

LIVE

UNDERGRADUATE

IDEAS

PRIMARY TEXTS JOURNAL

FEBRUARY 2019

***“Once you realize the
absurdity of the world we
live in, you cannot go back.”***

John Dotterweich, pg. 55

***“We need death.
We need to cherish its
power and cleansing.
Do you believe this?”***

Paukhansuan Sonna, pg. 17

LIVE IDEAS: UNDERGRADUATE PRIMARY TEXTS JOURNAL

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LIVE IDEAS: UNDERGRADUATE PRIMARY TEXTS JOURNAL is the open-access, peer-reviewed undergraduate journal of Kansas State University's Primary Texts Certificate program. It is co-produced by students and faculty at K-State and is published online quarterly (Oct., Dec., Feb., Apr.). *Live Ideas* was co-founded by Jakob Hanschu and Dr. Laurie Johnson in 2018 with the mission of providing a platform from which undergraduates could express their original ideas or add to the conversations of existing ideas in creative, unbounded and meaningful ways. It is a student-led adventure into thought-provoking and creative expression. The founding editors would like to firstly acknowledge Dr. Glenn Swogger and the Redbud Foundation he founded to support the liberal arts and sciences, without whose financial support the creation of this journal would not have been possible. Second, we would like to thank the numerous reviewers, contributors, and friends that helped us get this journal "off the ground."

—Jakob Hanschu & Laurie Johnson

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INTERVIEW WITH THE EDITORS

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A week before the first edition of Live Ideas was set to be published, Kaylee Kerns sat down with Jakob Hanschu (her fiancé) and Dr. Laurie Johnson, founding editors of the journal. Below is an edited transcript of their discussion on topics ranging from the goals and formation of Live Ideas to their favorite primary texts.

KAYLEE: *What is a primary text?*

JAKOB: To me a primary text is an original work—well not even an original work, but an original idea, an idea taken directly from someone . . .

DR. JOHNSON: Yeah, like not looking at others' commentaries, but going right to the source.

JH: Reading the real book and not just the textbook.

LJ: Well it's kind of like one of our slogans for the Primary Texts Program . . . Mark Twain said: "Supposing is good, but finding out is better." That's the difference, right, because if you read someone else who wrote about Plato, you don't know for yourself whether or not that's right. There's some things you can't learn by *just* reading textbooks.

JH: To throw in our other slogan: "Reading primary texts helps you learn unfiltered and witness thoughts in the raw."

LJ: That's the central theme of the Primary Texts Program. It gets students to look at how creative people actually create. The journal is an extension of that vision. We're going to have students not just writing about other primary texts but actually creating their own, because that's the whole goal of education—to get students to the point where they are creators and authors not just regurgitators.

KK: *How is this journal different from others?*

JH: Most academic journals aren't read by the public and aren't read by undergraduates (unless they're forced to) because they're dull and heavy. You get bogged down by references, jargon, and jargon that's in references. We want to avoid the traditional journal format, so the main way *Live Ideas* is different is that we strongly encourage a conversational, informal style. Those are the pieces we would prefer to publish. Another thing that separates us from other journals is the different kinds of content we publish. We publish traditional articles, short "food for thought" essays, poetry, art, videos, and photo essays, all of which are valuable mediums for students to express not only their creativity, but their original ideas.

LJ: A big problem in academia is that we have a tendency to poorly communicate our findings and ideas to general audiences, which limits

our impact. There's a growing interest in taking knowledge generated by academics and translating it into something interesting to the average reader. I see this journal as a place for students to learn how to do that. As scholars, we have an obligation and responsibility to get these good ideas out there, out to the public who can use them or at least enjoy them, depending on what it is they're reading.

KK: *How do you involve students other than having them submit pieces?*

JH: Students can submit many different kinds of content to the journal, and we're also somewhat unique among undergraduate journals in that we're almost entirely student-run. I'm the editor and Dr. Johnson serves as the associate faculty editor. Under us, we have a board of student and faculty peer-reviewers. Every piece is peer-reviewed by K-State students as well as one faculty member . . . So students looking to be involved in the journal can either submit as an author or can look to become a peer-reviewer.

