

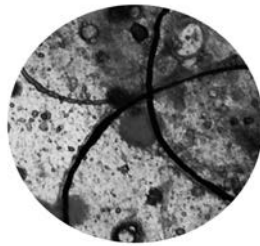
The background is a complex, abstract composition. It features a light-colored base, possibly off-white or cream, heavily textured with numerous small, multi-colored splatters and dots in shades of pink, red, yellow, blue, and black. Overlaid on this are several large, hand-drawn black circles of varying sizes and positions. Some circles are solid black outlines, while others appear to contain faint, colorful patterns or are partially filled with the surrounding splatters. The overall effect is one of organic, chaotic energy.

The

Writing Anthology

2014

The Writing Anthology



A publication of the English Department and the Art Department

Edited by Rachel Bing, Kaitlyn Sharp, and Dana Wolthuizen

Advisor Walter Cannon

Central College Pella, Iowa 2014

Central
College
— 1853 —

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 34th edition of *The Writing Anthology*.

We are very excited to share this year's publication with you. After reviewing nearly fifty submissions, we selected the following thirteen pieces to be featured in the anthology. The difficulty of this selection process is a testament to the excellent quality of student writing at Central College, and we are proud to see all the hard work put in by our peers.

The strength of many of the chosen essays lies within the powerful connections the writers make between different themes, experiences, and concepts. As a result, we wanted to design the anthology in a way that would reflect the connections between the ideas presented in these diverse pieces. The first seven essays are centered around how humans and objects are affected by external factors ranging from art, political conflict, death, and religion. In the next five pieces, we feel that the authors explore how they affect our natural environment and in turn how it transforms us.

The author of the final essay wrestles with her identity and the change within herself as she matures. We can learn valuable lessons from each author regarding how we as humans are altered by our external, natural, and internal environment. We hope you find the progression of this year's edition meaningful while reading these exemplary pieces.

Each year we select an author as the recipient of the John Allen Award for the best example of student writing. This year, we are pleased to announce that Mycaela Crouse will receive this honor for her insightful essay grappling with her sense of home and its social and natural history in "Vandalia."

We want to congratulate all of the student authors: thank you once more for your exceptional work. We would also like to thank the professors who took notice and submitted these essays to the *Writing Anthology*. We specifically offer thanks to our faculty advisors, Dr. Walter Cannon and Dr. Paul Kovacovic. Your expertise, guidance, and support throughout this process have been greatly appreciated.

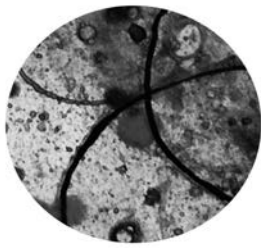
Additionally, we would like to thank Professor Mat Kelly and all of the talented artists for their outstanding contributions. We would particularly like to thank Kathryn Zaffiro, who provided the cover art with her piece "Bubble Colors." Finally, we would like to thank Steffanie Bonnsetter, project director for Central College Communications.

Again, thank you to all who made this year's publication possible. We simply couldn't do it without you. Happy reading!

Rachel Bing '15
Kaitlyn Sharp '14
Dana Wolthuizen '15

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A Voice from Iran

Emalea Diehl

LAS 110: Creativity and Human Nature

“I’m interested in juxtaposing the traditional with the modern, but there are other more philosophical aspects that interest me as well—the desire of all human beings to be free, to escape conditioning, be it social, cultural, or political, and how we’re trapped by all kinds of iconographies and social codes” (Heartney 239). Photographer and videographer Shirin Neshat, an artist originally from Iran, explores fascinating and controversial subjects using art as her medium to allude to her thoughts and ideas. Neshat grapples with the struggle of identity and the role she as a woman plays in Islamic Iran and its contrast to her experience in American culture and society through her art. As she embarks on this journey, she begins to discover the identities of women as a whole that surround her, and consequently, her own identity. Although all of her works, complex and rich in meaning, deserve recognition and observation, time only allows for the exploration of her expression and identity

I was wowed by Emalea Diehl’s, “A Voice from Iran,” when I read it the first time and I still am. The research paper asked students to address how a visual artist examines the issues of identity and difference in their art making. I was impressed with the maturity and sophistication of writing that was exhibited and with Emalea’s ability to interweave her own voice to the level of the cited passages that she used. In particular, Emalea wrote eloquently with a fullness of understanding about Shirin Neshat’s movie,

Women Without Men.

- Brian Roberts

in a few of her works—the poignant, fierce photography collection, *Women of Allah* and her arresting and moving film, *Women Without Men.*

When searching for threads of identity and self-expression in the works of an artist, it is essential to know the background of the individual to more fully understand the current positions and expressions the art takes. Jerome Bruner expounds on this idea of identity and self, noting “we constantly

construct and reconstruct a self to meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future” (Bruner 45). Thus, by reviewing Neshat’s past experiences and childhood, it is easier to understand her current art and the messages it

conveys.

In an interview with Scott MacDonald, Neshat shares her childhood and early adult life experiences. Spending her childhood in Iran, Neshat grew up with her father’s influence to pursue education and opportunity. Nontraditionally, he extended



this mindset to both his sons and his daughters. After an education in a Catholic boarding school, Neshat joined her siblings abroad

to continue her education through high school and college in the United States. Out of all her sisters, Neshat was the only one to remain in the United States and finish her college degree, graduating from U.C. Berkeley and continuing on to gain her Master of Arts and Master of Fine Arts through

Berkeley. After spending a few years creating what Neshat calls “mediocre art,” she discarded her work in art, instead focusing on her job with Storefront for Art and Architecture, a non-profit organization created by Kyong Park, Neshat’s husband at the time. She attributes her time there as her real art education. After ten years with Storefront for Art and Architecture, Neshat stepped away from the job, eventually turning to her own artistic career (MacDonald 11-20).

Around this time, Neshat made her first trip back to Iran after over a decade of absence, primarily for the purpose of reuniting with her family as well as her country. As she expounds upon this trip to Lila Zanganeh, Neshat describes her journey back to Iran in 1990 as life changing. With the Islamic revolution, the country had gone through extreme alterations and seemed a terrifyingly different world than the one she had left behind so long ago. Although it initially brought up numerous emotions, ultimately it led to fresh inspiration for her art—it gave her a purpose (Zanganeh 46). This purpose is what drove her to resurrect her work in art, giving her a passion and a subject. In the beginning, her art was not overtly opinionated, and she simply attempted to record and interpret what she was experiencing in her return to Iran and the Islamic

revolution. As she uncovered more about what was really happening, however, her position became more unforgiving. With her open judgment of the treatment of women, she was forced into exile (TED).

Addressing a myriad of social, as well as personal concerns in which she herself was caught in the middle, Neshat conveyed her thoughts and opinions in regards to feminine status inconsistencies and conflicting identities through her art as a female Iranian. Because her work appeared to ring in support of the chorus of Western idealism—values such as personal choice, individualism, and liberty—critiques and discussion around her art focused on the political stances as well as the feminist messages (Heartney 230-233). Slowly, her focus toward women, specifically women from Iran, began to develop. In her work, *Women of Allah*, Neshat begins to display her response toward the treatment, attitudes, and roles of women. By portraying Muslim women through the political lens, while still depicting their authenticity, Neshat opened a window into a world of the silenced and invisible for her Western viewers (Heartney 233).



Her series of images, *Women of Allah*, invoke questions more than any other response. The stimulating and somewhat shocking images consist primarily of a covered woman holding a gun in various positions, in many instances, pointing the barrel at the viewer. In most of these pieces, Neshat herself is the primary photographed subject. She has intricately added ancient Iranian poetry on any visible parts of the woman’s skin in most of the photos.

The photos seem to suggest that she herself is at war. Torn between her cultural and religious customs of Iran and Islam and her desire to be free from the suffocating treatment of her sex, she is swimming in conflicting emotions. Although her work clearly expresses anger, it also alludes to a sort of frantic sensation of being trapped, as this same culture and religion is a part of her identity. To separate seems impossible. In addition, her experience with Western idealism has not been entirely liberating. In her other works, she refers to the void she feels with the encompassing individualism of the West. Responding to questions regarding her “Women of Allah” series and its translation, Neshat comments,

“You have to keep in mind the context in which this work was made. I had no art career; I was not thinking about audience since I didn’t have any; I was making this work for myself “



(MacDonald 36). Eleanor Heartney points out in her commentary on Neshat’s work that “critiques that situated her within what would later, post 9/11, be dubbed ‘the clash of civilizations’ and acclaimed her as a symbol of resistance to Iranian repression, miss much of the complexity of her work” (Heartney 230). In other words, if the viewers easily label her one way or another, they are not looking close enough. The underlying message is rich with obscurities and conflict.

Daringly, after completing the series, Neshat chose to alter the angle with which she approached her work as well as the medium of her art from photography to filming. Believing that it would broaden the scope and effects she desired her art to produce, she plunged full-force ahead into this new venture (MacDonald 40). The medium of film proved to be a successful vehicle, allowing her art to take the expression a step further. With the new

form came fresh ideas, taking Neshat to a variety of different places. Because she had been exiled from Iran, Neshat traveled to numerous countries such as Turkey, Morocco, and Mexico

to form her work and emulate Iran by recreating similar cultural depictions (TED). She has created a number of short pieces, each lasting around ten minutes in length.

One of her biggest projects, *Women Without Men*, was completed somewhat recently, releasing on April 9, 2010, in the United States. The film, adapted from the book *Women Without Men: A Novel of Modern Iran* by Shahrnush Parsipur, follows the lives of four women from unique, distinct backgrounds, ranging from a wealthy upper-class position to the status of a prostitute. As their individual struggles and oppression by the men accelerate, their worlds begin to collide as they are driven together through a mysterious garden, guarded by a caring elderly man. To their utter relief and amazement, three of the

women find refuge in the garden. Slowly, they begin to heal. However, eventually, their utopia is shattered by the inevitable reality of a depraved world, and the film ends with a sobering tone, leaving the audience uncomfortable and unresolved. The motion picture captures a glimpse at the ache and longing the women are consumed with—as one of the women articulates in the closing scene, “All that we wanted was to find a new form, a new way. Release.”

For a motion picture, *Women Without Men* stands out in its artistic beauty, exploring surprising shots and angles. The soft, subtle use of color and lighting lends it an almost portrait-like quality while presenting entrancing cultural displays and representations of Iran. It is distinguished by its minimal use of dialogue; more is spoken in the spaces of silence than what is articulated in the verbal exchanges. Compared to other contemporary films, its plot moves slowly—yet at the same time profoundly, to



the viewer that reads between the lines. The end goal is to ponder, question, and linger in the ambiguity of injustice through art, versus the goal

of many traditional films to entertain. *Women Without Men* accomplishes this feat with haunting beauty and quiet power.

True to form, Neshat does not seek to answer questions, but to raise them. In an interview, she said of her artistic work as a whole, “it does not offer one-sided answers, because it challenges our political, and aesthetic stereotypes...purposefully, I was not giving my point of view, and that disturbed many viewers” (Zanganeh 45). The film forces the viewer to wrestle. Unrelenting, it does not offer any sort of resolution or solution for the treatment of women. Later on in this interview, when discussing the role of women in Iranian society, Neshat goes on to point out that feminism exists in Iran; it simply plays itself out in deeply contrasted ways compared

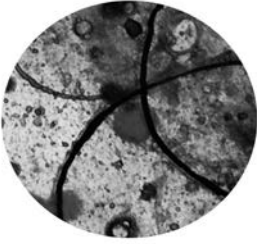
to Western society. She states that women are neither victims nor completely submissive to men, voicing her surprise at the indignation this opinion raises in Western-Iranian women. She believes that women have gained recognition in Iran and still possess it today through their own battle-efforts, and that it continues to grow (Zanganeh 47). In some ways, she herself seems to be groping just as much as her viewers for answers, not only about women, but also about herself. She points out that although women are suppressed and stifled, they still have a voice—regardless of whether or not it is heard. She fights fiercely for the recognition that women possess a strength and fortitude that is significant and enduring, regardless of whether they are overcome by another or not. Neshat does not possess the answers for change nor does she pretend to. She simply cries out for recognition

and release to be free.

Although only a few of her works have been showcased, *Women of Allah* and *Women Without Men*, it is clear that Neshat’s abstruse and complex analysis of women in Iran through art is also leading her down a path towards her own identity. The road is still winding and largely unknown, but she continues on, unafraid of overstepping the boundaries of political correctness and preconceived notions of expression and social identities. Her journey is not without cost, but she embraces her position despite the personal expense. As she states in the closing of a speech, “Iranian women have found a new voice, and their voice is giving me my voice. And it’s a great honor to be an Iranian woman and an Iranian artist even if I have to operate only in the West for now” (TED).

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Monologue

Kseniya Pronina

I liked Kseniya's work because it revealed a lot about the culture of the Mongolian Empire and even had a reference to Skywalker which as we know is used in *Star Wars*. I liked that her bibliography used older and newer references. I liked the set up of a grandmother talking to her grandson. This monologue reads well too.

-Cathy Haustein

LAS 410: Science Fiction and Empire

Sleep my little man. Good warriors need a good sleep. Your legs need to be strong to ride the fastest horse for days and nights. Your arms need to be strong to keep a bow and kill your enemies in one shot. Your spirit needs to be strong enough to ride day and night without food. Your guts need to be strong enough to capture new lands and raise the power of our tribe.

Close your eyes, my little beauty, and sleep. Your grandma will be with you. Your crib is warm. Your blanket is made from wool. Do not be afraid, I can protect you. My arrows are fast and my eyes are sharp. I will kill hundreds of wolves if they are so stupid to interrupt your dreams. I will chase any evil spirits that live in the white Frozen Lands if they dare to see you. I am not afraid of these very powerful spirits that penetrate under people's clothes to turn people into white icy trees. Do not worry, I have a loud voice. I will call the greatest shaman. He will hear me and he will come. He will

speak with the Sky, he will beat his drum, he will dance the sacred dance, and all evil spirits will be terrified. They will run as fast as they can to the white Frozen Land and they will never presume to scare you.

Sleep, my brave warrior. When you start to walk I will take you to the Great Mountain. We will ride as many days, as teeth you have. We will climb at the top of the Mountain so you can see the greatest God of the Blue Sky. We will take off our hats, we will look up and we will call him. He will answer you, the greatest great-grandson of Genghis Khan. Tengri, the God of the Blue Sky will answer half-god Mongke, the future Khan of Khans (Hartog, p.7). But we need to be careful. When the Sun falls asleep, Sky-walker starts his hunting (Lamb, p.41). He is a very crafty hunter. He can look different to foolish careless horsemen. Sometimes Sky-walker is as round as a wolf's eye, sometimes he looks like wolf's fang. He has a big lasso to capture stupid people who look at him too long. Only the sun can fight him and chase him from the sky. But do not worry, we are not fools. We

will speak with Tengri after the sun wins over Sky-walker. We will be safe.

Oh, I will show you lots of sacred places where powerful rivers slow down to show their power and beauty. These are the holy places and even the most powerful people are not permitted to foul it. Rivers have the highest power and will punish people who disrespect them. I know, it is very hard to believe, but at the other end of the world the very stupid people live.

Anybody can reach them if he rides many days and nights in the different direction from the Frozen Lands. These people believe that they are more powerful than rivers. They foul rivers. They take off their dresses and put them into the rivers. And after the dirt is left in rivers they dry their dresses and wear it again. It is true! I saw it by myself. Why do they do it? Only to show that they are not afraid of rivers' power. Stupid, stupid people. They also like to wash dirt from their bodies and they make the powerful rivers accept the dirt. Why would anybody do that? They do not respect rivers and the rivers gave us a power to fight them, to kill their men,

and to capture their livestock. The stupid people will give us their gold until the sun looks at us and until we respect the rivers.

But the stupid people do not understand that. I remember how your half-god great-grandfather, our ruler Genghis Khan told them: "If you had not committed great sins, God would not have sent a punishment like me upon you" (Masselos, p.25). Yes, this is the truth. Their God is probably a very powerful God. He lives on the sky and speaks with them from long stone towers. But their shamans are useless. They know how to read spells, but they do not even have drums. How can even the most powerful shaman intimidate evil spirits without drums? I do not know why these people do not tie each shaman to the tails of two horses that run into different directions. They need to use our shamans with good loud drums.

Yes, my little warrior, these people are weird. They even do not eat normal food. They have sheep and hunt for deer and rabbits to eat them. But everybody knows that a wolf, or a dog, or a groundhog is as good as a horse or as a cow. Can you believe that they prefer to starve but do not eat a rat? Instead of that, they eat some weird orange and red balls that they find on trees or even on the ground. They argued that it is sweet and very tasty, but I was not so stupid to eat something that no normal people would eat. Do not worry, my little

man, you will eat only high quality food. Tomorrow, your grandma will chew meat from the ribs of the young fox for you. We have a leftover from our supper. I put it in a small leather bag and you will enjoy it. Your brother just milked a black mare. The sour milk is especially good when it is made from her milk. You will enjoy your lunch tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, and each day that will come after it.

Sleep, my little warrior, you will grow up big and strong. You will eat more than anybody else. You will drink until you can stand, and you will drink when you could stay, as do all honored men. You will have lots of wives and even more concubines, as it is appropriate for a good warrior. I will not be with you, at that time. I will sleep forever, but our family will help you choose the right wife for you. She will be from a powerful and rich clan. She will bring you even more wealth and respect. She will be a strong woman to give you healthy children. She will be a good hunter to help you in your military companies or to protect your belongings and your children while you will hunt.

Can you imagine, my little man, that there are women that cannot protect themselves? Women from faraway lands cannot use bows. I know it is hard to believe, but it is truth. I saw it. After my second husband kidnapped me from my first husband, I accompanied him

in his military company. Oh, I was a good warrior. You can be proud of me. Four other wives and I rode among our men. Our horses were as fast as our men's horses. Our arrows were as sharp as our men's arrows. We killed as many enemies as our men killed. We took as much gold as our men took.

I was a good warrior, I was strong and I was as brave as any man. It is not a surprise that men liked me. I was kidnapped four times and I was a good wife for all my men. I gave sons for all of them.

