat up in my bed and surveyed the disaster my roommate calls his side of the room. The crunch of the plastic mattress signaled the repositioning of my roommate in his bed, forcing his pillow over his head. I slipped on my sandals, grabbed a towel, and journeyed outside my room to the bathroom down the hall. I turned on the shower to let it warm up while I got out my soap and shampoo. Of course I was the first one on the hallway to shower, so the warm water had not yet been circulated through the frigid pipes. As I stood there waiting, hearing the passing traffic and the drone of the water

hitting the shower wall, I noticed my foot tapping to the rhythm of that song I just listened to in my bed. There it was, moving as if it was singing: "8-6-7-5-3-0-9, 8-6-7-5-3-0-9." That damned tune had already possessed me! I shrugged it off and got into the shower, just trying to continue my normal routine. Minutes later, there I was, lathering my hair and humming the melody. It got me again. On top of that, I was thinking the lyrics and the guitar parts, and so, in my head, there appeared to be a Tommy Tutone concert, which is strange considering that I have never been to one of his shows nor do I even know what any of the band members look like.

I managed to make it through that shower and to my eight o'clock class, although I do recall that tune stalking me at least twice on the way over. "How annoying," I thought, "how a DJ on the radio can possess your whole day with a simple song." And that it did. As I entered the classroom already five minutes late I had to make a conscious effort not to start humming that wretched tune for fear of publicly humiliating myself. I was able to keep my lips tight, but my feet succeeded in tapping to the rhythm of the song. A song can be so overwhelming to me, probably because I am a musician. I do not just listen to a song, or hum a simple melody line. I analyze the chord structure and imagine the voicing. I see the drum part and follow the bass line. Can I just be normal sometimes? As it ends up I missed a few things the teacher was saying, but I managed to stay somewhat alert for the rest of the class.

It was already 7:00 p.m., and I found myself sitting behind the piano at a City of Angels pit band rehearsal. As I warmed up and looked through the score to see what songs we were practicing today, I was interrupted by those numbers—that song; "8-6-7-5-3-0-ni-ee-ine!" Being the musician I was, I simply plucked out the chords to the song, which had so rudely interrupted my normal daily life and diverted my focus so incessantly. There it was—my time to shine for the band in my head. I worked all day at the song, and sure enough it came pouring out like something that had been practiced for weeks.

About two years ago on a Sunday morning I was at church accompanying the choir on the piano. As I can remember it was a normal Sunday. There was not anything about the weather that stood out. It was not a special feast day. Nobody I knew was celebrating a birthday. The songs that we sang were familiar ones we had all sung before, and the Sunday followed perfect routine, except for the one thing

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that now stands out in my mind.

Whenever I play a song I want to do my best and sound good. I like to feel the music and make the instrument sing. Sometimes when a song is played too much, it loses its meaning and becomes difficult to express. It becomes just another set of chords and some melody that gets blurred together with other tunes. The song, which I remember, is exactly that: some tune that mixes in with the rest of them. I have performed this song countless times, and only once have I felt the way I did on this particular Sunday. "Here I Am, Lord" was the communion song. It started the same as it always had. The piano began with its ballad-like intro and the male voices started to sing the first verse. It is one of those pieces that starts small and builds to be something huge. I do not ever before remember it getting quite as big as it did on this Sunday.

As I played I glanced around at the assembly; I practically had the song memorized. I do that sometimes when I am bored. The second verse was led by the mellow female voices and followed by the refrain, which was sung by both male and female voices. Maybe that was it: the blend of the voices that made it perfect, or the way it was sung. But it was perfect enough to draw me away from my trance and into the music. At that moment I played with such vigor and strength that it had to wake everyone up from their dazes. A pungent shiver ran down my back, through my arms, and into my hands, which must have triggered the most spectacular sound ever. I became taken away by this music and by this sound. My mind was somewhere so deep into the music that not even a gunshot could awake me. I recall my eyes going out of focus and my face revealing a blank stare. Whatever it was, I was not coming out of it until the song was over, and who was to say when it would be over because it seemed governed by its intensity. Somewhere along the way, the Holy Spirit must have tapped me on the shoulder because I received the signal to end the song. I led it from its climax and brought it to its conclusion. The story was then told. Not so often do I tell or listen to a story that intensely, but this time something or someone stronger must have been guiding me. This was not a normal Sunday by any means. It must have been "Here I Am, Lord" Sunday, and nobody told me about it.