LJ: And that's working out really well. People are getting their reviews back on time, and the reviews are good. It helps the authors see how other people view their work and how they can improve it.

JH: We want to be a journal that students will read . . . So what better way to decide what content to publish than have students reviewing our pieces?

LJ: People may be wondering if we reject anything . . . the primary reason for rejecting pieces so far is that they don't fit the journal's goals and style.

JH: If it doesn't fit or if it's poorly written. I mean each piece goes through two editors—one student and one faculty—then two student peer-reviewers and then a faculty member.

LJ: So we have quite a few 'revise and resubmits' where writers respond to the comments of the reviewers, and that's usually very helpful. For the most part, if writers look at our requirements to get an idea of what we're looking for, and if they make sure the writing is in pretty good shape, they'll get a good hearing.

JH: Yeah, so it's a fairly rigorous, but not impossible, review process. We want to publish undergraduates—we don't need to be *Nature*.

KK: *So the two of you started this project together?*

LJ: The name and the funding is what I'm responsible for and Jakob's responsible for most everything else. It's perfect. That's the way I want it to be.

JH: The original idea is hers—like the idea to actually start an undergraduate journal—and even the name of the journal is hers . . . and she secured the funding, and then was like "Here's this idea, see what you can do with it."

LJ: And then he just ran with it, which has been great.

JH: Well, I think the name is one of the best things . . . if you don't have a catchy name, nobody is going to read past the cover.

LJ: Well you know I came up with that by thinking about what the Primary Texts Program is trying to teach students. Even though you're studying ideas from people that might've lived hundreds, if not thousands of years ago, or even just a generation ago, they're still alive because you can still engage with them, and they can still help you figure out life . . . they're "live ideas." That's where that idea came from.

KK: *How did you develop the idea of the journal? What made you want to do this?*

LJ: I just thought it would be nice for students to have an outlet for their writing. I mean, I've run across some really good stuff. Every year there's one or two papers I think are brilliant, and they usually aren't larded up with jargon or references . . . Over time I thought: "My gosh, you know, why can't more people read these things?" They're truly good contributions . . . many times a student will go through four or five years of undergraduate college and will have written some really cool stuff, but it just gets put into a box somewhere and no one reads it. Then 20 years later they drag it out and are like: "Dang, I wrote some pretty good stuff! Why didn't I do something with that?" So I just thought: "Let's see if we can fix that."

KK: *As an undergraduate student, how did you get involved in Live Ideas?*

JH: I'm a Primary Texts student, and this journal is run by that program. I took DAS 300, which is titled "The Great Conversation", and the title fits . . . Dr. Johnson was the instructor, and we had a bunch of different people come in and give lectures on different subjects, and at the end of the year we wrote a paper engaging with the ideas we'd covered. I wrote mine on Darwin's *Descent of Man*, critiquing his idea of social evolution. Dr. Johnson liked my paper and encouraged me to apply for the Swogger Scholarship, which I did. Around the same time, I started attending her book club on sustainable food systems, called "Farm Book Club" . . . So she'd seen some of my work and knew me fairly well, and I had expressed interest in helping out with the journal, so she approached me and was like "Hey, would you want to do this?" and I was like "Yeah, this is amazing, I'll do this." . . . So that's kind of the way it went I guess.

KK: *What advice do you have for students who want to publish in Live Ideas?*

LJ: If they have an older paper they're proud of because it was really well done and captured and expressed an idea they had, I'd tell them to pull it back out and take a look at it to see if it can be submitted to *Live Ideas*. And, while they're writing papers in the future, they should keep in mind that they have an outlet for publication . . .

JH: A good deal of articles we've had in this first edition seem to have been class papers that have been "whipped into shape," so to say.