But women from other lands are so useless. Can you imagine, my little man, they do not even know how to use a lance or a hatchet? They wear dresses that are different from what men wear. They believe that it can make them more attractive. They connected long pieces of fabrics and wear it. How, I ask you, how can they ride horses if their dresses do not allow them to even sit on horses? They wear lots of useful stuff on their hands, necks, and in ears. Usually it is made from gold and gems. I saw one woman that wore so many gold hoops that all her hands were covered from her thumbs to her elbows. She wore enough gold to buy as many calves or foals as you can see. But she did not buy livestock; she wore all the gold to make her more attractive to men. Stupid woman! What kind of man would like a woman who cannot ride a horse? Why would a man want a wife that

cannot protect her children from wolves?

I remember when my father and my uncles decided that it was time for me to get married. They gave a sable cloak and horses to make me an attractive bride. They presented me red and orange boots. My oldest brother made them for me from soft sheepskin. He did the same boots for himself but painted them in gold and orange. I still wear those boots. My other brother gave me his coat. It was so big that I could wrap it around me two times and I was never cold.

At that time the head of our clan was dead and his first wife was in charge. She was really old, some people told me that she saw the beginning of the summer as many times as you, I, and your mother have on both hands. Yes, she was really old, but she was very clever and lucky. Can you imagine that she never broke any of her bonds? My duties were to serve her and despite the fact that I did not have a son, she treated me with respect. She taught me how to survive in the steppes if I need to enter it alone. She taught me how to resist shamans' spells if one of them decided to put a love spell on me. When I bind up my hairs, shaved it cross my forehead, and wore a gold diadem, she gave me to my first husband (Lamb, 49).

He was Genghis Khan's son. His mother was the superior wife longer than any other wives. My family made a good choice for me and I was a good wife. I hunted with him and I guarded his belongings if he hunted without me. I respected his clan. I give him two sons and another son, from probably another man. He was a good warrior. He died as a man of honor during the battle in faraway lands.

Sleep, my little man. You will never marry a stupid woman from faraway countries. These women are so useless that their men do not even ask that they advance. I always gave good advice to all my husbands. I helped my first husband choose his third wife. She was from a respected and rich clan. She brought us many horses, as you can see. You ride for two days. She brought us two sons from her previous marriage and she gave birth to two more sons. They all were good warriors.

I saved my second husband when warriors in white dresses and with covered faces attacked us. It was only he and I but it was as many enemies as fingers on your hand. They unexpectedly jumped out from a pile of big stones. I did not hesitate; I beat my horse and rode as fast as lightning. I waved my latch and killed one of them. He was very surprised when he died. Other men looked at

me and did not move for a couple moments. It gave me a chance to kill another one and my husband fought the rest. He was a good warrior and I was upset when a young Mongol warrior killed him. This warrior was strong and healthy and he made me be his wife.

He was young but clever. He wanted to be married to an experienced woman who knew lots about love and battles. I meet these requirements. When my third husband wanted to use a new weapon that three men from faraway lands gave him, I told him: "Kill them!" They swore that their village accepted him as a ruler. They swore that they loved him as a father. They swore that they were ready to follow him. But I noticed that their eyes were cold and motionless as a snake's eyes. And I told my husband: "Kill them!" He was a good warrior and he did it. He respected me, but when I became weak he left me in the steppes to die. He found another wife.

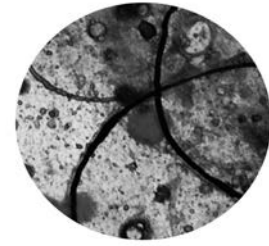
Sleep, my little man. Nothing will interrupt your dreams. Nothing will bother you. Your eyes are closed. Your cheeks are pink. Your lips smile. A small drop of milk glitters on your chin. Your tiny fists keep a toy hatchet. You will be a good warrior. You will be a ruthless man.

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The College Experience for Gay Women

Jessica Stika



*ANTH 366: Ethnographic
Field Methods*

Introduction

The college experience is different for everyone. Some young people attend large state universities, some go to trade schools or community colleges, and some choose to attend small liberal arts schools. Whatever type of school someone chooses, it is a whole new setting that differs from anything they have encountered so far in their life. But what about gay, female students? How are their college experiences different from those of heterosexual students, specifically at a small liberal arts college in the Midwest? This is the setting where I have conducted my research. The information I gathered stems from two gay, female informants in a relationship with one another. Karen and Susan are both juniors at Regional College, a small private college (all names and places have been changed to ensure confidentiality).

I used several different methods to obtain the data for my research. I began my investigation with participant observation, where I would simply hang out with my informants and note certain

In the course students learn how to employ a range of methods that anthropologists use to carry out research, from interviewing to participant observation. Early in the semester, students choose a sub-culture to document. I chose Jessie's paper for both its engaging personal writing style and its very interesting content. She documents the lives of lesbian college students, and does so through an engaging writing style that brings the reader into the lives of her informants.

-Jeffrey Bass

word choice, behaviors, and interactions between the two. In addition to observing them as they naturally interacted, I also completed several interviews with them, following both structured and unstructured formats. Most of my interviews, however, followed an unstructured format and consisted of free-ranging conversations where Karen and Susan had the freedom to guide me to what they saw as the most important aspects of their experiences and sub-culture. I then posed questions to them about themes, folk terms, or other important information as they arose.

All of my research and interactions with Karen and Susan circled back to that ever-elusive question: What is college all about for a gay, female student? I argue in this paper that college is a context for gay students like Karen and Susan to come out and communicate their newfound identity to others. It is a stage where they can gain a better understanding of how others

might react to their sexual orientation and potentially modify their actions for future success in communicating that identity. At times during this experience, challenges are posed, and Karen and Susan must learn how to handle them accordingly. They possess this unique span of four years where they can discover the difficulties they will face in the future and acquire knowledge for how to cope with that. Not only is college about learning how to navigate the consequences that result from their gay identity, but it is also about embracing it and participating in the positive features of their sub-culture.

Both Karen and Susan did not fully come out and embrace their sexuality until arriving at Regional College and have only been "out of the closet" for a little over a year. Because of this, both described their process of coming out to me in detail, as is documented in the first section of this paper. After the coming out process, their next

step was to communicate their new identity, and I discuss the many ways in which they do this. Next, I describe reactions of others to their identity. I then illustrate the challenges that they face as gay women on at a small, private college. Although a large portion of my study is comprised of certain challenges or struggles that Karen and Susan have faced in their college experience, there are also unique, positive features of their college lives that I have discussed in the final section of this paper.

Coming Out

“Coming out” acts as the very first step in living a positive and successful life with a gay sexual orientation. It refers to the period in one’s life where people relate their self-knowledge about their sexual orientation to others such as family members and friends. Due to the fact that a person will continually be meeting new people, however, the coming out process will never be over. College, therefore, is an environment where young gay men and women have the opportunity to come out to others since they will be interacting with many new people. It allows them to practice coming out and to gain knowledge about the different reactions that can occur. With this newfound knowledge, then, they become more fluent in coming out and prepared for a range of reactions. This section will discuss Karen and Susan’s process since both of them

came out in their second year at Regional College.

Susan was the first to relate to me her coming out story. What I began to understand right away is that she never questioned her sexual identity until she was in college because there was never any reason to question it. She was given a set of rules (i.e. girls have boyfriends, not girlfriends) and lived life accordingly. The influence of heterosexism remains an important issue for gay college students. As an illustration of this, Susan observed the following in my first interview with her:

I think society’s expectation is to settle down with a guy, have the 2.5 kids, and white picket fence and I don’t think that’s an option for me now obviously cuz I don’t want to marry a guy....That’s one thing I still kind of struggle with because I don’t want people to think of me differently because I am gay, cuz I’m still the same person I was. It’s just like I don’t like guys like you like guys.

Susan only knew of two people growing up in her hometown who were gay, and this played a factor in her process. Certain limitations arise in the hometown environment that prevents a gay individual from coming out because of the long established attitudes of a community. It is likely that in places with little diversity, not only is it harder for those with differences to thrive, but they

repress those differences for a longer period of a time.

For many gay individuals, their realization about their sexual orientation is accompanied by strong emotions of frustration, confusion, and even denial. The turbulent emotions associated with the initial coming out process were exemplified in the distinction Susan made between the sober and drunken kisses she had with her first girlfriend. In the “drunk” instances, of which there were several, Susan was able to deny her feelings for another girl because, for her, “That’s what happens when you’re drunk—you make out with girls and it’s fine.” However, when the first sober kiss occurred, Susan termed it awkward and even cried about it—obviously a more emotional response. This difference in response demonstrates her internal struggle about her self-knowledge most clearly. When Susan finally had to face her actions and could no longer place the blame on alcohol, it hit her the hardest, especially with the fear of nowhere to go from there. She explains, “I think I knew, but I didn’t wanna admit it to myself because I was afraid of having to tell people and it would have been just easier to keep going out with guys because that’s what society expects from you.”

Karen related a similar story about her coming out and even offered steps for the process. There are four steps (or groups of

people to tell) in the coming out process, although there is no one particular way to do it. First, once an individual is struggling with these new emotions and feelings, there can be confusion, anger, and denial. This step is about self-realization and embracing one's sexuality. It is important to have confidence in order to be able to relate this self-knowledge to others. Embracing one's sexuality is critical since communication of one's gay identity will not occur if a gay person is not personally comfortable with their sexuality. The second step in the coming out process is relating this knowledge to parents. Third, it is important that close friends learn this information directly from the gay individual in order to avoid hearing about it through gossip. The last step is to come out to the rest of the world, although this does not always mean that it has to be directly communicated. It is merely about affirming and not hiding one's sexual identity if questioned by others. The most effective manner to accomplish this step is to change the biographical information section on various social media that describes what sex they are interested in dating.

These last two steps in the coming out process, telling friends and others, are especially significant within the college environment. While the self-realization phase is more personal and telling parents does not pertain to college, the last

two categories of people are those people whom a gay individual is surrounded by at college. These are the people and friends they will first come out to. What the college environment offers, then, is a setting to practice the process. A gay person can attempt different methods of coming out and gauge the reactions they receive from others. Because of that, they will be better informed about how others respond. This information and knowledge will be helpful in future situations when new acquaintances are unaware of their sexual orientation. Two things Karen describes as being necessary for her to come out were "courage" and a "thick skin" since a gay individual will come out the rest of their life.

Ways of Communicating Gay Identity

Once they have come out to themselves, college presents gay students with an opportunity to experiment with how they communicate their gay identity. They begin to get answers to some key questions: How will others react to my sexuality and what is the most effective ways to communicate my identity? For this section, therefore, I describe the ways in which gay people communicate their identity, as doing so is one way in which they embrace who they are. Once they are confident in their identity, they begin to communicate it in many different ways. I noticed, for example,

that Karen and Susan communicated their gay identity to others with both individual and couple actions. Individual actions reflect dress, verbal affirmation, steps taken to change social media (previously described), and the display of symbols. Couple actions, on the other hand, refer to public displays of affection and verbal referencing when together as a couple.

Several different types of dress can be used to signal to others one's sexual orientation. Karen noted that many people have said to her, "But you don't look gay." However, for her it is the "little things that make up obvious things." For example, if Karen wants to look "really gay," as she says, she would put on a snapback. In fact, on one of the nights that I hung out with Karen she changed her clothes several times because she did not think she looked "gay enough." Her solution to this was to put on a snapback, which is just a baseball style hat with the snap attachment on the back for sizing. She also wears her rainbow bracelet every day (the rainbow is a sign for gay pride). I think it is important to clarify here that many types of dress for lesbians (even some that I have mentioned) have been transformed into popular culture stereotypes for lesbians. Karen and Susan recognize these stereotypes and even participate in them, but as a personal choice.

There is a strong

notion that lesbians must look masculine. Apparently to others, Karen does not look gay because she does not “hit the weight requirement,” meaning that the person making that comment views all lesbians as fat and ugly. Not only does this stereotype signal that lesbians must look masculine, but also that attractive people cannot be gay. The issue of “looking gay” is one of the challenges that both Karen and Susan said they must cope with regularly. This challenge is twofold, as the women reject some of these stereotypes, but selectively adopt others. For example, a type of gay signaling is what Karen and Susan term “dyke shoes.” They explained that DC brand white slip-on-shoes are an example of these. Susan owns a pair, and she still automatically questioned the sexuality of one random girl on campus who wore a pair.

Other ways to communicate gay identity is to display more broadly recognized symbols of gender identity, such as the rainbow flag or a female Venus symbol. Karen told me a story about how she never outright communicated to her roommate about her sexuality in the beginning of their relationship but instead hung up her giant rainbow flag in their room. Her roommate just assumed it, although it also became obvious from other conversations and actions. Karen also has recently acquired a new tattoo on her wrist that consists of a small,

black female symbol (a circle with a cross) that does not represent her gender but her gay identity.

The most notable couple action, on the other hand, for Karen and Susan is PDA (personal displays of affections). This includes holding hands, kissing, and hugging. It is a particularly significant way for homosexual couples to communicate their sexuality, since others could otherwise mistake them for just being friends. While Karen and Susan’s relationship has PDA, it is minimal. An interesting distinction made about this is that while Karen values privacy, Susan’s reasoning for less PDA is due to insecurity about their relationship in public settings. However, the social context needs to be taken in to consideration. For example, it is difficult for them on campus because Susan’s cousin attends Regional College as well and does not know about her sexual orientation. Karen, however, feels more comfortable on campus with it because “most people of this demographic are okay with it.” The campus acts, as an appropriate arena to test boundaries and gauge how much PDA is acceptable in various settings, which will be a necessary asset of knowledge in the future.

Another important couple action is how both Karen and Susan refer to one another. Karen introduces Susan to people as her “girlfriend” if she wants people to know about their

couple status. I have also heard each of them call each other “woman” or “lady friend” when talking with one another. These two terms are used light-heartedly to joke with one another. When the two want new friends or acquaintances to know about their gay couple identity status and subtle hints are not working, they will be “sickeningly obvious.” This is when “dear” and “honey” appear in conversation. Neither reference is serious in how they refer to one another; they just do not want to directly tell others that they are a gay couple in some cases to avoid awkward situations.

Reactions to a Gay Identity and Resulting Challenges

After communicating gay identity, the next step is considering how others react to that identity. As previously mentioned, the college experience is one characterized by the endless cycle of meeting new people. After communicating their sexual orientation, an equally important issue is how those new people will react to their sexual identity. College is where gay individuals note these various reactions and develop strategies to better cope with similar situations in the future. I have identified three main reactions to the gay sexuality: negative, positive, and neutral. In this section, I will describe several examples of each of these three reactions and also comment on challenges

that arise in conjunction with either negative or neutral reactions.

In regards to the negative reactions received, the most easily identified are those that are verbal. The most common response that Karen has encountered is one in which people will change the subject of what they were talking about if her sexuality arises in conversation. It is a subtle way for people to escape the topic because they find it uncomfortable due to their views on the matter. Nonetheless, it is an obvious avoidance that makes the situation awkward, and as a result, the relationship with that person will never be the same. It appears to be an automatic judgment about the person. Another type of indirect verbal attack on their identity is when people voice their negative opinions about homosexuality or related issues. For example, many people will offer their opinions on how they are against gay marriage. Susan especially noted that one of her good friends has called homosexuality a sin even though they are close friends. Negative opinions do not need to be specific to them in order for them to be affected by these opinions.

Explicit rejection and the refusal to use certain vocabulary are two other

types of negative verbal reactions. As an example of explicit rejection, Susan described when she first told her parents she was gay and her mom responded with, "I don't want that happening in my house." This means that her mom did not want "gay" in her house, and Susan was thus absolutely rejected for her identity. This type of verbal rejection can come in many forms or phrases, but it still comes down to the fact



"Clear Thumbtacks" by Breanne Riesberg

that people are dismissing the identity of the gay person as illegitimate or wrong. The refusal to use certain terms or expressions is another way in which some people react negatively. Both Karen and Susan have family members and friends who refuse to use the term "girlfriend" when talking about their significant other and will use "friend" instead. They may do this because of uncomfortable feelings they have about their sexual orientation or because

they fear whomever they are talking to will either judge them or Karen and Susan.

My informants also found various comments frustrating that probably were not intended to be negative. They found it irritating when people are simply uneducated, ask stupid questions or make unintelligent comments. Examples include the following, "Who wears the pants in the relationship," "which one of you is the

dude," "who pays for things," and "but you don't look gay." They view this as a negative reaction because the relationship is being scrutinized without any effort by the other person to become informed in a meaningful way about same-sex couples. This is what Karen termed as being treated like "novelty item." Novelty, in

this instance, does not refer to a positive characteristic. These types of questions reveal to them that the person views their sexuality and relationship as an anomaly. For Karen and Susan, it proves that they fail to acknowledge that all relationships do not have to be like male-female ones. Gender rules or roles do not apply to their relationship because the dynamic is obviously different, hence the definition of gay. Karen and Susan do

not understand why this struggle over understanding gender roles exists. For Susan, “That’s what gay means. We don’t want a guy.” Although a witty comment by Susan, these questions add unique stressors to their relationship.

More subtle, yet possibly more powerful, are the negative reactions that are nonverbal. These are more frequent because many people, as Karen said, are “not ballsy enough to say you’re going to hell.” One of the nonverbal reactions people can have is staring. Susan described her experience with her ex-girlfriend (who she said looked like a “dude”) and how they went out in public and people would stare at them. Attacks that come from unacquainted people such as this instance are just as difficult to deal with. Karen did say, however, she would “take new-fangled Christians over someone who says she is going to hell.” The terminology “new-fangled Christians” refers to people like who call homosexuality a sin but who still love the sinner. In short, it means that some of their friends choose to ignore their sexual orientation as a way to remain friends with them, but they find a gay identity to be wrong, either morally and/or physically. Ignoring a personal fact about someone, though, also affects Karen and Susan negatively. Although it is not spoken, the message comes in loud and clear.