As a songwriter I can relate to what it is like when you are deep into a project searching for that perfect lyric or perfect progression. An idea floats around in your mind and you want it to stay until you are able to put it on paper. It seems that sometimes that idea is better in your

head or just does not come out right. I know that when I go to write a song I want to produce something that people will want to hear and enjoy. Perhaps that is the challenge presented to any kind of writer. It can be a burden or help, depending upon which light one wants to cast upon the subject. But it is for sure that when one writes, he or she wants to be left alone to ponder the thoughts which take up precious memory, and to preserve them so the message can be written, and later successfully delivered.

Recently I traveled down the hallway of my dorm to my friend's room, searching for him, like I often do. Most of the time I am successful in finding him in his room on his chair next to his computer, but this time I found another one of our friends sitting there watching television. Naturally I asked the kid sitting there where Mike was, because I was in search of him. He responded saying, "I think he's across the hall talking to his girlfriend." This seemed fair enough because that is what Mike often does. So I exited the room and proceeded to the kitchen across the hall only to find that the door was shut. Confused, I thought, "The door is never shut. I wonder why." Sure enough I heard the sound of a guitar reverberating around the room. I opened the door only to find Mike sitting down playing his guitar at the table with a pad and pen. I kept my head in the doorway for a while, it seemed, and processed what he must have been doing. He was playing something, which I knew he made up because he played it for me before, and was singing some words that appeared to be written on the pad in front of him. Throughout the duration of me poking in on his time alone with his floating thoughts, he managed to never notice me. Keeping in mind that he was probably trying to write, I politely removed my head from the doorway and gently let the door shut, hopefully allowing him to finish verbalizing the thoughts streaming in his head.

As I walked back to my room, I felt proud for him and for me. I was happy that he was writing because I know how much pleasure it can bring. I was also excited to hear what he was composing. I was proud of myself for leaving him and his thoughts alone. I had no right interrupting them. They were meant to be together at that very moment devising a way to express what was deep within the soul. I was glad that I decided to leave and let that moment be for them, because I know that is what I would want.

Music comes from deep within us. It is sometimes difficult to

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explain where it comes from or why it comes, but it is there and will always be there. There is seldom a day that goes by when we fail to hum a melody, tap a rhythm, think a lyric, or hear a song. If you wake up to an alarm, you wake up to music. You may not realize it, but that buzzer is going on and off in a rhythmic pattern. If you wake up to a beep, then you are hearing a note in the musical scale. You might drive to work and listen to talk radio. Although it might be talk radio, there is always some background music to alert the listener that the traffic report is coming on or that weather is next. If you do not listen to the radio on the way to work in the car, or if you take the train, you still encounter music: in the drone of the engine, the hum of the tires on the road, or the rattling of the train on the track. If you do not work, then you surely must walk! There is nothing more rhythmic than walking. If you are confined to a wheel chair then you must push yourself in some kind of rhythm, or listen to the hum of the electric motor powering your chair's movement. Anyone who has ever turned on a vacuum cleaner knows that it makes some noise. Anyone who has ever listened to the vacuum cleaner realizes that it sings a note.

If you ever go through a day when you do not hear music or any musical element, please let me know, because I have never experienced such torture. I could only imagine that if that ever happened, our own bodily rhythm would get thrown off, and our day would just seem different. Where would we be without music? Without rhythms? Without beats? Without tones? Since most of us do not realize that music is all around our environment, most of us would not know if that music was not here. Our day would be different if music was not present, but we would not realize.

When that song from the early morning radio show repeated itself throughout my head for the whole day, I was unaware as to why it happened. Perhaps it was meant to play in my head. Maybe that song did not ruin my day; maybe it made my day. Maybe that song is what I needed to get me out of bed. Maybe it gave me purpose. Without that song, I might have overslept and missed my early class, leaving me in confusion for the entirety of the day. That song might have been my fuel. I will never know why I felt the way I did on that particular Sunday, and I will never question it. I remember that particular instant to this day, and probably will never forget it. It is a musical moment that just "is" and always will "be." It adds song to my life. The moments between people and their thoughts are precious enough to be left alone and personal. The

song that is written is probably their best way of really saying what is going on, because if they were to try and speak what is precious to them, it might just come out all wrong and distorted in a moment where clarity is the greatest importance. The moments we are given to spend time with our thoughts are the ones that write out life's masterpiece. A song speaks ten times louder than any phrase, any sentence, any paragraph, or any book. A song is so much more than any essay. A song sticks. A song makes you move. You can feel a song. A song is alive.