LJ: We've also got excellent poetry, short stories, and art. We should especially encourage our K-State artists to submit, because we've got two pieces in this first edition, and they're really special.

JH: I'd love to get to the point where every image we use in the journal is either a photograph or piece of artwork done by a K-State student. That would be great.

LJ: We also don't have any videos right now, so I'd like to encourage people to submit some!

JH: And if you're wondering how we publish those . . . The goal is four editions per calendar year—two interactive PDF versions in the spring and two in the fall—with two printed editions—one in the spring, and one in the fall.

KK: *On a more personal note, what is your favorite primary text, or something that you keep finding yourself going back to?*

LJ: Let's see . . . My favorite is probably *Henry the Fourth*, part one, by William Shakespeare. I just watched it again last night.

JH: *That's your favorite primary text ever?*

LJ: As far as—you said personal, like what personally strikes you. Because there's this

interplay . . . in this particular play, you have Henry, who is this profligate son who just . . . you know, he goes off and parties constantly with Falstaff, this big, fat guy who lives a life of total debauchery . . . anyway, there's this moment in the play where Henry and Falstaff realize their days of having fun are over, and that Falstaff's really looking at the future king, and it's just the most amazing moment . . . it says a lot about life—there's this half of you that's Dionysian and the other half is Apollonian. You know, there's always that risk-taking, party-loving, happy-go-lucky part and we ought to not totally forgo that in order to be king . . . I've contemplated this Shakespeare play most of my adult life.

JH: Wow, I've got to watch this. Dionysus is brought up by a lot of social and cultural theorists because of what he represents, since he kind of represents desire, and that's the side of us that fascist regimes try to suppress.

LJ: Right. We tend to think of that as childish pursuits, like as it's presented in the play, but it is part of who we are, and if we totally forgo it . . . that's where the creative spark is, too, I think, it's in that part of us.

KK: So how about you, Jakob?

JH: . . . Well I guess this means I'd better try to think of one . . . I mean, there's two that immediately come to mind. One is Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, because it's a brilliant

and wild ride. She goes on about science fiction, speculative fabulations, string figures, and so on, but it's all about environmental thought and how we can decenter the human to re-entangle ourselves with the worlds beyond human. Then there's the other one, which it's not a book, but it's a primary text . . . it's this speech by David Foster Wallace called "[This is Water](#)", which starts out with the lines: "There's these two young fish swimming along, and they meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says 'Morning boys, how's the water' and then the fish look at each other and they're like 'What the hell is water.'" You can just picture this, and then he goes on from this little story to blow your mind with all of these different realizations . . . he blows *you* out of the water.

KK: You know, you could put in the first video entry . . . There's this video of Jakob pretending to be David Foster Wallace—he's trying to time that speech with a song and each time he fails at timing it perfectly, and he just gets crazier and crazier each time he records it, and I feel like you'd greatly appreciate it.

LJ: I never took you to be a David Foster Wallace fan! Did you study David Foster Wallace's personal demeanor before doing this? He's very uncomfortable most of the time, he just exudes discomfort.

JH: Let's just say that I did not take his demeanor into account, though I knew it. In one of the videos I'm wearing a beret . . . and a

Miller Lite jersey. It's like a football jersey, only for Miller Lite. I'm not necessarily proud!

LJ: I will see these eventually, I know I will.

KK: That's why I was saying Jakob should make it the first video entry.

JH: Well . . . we've digressed.

LJ: Not necessarily, some of that stuff is great—

JH: I'm wearing a Miller jersey!

LJ: Actually, I don't want to see this . . . it might forever color my opinion of you!

JH: Let's just pretend I'm a Žižek in the making! Like this totally unpolished guy that writes.

LJ: I mean, there's worse things that could happen to you. That would be so cool . . . to look back when I'm retired and see that I helped form another Žižek!

JH: Is that *really* what you want though?