The grief of family members, especially parents,

was experienced by my informants, as the most powerful negative reaction. Susan’s mom in particular had to grieve for the loss of Susan’s future with a man and everything she had envisioned for Susan during the first twenty years of her life. Her mom thought she knew exactly how Susan’s life plan was supposed to unfold, but Susan’s life is obviously different with a gay identity. It is a process that both Karen and Susan mentioned that their parents had to go through. Susan’s story best captures the profound grief experienced by some mothers:

I think Mom took it the worst because...I think to her like her dreams were being shattered for me not ever going to marry a guy and have a family with a man and all that stuff, and so I think she was a little upset and when she gets upset, it seems like she’s mad but she was kind of yelling and Dad was just really calm and was like, “Dawn, there’s nothing we can do about it.” So that was kind of comforting and then I had enough of that conversation and was like, “Guys, I’m leaving.”

And her parents let her leave and did not speak to her the rest of the day. During one of the scariest and most vulnerable moments of her life, Susan’s parents let her leave because they needed to fully grasp the situation for themselves. Not only did

Susan and Karen experience strong emotions when they were coming out to themselves, but their parents also grieved for the loss of the lives they thought their daughters would live.

Although Karen and Susan described many negative reactions, they also noted some of the positive reactions they have received. The most easily identifiable response is one of affirmation, whether it is verbal acceptance or a physical affirmation such as a hug. Susan told me a story about a time they went out to eat and they were walking out of the restaurant holding hands.

So I was being romantic one night and was like hey Karen lets go to Capital City out of the blue...[I] took her to Spaghetti Works and had a nice, lovely dinner. Funny story about the check the waitress came and was like are you together orrrr and made some kinda sexual hand sign...Anyway. As we were walking out, I grabbed her hand and when we got to the parking lot a guy rolled down his window and yelled, “Good for you!”

For Karen, this instance: “Restores my faith in humanity.” However, a positive affirmation does not have to be as extreme as this example. It can be any kind of small acceptance from anyone.

Other positives that are similar to affirmation are

encouragement and respect. These are distinguished from affirmation because they are about embracing their identity, not merely acknowledging it. This is best exemplified in one of Karen's experiences. Last Valentine's Day, she was at the store and had picked up flowers for Susan and was waiting in line to pay. An elderly lady turned around, smiled, and said, "She's going to love them." Not only was the lady saying that she accepted Karen and who she was in terms of her sexual identity, but also that she needs to be proud of it. She saw it as a viable lifestyle, not something that was different that should be tolerated. That is why encouragement and respect are different from affirmation. Karen and Susan see this respect as coming from them being honest about themselves. Some people value what they are doing—value that they are being truthful with others and not hiding any part of their life. People respect those who are not ashamed of who they are.

Another positive outcome to coming out is that they could develop more intense social bonds with others. An entire "gayness" culture exists that Karen and Susan would not have the opportunity to experience if they had remained inside the closet. As soon as one claims an open gay identity, one can find other similar students who face similar struggles and who can then support each other. Having a gay identity

means that you are part of a gay community that supports you. Another positive is that gay people are sometimes able to bond more easily with the opposite sex because there are no expectations of heterosexual sexual attraction. Karen illustrates this with the relationship she now has with her brother, now that they can "scope out the chicks together."

While some reactions can be negative or positive, there are those that can also be indifferent. These are harder to identify and evaluate with concrete examples, but Karen and Susan agreed that they have experienced this. There are those who find no importance in their sexual identity. It is not going to change any aspect of their relationship with the gay person, so it is not mentioned. There is neither promotion nor condemnation of it, but rather a type of neutrality that I have termed conditional acceptance. I will use Karen's aunt and uncle to illustrate. They are religious and would consider homosexuality a sin. However, they find value in the larger teachings of the Bible, such as love and acceptance that, by default, trump the homosexuality issue. Therefore, they remain indifferent because they love and accept Karen, but do not affirm or encourage her in her identity.

Religion is a prominent topic of discussion between my two informants. One of the main reasons why Christianity presents a challenge for

gay identity is because of the passages in the Bible that discuss and depict homosexuality unfavorably. Many times, this is what hinders people's acceptance of a person's gay sexuality. In fact, my informants see a person's religious beliefs as the most significant factor in determining how others will judge them. Susan sometimes saw people's religious background as having such a strong effect on them that she admitted she might have at times imagined them judging her:

I think half the time I'm just convinced, like, imagining that people are judging me just because I know that judgment comes along with it [Christianity]. So I'm going to assume that everybody is judging me. And I don't really handle judgment very well. I'm not going to say anything about it or act like I care. I don't know, I think, me on the inside, it hurts just to know that people don't understand it.

A general consensus on the topic of homosexuality and religion is that Christianity does not tolerate it. Challenges arise when places, Regional College in particular, are Christian affiliated. Students cannot ignore this aspect when choosing a school, so a large proportion of the student population will

most likely embody those sentiments. Karen and Susan are both highly aware of this and what it means for their sexual identity. Since this may play a role in how other students view them, it represents a problem. They must be wary of all places and people who claim to be Christian affiliated because it could mean intolerance of their gay identity.

The last recurring theme in regards to challenges relates to family acceptance. One specific concern is the challenge of family functions and word choice. Karen says her family attempts to “save the youth and innocence of the children,” so her parents limit when and with whom Susan can be around. Both women also noted that their immediate families control when other extended family learns about their sexual orientation. For this reason, they have to keep it a secret from them. Susan, for example, has a cousin who attends the same college; because of this she has to be careful of how she acts when in public. She has to hide a major part of her life; Karen is simply her friend in those situations. The last challenge family members present are lack of acknowledgement. This challenge plays a role when Karen and Susan want their relationship to be seen as legitimate. They do not want to be ignored just because it does not fit into what their parents had envisioned for their daughters. Karen and Susan work harder to prove

that their relationship is just as legitimate as a heterosexual relationship, other than the gender of their significant other.

Taking Back Control: Positive Features of Gay Identity

While much of my research showcases the struggles Karen and Susan face as a result of their gay identity, the positive or favorable aspects of their culture should not be overlooked. This section will describe some of those. Not only does college act as a useful environment for gay people to discuss and handle struggles or issues that occur as a result of their sexual orientation, but it also offers a separate space away from their hometown where they had been previously limited. At college, Karen and Susan embrace their sexuality and experiment with various versions of that identity. They figure out who they are and how they want to approach the world after graduation.

Karen takes back control of ways that are used to discriminate against her. For example, she can “look really douchey and get away with it” (which actually may affirm the stereotypes they described to me). Nonetheless, she is able to wear her snapbacks and flannel shirts, and it is more appropriate than if she were straight. Surprisingly, new rules apply to her. Perhaps this is what perpetuates the stereotypes, but in this instance it is a

form of empowerment for Karen. She is taking those preconceived notions and claiming them as her own. Another way in which they empower themselves is in the language they utilize when together or with their close friends who accept them. I have heard them use multiple terms that would be considered homophobic or offensive if someone else were directing those comments at them. These include “homo,” “gaywad,” “lesbo,” and “dyke.” For them, it is not derogatory, but rather playful and sarcastic. The utilization of these words prevents others from using them as a way of hurting them.

One dominant topic of conversation, when I hung out with Karen and Susan, stemmed from a preoccupation with finding out who else on campus was a lesbian. They used the term “stalking” to refer to this activity. I personally spent at least half an hour one time with Susan “stalking” a girl on various social media trying to find out if a freshman girl who lives in Susan’s dorm is gay. I was amazed at the determination Susan devoted to this. There have been multiple conversations about the pending sexuality of someone on campus with them. Most often, one of the main qualifications is whether the person up for debate is a “Jesus lover” or not. If they are a Jesus lover (consider homosexuality a sin based on the Bible), then they probably are not gay since religion

plays such a significant role. Other factors that are important is how the person dressed and then whatever Karen or Susan could find on Facebook or Twitter in regards to pictures and biographical information.

Karen termed this pursuit as “aggressive.” She wants to find other lesbians and bring them into their gay community since there are not many gay people at Regional College. I will share a story the women told to me to demonstrate the lengths they will go discover the sexual orientation of a girl. One night they were walking by an underclassmen dorm and noticed a rainbow flag hanging on the wall in one of the rooms. They got excited and ran into the building in an attempt to find out which room it was. They eventually found the right one and used the names on the outside of the door to get on the student directory to narrow down whom it could be. From there, they used all the names they found on the directory to find those people on Facebook to see if they could find roommate pictures or any signs if the girls were a couple or if just one of them is gay. They eventually figured out whom both girls were and that only one of them was gay. Karen calls it a “sick thrill” to search for people who are lesbians. According to Susan, as a general rule in stalking, “Nothing is off limits. Go to all lengths you can.”

Above all, the driving

motivation behind Karen and Susan’s stalking is not due to an obsessive want to find someone to date. Rather, it is to find people who are similar to them, who can share in their experiences and challenges. Susan describes it this way, “I feel like it’s more along the lines of the sense of community, like people to hang out with that are like me and understand it.” Not only do they view having a sense of community as a positive feature of their identity, but they also like to offer it to others (even if that is through systematic stalking). They live in a sub-culture where support is key, especially on a campus where diversity is limited.

An interesting paradox arises from their minor obsession with figuring out who is gay. Karen admits that they are “judging someone constantly but are in a culture that promotes no judgment.” Karen and Susan are essentially telling someone “you’re so gay but you don’t know it.” However, they do not mean to be hurtful or judgmental; in reality, it is about acceptance. They want other people in their life who accept them and can identify with their situation. More than that, they want to offer that too. Generally, it is not a serious matter or pastime. In actuality, it is a fun activity that allows them to discuss their sexuality through the use of other people’s sexual identity.

Although no set of rules exist in regards to the manner in which to stalk a

potential lesbian, Karen and Susan offered the following guide:

Stalking Protocol:

1. Get the vibe and/or see gayish behavior. Commence stalking.
2. Find out their name. Ask anyone who may have a link to the questionable person.
3. Social media stalking: Facebook stalk... if you’re lucky they’ll have their preferences listed as interested in women. If not, stalk further. Look for any gay signs at all. (I.e. snapbacks, flannels, questionable pictures with girls, kissing photos with girls...the last is a long shot)
4. Blatantly ask other people if they are gay. Word travels fast in the gay tree.
5. If at all possible, befriend that person in order to obtain an inside view.
6. **FOR THE BOLD:** Straight up ask them.

Obviously, from these steps Karen and Susan shared, stalking is a playful and harmless activity. All they wish to do is expand their community on campus and offer insight and help for any lesbian struggling with similar obstacles they have already experienced.

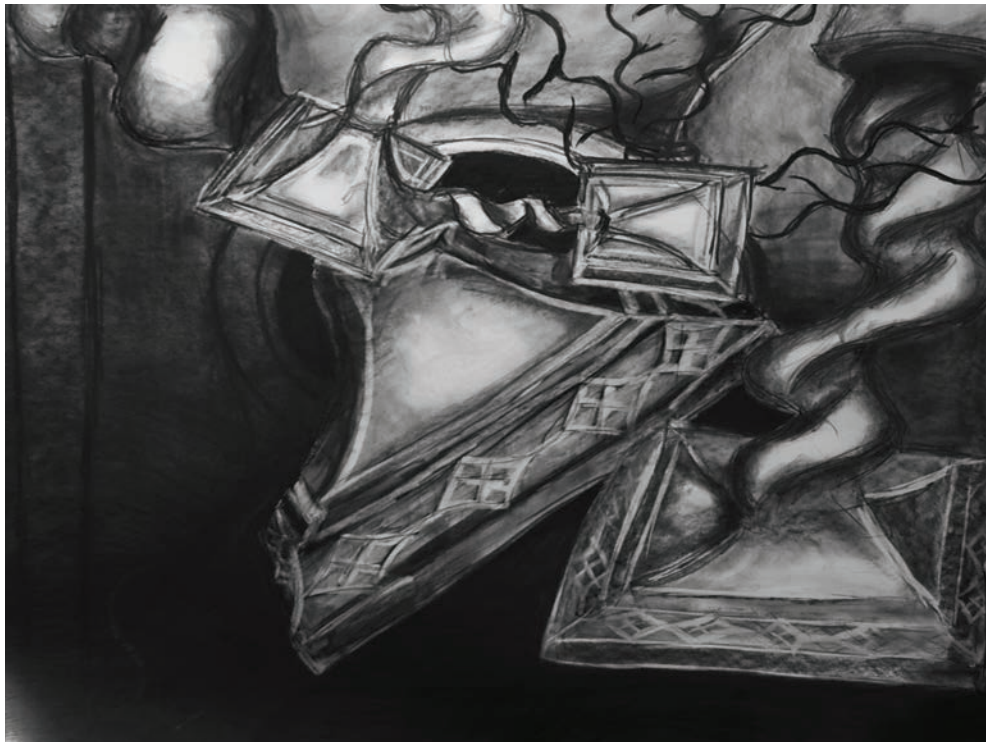
Conclusion

The main goal of my field project was to understand how the college experience is different for gay women. Most importantly, I described the role of the four years of college and what its significance is to a gay individual in the scheme of their life. In the end, the college experience for someone who is straight and someone who is gay is in some ways the same. As Karen shared, in college, “you’re in a bubble for four years before you get kicked in the ass to figure out who you are.” The college experience provides an arena for a young person to find his or herself before they are required to grow up and search for a career and establish themselves in life. The process for finding oneself, however, is

different for my informants because straight and gay people attempt to figure out different things. For gay people like Karen and Susan, the “road’s still bumpy, the bumps are just different.” These four years of college are about pushing and testing boundaries in regards to their sexual orientation. They attempt to answer questions, such as one that Karen described: “How much hand holding can I get away with without it being an issue?” It is practice for real life.

Gay individuals need the college experience as a way to practice for future encounters with new people. College is a medium to get away from the hometown realm; it is a place that is separate from all things

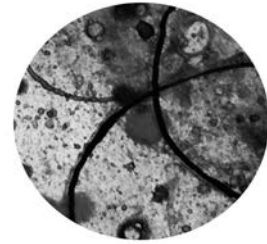
familiar—whether that is friends, family, or attitudes. It is a place where they experiment with different challenges and reactions. Young, gay individuals freely communicate their gay identity at college and have the opportunity to modify how they do that if they wish. It allows them to gain knowledge about what may occur in the future. Karen and Susan’s hometowns did not provide the setting necessary to be able to test these boundaries. Thus, college is a critical platform where gay people entertain certain actions, reactions, and challenges. They then play with them, and possibly modify them in order to be more successful in life’s future scenarios.



“Magic” by Coleman Neil

Call Me Death

Natasha Kingston



ENGL 251: British Literature

Death has forever been, and will forever be, me. I came into the world a stillborn child, leaving as quickly as I had entered. Mortality will forever be a mystery to me. The Almighty may have found the realm of humanity unfit for my presence, but he made up for it in my heavenly eternity. In my physical death, He provided me an opportunity. "Malachi, messenger of the Lord," rumbled he, "the Angels will raise you to fulfill your heavenly purpose." Out of death, as Phoenix rises, rose an Archangel. I earned my wings, my brooding Scythe, and a destiny.

Azrael am I, the Archangel of Death. I am revered by few, and feared by most. I am clad in black, as the nature of my work insists. The transportation of souls is entrusted to me. Black is a neutral color. For heaven is purer white than man could fathom, and hell is darker and more dismal than any black could accurately demonstrate. It encourages the soul, my companion in travel, with no hope of heaven and no fear of hell. My brooding Scythe is not for cutting down my "enemies," or forcefully taking

Natasha's persona paper as Death demonstrates her perceptive reading and creative interpretation of the texts. She began first with an exploration of Death in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. John Donne's "Death be not Proud" sonnet inspired her to return to the character to add depth and dimension. Above all, Natasha's tone surprised us as readers and commanded our attention; her voice resounded even after we had finished reading the paper.

-Mary Stark

life from those who neither deserve nor expect it. I can only dream of such power. Such decisions will forever remain out of my hands. I have no enemies, I fear no man. I am but a humble messenger with a higher purpose, carrying with me my treasured, boisterous walking stick. My Scythe allows me to keep the soul safe on our excruciatingly long journey, lest it try to run from me.

Mortals, those simpletons, take little time to think of me. They lurk under the impression that life is a birthright, scouring to the ends of the Earth and polluting it with their nonexistent morals and poor excuse for a work ethic. Life is not free. It is a gift graciously bestowed upon the lowly human race as a philanthropic sentiment of the Prince of Hell and Yahweh. Such a gift has a price, and such a price must be repaid.

As a messenger for these deities, I descend to Earth to collect. The human soul

is the requested collateral, and I am appointed to escort it to its final resting place. My job is honorable, but my designated bounty anything but. Those beastly mammals taunt and scorn me, and claim themselves my "victims." They aim insults under the false impression that their malice will turn me away. They falsely believe they can con their way into more time in this God forsaken domain. With the blasphemously eloquent words of John Donne, they sneer in my direction:

**Though art a slave to fate, chance, kings,
and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness
dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep
as well
And better than thy stroke; why swells't
thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou
shalt die. (10. 9-14)**

My response? "Who is the desperate one, you ungrateful fools?" I'd rather spend my

days in Hell than be at the mercy those imbeciles. Must there be an attempt to wound me with words in order to feel more content with their miserable, heathen lives?

Aside from the pure idiocracy that is the “free world,” that argument is both invalid and unreasonable. I am immortal; death is of no concern to me. Fools think me indentured and enslaved? Perhaps they should spend less time catering to their vices and spending their precious time chasing futile dreams. Chastising my “swelling” and the place in which I supposedly “dwell” is a waste of breath. I go where the Spirit sends, do His bidding. I have no control over the future or the course of human life. “Fate” is nothing but the divine plan and I its designated messenger. No amount of callousness will alter the divine plan, the soul comes with me. My job description is forever stagnant: The Almighty orders, and I fetch. Humans, though you often turn a blind eye and deaf ear in my direction, I urge you to learn from the mistakes of your forefathers, dating back to Adam and Eve. Respect the God who kindly gives you life. It is he who decides

when you cease to exist. But, alas, even my warning will not commence the ceaseless and worthless begging that will ensue when I arrive.