There is much mystery left in music for which we dare not try to find answers. Instead we should enjoy the days that the music brings us and cherish the moments which are unspeakable. Without these songs in our life, we would be deadened by spoken words. Music really gives us life. Music really is alive.

MOONRISE

MARISA NIMON

Perception is relative. I've moved the folio around the room, exposing it to all different lights, heights, and angles, but still am left unsatisfied. Of course I realize that no matter the position, the photograph remains the same. From the outside, the book is ordinary, despite its size, with ordinary pieces of paper sewn into its binding. Its cover is of simple design. Ansel Adams at 100 stands alone, centered, in its natural colored glory. The earth tones give birth to symbolism at its best. A passerby, ignorant of the contents, might call it plain. If only they'd opened the cover, they too would appreciate the symbolism here. Every one of those very ordinary pieces of paper bound in simplicity is ornamented with an extraordinary image, a piece of art, words unspoken. I've held a conversation with my subject, page 96. For this reason I want it to be perfectly placed. I want to be able to capture it, turn up its volume, and listen again to everything I heard. Finally it rests, leaned up against the side of my bed, light cascading down the page from above.

Brightest, simplest is the dark skyline, now blacker than black, while a glowing shadow slowly makes its way downward to the bottom of the page just as the moon has done for the cemetery in this photograph. The spotlight hanging from the sideboard is positioned over Ansel Adams' "Moonrise" in such a way that all the tiny dust particles, which were also attracted to this piece it seems, create a starry effect against the blackened sky.

Mi hija, I'm telling you that's the Big Dipper. No, Papa, it's not. It's the little one. The little one isn't visible this time of year. Papa please, that is the Little Dipper. Mi hija, let me show you.

A blanket of stars, like fairy dust, lain across the smooth canvas-like sky, sparkling, as we talked on for hours. The New Mexico sky,

especially at night, in summertime, when the wind is warm, is a sight not to be missed. It's special. My father pulled me close to him, reaching from behind, taking my hand in his, and pointed our fingers toward heaven. We did this often and though it may seem a silly way to spend an evening, we didn't care. This was our time. Those were our stars and it never really mattered which was which. My father used to say that God painted that sky just for us to get lost in together. There we'd have no worries, only each other.

This place is free. The landscape embodies clarity. No pollution blurs the stars nor smears the clouds. No planes interrupt the crisp sound of a silent northern New Mexican sky. Every star is in sight. I used to lie in the back of my father's truck after closing time and stare up at those stars in awe on the bumpy road home. The creamy Milky Way stretched across the ceiling like unmixed milk at the surface of a chocolate dream. Stars snuggled themselves tightly around the creamy band and glistened in the moonlight.

Dad? Yes, *Mi hija*? Why does the Milky Way live in New Mexico? *Ha, what do you mean?* Well this is the only place I can see it. *Well baby, just because you can't see it doesn't mean it's not there. It all depends on where you are standing.*