LJ: Well, Žižek really makes people think. Even if you don't agree with everything he says, he's like my idea of a public intellectual, because he's out there, he doesn't compromise by dumbing things down, and he uses humor and art and film. No matter what he says, he causes you to think, and that's good. He doesn't disdain the average person. He feels like he can communicate with us.

JH: And he has opinions on stuff that people care about in addition to understanding a ton of philosophical works. This reminds me . . . the other thing about *Live Ideas* is that we're provoking. We want to be provocative without being . . . I don't know . . . be as provocative as we can be, let's just leave it at that.

LJ: Without being intentionally offensive.

JH: Yeah, right. Provocative and not offensive, that's probably the best way of saying it.

KK: *Is there anything else you'd like to add?*

LJ: I'm just really pleased with how many students want to be involved. It was not hard to find Primary Texts students that wanted to be reviewers . . . They seem to be enjoying it and are very prompt about getting their reviews back. It's really worked out extremely well.

JH: Yeah, the quick reviews have been glorious as an editor. And as an author it's got to be nice—you submit a piece and then six weeks later you know if you're being published. The last thing I'd say is that the purpose of *Live Ideas* is to get people to think. *Not just to show that our ideas are alive, but to bring ideas to life.*

LJ: Yeah, so hopefully people will read these things and start up conversations about them, you know? It would be great if I were walking down a hallway and heard a group of students talking about an article or short story or art piece from our journal. ~

MISHIMA IN LOVE

Paukhansuan Sonna
freshman | philosophy

What if you could have a life-changing conversation with a brilliant thinker? What if you finally discovered who you're meant to be? In 1970, British journalist Daniel Godwin has the opportunity to finally meet the infamous Japanese author Yukio Mishima in Japan. Little does he know he is about to step into the daunting presence of Japan's last true Samurai.

Keywords: Mishima, Japan, masculinity, politics, West

The following is a story about a fictional British journalist, Daniel Godwin, meeting the infamous Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. The story analyzes some of Mishima's ideas and their relevance to Western audiences. Moreover, it offers a fresh perspective on matters concerning the decline of tradition, religiosity, masculinity and other pertinent issues facing Western civilization. The British journalist serves as a symbol of the disheveled Westerner who is searching for a philosophy to unite his disjointed masculinity and status anxiety into one coherent identity. Mishima offers such a view by combining art with a politic of brutality and self-mastery. However, I end the story by including Mishima's suicide and the impact it had on Daniel. Mishima committed seppuku in a military base in 1970 to unsettle the Japanese public and make a message about his stance on the nation's future. I interpret his final act as a symptom of a deep depression and separation from the world. Daniel is stunned by the act as he had grown to love Mishima and value his every word. In the end, I try to demonstrate that Mishima was also human and vulnerable, though he communicated a bravado of hyper-masculinity and dominance.

I LANDED IN HANEDA airport sometime around noon. Light showers had followed our descent but gently dissolved by the time we landed. Though the journey had eclipsed, I was still processing how false beliefs of mine were mangled in just one sitting. When the clouds peeled back, I finally appreciated Japan in her full glory. Throughout the war, I

had assumed Japan was nothing more than a samurai's wasteland, a country brimming with myth and little substance. In all sincerity, I have never seen another country like her. The lush hills and sacred grounds unmarred by the war were more tantalizing than the paintings I'd seen years prior. But as I filed through the airport, I noticed it was almost indistinguishable from the one I had left in Great Britain. If you remove the language and the people and allow the structure to speak for itself – it would spew western ideas.

“I’VE WONDERED ENDLESSLY HOW PEOPLE COULD FIND INKLINGS OF JOY AND SATISFACTION IN THIS LIFE.”