Lo, that cowardly begging, how I can bear it no longer. Even the brilliant Faustus was no match for me. He, no different from others, was forever groping for this world to remain intact for him when his time had finally come.

**Stand still, you ever moving spheres
of heaven,**

**That time may cease, and midnight
never come.**

**Fair Nature’s eye, rise, rise again,
and make**

**Perpetual day, or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural
day,**

**That Faustus may repent and save
his soul. (13.60-65)**

I have no sympathy. History repeats itself; the humans will once again find themselves surrounded by poverty, squalor, and disappointment. For Faustus even sold his soul, volunteered for indentured service, and was still unsatisfied when I arrived for him. He forgot his life would ever find its end, and that his books and knowledge would fail to sustain him in my presence. “Come not, Lucifer!”

he cried, still yearning for the semblance of his pitiful life (13.112). For his sorrow, I have no pity. I lack this sympathy because not even the most pious of people deserve such a sentiment. Second chances are not worth giving. I am condemned to a life of roaming, collecting these unwilling souls; why has humanity failed to learn from its mistakes? Few are ready to come with me, and fewer still willing to do so. Have those accursed mortal not the faintest idea of life’s sanctity? *Carpe diem*, my peasants! The world awaits!

So, call me Death, asinine mortals, though it is not my given name. As is your destiny to take leave of the physical realm, mine is to collect thee. I will graciously allot you time to beg, to needlessly lament over your transgressions and lack of a purposeful life, but I tell you now that it will do little for your plight. The way the universe works is above both of our musings. So come with me quietly, and with dignity. Let not what could have been cloud what will be. Perhaps that makes the future less grim, as I hope I have helped you to see. For I am not death, but Death is me.

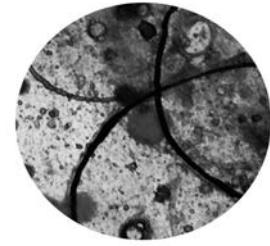
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The Dialogue by Dietrich and Kemlyn Tan Bappe— A Dueling Drawing



Renee Van Roekel

ART 110: Ancient Art History

Normally, people consider dialogue to be between two people. The English Oxford Dictionary defines dialogue as “a discussion between two or more people or groups, especially one directed toward exploration of a particular subject or resolution of a problem.” The painting entitled, *The Dialogue*, offers a complex perspective of what dialogue within our ecosystem could look like. Imagine an artist who wants to show life as a complex process where all things are inter-connected. Humans co-exist with creatures, which co-exist with the sea, which subsist with all creatures and organisms of the world, and so forth. The artist of *The Dialogue* blended a busy scene of life with the contrast of pastel colors and sharp ink lines for an interpretation of an ecosystem with a dialogue of its own.

At first glance, the larger and less abstract images stand out—a human arm with a hand, a lizard, and various forms of sea life. However, the mere busyness

Learning effective ways to put visual ideas into words is one of the most challenging aspects of studying Art History. The difficulty lies in the way that the colors and forms we see with our eyes communicate more than just material things; they evoke mood and memory and a host of other intangible experiences that don't always translate readily into written words. When a writer adeptly describes a work of art and at the same time manages to summon for the reader these intangible qualities, she contributes whole new wonders for the reader and viewer to ponder. Renee's essay does just that: her eloquent description not only guides us in discovering meaning from the complex physical composition of lines and colors in the picture but also prompts us to reflect on the sensations these forms generate in the viewer's mind.

—Susan Swanson

of the colorful painting cannot be ignored because it contributes to a sense of visual chaos the viewer feels. Looking carefully at the different images within the big picture help the viewer to interpret the dialogue the artist may have wanted to convey. Within the painting are hearts, a cat, a turtle, a face with eyes, nose, and a mouth, tea cups, sting rays, crabs, jelly fishes, an electronic lamp with plug in, a ladybug, birds, plant life, a shark, snails, an Eiffel tower replica, a windmill, as a source of energy, mountains, a spider web, a skull, and various images of humans. There is no distinguishable foreground or background, but an even display of images integrated together. At the top of the painting floats a can, reflecting a concern for the environment due to litter and other ways that humans harm or interrupt the natural earth. With so

many visuals on a small scale, the viewer is overwhelmed by the amount of images in close proximity, leaving little space all together and calling for an attention to detail. The formal elements of color and line are used dramatically to draw the busy scene together, creating chaos and excitement.

The materials of the dueling drawing are watercolor paint and ink on paper. The total composition evokes a message of co-existence and perhaps a concern for the ecosystem. The artwork is complex, and contains a lot of detail in a small amount of space. The pastel watercolors give a lively and colorful vibe to the picture. The colors are mostly secondary and of a lower saturated quality. Because watercolor paints have a way of blending and running together, more freedom and less rigidity is given to the art and its colors. The black

ink is a sharp contrast to the soft pastels. Ink is more precise and gives the artist control back, helping to define details and place images, while letting the color do its work by bleeding and merging together on the canvas. The artist's use of ink gives the painting one of its important qualities of continuous black lines, which breaks up the busy painting.

Line work is a major component of *The Dialogue* and an element of the overall composition that allows us to interpret the dialogue conveyed in the art. Since sharp lines are not formed from watercolor painting, the ink serves as a way to define lines of the forms.

The sharp lines from the ink, for example, cause the large human forearm and hand to stand out in the corner of the painting. Although the lines break up to create different images, there is also apparent use of continuous lines in the painting. Some of them seem to have no distinguishable beginning or end, and many split off in different directions, adding to the drawing's complexity.

Although sea life is one of the more major themes, several discernible images of humans complete the circle of life. Some of the forms are of people in a fetal position; they look like they are curled up or sleeping. Others look like they are

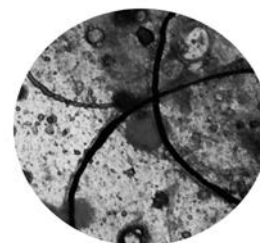
leaping or dancing—signs of vitality or movement. The presences of human figures in the painting suggest an interpretation of human effects on the ecosystem and environment. The artist may be reflecting on mankind's overall role in the ecosystem and the dialogue that naturally exists between organisms. The painting is unified by its common themes of ocean, earth, and the natural life, life that has been interrupted. Imagine the dialogue of the ocean, the creatures of water and land, and of people and organisms. It is not a simple communication. The dialogue of the ecosystem is complex, busy, and above all—conflicted.



The Dialogue - By: Dietrich and Kemlyn Tan Bappe

Richard Strauss's *Elektra*

Brandon T. Mennenoh



*MUS 212: Music History -
Baroque to Modern*

In 1903, Richard Strauss attended a theatrical production of *Elektra* adapted by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Strauss immediately recognized *Elektra's* potential as an opera and in 1906 began the first of several collaborations with librettist Hofmannsthal.¹ The modern tonal language of *Elektra* elicited mixed audience reactions at the premiere in 1909. The plot involves murder, deceit, and revenge. Strauss brings the passionate drama of *Elektra* to life through bitonal dissonance, taxing vocal lines, and Wagnerian orchestral effects.

We experience the story through the eyes of Elektra, daughter of Agamemnon.² Elektra's mother (Klytemnestra) and her lover (Aegistheus) murder Agamemnon and cast Elektra out in the street to dwell like an animal; she is unable to enter her mother's house. Her brother Orestes has been exiled. Elektra takes many opportunities to breathe

Brandon's thorough research and the quality of his writing made this paper stand out among the rest. I believed it could successfully engage readers with varying levels of theoretical and historical knowledge of music.

-Cynthia Doggett

insults and threats against her mother and Aegistheus in secret and in public. Every day she walks out into the courtyard and laments the death and betrayal of her father and her hatred for her mother and Aegistheus. The chorus of maids draws water from the well in the courtyard as they express their distaste for Elektra's "degraded condition"³ and compare her to a howling cat.⁴

Elektra's sister Chrysothemis enters the courtyard to warn of their mother and stepfather's plans to lock her away in a tower where she will starve to death. The two sisters are polar opposites. Elektra's motivation is the hope that someday her father's death will be avenged. Chrysothemis hopes that she can eventually leave her current life behind, marry and have children.⁵

Elektra reacts by accusing her sister of weakness.⁶ Chrysothemis begs her sister not to cross paths with her mother. After Chrysothemis leaves the courtyard, Klytemnestra enters with her attendants, talismans around her neck, and supplies to offer sacrifices to the gods. Despite her hatred for Elektra she now implores her help. Charles Osborne in his book *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss* states "Klytemnestra describes her sleepless nights, the horror of the nightmares that infest what little sleep she can find...she asks Elektra to tell her of a cure." Elektra informs her mother that her nightmares will end when her exiled son comes to murder her.⁷

After the confrontation, a servant comes to Klytemnestra and whispers to her that Orestes has been killed. This news brings great joy to Klytemnestra and she sends a messenger to deliver the news to her husband. This information is not disclosed to Elektra until Chrysothemis

³ Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Richard Strauss*, North Pomfret, Vermont: Trafalgar Square Publishing, 1988.

⁴ William Mann, *Richard Strauss: A Critical Study of the Operas*, New York City: Oxford University Press, 1966.

⁵ John W. Freeman *The Metropolitan Opera: Stories of the Great Operas*, New York City: The Metropolitan Opera Guild, 1984.

⁶ Freeman 402.

⁷ Osborne 1988, 67.

¹ Kennedy, Michael. *Richard Strauss: Man Musician Enigma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

² Richard D. Chessick "On the Unique Impact of Richard Strauss's *Elektra*," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* XLII, no. 4 (October 1988): 585-96.

comes out of the house. Elektra is reluctant to believe this at first, however she then decides that she must take the murder of her mother and stepfather into her own hands. Elektra seeks the help of her sister and reveals that she has kept the axe that killed their father buried. Elektra begins to flatter her sister by praising her virginal strength, yet when Chrysothemis refuses, Elektra curses her again. So, Elektra decides to go on with her plan and goes to the place where she buried the axe.¹

While Elektra is digging for the axe, a stranger enters the courtyard. Elektra inquires the business of the stranger who is watching her. The stranger has come to bring the news of Orestes's death to the queen. Elektra expresses grief over her lost father and her recently lost brother. The stranger takes pity on her and reveals himself as Orestes. Klytemnestra leads Orestes into the house, not knowing that this man is her son; her screams soon follow. Elektra's stepfather Aegistheus returns and enters the house to receive the news of Orestes's death. Aegistheus's cries for help go unanswered as Orestes murders him. Elektra rejoices in their triumph by dancing her victory dance before she herself falls into the hands of death.²

Three ancient Greek

¹ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, "Elektra," Berlin: W. Adolph Furster, 1910, 31-41.

² Hoffmannsthal 1910, 56-7.

authors penned interpretations of *Elektra*, but librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal was most influenced by the *Elektra* that was created by Sophocles.³ Despite the influence of Sophocles, there are two major differences between his play and the libretto of Hofmannsthal that put Elektra more in control. For instance, Sophocles made Klytemnestra a more aggressive character and reveals that part of her reasoning for killing her husband was to avenge her murdered daughter:

"You lash out at me, I lash back!

Your father... was killed by me...

this father of yours... was the only Greek generous enough to please the gods by killing his own daughter..."⁴

Hoffmannsthal omitted the detail about Klytemnestra's daughter. Instead of lashing out at Elektra, Klytemnestra implores Elektra's help: "Yea-thou for thou art wise, and in thy head all things are strong. And thou could'st tell me much that would give me help."

In Sophocles's play, Elektra lives at the end, however in Strauss's version, she dances a victory dance after the murders of her mother and stepfather and dies herself. The deaths of Klytemnestra and Aegisthus leave her with nothing left to live for because she spent

³ Chessick 1988, 586.

⁴ Sophocles 2011.

so long waiting for revenge.⁵ According to Richard Chessick, Elektra's death brings her to a union with the gods.⁶

The role of Elektra makes heavy demands on the voice and to this day remains the most difficult soprano role in the operatic repertoire⁷, in part because the character of Elektra remains on stage from her first entrance to the end of the opera, but also due to the unusually high range. In an article featured in *Vivace*, the official magazine of the Des Moines Metropolitan Opera, we find that "a cursory look at the score shows that Elektra sings eight B-flats and four high-Cs..."⁸ The singer portraying Elektra passes through the low middle and high parts of her range and has to remain is a high tessitura for significant amounts of time. In the below excerpt of Elektra's confrontation with Klytemnestra, the soprano has to sustain a high C for three measures followed by two measures of high Gs and F#s and then has to sustain a Bb. This particular section of the aria shows the highpoint of the scene.

⁵ Derrick Puffett, "Richard Strauss: Elektra," Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶ Chessick 1988.

⁷ Chessick 1988, 286.

⁸ Michael Egel, "Giving Voice to Revenge," *Vivace*, spring 2013, vol. 1, issue 1.

⁸Strauss constructs his vocal lines to build up to the climax. In the measures leading up to the high C, the soprano will sing many Es and Fs on the staff progressing to Gs and Abs before jumping to the triumphant C.¹⁰ The high C helps the character of Elektra convey several emotions. The excerpt shows the climactic tone as she confronts her mother. She also sings a high C when grieving over her father and again right before her death. The role of Klytemnestra is not an easy role either and requires quite a range. This role asks for a contralto but also requires the singer to utilize the highest reaches of her range. In the below excerpt, Klytemnestra sustains an F and then has to drop down to a Bb below middle C; the singer is also required to sustain a high G.

⁹ Richard Strauss, *Elektra* (tragedy in one act) libretto by Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Berlin, W. Adolph Furstner, 1910.

¹⁰ Strauss: *Elektra*, 105.

¹¹ Strauss: *Elektra*, 74.

After the first performance of the opera, the contralto who sang the role of Klytemnestra called the opera a “horrible din” and refused to do another performance because it was so challenging. In today’s opera world, most mezzo-sopranos and contraltos welcome

opportunities to showcase their entire range.¹² Because of its demand on the voice, performances of *Elektra* are rare and only a select group of opera companies have been able to perform the work.¹³

Richard Wagner was an enormous influence in Strauss’s work and during his conducting career he conducted all but one of Wagner’s operas. Strauss revealed in a letter to his sister that he had become a “converted Wagnerian.”¹⁴ His deep appreciation of Wagner’s operas came about after he studied the score and attended a production of *Tristan and Isolde*.¹⁵

One of the Wagnerian components of Strauss’s *Elektra* is the expansion of the orchestra and the orchestral effects. Because of the large orchestra, Strauss created a broader range of effects and severe dissonances.¹⁶ The

¹² Kennedy 1999, 156.

¹³ Vivace 2013.

¹⁴ Kennedy 1999, 26.

¹⁵ Kennedy 1999.

¹⁶ Mann 1996, 75.

orchestra that accompanied the premiere performance was ninety players—the largest that an opera pit had ever heard.¹⁷ The brass section was exactly the same as Wagner’s *Ring*: “eight horns...two pairs of Wagner tubas...three trombones and a contrabass...three trumpets and a brass trumpet...piccolo and three flutes, three oboes and hecklephone; three bassons and contrabasson.”¹⁸ The clarinet section was eight players strong and included Bb, A, Eb, and one bass clarinet. Strauss also took liberties in dividing the string section; instead of splitting 32 violins into two parts, he used 24 violins and divided them into three parts¹⁹, and even four in the second half.²⁰ An orchestra of this size creates a full and resonant sound and allows for unique instrumental combinations that help narrate the story.²¹

There are many leitmotives that appear in orchestral score. The famous *Agamemnon* makes several appearances in the opera. It is sung by Elektra and played in the orchestra. Its most profound restatement is when the orchestra plays it just before Elektra dies.

¹⁷ Vivace 2013.

¹⁸ Puffett 1989, 128.

¹⁹ Puffett 1989, 128-9.

²⁰ Mann 1966, 74.

²¹ Vivace 2013

At the beginning of the opera when Elektra sings of avenging her father, a waltz theme is played by the orchestra to symbolize her victory; it reappears during Elektra and Klytemnestra's confrontation and several places in the score. As with the Agamemnon motive, the most dramatic reiteration of the waltz is before Elektra's death.

Strauss was influenced heavily by Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde* and the famous Tristan chord is even written into the score. Like in *Tristan and Isolde*, the dissonances in the opera are not resolved until the final scene.¹ In a critical study of Strauss's *Elektra*, Derrick Puffett says Strauss's "tonal

plan...presents a character and a state of mind." Strauss made use of bitonal harmonies. The key that appears the most in the opera is C major, which signifies the heroine Elektra; Agamemnon's death is signified by D minor and Klytemnestra is characterized by the bitonal combination of F minor and B minor; Eb is played whenever Chrysothemis makes an appearance. When Elektra and Chrysothemis are both on stage the two keys are played together.² F major is played when Aegithus makes an entrance. The sharp dissonances occur when the bitonal relationships occur half a step apart or a tritone apart; for example C/Db or C/F#. Klytemnestra's bitonal relationship is connected

by a diminished seventh and Strauss composes disintegrating French six chords to illustrate the burden of her nightmares. The recognition scene and the waltz are in the triumphant key of C major, however, when Elektra dies, the orchestra modulates to the unrelated key of Eb minor until a resolution in C closes the opera.³

The emotion of *Elektra* is enhanced by bitonal harmonies, the Wagnerian orchestral effects, and dramatic and taxing vocal lines. *Elektra* is Strauss's most modern work and the only opera he composed that pushes the limits of tonality. After *Elektra* he retreated back to a more conservative style.

¹ Puffett 1989, 105.

² Puffett 1989, 99-102.

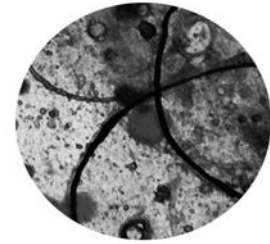
³ Puffett 1989.



"Radial Silence" by Freddy Koke

Thangka: A Guide to Enlightenment

Gina LeGrotte



LAS 410: Buddhist Traditions of Tibet and the Himalyas

Whether you belong to the Buddhist tradition or hold any other set of beliefs, a thangka can be a journey to enlightenment for you. My first encounter with the Tibetan Buddhist thangka of Padmasambhava at Central College became my first 30-minute meditative journey of the Buddhist way. While I hold to the Christian faith, I feel drawn to the compassion and humility at the core of Mahayana Buddhism and regard this meditation as a way to further my own Christian faith by cultivating similar core virtues. I documented the experience of my own interpretation of the thangka from my initial reaction to deeper and more profound reflections. As I meditate, it is clear that the more time and focus that I use to steady my mind on the teachings of this thangka, the more it guides me into clarity.