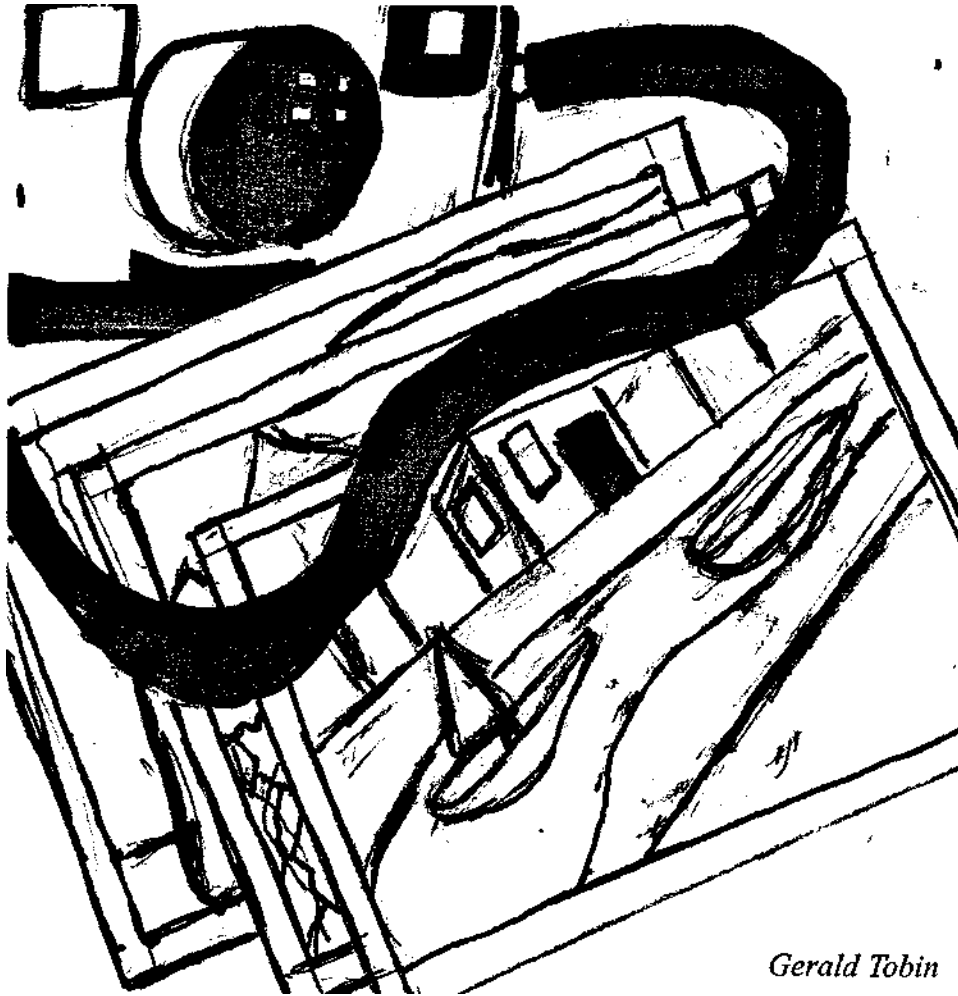
Adams stood atop his car when he took this photograph. Pure chance led him to this spot. He had been working all day in Santa Fe on a shoot and after becoming frustrated, decided to head north for a more agreeable landscape. He just happened to glance to his left while driving the highway, at which time he saw this "extraordinary situation - an inevitable photograph." In the name of art he promptly stopped the car and swiftly gathered his equipment. He knew that if the photo were not executed quickly, the light would fall and the white crosses would slide into the shade. Though his companions did not understand his rash behavior, Adams saw something artistic in this scene. "He felt at the time it was an exceptional image and when he took it, he felt an almost prophetic sense of satisfaction".

Looking at it now I feel the same satisfaction. The position is just right, just how I wanted it. So many thoughts are evoked from this scene, in this light, from this angle; so many words unspoken are lifting themselves from the page, floating in through my eyes, traveling down to my heart and out my fingertips. The spotlight from above the folio is shedding a faux moonlight on the famous landscape. Adams was said to be a bit of a loner. He thus tried to speak to people, to convey messages,

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through his images of the quiet nature. Though his words may not be the mirror image of my own, the important thing is to appreciate the common evocation of thought.

As the rule of thirds moves us downward into the second, and slightly more complex, section of the photograph, the gray mountain



Gerald Tobin

landscape, my thoughts drift like the snow capping each peak. I'm taken back to my grandmother's stucco porch facing the foot of Bobcat Pass. Her stories always began in the same way. *All of the women in our family are very strong.*

An old photograph hangs, dusty with character, in my grandmother's bedroom. Originally it was taken in black and white and the lady, dressed all in black, hair pulled into a bun, had her complexion painted on as people often did in that day. Isabelita hung in an oval metal

frame rusted with history. I passed her and ran my fingers across her feet many times before though I knew neither her name, nor her story. Still there was something very familiar about the face she was making. She was very old, but lurking in her smirk was the spirit of a tenacious child. I couldn't place her so I moved on as children often do.