I've always been too ashamed to share or even express these private musings. They could only be awakened by someone far more enlightened and attuned to beauty than me. Even now as I write this testimony, I am humbled by the void of my past life. It's a rather long story, but my journey to this point has not been without great suffering and toiling. I've wondered endlessly how people could find inklings of joy and satisfaction in this life. Insofar as I could tell, my life has been an abject failure. A psychologist friend from my days at St. Andrews told me he believed we secretly measure success upon how many childhood dreams we fulfill. I am sure his view was disassembled and butchered before a dissertation committee, which, ironically, strengthens his point. Regardless,

many friends in my life have dissolved into mist clouds, demonstrating that the only true companions of mine are my pen and paper. I've already reached some 900 pages of writings on matters of my heart. I wonder why my soul hasn't cascaded upon itself.

"Jean!" I called out.

We were out on the streets, cars honking and people clamoring for their rides. A man in an eggshell blue suit noticed me. He removed his shades, and I saw his face. It was Jean in all his unhinged prestige. While studying at St. Andrews, I became friends with him, and, unlike me, he finished his education and went on to be an ambassador and writer. His father had the proper connections to facilitate such a hedonistic lifestyle. When our hands met, I was surprised that a man of such magnitude and strength imparted a surprisingly gentle touch. His handshake was almost weak enough to be considered insincere.

"Daniel, it's good to see you. It's been so long." He said.

"It has, Jean. It has."

His face tightened with concern. "Here, let my friend take your bag. I'm sure you're exhausted. You left at three in the morning and stayed on that plane for so long."

"Oh, it's fine." I lied. "I can carry it. I packed light anyway."

He bit his lip and chuckled. "Well, I guess that's typical of you. You know, Daniel, you're meeting an interesting fellow. I can tell you that much."

"I certainly wouldn't want you to spoil him."

Jean nodded and allowed me inside his Cadillac. We sat together in the back while his servant took the wheel. I gazed out at the rain pattered window one last time as we left the airport and ventured deeper into the heart of the city. In all his braggadocios fervor, Jean wanted to guide me through Japan and flaunt his grasp of the language. He always presented new knowledge as if it were his original invention – as if he conjured such truths from his unknown past life. Yet when I began practicing my interviewing skills on him, asking questions only a true native of Japan would know, he only offered basic rebuttals and relayed the other questions to his driver.

***"I ENVIED JEAN'S LIFE, HIS JOB
AND HIS UNSHAKEABLE
LIFE PROSPECTS."***

"Say, Norio, what does it truly mean to be Japanese now?" Jean asked the driver.

He gazed back at us with a childish grin on his face. "We love peace and progress."

Surprisingly enough, the boy spoke perfect English.

I was expecting breaks in his sentences and a voice unlike a westerner's. Yet he spoke as well as me and Jean. It was dawning upon me how naive and unfortunately narrow my view of the world is in comparison to its true face.

Indeed, other realities emerged from our ride together. For example, I envied Jean's life, his job and his unshakeable life prospects. Throughout our ride, I never felt as if he spoke

to me as an equal, but merely a pet. And by the time we arrived at the embassy, he informed me I would be needing better clothes to approach someone like Mishima.

"Isn't he polarizing?" I asked.

"How do you mean?"

"I mean, what difference does it make how I dress? Who am I impressing? He isn't the people's national treasure."

"Daniel, you're changing for his sake – not Japan's."

I shook my head back and forth. "Must I? I think I'm fine."

"Enjoy my courtesy, Daniel. You seem much too tense for an interview. This is Christian charity."

"I suppose."

A pompous giggle left his throat. "Come follow me."

We entered the embassy, an office building frothing with officials and random Japanese citizens. Everyone was bustling aimlessly with as much coordination and consistency as a beheaded chicken. Secretaries wandered around with stamps and official documents; cigarette smoke littered the air like perfume; the walls were dishearteningly mute colors devoid of any hint of dynamism. In all honesty, I wanted peace and quiet, a semblance of home in this "British" embassy. I instead found myself utterly alienated in the place I thought to be an extension of home.

As we paced up to his office, Jean informed me he had a suit tailored for my arrival.

"How did you get my measurements?"

"Oh, I called a few days ago and your secretary informed me you were away. I couldn't wait much longer, so I demanded your measurements."

"And she gave them to you?"