Upon first viewing the thangka, it did not look like there was very much going on. Initially, it seemed obvious that the centerpiece of this thangka is the rainbow figure of Padmasambhava shown sitting atop lotus flowers. He

Gina LeGrotte is the quintessential interdisciplinary student. She is a psychology major with a strong background in art. And then she also has a very strong interest in religion. So she brings all that to the table; all her interests are on display in her "reading" of that Tibetan Buddhist thangka that hangs in Central Hall Room 316. Although a devout Christian, she is very open to other religious perspectives. Just talking to her, one can tell that her life is a spiritual journey -- one that is still looking, open, and alive to all that she encounters.

-Michael Harris

is rising up out of turbulent, mucky waters, symbolizing his origin in the world from which he rose to reach awakening through reason and meditation. The concept that the Buddha has his roots in the world is important to meditate on because it reminds us that we all have the capacity to become a Buddha.

The landscape around him seems to depict the beauty of nature and also the upward path toward nirvana. The tiered or hilly mountains reflect stages of enlightenment or meditation until they culminate in the realm of Buddhahood. This realm of awakening is depicted here as a heavenly place above the world. It is in this realm that we find three celestial bodhisattvas that act as guardians over those who still suffer in the world. A fourth celestial bodhisattva is shown sitting on the earth right next to the turbulent sea. This is fitting because,

as David Timmer points out, she is the goddess of salvation from danger and misery. She may have overcome suffering, but she has not separated herself from the world. Her compassion for the suffering of others bids her to stay in the world in order to help others attain enlightenment.

The silk frame serves as a guide into the thangka. The dark blue background of the frame leads us into the Buddha's heart, which culminates in a dark blue center. Yet, if our gaze is caught by the colors of the lotus flowers in the frame, they also lead our eyes back into the Buddha because the lotuses are made from the same colors as the rainbow Padmasambhava. It is as if the painting is guiding me across the canvas. With this realization, it becomes clear that the thangka is not just a bunch of symbols and hidden meanings; it is a guided journey.

A good piece of art always has the power to move our eyes across its surface in a specific path. I learned of this power while I was attending art school at Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia. Applied to this thangka, I find that, no matter where my gaze starts, my eyes are first drawn to the center of Padmasambhava's heart. From the heart, I slowly descend to the place from which the Buddha has arisen. I am surprised to find that he comes from such a violent place that it can be rendered as tempestuous waters. Yet, in this unsettling place, I meet Tara who encourages me to start on the path toward awakening that will ultimately cease all my suffering.

From the raging sea, I start to climb up the mountain in an effort to protect myself from this place of suffering and to search for a place of peace and safety. As I slowly climb, I come upon the summit of the mountain and, in a climactic moment, I catch sight of the celestial beings. Yet, as I stand atop the mountain to peer up at these magnificent beings, I realize that I have not yet reached the state of mind that is necessary to remain in this heavenly abode. I am led back down into the heart of the Buddha to reflect on his wisdom and compassion.

With the leading of the eyes, the thangka

transforms from a magnificent piece of art to a tool for teaching and meditation. The cyclical journey draws the viewer into a never-ending story that he may meditate on for as long as he needs. The story teaches us that the heart of the Buddha is powerfully compassionate, full of wisdom, and open for contemplation. This heart of compassion extends softly and effortlessly into the world around him. Padmasambhava's heart radiates into the world, but not like rays of the sun, which are straight, forceful beams of light. This unobtrusive extension of Buddha's compassionate heart is illustrated using lines that softly undulate outward into the world.

While Padmasambhava is the centerpiece of the thangka, his humility is evident in the subtle lines that delineate his form. The viewer can barely distinguish the outline of Padmasambhava's figure within the rainbow halo that surrounds him. The artist does not want us to get caught up in the thought that it is Padmasambhava, in bodily form, that is the focus of our meditation. Rather, it is the wisdom and reason in his mind (sprouting from his third eye) and the compassion in his heart that should be at the center of our meditative contemplations.

With all these magnificent qualities, the Buddha seems to be something that is quite unattainable, but the thangka teaches us that

we can follow in his ways and achieve the same end. Buddha has risen from the hardship, suffering, desire, and ignorance that we experience every day. Yet, we begin to overcome the pain of this world when we see that Padmasambhava has no body, no self. He is only for the benefit of others and does not expect fame or power to come from his generosity. Padmasambhava reached enlightenment and, in this awakened state, his goal is to extend his wisdom to the world. As we begin to meditate on this, we reflect on a concept of no-self or emptiness.

If we meditate long enough and allow our mind to steady itself on the thangka's teachings, we start to move through stages of meditation. The celestial bodhisattvas become different sources of meditation for us. We meditate on wisdom, on compassion, and on defending ourselves from demons. When we meditate on wisdom, we want to push away all ignorance and all misconceptions of ourselves so that we can see things for what they truly are. When we meditate on compassion, we want to give all of what we are to the world around us in order to cease the cycle of suffering for all people. When we meditate on defending ourselves from demons, we want to push away slothfulness, apathy, and untamed thoughts. Focusing our mind on these ideas brings us an understanding of them and eventually this understanding brings a change within us. We are able to reach higher and

higher stages of meditation and reason as we climb closer and closer to becoming fully enlightened.

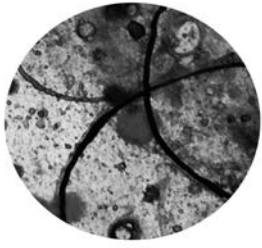
My experience with the thangka exceeded my expectations. I left with a sense that I had moved

forward without even taking a step. It seemed as if I were taking a journey that I had gone on before, like I was reliving a memory. If nothing else, this viewing encouraged my respect for Buddhism and enhanced my desire to

reflect on the concepts that I have yet to understand. This journey through the thangka of Padmasambhava will not be my last voyage into the beauty of Buddhism.



Tibetan Buddhist Thangka Tapestry - Central Hall Room 316



Sunset at St. Cwyfan's

Rhiley Huntington

ENGL 343: Travel Writing

Whitewashed and small, the chapel springs from its island like some great, rare block of salt. It is only an hour before sunset, so the late light is beginning to drip between the clouds around us. Great beams of it drop down into the sea, streaming from their banks and the gulls are, for once, quiet. Ahead, the rest of my group clambers over algae-covered rocks. They are aiming for the small staircase, steps covered in seaweed, cut into the island's concrete retaining wall. The church, St. Cwyfan's, can only be reached at low-tide, unless you have a boat. On the way here, my program director, Tecwyn, had to stop by the post office to fetch the key to the front door, left there for him by the pastor. From there, we'd driven half an hour through Anglesey, down small back roads, turning past dilapidated stone walls and, I suspect at points, using sheep as landmarks.

Right now, my eyes are darting from the beginning sunset, to the church, to my feet. I'm beachcombing and as I walk, my pockets ripen with shells. Here is a mussel,

blue lean oval, and there, a razor clam, long and slick. Everywhere are an infinite number of small white cones of shells, worn from years of battering the coast. These are some of my favorites, for even they have forgotten their story. Were they great or small? Strong or weak? Colorful or white as sun-bleached bone? Neither of us knows. I also find tightly rolled snail shells, banded with pale pinks and blues. I've found these on other beaches, but here they seem brighter, smaller, more fragile. I start out counting them as they drop into my pockets—2, 3, 4—but gratefully forget the number by the time I reach the island.

When it was first founded, St. Cwyfan's was joined to Anglesey by a thin land bridge. However, over time, this bridge eroded and the parish became what is today known as the Church in the Sea. Each year, a few services, along with a smattering of weddings and

christenings, are held in the 900 year old chapel. Local men and women help to maintain the whitewash on the outside walls, first applied in the 17th century when the church was restored to its current state. Atop its slate roof sits a small, empty belfry. The whole building is about as large as my living room at home. Its windows are small and simple, their frames gently sagging. Ahead of me, Tecwyn has left its door unlocked and opened. I duck inside.

Inside, a hodgepodge of well-worn wooden chairs faces the altar. The stone floor is streaked with grooves of sand and the roof is supported by wooden beams, the color of driftwood and sagging ever-so-slightly. Small collections of rocks and shells adorn the windows and altar. They are piled into pyramids and concentric circles, arranged by careful hands. Whose careful hands? A priest's, a pilgrim's, a mother's? Is it a ritual, one rock set down for every

The essay is a meditation on both personal and public history. I was simply impressed at the range of Rhiley's connections between her time studying abroad and her previous life as a collector of "curiosities."

-Keith Ratzlaff

prayer? An offering? A symbol? I can't imagine that it's just for decoration. I want it to mean something more.

* * *

When I was a child, my mother would give me a small bucket when we went to Saylorville Lake. I would pick up chunks of limestone and sandstone and shale, opaque pieces of quartz and sparkling granite. Then, of course, I didn't know their names. I knew only that they were pretty and that was more than enough for me. My mother, a teacher, would have me describe them as I picked them up — smooth, sparkle, heavy, small, glassy, rough— each rock forming an identity as I dropped them in.

As soon as I got home, I would run to the balcony and pour the bucket out, some of the smaller rocks inevitably falling between boards. I'd rush into the kitchen to fill up a bowl with water and run back out with it again, shirt soaked by the time I made it to the balcony. Outside, I'd drop each rock, carefully, one at a time, into the bowl. I had learned that rocks took on a new form underwater. Their colors would deepen and textures heighten, like my own hair when I lay down on the floor of the swimming pool, wrapping around me, undulating and foreign. Here, in the water, I would name the rocks. A round,

pink pebble became Zoe. A crooked piece of gravel was Gus. It was a baptism, like when I'd watched my mother dipped into a deep tub at the local church, coming up smiling. Swimming for Jesus. Being reborn.

When everyone had had their name and their bath, the rocks would be lined up to dry on the balcony's boards. I ordered them by how beautiful I thought they were. The shimmeriest and smoothest rocks sat closest to me and the line would run all the way to the deck's edge, where sat the broken and brown rocks. I would go down the line, telling each what I liked about them, why I had picked them up, repeating the words I had said on the beach: smooth, sparkle, heavy, small, rough, glassy...

* * *

Outside St. Cwyfan's, it has begun to rain lightly. While my group moves inside and under the eaves of the church, giggling and zipping up raincoats, I walk to the island's low bordering wall. The land runs straight up to the edge, like flour heaping from a measuring cup. I lie down in the grass, my eyes level with the wall, hands crossed beneath my chin. I watch the sun setting over the ocean and I imagine its water as a great tabletop and me as a child, nose pressed just against its edge until everything is a vast plane of wood grain under a drywall

sky.

St. Cwyfan's wall was built in the 1880s, when a group of locals realized that the land was eroding. While the church is still here, obviously, before me spread a delta of cracks in the wall's stones and the concrete laid over them. From the cracks, lichens are growing in a multitude of colors, oranges and whites and greens blending into the ocean beyond them, then blending into the horizon and impending star rise. I wonder if they realize that their house is built on sand, made to look like a rock. St. Cwyfan's is still slowly eroding and sinking and shrinking and no number of pyramids of rocks and shells will ever save it, no matter how perfectly piled, no matter how named or washed or lined up in perfect rows. We can place a stone in front of a tomb but, eventually, it will be rolled away. Waves will roar. The world will lose its miracles and begin waiting, waiting for salvation. Rock, paper, scissors. Chapel, rock, time. Rock covers chapel. Chapel covers time. Time covers rock. We cannot win.

Rocks are mentioned many, many times in the Bible. Miracles happen at rocks. Water and fire are brought forth from them; they are broken into pieces by the wind and rent at the death of Christ. They are used as places of worship, shelter, observation, and meeting. Rocks build homes, hammer nails, hold the Ten

Commandments, and Christ himself is, countless times, likened to a rock: strong, trustworthy, and ever-lasting. During Sunday school, we would often talk about the parable of the man who builds his house on a rock and the other who builds his house on sand. Whose life isn't sturdy? Who's in trouble when bad weather comes? We had a song with hand motions and made sample buildings out of toothpicks on top of sand from the playground and rocks we brought from home. The sand would always wash out, tiny houses and schools and bakeries floating towards the drain until, at the last second, the teacher would reach in and pluck them out. They lay outside the classroom on the pavement in tiny lines, drying in the sun so we could take them home.

As I walk back from St. Cwyfan's, the grit of sand and November cold forces its way into my skin and I collect my shells hurriedly, taking anything I like even slightly, pushing it into my pocket, and trudging forward. Shells are almost never mentioned in the Bible, except when listed in offerings or accounts of supplies. In Exodus, the Lord tells Moses to take shells with him to leave on the altar of the Tabernacle, the Israelites' temple and dwelling place for the Spirit. I pass again over the algae-covered rocks and turn to look back at the church once more. A lone grey heron roams the beaches as the sound of the nearby racetrack shakes in the air. The sun is nearly set, the white church now an inky silhouette losing its edges. My classmates are far ahead, so I run back

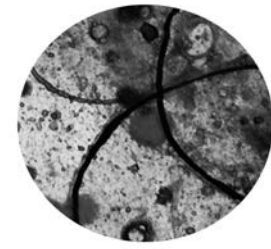
to the bus, the sheep along the country roads vanishing, afraid of my footfalls.

Back at my dormitory, I will pull the shells from my pockets one by one and rinse them in the sink, sand trailing down the drain. They will spread across my windowsill in small, neat lines, peaks rising and falling like sand dunes or rocks in low tide. I will bring back rocks, too, slowly at first, then by the multitudes, numbering each with a fine tip marker. In a notebook, I will list the numbers, followed the places I collected them. Aran Islands, Ireland; Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh; Menai Strait, Anglesey; Mount Snowdon. They lie in my desk in plastic bags, carefully placed next to each other in the dark, but never touching, like old birds in a museum drawer.



"I See the Light" by Gavin Macdonald

Sandra Steingraber's *Living Downstream: A Critical* Review



Shannon Schmidt

*POLS 233: American
Environmental
History and Policy*

I nominated this piece because it exemplifies not only excellent writing within the parameters of a demanding assignment but also because of the author's personal investment of passion for and engagement with the topic itself: cancer, human health, and the effects of environmental toxins.

-Jim Zaffiro

As a rare hybrid scientist-writer, Sandra Steingraber takes it upon herself to do what many well-intentioned scientific articles can't do; effectively communicate the science behind environmental impacts on cancer. Her training as a field biologist enables her to decipher the tricky implications often hidden in scientific jargon, while her writing ability lets her communicate the findings and tell her own compelling story. The result is *Living Downstream*, a book that really makes the reader think about the overly synthetic world that we live in today.

The central story that Steingraber tells is one of an industrialized world that is quietly poisoning the very things that allow it to sustain life: air, water and even food. While chemical companies deny any harm their money-making toxins might do, the research that Steingraber reveals in this novel tells a very different story. As she

says in the prologue of the second edition, "to ignore the scientific evidence is to knowingly permit thousands of unnecessary illnesses and deaths each year."¹ Because I come from a science background, it is easy for me to see the connection between the environment and cancer incidence illustrated by Steingraber. When children have a closer cancer history to their adoptive parents than their biological parents or when immigrants slowly adopt the cancer incidence of their new residences over their home countries, it becomes clear that the influences are more extrinsic than intrinsic.^{2,3} That doesn't mean that genetics don't factor in, just that the environment might play an even bigger role. This is something that needs to be taken into account.

Most importantly, we need to realize, that in the case of pesticides and antibiotics, we are fighting

a losing battle. Resistances in both types of pests are cropping up faster than we can create stronger biocides to kill them. Now think about that. In order to keep our food, our hospitals, our kitchens, and our lawns clean and pest free, we continually dump synthetic chemicals that are designed to cause cell walls to disintegrate, organs to fail, and ultimately living things to die. And we keep increasing the levels at which we use these chemicals. It is just crazy to think that disease and, more importantly, discomfort is only kept at bay by chemicals designed to destroy. This point has been made by many concerned authors including Steingraber and Rachel Carson.

Having read Carson's *Silent Spring*, I already knew the terrifying story of pesticides. However, having read *Silent Spring*, I had thought the horrors of pesticides were resolved and

that the nation could move on. Steingraber is saying that is not the case. Regulations are either not strong enough, not enforced, or not even written in the case of most of the carcinogens mentioned in this book. It is clear that the war Carson declared on synthetic biocides in the 1960s is far from being won.

Steingraber pays homage to Carson in *Living Downstream*, telling about the author's struggles through both cancer and the backlash of *Silent Spring*. The letters from Carson to a close personal friend add another dimension to her story. In the film *Rachel Carson*, her death seems like one accepted by a wizened scientist who knew what was coming. However, the letters revealed by Steingraber uncover Carson's hopes for another summer. These letters show a very different ending that reminds the reader that cancer robbed at least 10 years of Carson's life.⁴ Steingraber also tells the story of Jeannie, her own friend that loses the battle with cancer. These friendships show that cancer doesn't just affect the 45% of men and 40% of women who are diagnosed with it.⁵ Cancer impacts families, friends and entire communities. Three people in my class were diagnosed with cancer before we graduated high school. One of them didn't make it to graduation. Almost everyone associated with Waukee High School attended the funeral.

The generation most impacted by cancer is going to be mine. I say this because I have hope that changes can be made before things get too out of hand for the generation after me. In a perfect world, the demands of Olga Owens Huckins would be met, and synthetic chemicals would cease to be used until all their effects are known and understood.⁶ However, this precautionary principle isn't exactly feasible. Some products require synthetic chemicals, and not every

The generation most impacted by cancer is going to be mine.

synthetic chemical is bad. The best option is that the US could develop something like REACH, a program adopted by the European Union. While the testing period may be costly and time-consuming, this program ensures that chemicals used and manufactured in the EU are all safe for people and the environment.⁷ As chemicals get the all clear from toxicity testing, they become available for use on the market. It's a good way to ensure that the chemicals being used are safe. REACH seems like a marriage between the precautionary principle and the economics of still being able to produce products that do rely on synthetics.