It was summer and my great great grandmother, Isabelita, had gone to stay in her cabin up in Bobcat Pass for the harvest. One evening while outside milking her cow, she lost her way in the fog, which had leaned in to kiss the earth. Unafraid, she began to walk, accompanied by her dog Shyita. She walked and walked until coming to an abandoned miner's cabin. There she slept for the first night and listened to the mountain lions moving closer and closer to the cabin. Still, she slept unafraid. The next day she awoke and followed the stream downhill. Shyita periodically left her supposedly in an attempt to lure her home. For three days and three nights, wearing only a sweater and her apron, carrying a box of matches, Isabelita followed that stream downhill. When she finally reached the foot of the mountain she had traveled all the way to Costilla, Colorado. She found a small house and settled there with a family whom she helped with laundry and other chores. Her whole village, including my great grandfather who was only five at the time, set out on horseback to search for her. Because there weren't any means by which she could contact them, she continued to work. Days later a member of one of the search parties stopped at the casita and asked if anyone had seen her. In hopes of receiving a reward, the man who owned the house denied seeing her. Isabelita, hearing the two men speak from the creek behind the house, came running with that child like smirk resting on her face. She was taken home safely and lived for many years passing on the story of her experience.

Experience changes the way you look at things. After hearing the tale of Isabelita, I went back to my grandmother's bedroom and again peered at her portrait. I looked at her differently now. I understood why my grandmother had always looked at it with such love and admiration. It was no longer a dusty artifact, but a piece of my history. I knew now why she looked so familiar. My great grandfather, Eugenio, he makes that face. I make that face. My perception had been changed.

Looking down again at art, I move to the foreground of "Moonrise." I venture forth into the third and final section of the photograph. The moonlight hits the gravestones and crosses in such a way that their white hue creates a dancing reflection in the shadows of the

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foreground. Perhaps it's really here that our conversation began. The tiny crosses that Adams fought to capture in the moonlight were the first to catch my eyes. They add something historical to the photograph, something deep. I began to ask myself how many different stories were buried underneath those tiny white crosses? How many prayers were said in the pews of that church?

Dios te salve María, llena eres de gracia, el Señor es contigo, bendita tú eres entre todas las mujeres, y bendito es el fruto de tu vientre, Jesús. Santa María, Madre de Dios, ruega por nosotros pecadores ahora y en la hora de nuestra muerte. Amén.

I stood in the vestibule of St. Antonio's with a series of stained glass designs fluttering in a mosaic of colorful light before me, my hands sweating. Between my feet the words **Vaya Con Dios**, Go with God, are etched in a slab of concrete. I dipped my finger in the small glass bowl of holy water at my right and slowly made the sign of the cross on my forehead. My great grandfather, Eugenio Rael, built this church. In fact he built every house he's ever lived in and hung his heart on every door. He laid the foundation, hung the rafters, shaped each pew to perfection, and built the altar from scratch. I smiled as I noticed his personal touch, a small sun, chiseled front and center on the face of the altar. My grandmother and I knelt in the first pew and together said the Hail Mary in Spanish. Mid prayer I opened my eyes and looked around me. This place was special. It represented safety and sanctity, family and history, faith and love. That meant something, something that stretched deep inside of me. From the outside its square shape and natural adobe color look simple to the eye. One wouldn't even acknowledge that it was a church unless by chance you noticed the small white cross hanging over the south entrance. You'd have to go inside to understand its beauty. You'd have to search deeper still to the roots to understand its grace. The prayer I said that day with my grandmother was a common one, yes, but said in her language, with her grandchild, in a church her father built made it special, different. Somehow, even to me, it had a sweeter ring to it that day.

I guess my father was right. I guess Ansel Adams was too. It all depends on where you are standing, who you are standing with. To the average photo buff the church and cemetery at the feet of "Moonrise" are simply articles in a beautiful landscape that add character to a shot, but for the very few they might be the roots of a conversation with history.

I've reached down and clicked the switch to the spotlight.

Goodnight moon. I picked up the book and one last time investigated the likes of "Moonrise." I could get lost here. I thought to myself about all I've taken from this photograph and remain baffled with the differences in what I'm seeing and what he must have seen when he took this, what you'll see. I went over once more all of my reasons for choosing it, or maybe I should say all of the reasons that it chose me. Like Adams, I looked at this picture and saw art, but with that I also saw family, and struggle, and point of view, and the relativity of it all. I realized that we all have our stars and unmixed milk, photographs and legends, chapels and prayers. Each image in that book tells a story, but not every one will be in a language I can understand and not every one will want to talk. I've closed it respecting that. I sighed as I brought the natural colored folio to its place. Finally it rests in the corner, and all I have learned will rest with it inside a chapel of black and white stories.