"Daniel, I'm a friend. Suzanne knows that."

I forgot.

Jean opened the door to his office where one of his maids had already rested the suit on an ivory table. It was beautiful: a midnight color three-piece suit with a crimson lapel only adding to its unfathomable grandeur. The wool coat I had on became a staple of embarrassment as I stood before something so divine. My eyes landed on Jean's crooked smile.

"Do you like it?"

I nodded. "Yes, it's wonderful. I've never seen anything like it."

My eyes grew wide and fastened upon each detail. There were no misplaced threads like the suit I bought in India. There were no flaws or imperfections I could even imagine across its mythical threads.

"Was this made in a factory?"

Jean looked hurt. "Oh, no. I only give friends the best of what I have. This was made by one of the finest textile connoisseurs in Japan."

I didn't anticipate this much luxury or sophistication. I didn't expect this much hospitality from Jean's unusually cold gaze.

"Well, I shall leave you to try it on."

He paced out of the room and gently closed the door – just enough so that I could hear every priceless wooden interlocking

piece snap together as a seal over my fate. I first removed my glasses, then carefully slid my hands under the spine of the coat. As I raised it to my body, I could feel the smoothness of each fiber and see the luster of every thread. The sun's rays bounced off the suit's surface like how light dances off the surface of water. My eyes and senses craved being enveloped in this symbol of prestige and completion. When I turned to the mirror, I looked like a different man. I didn't know that I could look upon my reflection for a few pithy seconds and love every detail of my person.

**“THERE WAS SOMETHING
TITILLATING ABOUT BEING
DESIRED, OF HAVING
SOMETHING NO ONE ELSE HAD.
IT HAD BEEN SO LONG SINCE
I FELT SATISFIED WITH MY
MATERIALITY.”**

Without my permission, Jean entered. “Wow! I told you it would be a match! So, what do you think?”

“I appreciate this, Jean. I really do.”

“I'm glad. Well, I'll have your quarters prepared. There's some food in the lobby if you'd like some. Anyway, you have an interview to attend.”

“Yes. Thank you, Jean.”

For a moment, I was tempted to believe Jean was my friend, but it had been an eternity since I felt such a brotherly connection with someone. While he guided me down the steps to my chauffeur, I couldn't help noticing how

many people were carelessly lending their eyes across my body. There was something titillating about being desired, of having something no one else had. It had been so long since I felt satisfied with my materiality, and this feeling solidified as I entered my vehicle.

I unbuttoned my suit, allowing myself some freedom before confronting my interviewee. I sifted through my files on this man, and what *The Underground* wanted from me. They wanted a full profile of this Mishima fellow – his background, his desires, his politics, his religion, his plans... My mind created webs and avenues of possible conversations, ways to approach him.

“So, you're heading to Yukio's?” A woman's voice asked.

My eyes wandered up to the driver's side and to the Japanese girl behind the wheel.

I nodded. “Yes, I am. Sorry, my name is Daniel Godwin. You are?”

“Aiko. Nice to meet you, Daniel.”

For the first twenty minutes of the ride, I was writing potential questions and preparing a road map of subjects. I didn't care in the slightest for Aiko's input. With all due respect, I viewed her as a mere cog turning the wheel of my destiny ever closer to Mishima's. Yet, a magnetic force was radiating off Aiko's body and weening me to speak. So, I started a conversation. “Aiko, tell me about yourself.”

“Um, what do you want to know?”

“Well, how did you get this job?”

“My parents are the Japanese consuls for Britain. And, I actually don't 'work' at the embassy.”

“Oh, so you aren't a...”

“–A commoner? Yeah, you can look at it that way. I'm good friends with Jean. Since I got out of school early, he invited me to drive you around.”

“Seems a little informal of him.”

**“MISHIMA HAD CONTROVERSIAL
POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS . . .
HE'S A ROMANTIC,
I NAIVELY CONCLUDED.”**

“Hey, I'm doing my best. This is my first day on the 'job.'”