Unfortunately the US is still in the phase of writing right-to-know laws, which will tell you what kind of toxins you are likely exposed to in your home and workplace, and implementing cancer registries, which track cancer diagnoses. While these developments have stockpiled invaluable amounts of data to use in the fight against cancer, they are insufficient to actually get carcinogens banned from use by the EPA or FDA or whichever other regulatory body might be involved. Steingraber goes far enough to call her home state's cancer registry a "thriving child with a stillborn twin" without the hazardous substances registry that could have linked environmentally caused cancers with their carcinogens.⁸ It's not surprising that the hazardous substances registry did not get funded. It seems that if the government doesn't want to hear something, the programs meant to uncover those facts usually lost funding. This was seen in the very costly White House review on Global Climate Change that just disappeared when it had a chance to upset the oil industry. It was also seen in the 1960s during Carson's time when many government scientists were silenced by the possibility of losing funding.⁹ It is even seen today in the sheer lack of any long term cancer studies, noted by Steingraber in her prologue.

It seems as though

changes need to be made on a grassroots level. As Steingraber states, "From the right to know and the duty to inquire flows the obligation to act."¹⁰ I, for one, am on board. While Steingraber's personal stories of her own fights with cancer were meant to help tell the story of environmental cancer in a stronger way than scientific fact can alone, it has made me very wary. Much like Steingraber, I grew up in a corn and soybeans county that grows the nation's food through pesticides and nitrogenous fertilizers. Tazewell County and Dallas County have much more in common than I would like to admit. Both are in "prairie states" that are essentially prairie-less. They both too have areas of industry that have also added to the amount of synthetic chemicals in their environments. This makes it seem like Iowa would be a hot bed of cancer due to the farming communities flanked by industrial areas. However, it seems as though the children of these families are more at risk of developing cancer. ¹¹ This is supported by the cases of leukemia, lung and liver cancers at my high school as well.

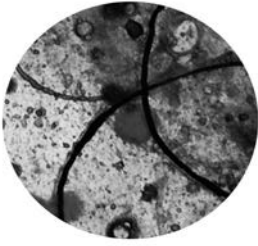
Toxicity research also supports this idea. Many studies have alluded to the fact that younger organisms are more susceptible to toxins than the adults of the same species. In my own research on the biocide triclosan, we found a much lower lethal concentration for zebrafish hatchlings than had been found for adult zebrafish. Working with Dr. Palenske and Dr. Du Pre on triclosan has also opened my eyes to just how prevalent some synthetic chemicals are. While triclosan itself isn't linked to cancer, it is linked to endocrine disruption and high toxicity to aquatic organisms. This isn't what is discouraging. What is discouraging is the fact that triclosan has been shown to be so toxic and is still used in everything from soaps to detergent to deodorant. This is the same discouragement that cancer activists face. There is a large amount of literature out there that does link many synthetic chemicals to cancer in a wide range of animals. Still, the information is considered inconclusive for humans and the chemical remains at large. It's maddening.

While I'm not at the stage of scouring my body in the despair that I have cancer, *Living Downstream* has made me very aware of the possibility of cancer. Many others need to be just as aware. There are countless chemicals, either synthesized or resulting as by products, that are constantly being put into our environment. Some cause cancer. Some cause other diseases. Some like triclosan lower metabolism and could possibly contribute to the obesity epidemic. And yet the scariest part isn't that these chemicals keep building up. The scariest part is that most people are unaware that this is even occurring. That needs to change.

The fact is cancer is very possible for many in my generation. Unfortunately, it seems like things still have to get worse before they can get better. However, I think that books like *Living Downstream* and *Silent Spring* bring attention to these easily overlooked problems. With enough attention, someday the US might be in a place where policy will reflect the precautionary principle instead of the chemical industry.

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- ⁶ Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream* 34.
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- ⁸ Sandra Steingraber, *Living Downstream* 49.
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On Worlds

Joanna Blomquist

ENGL 240: Personal Essay

One warm summer night a while back, I was walking to the house in the dark after helping Dad out in the barn. I had a flashlight in my hand, but I left it turned off, enjoying the feeling of walking in the warm darkness. It was a clear evening, and I stopped to look up at the stars. This was one of the reasons I love living out in the country – the stars come out so much clearer. I stood in the middle of the front yard and gazed into the vast expanses of sky above me. The wash of silver dots filled the sky, looking as if someone had painted the dome above the Earth with glitter. I stood there in awe, sensing the usual feeling of smallness one gets from trying to contemplate the galaxies and sheer space above their heads.

As I gazed upward, totally still, I started to hear noises around me. Out of the darkness, a rustling started up, though I could feel no breeze. First, the rustle came from my right, and then I heard another rustle over beyond me on my left. I

Joanna Blomquist wrote "On Worlds" in the section of Personal Essay where students were asked to write about their relationship to the natural world. Joanna's experience in crossing what we might normally think of the boundaries between animals and human beings--her "snake handling"--was one of the highlights of the semester.

-Keith Ratzlaff

peered into the black, hoping to catch a glimpse of one of our cats prowling about in the night, but there was nothing. The rustling grew, until I'm surrounded by the sound of small, constant motion in the grass. Whether they had been lulled into complacency by my silence, or I had just paused long enough to hear them for the first time, what sounded like hundreds of little nocturnal creatures had started going about their nightly business.

I stood there that night, sandwiched between the vast expanses of glittering galaxies above my head, and the activity of the world at my feet, and felt a profound sense of discomfort. Though I had walked and played in this yard for over fifteen years, here, in the dark, it became a crawling, alien place. Whatever I might have thought, I was not the only one who considered this place my home.

That encounter with

the unknown that night got me thinking about how I viewed my place in my ecosystem. As a human, my main concern is usually human things. I worry about school and extracurricular activities, driving places in a climate controlled car, and dashing in and out of buildings on concrete walkways that minimized the amount of interaction I have with the world around me. Human kind is wrapped up in itself, conveniently believing that it, for the most part, has control over the trees and grasses in our lawns and parks. Subconsciously, we have tried to draw a line, saying, "Nature comes up to here, we live on this side." Nature itself, however, has a funny habit of disregarding our imaginary line.

I moved home last spring from school, still filled with adrenaline from final exams. One particular

day, I had a full to-do list. There was a large pile of stuff sitting in the living room that had accumulated in my dorm room throughout the year, which needed to be put...somewhere. I had gone into my room to put away a bank statement, pulled open the top drawer, and there was something curled up in amongst an old set of colored pencils. The thing twitched, I realized there was a snake in my desk drawer, living thing amongst the rag-tag bunch of office supplies. He was as big around as a nickel, tan with two rows of alternating black spots. He (she?) had one long yellow stripe going down the center of his back, and two cream colored stripes going down his sides. At my opening the drawer, the snake moved his head, his small black eyes staring at me as his little, his delicate tongue flicking out at me. I stared down at the snake and he stared back.

If I had been Annie Dillard, Rachel Carson, or someone else more attune to the delicate sensibilities of snakes, I would have left the desk drawer open, gazing at the fascinating bit of creation before me nestled against old papers. Being me, though, I carefully but swiftly shut the drawer and leaned against my desk, my heart beating fast. The animal instinct in my head warning me Danger! Snake! Ah! - my sense of self-preservation kicking into overdrive.

The other part of my brain stared in fascination at the now closed desk drawer, realizing the futility of my actions. Wherever the snake had come from, he must have gotten into the drawer through the back, since the drawer had been shut when I walked into the room. Closing the drawer did not lock the snake safely away; it just prevented me from seeing him.



“Tinted” by Kathryn Zaffiro

Adrenaline continued to pump through my veins, a mixture of excitement with a touch of danger. There was a snake in my desk drawer!

Garter snakes, or *thamnophis sirtalis*, according to herpnet.net, are really common in the state of Iowa. They like moist habitats the best, but can also be found in open fields, grasslands, and forested areas. Very adaptable, they can live in parks, vacant lots, farmland, and backyards as well. Especially in winter,

they like taking cover underground in burrows or peoples' basements. They are NOT poisonous, and can eat just about anything that they can catch and swallow. If you believe what people say online, these snakes also enjoy surprising unsuspecting humans in their spare time – from basking on porches, to full laundry baskets, to appearing just as people are getting out of the shower. When not terrorizing the human population, they like resting in enclosed areas where they can feel safe, like laundry hampers, boxes, or, in my case, desk drawers.

I stood there, looking through the window out into the sunny, normal day playing itself out in the backyard, wracking my brain for some idea of what to do with to do next. Adrenaline pumped through my veins, not necessarily out of fear, but out of excitement. There was a snake in my desk drawer! How often does that happen? I was the only one in the house – Dad had gone into town and I didn't know when to expect him back. I was on my own.

I thought back to what knowledge I had of snakes. Oddly enough, it was larger than most people's experiences. We live in an old house, so throughout most of my childhood there has been a resident snake living in our damp, unfinished basement. The first couple times Mom encountered it when going

down stairs to do laundry, she would shriek and dash back up the stairs to get Dad to take care of it. By the time Dad would in from the barn to get it, the snake would be gone. Eventually, Mom got so used to the snake's presence that when she did encounter it, she would grab a broom and sweep it off into a corner so she could go about her business.

One of my earliest memories of snakes in our house happened when I was about three. My Grandpa Blomquist was over for lunch, and we were all sitting around the kitchen table finishing up our meal. Mom got up to go get dessert and screamed! I looked over the top of the tall, straight-backed chair just in time to see a snake, dark, at least three feet long and thicker than a broomstick, slither out from underneath the stove. Mom got out of there as Dad went to get leather gloves to grab the snake so it could be released outside – far away from the house. Grandpa just sat beside me and laughed, more amused by the whole situation than alarmed. He was a tough old farmer – not too much phased him.

Gloves! That was what I needed! Dad had said at the time that the gloves would allow more traction to hold the snake so you could keep your grip. Quickly, I ran and got gardening gloves from the bin in the kitchen. Armed with my pink-flowered gloves, I opened back up the drawer.

He was still there, curled up and staring out at me with his black, beady little eyes. Carefully, I reached for just behind his head, and pulled him out. He didn't try to bite or thrash around; he just wrapped himself around my hand and wrist for support. Keeping a firm grip on him, I went to sit outside, wanting to wait to let him go so Dad would get a chance to see him. Plus, deep down, I wanted a witness to what had happened. After all, I had just caught a snake single-handedly, and wanted someone else to share the amazement I had felt at finding it in my desk drawer.

As I sat, he attempted to slide his smooth body through my hands and slither away from me. Through my gloves, I could feel his muscular little body working out of my hands despite my grip on him. Just as he'd slip out of one hand, I'd put the other one up, causing him to run through my fingers in a continuous cycle. He was beautiful in his own way, and totally alien from what I usually saw day to day.

How had he managed to live in the house for so long? The only thing I could figure out was that he had managed to slip into the basement, and then crawl up through the heating vent to my room. Since I had been away at school, no one would have disturbed him in his hideout in my desk. He hadn't made the distinction like I had that he, as a snake, belonged outside the house with the rest

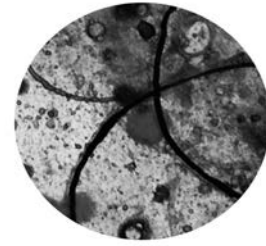
of nature. He had just wanted a warm place to stay, which seemed like a reasonable request.

After about five minutes or so, Dad drove up the driveway in his battered white Ford pickup beside me. I walked over to him, proudly displaying the snake in my grip. Dad gave it a look-over – interested, but more in the way Grandpa had been all those years ago when the snake inched his way out from under the stove. He lived and worked outside amongst creatures all the time as a farmer and wasn't confined to a lifestyle that kept him ignorant of what other organisms were living nearby. This new creature I had found, even within the bounds of our house, held no new revelations for him.

My find properly displayed, I walked behind the house to a stand of trees where I could release the snake. As I watched him slither away in the grass, I thought again of that night filled with stars and rustling, unknown worlds of creatures. Now I knew one small part of that unknown world. Sure, it's not much compared to the vast amounts of space in the galaxy and the small groups of creatures here on earth, but at least one boundary had been broken down between my human centered world and the world right outside my door. I smile and sit in the warm sunny grass a little while longer before walking back to Dad and the house.

Vandalia

Mycaela Crouse



Recipient of the John Allen award

ENGL 213: Nature and Environmental Literature

“Vandalia” wrestles thoughtfully with the author’s sense of place, especially with the question of how to bear witness to loss but also face the future with realistic optimism. The essay also situates place in the contexts of social and natural history.

-Joshua Dolezal

Southeast Iowa, Fall 2010

“Please, Papa, buy the treatment. Please.”

Dad scratches his nose then stuffs his hand inside the pocket of his overalls. “I’ll run by Earl May next time I’m in town.”

I look out the west windows towards our two towering oak trees, older than me. Older than my dad. Older than our house, which was built before people listened to the radio or tractors had rubber tires.

“Thank you. They’re worth it.”

He rubs the back of his neck, tired of my nagging. I understand; the chemical is expensive, and I’m not the one paying for it. Still...

* * *

Southeast Iowa, Summer 2010

I hop off my bicycle onto Competine Road and knock down the kickstand. I’m about five miles to the east of

my house – three and a half as the crow flies – and straddling the dotted line in the middle of the highway. I’m not concerned about getting hit. The vehicles that come down Competine are big enough for me to hear from a mile off and are mostly seen during harvest time.

It’s the beginning of June so the crops are only shin high. In another month and a half, these country roads will be nothing more than pathways weaving through an impenetrable maze of corn.

Today, though...

Today I can see forever.

I’m stopped at this spot because it’s the highest point around. Every which way I turn, the fields stretch from one horizon to the next, dividing my world in two: blue on top, green on bottom, me standing where the two kiss. The wind is blowing just right – a caress from the west – and carries the perfume of freshly turned dirt and new life. I inhale deep, greedy

gulps. It is as Ted Kooser writes in *Local Wonders*, “The unique combination of a number of fragrances into one indefinable evocative scent that punches its fist straight to the heart” (123). This place even has a taste to it thanks to the ubiquitous dust: a dry, chalky texture with a thick aftertaste intermingled with my salty sweat from the long bike ride. From here, I can watch as the bean plants sway to the side in silver ribbons, rippling like waves across a dark sea. Our own ocean right in the middle of Southeast Iowa.

There is another reason I like this place. When I look to the west, despite the miles, I can pick out our house. It stands atop a hill, too, though that’s not what makes it visible from this distance. It’s the two pine oaks. They soar over all the other trees and buildings in about a fifteen mile radius. It doesn’t matter which way I come home – north, east,

south, or west – those trees are the first thing I spot. Two giants standing sentinel in our backyard. I know I will never be lost so long as they are there, working like beacons, pointing me homeward.

Except that's all in jeopardy now. Our trees have an infestation. The district forester stopped by and after his inspection informed us, "The galls won't kill the trees, but you might want to take care of it just in case."

The just in case argument is a hard sell for my father. The chemical that kills the larvae inside the galls costs \$80 a quart. And our trees are so big we'll need four quarts. Each. That's \$640 total for the treatment, and it'll take more than one application to get rid of them.

I'm pushing hard, though. Those trees aren't just trees to me. I've lived in the same house my entire life and the oaks are a part of my home. I've spread my blanket beneath their boughs and leaned against their rough bark, reading novels and swiping off the occasional ant that strayed across my legs, no doubt mistaking them for roots. The tree furthest to the east hosted my five year old birthday party's pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey game. The one to the west had shelf fungi so large I used to try to climb them when I was younger. We even had one of those clichéd tire swings hanging from the branches of the eastern one, a branch so

high up Dad had to borrow my uncle's cherry picker to hang it.

That's what I'm losing if those trees die: memories.

I linger in the road a moment longer, trying to cement in my mind what the oaks look like from here. I want to be able to picture them clearly in the future, not only because this is the summer after my senior year of high school and I'll no longer be living at home come fall, but also in case there's ever a day I stand where I am now and have no trees to direct me home. I worry that day might come sooner than I had hoped.

Because, even from this distance, I can see the stark outline of their bare branches. The oaks didn't bud this year.

* * *

Ohio, Spring 2009

It's my junior year of high school, and we're driving back from Pennsylvania, my mom, dad, and I, after watching my brother compete at Nationals for track. I'm reading *Gone with the Wind* to pass the time and just finished. I shut the heavy novel, lean my head back, and close my eyes, the last passage reverberating in my mind: "I'll think of it tomorrow, at Tara" (1448). Tomorrow, at Tara... at Tara.

"Mom, Dad? I think we should name our home."

I catch my mom's eyes

in the rearview mirror. My dad is in the passenger seat but doesn't turn around. I can see his belly – too many Mt. Dew's – move steadily up and down. He's probably asleep.

"What's that, Bug?"

Mom asks, directing her attention back to the road.

"I said, 'I think we should name our home.' You know, like Scarlett O'Hara and Tara."

Mom laughs and then falls silent. I consider the subject dismissed, but she surprises me by speaking up a few minutes later. "How about 'Little House on the Hill?'"

It's my turn to laugh. "That's good! Maybe a bit long, though. What about Twin Oaks?"

"Nah, we have more oaks than just the two big ones."

We both fall silent again, brainstorming. After a while, when neither one of us comes up with any good suggestions, we let the subject drop. Mom turns up the radio and I fish out my Spanish homework from my book bag. Eventually I nod off as well.

"Mycaela!" Mom shouts some time later.

I shoot up, wide awake. "What? What's the matter?" I peer out the window, searching for something worthy of her exclamation, but see nothing besides the same low hills and occasional farmhouse I saw before my impromptu nap. I think we're still in Ohio.

"Look at that name. To your right," Mom instructs,

tilting her head that direction.

I glance over. There is a giant exit sign with the word Vandalia written across it in bold, white letters.

I try the word out, letting it roll off my tongue. “Vandalia. Van-dale-ee-ya. Hmm... I like it,” I say, grinning.