VERNUM REPROBA

J.D. ANDRASKO

I died a few days ago. And though I expected to gain some sort of profound knowledge from this experience, I was less than satisfied with what I received.

More uneasy by this feeling of intellectual emptiness than by the fact that I was dead, I decided to engage in conversation with some of the great minds of history. Evidently, and much to my surprise, I had a reputation that preceded me, because many of those minds also wanted to speak with me. I considered talking to Beethoven, or Newton, or Whitehead, but decided to begin my discussions with the philosopher who did the most important work with what I believe is the basis of all philosophy — that is the question of existence.

Descartes floated on one of Aristophanes' clouds, and I stood on a solid foundation of nothingness so that our heads were level. We did not speak, but thought with each other. This mode of discourse enabled me to pinpoint and remember his and my own rationale much more easily than words could have.

I thought...Why?... and he finished my thought.

...was I content to accept 'cogito ergo sum' as a truth? Because it is the only true thing that one can possibly know. One is only privy to his own knowledge and thoughts in life and no one else's, unless they blatantly display them to you. And even still, you may not understand the exact principles from which they are working, or the motives behind their telling you. Your own thoughts are the only ones that can be true to you...

.. .But René, how do we know these thoughts are our own? I can think of three other possibilities for the origins of our thoughts. First, they could originate from that celestial powerhouse, God. It would be

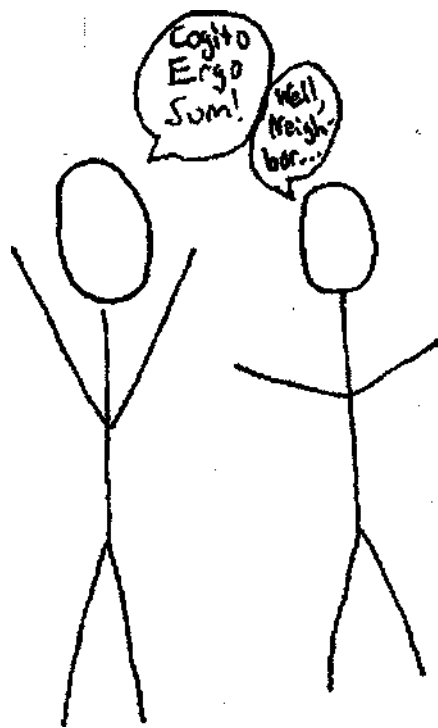
quite impossible for our thoughts to be of divine inspiration unless from some deity other than God Himself. My own doubts (not to mention those of millions of people around the world) go beyond simple questioning of faith; they are as advanced as pursuing a real and definitive understanding of God, a necessarily forbidden act by Christian dogma. So, why would a good God place thoughts in my head that would send me to hell? ... Then, I suppose that you have learned from some of the neurobiologists here that a thought might be a series of random firings in the synapses of the brain. However, I think that logic itself can prove this to be quite wrong. It is difficult to believe that a random series of thoughts could lead to logical trains of thought and conclusions of any sort. ... According to these two possibilities, it might seem that our thoughts are our own. However, from talking with psychologists, you may have also come to know that there is a part of the mind called the 'unconscious' that rules all of our thoughts. Now, since this part of our mind is in charge of our thoughts, and we are not aware of it, how is it possible for a person's thoughts to be true to them? Granted, the unconscious is a part of the mind, and the mind is a part of the person, but as long as it functions below our consciousness, then our own thoughts and motives are foreign to us...

He did not seem restless. Rather, he seemed interested in what I was thinking.

He thought...I doubt that you will convince me that I do not think for myself, but it is a possibility, one that I am glad you doubted in the first place. My entire philosophy centers on doubting things that are widely accepted and it is only fitting that it should be doubted itself. But, if you cannot say 'cogito ergo sum,' then how can you prove that you existed?...

This question set me slightly wondering how exactly I was to prove this. My situation provided me with the perfect thought.