“Yeah, I thought it was pretty too. Vandalia,” she finishes with a whisper. “It fits somehow.”

“It’s beautiful.”

* * *

Our house was downright ugly when my parents bought it in the late 1980s, or so they tell me anyway. They were expecting their first child, my brother, and were frantically house hunting – a phrase I’ve never fully understood as it brings to mind couples in orange vests, shot guns in hand, houses cowering beneath their trees in fear of being spotted. Our house, a speckled brick rectangle sitting exposed on a hill, surrounded for miles by nothing but level fields, was a sitting duck.

It belonged to a dentist before us and used to be a fully functioning farm. The plot was eighty acres and consisted of a small barn, another much larger one, a windmill, silo, two corn cribs, and a few other sheds for chickens and milk, not to mention the house. They were all built by the Hines brothers, two engineering professors from Iowa State

University, a little after World War I. The pair spent some time in Brazil building bridges. After the government had paid them with gold, it was rumored they buried it out where the big barn used to be. My parents still have the occasional person drop by and mention the treasure hidden out there. We’ve never looked, though.

ISU was supposed to inherit the place upon the Hines brothers’ deaths, but the two had a falling out with the university and decided to sell it privately. In stepped the Stansberrys. They lived there for probably the longest length of time, and many of our community’s older generation still refer to it as the Stansberry place. The family ran into bad luck in 1979 when the house caught fire and burned down. The only things left intact were the outer brick shell, the marble fireplace, and some of the floor in the master bedroom. The rest had to be gutted and rebuilt. There are still a few places on the basement stairwell where you can see the charred wall beneath the paint.

The Stansberrys sold it soon after they’d made it livable again. There’s some debate about who owned it next, since Dr. George Evans and his family lived there, but Dr. Evans’s father farmed the land. They didn’t stay long. After about nine years, Dr. Evans moved his family into town where he could be closer to his practice, and then it was

Mom and Dad’s turn.

They had the option when they first bought the place if they wanted all 80 acres or not. My parents were both postmasters and had just had their first child, so money was tight. They opted for ten acres instead and rented out most of it to local farmers. After a few years (during which time I joined the family), Mom and Dad had finally raised enough to start transforming it from the Stansberry Place into the Crouse House.

If you were to look at it now, you’d never know it was originally a farmhouse. The process has been a slow one and even now, over twenty years after they lugged their first cardboard box through the back door, my parents are still changing the way it looks. Money is a factor, but time itself has left its indelible mark upon our land. The barn, a giant in its own right and old enough to land itself on the historic registry, blew down when I was six in a massive windstorm. The orchard, planted haphazardly in the corner of our yard by the Hines brothers (some of their old orchard equipment is to this day hanging in the garage) slowly dwindled from a variety of fruit trees down to just a pair of grafted apple trees. We finally had to cut those last two down about five years ago. Fruit trees, like most beautiful things, are relatively short lived.

The trees weren’t the only thing to go. All the original farm buildings are long gone, a giant shed replacing them just this past summer. The land my

parents used to rent out to farmers is now a three acre pond shaped vaguely like a whale. I was quite young when my parents put that in – I can remember the bulldozers, but that may be because they let my brother ride in one but claimed that I was too young yet. Righteous indignation has a way of solidifying memories.

That pond is as much a part of my home as the two oaks, the people, the house. I grew up amphibious, spending most summer days in the water, and it was on the bridge that spans one of the pond's "fins" that I shared my first, awkward kiss with a boy that I would end up dating till I was a freshman in college.

The sand volleyball court they put in when my brother and I were in high school now lays dormant, grass sprouting stubbornly around the edges. My father reluctantly took down the light pole for it this past year, an unspoken acknowledgement that his children had indeed moved out for good.

The house has not escaped change, either. Sunroom, living room, mudroom, attached garage added. Certain walls, extra doors to the outside, detached garage all removed. Wallpaper scraped off, paint changed, carpet laid out, windows multiplied. And somewhere out of that complex equation came the house that I love – the one

that I dream about some nights when I've been away at college too long and am feeling disconnected from the life I left behind. Vandalia.

I think John Price says it best in *Man Killed by Pheasant*: "I've never lived anywhere but Iowa. This has become the unexpected, defining journey of my life: to come home without ever having left" (9).

* * *

Pella, Iowa - Fall 2013

I've learned a lot this semester, my last fall here at Central. I'm in Nature and Environmental Literature, a class where we read books such as Sand County Almanac, Local Wonders, and Epitaph for a Peach. These, along with others we've discussed in class, all address issues concerning the environment, sustainability, preconceived notions, and how to make sense of and connect to the world we live in, and even how to reconcile ourselves to the fact that loss is sometimes inevitable. They've made me reevaluate my own sense of place, or, as Price elaborates, "the wildlife and nature areas I've learned to love, the human communities I've called home, the flawed yet promising terrain that's become as familiar as my own flesh" (9).

But, as Barbara

Kingsolver points out in *Flight Behavior*, "Words were just words, describing things a person could see. Even if most did not. Maybe they had to know a thing first, to see it" (250). This idea – that one has to possess knowledge of a place to see it properly – resonates deeply. Perhaps all the years I'd thought I had a pretty good grasp on where I'd come from, on Vandalia, had been a lie, a result of a kind of arrogance where I assumed I could love a place without ever bothering to ask what it was I was loving.

Nothing has opened my eyes more than my work this semester at Prairies for Agriculture. It's a research project that looks at the benefits of prairies from an economic perspective – trying to find monetary reasons for farmers to incorporate prairie plants into their buffer strips, around fences, and into roadside ditches. The idea is interesting since it takes a more realistic approach to sustainability. But it's also a little disheartening that those fighting for a cleaner environment have to resort to breaking everything down into profit margins in order to get people to make the responsible choice. I suppose Leopold was right when he wrote, "The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligation" (203).

Prairies for Agriculture is ongoing and will be for several years, but for right now, the team is just

collecting data. Some days this means wading through our fourteen acre prairie, painstakingly counting how many native species we see, other days it's mowing down two meter strips of land and measuring the biomass. Being involved with this process has taught me things about the land that I didn't even know to look for before. I'm studying the medical sciences, so I only briefly encountered environmental biology in introductory courses freshman year. But thanks to the patience of Dr. Benedict, the big-hearted professor in charge of the project, and Jessica and Stephanie, fellow students whose futures include conservationism and restoration, I am learning, slowly. I know now that the goldenrod is welcomed but the foxtail is not; I know that compass plants are called such because people thought they always pointed north (they were mistaken); and I know how luxurious Indian grass feels when you skim your hand over the amber tops of the tall, pencil-thin stalks. It is, as Price writes, "whole galaxies of life that somehow, until [this] moment, [have] existed beyond sight and care" (4).

I spoke with Dr. Benedict about seeding my ten acre plot at home. I was excited at the possibilities – it'd be a fraction of the size prairies are supposed to be, but it'd be a start. Perhaps we could prove Leopold wrong when he wrote, "Wilderness is a resource which can shrink but

not grow" (199). And not only that, but to think of all the gas we wouldn't be burning if we didn't have to mow the entire ten acres one to two times per week every summer! So many opportunities to be sustainable with so little effort on me and my family's part. I understood what Kooser meant when he wrote, "I can feel my will joining with that of the feeble



"As I See It" by Ashlei Bos

light in its struggle to push back the darkness" (94). Yes, we could push back. It was perfect.

Except it wasn't. Not for my parents, anyway. After I pitched the idea to them, I got strange looks in response. Sustainability isn't exactly a conversation most Midwestern agricultural communities have very often. Quite the opposite, actually. In high school, we learned the basics of increasing crop yields and animal husbandry,

not that the nitrogen runoff from our fields is causing an ecological dead zone in the Gulf, nor that tallgrass prairie is the single most endangered landscape in the world and Iowa has less than one tenth of one percent left. In our community, "going green" is an endeavor undertaken by sensationalists and idealists. A goal that's always going to be a little out of reach. Not to mention it's usually expensive.

When I asked my mother why she was opposed to planting the back half of our yard with prairie grasses, she answered, "It would just look weird."

I wonder now what I'll see when I stand on that Competine hill next summer. When the dichromatic landscape is before me, will I recognize that all that green is unnatural – a byproduct of vast monocultures resulting from the agroindustrial complex? Will I mourn the lack of orange-speckled purple prairie clovers, towering sawtooth sunflowers, the musky scent of prairie sage? When I see those bean plants rippling silver like ocean waves, will I wish they were wild ryes instead? I hope I do.

I can't help resenting this newfound knowledge to some degree. It's taken away the blinders, so to speak, where before I looked out at the land and saw only beauty, breathed in deep gulps of life, and reveled in the knowledge that this intensely fertile land I grew up on has the

ability to create so much food for the world, now I see the shortcomings of a people who either don't realize the terrible consequences of their actions or do realize and don't care. I see an American culture where demand and supply justify ecological death and destruction. I see loss instead of life. Price's words echo in my mind: "You do not deserve what little wildness you enjoy" (229). I've become a sensationalist.

One thing I know for sure I won't see when I stand on top of that hill next summer is Vandalia. Our house blends casually into the landscape now, no longer distinctive, no longer visible. I can't pick it out from the ten or eleven other houses because the only thing that made it stand out is gone. Our twin oaks were finally chopped down two years ago.

But that's not the end of this story. Our class went on the Farm Crawl this fall, where eight local family farms showcased their produce and their sustainable methods, proving that it is possible to escape the heavily subsidized industrial-scale farming. We learned about Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, which promote local,

small-scale farming. I was able to see firsthand how Prairies for Agriculture is attempting to prove that native plants would be beneficial for farmers. And there are larger organizations operating at the national or even global scale attempting to, if not reverse, at least slow down the damage to our environment.

So there is loss, yes, but there is hope, too.

* * *

Ohio, at the junction of Dixie Drive and the National Road – Early 1800s

A group of weary travelers unhitch their wagons after steering them into a rough circle, flattening rigid stalks of silphium in the process. It's almost dark, so a woman starts the fire and the food – what little's left of it – is slowly cooked.

The only sounds are the chorus of crickets, the crackling fire, and the low voices of the men gathered off to one side, discussing what to do next. The pioneers are headed to Vandalia, Illinois, to make a new home for themselves, but things are not going as planned. Illness among the children and a

series of hard rains make traveling the last 300 miles impossible. What to do...

"We could still try? Stay here a while and try to gather up enough supplies to finish the trip later," one man suggests, snapping his suspenders over and over.

"I say we just keep going, stop wasting time," another man interjects. He's tall, dark haired and burly. Intimidating. The other men nod their heads in agreement.

Except for one, a shorter man who leans against the side of a wagon, his arms crossed. When he sees the group agree to follow this harebrained suggestion, he decides to step in. "Let's just stay here," he proposes. The men glance at each other in surprise. "Look around you. This is good land. There's no reason we can't make a go of it here. Besides, we'll be getting nowhere fast on what we have left of supplies. Be sensible."

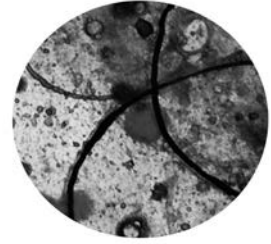
So the travelers put their stakes in the land, declare it theirs, and name it after their original destination: Vandalia. They realize that, failing to reach where they hoped, there's no reason they can't create their own home right here.

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Connecting the Dots

Katelyn Stevens



*ENGL 190: Reading, Writing, and
Doing Sustainability*

We had traveled thirty-five miles to reach the top and realized that we were still on the shortest mountain all around us. We were so small: we were so insignificant compared to everything else...

I used to go to Colorado at the beginning of August every year for a hiking trip with my youth group. We would travel thirteen hours from Lake Rathbun through Nevada and into the Poudre Canyon area. We always set up base camp at a site across from this mountain that looked like an elephant. There was one bathroom, if you could call a hole in the ground surrounded by a small wood shack a bathroom. There was no running water except for a small section of river that we would jump in at the end of the trip, even though the water was freezing and we were terrified of being swept away. We just wanted some form of bath.

It was a five day trip, and we would do all we could to lessen the amount of weight we had to carry in our packs. One girl only

I was amazed at the way Katelyn was able to “connect” so many stories and “dots” into a cohesive picture of her own sustainability autobiography. I also appreciated her voice throughout the journey.

-Mark Stark

brought one pair of pants and others sawed their toothbrushes in half and left deodorant behind altogether. The thirty-five mile hike up was never boring, from snake and fish catching towards the bottom to snowball fights a mile under the peak to free climbing, at last, a forty-foot tall pile of giant rocks to reach the highest point on the entire mountain. We sat there, leaning against the tallest boulder that was too jagged to climb and looked around. We had traveled thirty-five miles to reach the top and realized that we were still on the shortest mountain all around us. We were so small; we were so insignificant compared to everything else. I imagine this is how Henry David Thoreau must have felt when he said “the universe is larger than our views of it.” It was hard to believe that I was such a small part of the world but my

species and I have so much influence over it, almost to the point where we have no more control of our influence.

At the beginning of the second day when we were packing up our tents and dreading moving forward so early, our trail guide Rachel told us a secret. “When we get to the top of the mountain there is a vending machine that has pop and snacks that are flown in every month.” Tired and gullible, those of us who had never gone on the trip before honestly believed her. I could just imagine it: a green and black pop machine featuring the latest Mountain Dew flavor we were obsessed with and next to the pop machine, a big black snack machine. It would have a clear front featuring a revolving selection of delicious sandwiches that we knew were amazing compared to our trail food. It would sit

right at the base of that giant pile of rocks we painstakingly climbed.

Five years ago I was so excited for those imaginary machines to be there; however, now that I am going back this coming August, I would be so devastated if it were true. Humans had already degraded that area enough as it was. Damming the river upstream to build a bridge, only to then release the water later on and knock out the bridge, led to several trees being torn down along the path. Hikers would throw them across the river to avoid having to get their feet wet. We refused to use those trees which led to the other side and instead removed our shoes and rolled our pants up to cross the river the “old fashioned way” as Rachel called it. This eventually led to my first panic attack when the water was much deeper than anticipated, but I digress. All throughout the trip, we carried out our trash in little baggies at the tops of our packs, we dug holes for our natural bodily functions, and we did our best not to disturb anything. I didn’t get it at the time. I complained about how gross it was to keep trash with you for nearly a week. Rachel tried to get me to see reason, but I would not understand until I was much older how one person and her decisions can create such an impact on the environment around her.

The Hunger Games: A Humbling Dot

I had the fortune of meeting Rivkah Gardner-Frolick my junior year. She was an international baccalaureate student who switched into our AP Environmental Science class to avoid having to take IB art, which we all heard was brutal. Rivkah had this strange caring complex, especially for those facing poverty and hunger. She founded Central Academy’s first Hunger Club, which we all thought had something to do with *The Hunger Games* at first (but was completely unrelated), and she seemed to think that I would be a tremendous resource to the club. She recruited me early on to help with networking. One of our biggest events of the year was our Oxfam Hunger Banquet, which is defined by Oxfam America as “an interactive event... [where] the meal that you eat... [is] determined by luck of the draw just as in life some of us are born into relative prosperity and others into poverty.” We were trying to change “the way people think about poverty and hunger” (Oxfam America). If you still don’t know what I’m talking about I will explain it as simply as I can.

We hosted an event where students and community members came to have a meal. They were randomly seated and served according to where they sat. Fifteen percent of our guests received a full meal; chicken, rice, and vegetables, with a choice of beverage and eating utensils. This fifteen percent

represented first world cultures like Monaco whose gross national income was recorded as 6.4 million in 2012. Monaco is one of the most successful countries, and it doesn’t even have an agricultural system or resource exports (Europa World Yearbook). Thirty-five percent of our guests received rice, beans and water representing the thirty-five percent of humans who live in second world countries. Lastly, fifty percent of our guests received just rice to emphasize half of the world living in poverty. They also received a glass of “dirty” water we created using food dye to represent the countless communities without clean water. In Morocco, most of the country doesn’t have a way of transporting or disposing of their waste. They go outside in nature which pollutes their country and water. Creating a sanitation system is, at the moment, nearly impossible due to “costs of the pipe network, lack of water and serious environmental drawbacks” (Abarghaz). Everyone who had received the “dirty” water was astonished and most were very humbled by the experience, including myself. Clean water is typically a problem that we Americans attribute to primitive countries but it is a growing problem all over the world, including the United States. In a 2009 study by *The New York Times*, Charles Dughigs reported, “More than 62 million Americans have been exposed since 2004 to

drinking water that did not meet at least one commonly used government health guideline intended to help protect people from cancer or serious disease.”

Our Oxfam Hunger Banquet was unbelievable. It is crazy how I might not have been part of this group and amazing event had it not been for Rivkah thinking I had connections. Eventually I learned to view my connections as a personal, societal, and ecological concept. Rivkah’s link to me led to the culinary arts program that catered to and connected to our event. That connection sprouted for every guest we had and possibly connected all the way to the third-world cultures for which we raised funds through banquet admission. Although we were just an isolated, ill-named school club, we still had an impact and we weren’t so small once we made all of our connections.

The Ugly Truth: A Bold Dot

Our guests and I learned so much that day about how different it is living in a privileged culture where we take everything for granted. As Americans, we are so used to having as much as we want whenever we want. One hundred years ago, humans ate seasonally. As our technology industrialized and we developed more efficient ways of transporting and storing food, so did our food shed. James Farrell

in his novel *The Nature of College* defines a food shed as the “area affected by our eating” or basically where we get everything we consume, which has become global in the past sixty years (76). Farrell’s concept of “distancing” explains how humans had begun realizing that we could use networking to get food that we may not have had access to before. This networking seemed great at the time and quickly became part of our culture. Oranges at Christmas time was a tradition for thousands of Americans for years, and we began to forget how often unnatural fruit consumption in winter truly was and still is. Wait a second, how could the invention of modern preservation techniques be bad if I can have fresh fruit all year long? How was I supposed to know humans were meant to eat seasonally if I can have access to anything whenever I want?

Let’s consider the fact that our food may not be as fresh as we believe it to be. We have developed this veiled idea of freshness originating from our culture no longer having to douse our meat and vegetables with sodium and brine or soak our fruit in sugar to keep them for an extended time period. Our food appears fresher than previously available but this fresh food is one) not indigenous to our region or, in most cases, to our ancestral diet, and two) contains countless chemical modifiers and poisons to keep them appealing to the eye. For example, bananas are a big food item in my family. My dad

eats one every morning for his daily dose of potassium and my two-year old niece Ella asks for one every time she visits. I was always conscious of the fact that bananas don’t come from Iowa, let alone the US. However, I never really considered the jet fuel used to fly my bananas nearly six thousand miles from Argentina to Iowa just so I could give Ella a banana every week, nor the chemicals used to keep them ripe until they could be bought. It’s not just imported goods from outside the US, either. According to Dr. Farrell, “In eating one pound of hamburger we are... consuming the two hundred gallons of water it takes to make the beef... five pounds of grain...” and dirt “because the grain that farmers grow... cause[s] soil erosion” (78). “It takes nature about five hundred years to make one inch of topsoil” and “American farmlands lose 1.9 billion tons of topsoil a year” (17, 78). Through our monoculture and cattle industries, we are internally destroying the heart of our economic system. We are in deep trouble and I, like most Americans, was blind to the countless resources being wasted by our developed global food shed system and the destruction we’re causing through our devotion to short-term bypasses over long-term solutions.

The Green Mile: A Misunderstood Dot

Why do we not know about these things? I know that I grew up thinking that

I was living a green lifestyle. Like many Americans, my ideas about what is “good for you” came from a long line of misconceptions. My idea of healthy eating came from my mother (and my grandmother who doesn’t believe in sugar) who is a nurse and hears about what is ‘good’ for humans on a daily basis and what I have always been *taught* is good to eat. My family gardens in the summer. I have my own herb garden as my grandma gave me some oregano and licorice to start with years ago and my dad cultivates a modest vegetable patch in the far corner of our backyard containing countless tomatoes, radishes, and gourds. We live in Iowa though, so we buy our vegetables from the grocery store at all other times of the year as does every other American who does not eat seasonally as I am learning I should consider. Additionally, in every school cafeteria I have ever entered, there is a large food pyramid (or now a food plate) showing exactly how much of everything I “need” to have. We were taught to have a glass of milk, some kind of meat, a grain product and a veggie to have a “well-balanced diet.” We run into problems immediately with the notion that a glass of milk with every meal is healthy. According to a survey conducted by *USA Today* in 2009, sixty percent of adults can’t digest lactose. (Wiese) The number of lactose sensitive humans has grown every year. When I visited Europe and requested milk

for my cereal, I was laughed at. They explained that milk was for babies. Milk was never meant to be consumed after infancy. More conspiratorially, isn’t weird and unnatural that humans are the only mammal that drinks another mammal’s milk?

Why is it, then, that there is such a stress to drink three glasses of milk a day along with two to three servings of meat? Some, like Michael Pollen in his *Eater’s Manifesto*, would say that lobbyists for the multi-trillion dollar meat, egg, and dairy industry would have something to do with swaying the USDAs choices. What others would say, in all honesty, really isn’t significant. How much money would the CEOs of these companies lose if Americans begin to cut back on daily meat intake? “The average North American devours more than twice the daily protein requirement” (77). Wouldn’t the CEOs be sad when cutting our protein intake in two would also cut their salary the same way? Although, being honest, the working class would get laid off by the hundreds before a CEO would take a pay cut, as we all clearly saw in 2008.

Furthermore, when it comes to misconceptions, many people think they are living green in regards to their energy and water consumption. The truth of the matter is; it doesn’t matter if you use energy saver appliances and light bulbs, never turn on your air or heat, and take two minute showers

with low flow showerheads. A lot of the time, the measures we go through to live green don’t offset the little everyday consumerist exploitations that cause pollution. Like the fable of the hummingbird, it is important to do the best one can, no matter how little that may be.

As a strong, cohesive community, however we can do much better. Our society has a severe case of Affluenza, defined as extreme materialism caused by rampant consumerism. Our technologically focused society has this fixation on the latest and greatest. Take the iPad for example. The first iPad was released in 2010 and the latest, fourth generation, was released in 2012. What is the necessity of having a new model every six months for anything other than a shiny new toy to show off? Electronics contain a lot of components that are harmful to, potentially both, humans and the environment. Cell phones have “500 to 1000 components... such as lead, mercury, cadmium and beryllium and hazardous chemicals, such as brominated flame retardants. Polluting PVC plastic is also frequently used” (Greenpeace International). I have had four cellphones since the seventh grade. If we use 85 years as a basis for average lifespan, I will use over fifty cell phones in my lifetime. That’s insane. In our innovative and mandatory updated electronic system we are putting

thousands of chemicals on the market every day that will just become out of date in a couple of years and end up in a landfill polluting our earth. We are killing the dirt that we, and our future generation, will live on for the next few hundred years. If we don't change our ways, the only soil around here that's not covered by asphalt will be too toxic to produce food.

The Empire Strikes Back: The Final Dot

I was born, and have lived all my life, in Des Moines, Iowa. "The Great Flood of 1993", as it's so famously called, is a large part of modern Iowa history. My mom vividly remembers going to get water from a large pool filled up with filtered water flown in from surrounding areas. 250,000 people, in Des Moines alone, were without running water. (Wilkerson) In an excerpt from *Man Killed by Pheasant*, John Price discusses his proximity to Des Moines during '93 and how the national media claimed it was "Nature Gone Mad!" (Price) Personally, I like to think of it instead as, "Nature is Pissed." Our environment of concrete and asphalt covered soil, no longer allows for the absorption of excess water. When it rains, the water has no place to go besides

our sewer system and rivers, which, in case you haven't noticed, have a tendency to fill up rather quickly. Year after year our rivers flood and year after year we blame Mother Nature for the crazy hormonal shrew she is. Why don't we, instead, blame ourselves for once and take corrective actions?



"Landscape" by Kathryn Zaffiro

Americans, like all people, have this habit of consuming landmasses. It all started with imperialism. Before concrete cities, Columbus, and America, Europeans (mostly) held an obsession for the conquest of land. If a nation held a lot of property they held a lot of power. England, Spain, and The Netherlands were sending out expeditions and trying to gain early spheres

of influences in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. Humans have retained this obsession of expansion and greatness and transformed colonization into urban sprawl. The bigger the concrete landmass of a city, the more important and powerful it is. For instance, instead of a few roads leading to the areas surrounding our capitol, Des Moines, the cities merge into each other, obstructing the lines where Des Moines ends and West Des Moines, Urbandale, and various other suburbs begin. Greenery is minimal. There are more signs along the road pointing you to where you think you need to go than trees along the Interstate. Even more threatening is the everyday population increase and United States tendency to spread outwards to accommodate instead of upwards like in smaller countries. It is almost like America has all of this open space, so we have to fill it like we are decorating a bedroom.

It's A Wonderful Life: Seeing the Pattern of Dots

My sugarless grandma always taught me to follow the golden rule. She stressed helping others who are less fortunate than I, being open-minded towards others, and having an overall compassion for everything living. When I think about it, my empathy has developed over the years and isn't limited to just people

or animals anymore. As Bill Clinton said in an interview with Stephen Colbert, "I want to leave a better world. The reason you should do things for other people is selfish. There's no difference between selfish and selfless if you understand how the world works." Clinton and I share the belief that connections are boundless if one can step back and observe the pivotal points: from my first world selfish hunger on top of the most beautiful place I've ever been, to my involvement with Rivkah's Hunger Club, to taking my first global sustainability class. These moments swirl in my mind,

entwining and comingling, forming who I will be and how I will act in my upcoming years.

Global sustainability is defined as not "depleting natural resources, and thereby supporting long-term ecological balance." But, sustainability is, at its core, defined as the ability to uphold or support something: supporting each other globally. Steve Jobs said in a commencement speech at Stanford in 2005, "You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in

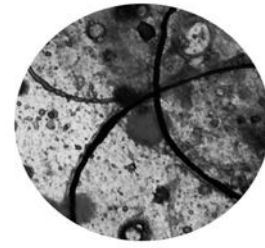
your future." Prospectively mapping out a clear and effective plan of action to save the world is impossible. We can, however, trust that green living will someday connect in our futures. We can believe that all of our small steps will eventually create a giant leap. We must learn selflessly to sustain our communities, our people, and eventually reduce our consumption enough to sustain our earth. We will connect the dots to realize that we were selfishly sustaining ourselves all along.

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White Cane

Marissa Hirschman



LAS 110: Creativity and Human Nature

When I walk anywhere with a lot of obstacles or in a place that is unfamiliar, I always carry my cane with me. When people see this long, white beacon, they immediately identify me as someone different, someone to be looked at or inquired about. My cane causes people to make assumptions about who I am before they even meet me, sometimes before they even see what I look like. They assume that I am incapable or unintelligent. Some even think I cannot hear. When people see my cane, they identify me as a blind person, nothing more. It is true that I am blind, but I am much more than that. After people see my cane however, often that is all I am to them. Though my blindness is a big part of who I am, it does not define me. My cane is more than an identifier, just as I am more than a person with a handicap.

Each time I grew, I had to get a new cane. Each cane was a little different – a little taller, a little more sophisticated. My first cane had a small indentation on the handle where my finger was supposed to go and a stick-

On one level, Marissa's account of her blindness and how she learned to use her cane is an inspiring story of another human being's rising above her limitations. But the real essay is in the way her experiences connect to all our lives.

- Keith Ratzlaff

on foam circle where I was supposed to place my palm. As I got older however, I got new canes with no markings. I might not have realized it then, but this meant I was learning. I had learned how to hold my cane, and now, I was starting to refine my cane skills. This meant that I was learning how to use my cane as more than just a weapon, I was beginning to use it to get from place to place. I was learning to do things without being told, to take responsibility for my actions.

When I was very young, I used to drag my cane behind me. I was not very aware of my blindness, and I did not realize how important my cane really was. I did not understand why I needed to use it when I had people all around me to tell me where to go. Then, my braille transcriber, who has taught me many life lessons, taught me one of the most important things I have and perhaps will ever learn. I was walking down the hall with my class, when I ran smack into a wall.

I promptly started bawling, as young children do, when Barb said “You should have used your cane.”

At first, I was angry, I wondered how she could let me run into something; I could have gotten seriously injured. Then I thought about it for a while and I realized what this seemingly pointless stick of metal was to be used for. I realized that this long stick was all that was between me and the world; and without it, I would never be able to get around on my own. When I ran into that wall, as strange as it sounds, I learned the importance of independence. I learned that relying on others was what was easy, but relying on myself was what I needed to do to get where I wanted to go. Sometimes, I still run into obstacles, literally and figuratively, but that will not stop me from getting what I want.

Though I trust myself when I am walking with my cane, sometimes, others do not. They inform me when there is an obstacle in my

way, or think they must open every door we come upon even if I get there first. I know they are trying to help, but I guess they do not realize that the reason I have a cane is so I do not need people to tell me when there are obstructions in my path. Sometimes I'll be walking, and the person walking with me will yell "Stairs!" I think they are worried that I will fall and hurt myself, but what they do not realize is that I have become quite skilled at finding such obstacles, even though it may not seem like it at times. Even if I do fall, I am not made of glass. I have fallen many times, but I have always picked myself up off the ground. When things like this happen, I find myself wanting to prove that I am capable of descending a set of stairs, so I run down them just to show that I can. This desire to prove myself has become an important aspect of my identity. I am constantly trying to prove to people that I can do things for myself and that even when I do mess up, I can fix my mistakes. I think there is something about all of us, an assumption people make that we try to overcome and disprove. Sometimes however, we must realize that the way others see us is not important, it is how we see ourselves that really matters.

Sometimes, when I walk with my cane, I get lost. I try to pay attention to what my cane is telling me, but I inevitably go in the wrong direction. It is times like these in which I must ask others

for help. This is one thing that I sometimes have trouble with, as I do have a proud streak and it is hard for me to admit that I have made a mistake. I have learned, however, that sometimes I need other people to help me find my way around. Even though I think I know what I am doing all the time, the truth is I really do not. I would be lost without my family and friends. I need their advice and support to keep me on the right path, to keep me grounded. When we go off to college, we think we know what we're doing. We think we have it all figured out, until our first load of laundry or the first time we have a bad day and our parents are not there to console us. When we are young, we strive to create our own identities without the help of others, but at some point we must realize that we need other people on our journey to becoming who we are. As Jerome Bruner puts it in his essay "Self-Making Narratives," "We seem virtually unable to live without both, autonomy and commitment, and our lives strive to balance the two" (49.) At first we think we do not need anyone, we think we can figure out our lives on our own. We are sure we have everything under control, until we realize we do not and that we actually do need other people. We must balance that need for others with our desire for independence, and use both in order to become who we are.

We are not all knowing. We are still scared kids trying to blindly find our way through life.

Though college has been a bit of a humbling experience for me, it has also made me feel freer to express my identity. When I was younger, I often worried that when I accidentally hit people with my cane, they would be angry with me and think that I was being rude. I have since realized however, that my cane is part of who I am I need it to get around, and if I accidentally hit a few people, it is okay, they will be all right. Being lightly tapped with my cane is better than the alternative of me not using my cane and running into the unsuspecting person. Also, when I was younger, I used to worry about offending people with what I said. As I have gotten older, however, I have gotten a little freer with my words. I used to be afraid to tell people what I truly thought, because I was worried that it would hurt them, or they would get upset. I have come to the realization that it is better to be honest with someone than to lie to them now and have them be surprised by the truth later. People have often told me that I am too blunt or too honest, but I think that it is important to know the truth, because then you can deal with it.

My cane is an identifier. It shows the people around me that I am blind. They must get to know me better in order to realize that that

is not all my cane is used for. People must get to know me to understand that I am not just a blind person, but that I am honest, blunt, and independent. They must

realize that I am capable and intelligent, and I can in fact hear what they are saying. I know people will always make assumptions about me based on the cane in my hand and

what they think it means. I also know that what truly matters when it comes to my identity is who I believe I am and what I think that means.

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"Patterned Perspectives" by Breanne Riesberg

Illustration Credits

The editors of *The Writing Anthology* would like to recognize the following artists for the contribution of their artwork:

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Ink and dish soap, cover and all title pages

“Clear Thumbtacks” by Breanne Riesberg
Watercolor, page 15

“Magic” by Coleman Neil
Graphite and conte crayon, page 20

“Radial Silence” by Freddy Koke
Black paper, page 28

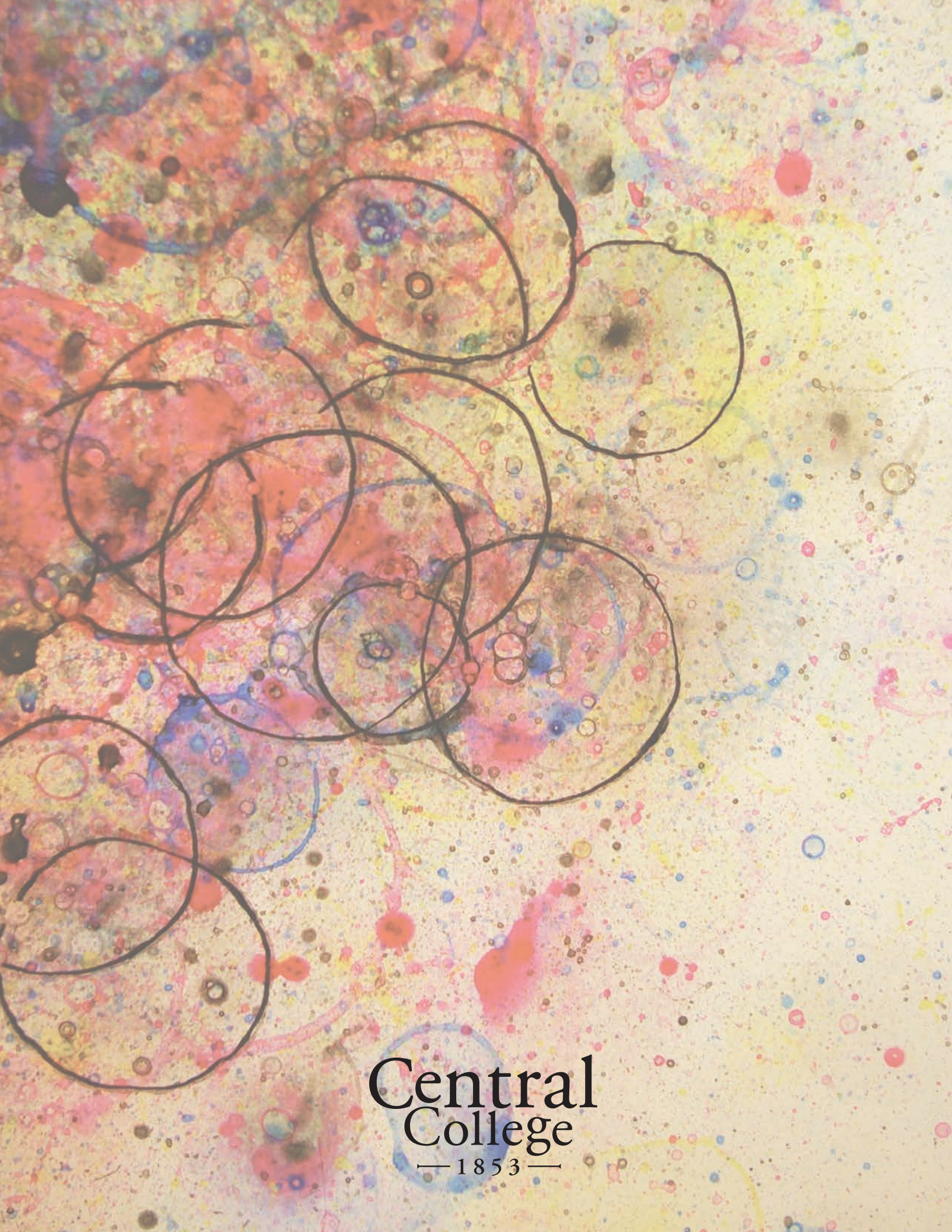
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