...Long before your time, Socrates refuted many people in part by using the principle of opposition. That is, if something has a certain property then it cannot rightly also have the property that is the exact opposite. So then, I suppose that if I did exist before, it would have been impossible simultaneously not to exist, and likewise, if I do not exist in my present state, then it should be equally impossible to exist. If I am to prove that I did exist before I came to this place, then I must choose an aspect of existence on which to focus. The soul, if it exists, is ephemeral; the mind is as wily and elusive as the soul; and the heart is intangible, at



Rene Descartes is unable to sway Mr. Rogers.

best, which leaves us only with the body. There is no doubt that my body did exist in life, and that it does not now exist. In life, it was a tangible object that others could bear witness to seeing and feeling, which might not be said for those other possible aspects of existence. Thus, since my body did exist in life, and since the body is one of the aspects of existence, then life is existence...

...That is very

well and good, but suppose I were to turn the tables and ask how you know that your body actually did exist in life and that it was not just an illusion. It is only logical for me to doubt you. If the fact that we think for ourselves is to be doubted, then the idea that the living world is reality (the setting of existence) is not safe from doubt either...

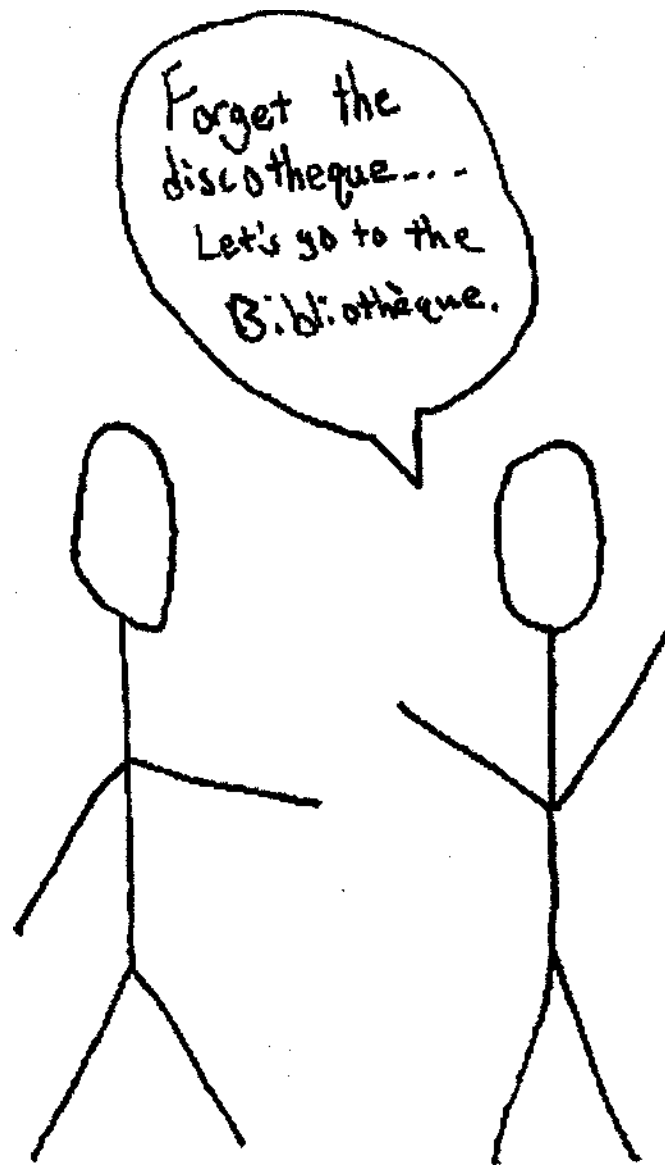
...Very well then, I do not need to prove that the physical world with which we all interact (including our own bodies) is real. Instead, I can return to the ancient principle of opposition. Supposing for a moment that life actually is not existence, then what must it be according to this rule?...

...Non-existence...

...And it is obvious then, that existence would consist of a time other than that which we spend in this allegedly 'non-existent' life. That is, there would be a time before and after in which you would exist, and life would be the time in between. So people would be able to pass from existence into non-existence and back into existence. But this is not possible according to Socrates' ancient principle. He would say, suppos-

ing still that life is not existence, that the time before and after would occur on the same plane of being with each other. In order for this to be true, if life were in fact non-existence, then people would be constantly passing in and out, originating in existence, and passing back into existence after life. This is preposterous: we all know that it is impossible to leave life and then return ... We know that we can freely pass into non-existence (death) from life, but it is an undocumented case of a person entering life from death. And thus, life is existence...

And from there, having, in my mind, proven my case, I was resuscitated back into life, almost immediately after I had died.



Thanks for reading The Forum.

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