Whilst chuckling at her joke, I suddenly felt a jerk from the brakes and Aiko's gasp. Some loose cattle had scurried our path and almost grazed the bumper. She began laughing hysterically and honked at the disheveled farmer passing by. “Everyone should get a car, Dan. This is so unnecessary.”

I found my pet name off-putting. We barely knew each other.

For the rest of the ride I tried to silently read other newspaper clippings on Mishima. He had recently released a book titled *Spring Snow* about a boy who falls in love with a girl destined to marry the Emperor's son. As I read through the French review of the article, I couldn't help but feel a welcoming sense of melancholy pulsate throughout my body. Another article, in Japanese with English notes on the side, revealed that Mishima had controversial political aspirations. He had formed his “Shield Society” based on preserving the samurai spirit of Japan and due

to his fidelity to tradition, the military allowed his group to train on their premises. *He's a romantic*, I naively concluded.

“Have you read any of his writings?” Aiko asked.

“No, I haven't.”

“It's interesting... I hope he doesn't scare you away.”

“How so?”

“He's something of an extremist.”

My heart sunk a little from Aiko's words. It seemed as if everyone had an impression of him, which made me wonder how objective our first meeting would be. Certainly, it is a rule of collegiality not to have preconceived notions of others. Freedom, I thought, is the best way of assessing authenticity.

“How original is that opinion?” I forthrightly asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You're young and impressionable. I'm sure you're sharing the mainstream opinion your parents and teachers have told you.”

She curtly replied, “I'm sure it's correct.”

“And, tell me, how much do you know about Japanese high culture?”

“Well, I think I'm part of it.”

“Right, right.” I nodded and contemplated another question. “So, have you ever met this Mishima fellow?”

“No.”

“And you have an opinion already?”

“What's your point, mister?”

I chuckled. “My point is that I'm trying to be objective.”

“Right. That's what you westerners

believe.”

I was baffled by her comment. Even though she seemed agreeable with western culture, she betrayed it on a whim. Regardless, I kept my mouth shut and waited until we arrived at Mishima’s complex. The farmlands gave way to a bustling metropolis, and as we climbed in altitude, we reached the kempt suburbs ever so shy of the city. Aiko opened my door and I stepped afoot on what I rightly presumed to be his property. I was surprised by the elegance of his home. There was a garden at the center, surrounded by an impenetrable wall and winding leaves. There stood a balcony outside the master bedroom with a table and chairs procured for our interview. I’m sure Mishima also had breakfast up there – perhaps he even wrote his novels atop that elevated view. The house looked so western for a man supposedly keen on keeping the Japanese tradition alive. He was labeled a right-wing nationalist and hyper-conservative, by some, yet his home revealed anything but. As I stepped out of the car with my briefcase, tape recorder, pen and paper, Aiko wished me well.

“Hope you come out alive.” She teased.

I nodded and grinned back. Perhaps I had been egregiously rude to her on the way here. I wanted to apologize but felt too embarrassed to confess error. As I approached the gate of Mishima’s compound, I gazed at my watch, hoping I wasn’t too early or late. That’s when I saw him for the first time – not just a profile but a full person. He wore a black low-collar shirt, short sleeves, a necklace, white slacks and a tight belt around his waist. His

body was magnificent. The Japanese tend to be a modest people, meaning I missed a grand detail about his physique. His chest was ripe with bronze energy, and his arms were toned like the statue of David. Yet as he came closer, his height dwindled. Mishima was a tiny man, I realized, only 5’1”. I was about a foot taller than he but when he opened the gates, his intense eyes overwhelmed me. Mishima’s presence and figure imbued him with the mythos of Zeus.

“Welcome. Welcome.” He said.

“I DON’T CONSIDER MYSELF A TRADITIONALIST, DANIEL. I CONSIDER MYSELF A REALIST, AN ARTIST.”

He had a distinct voice. It was akin to a nasal hum, a voice on such a high and sophisticated octave I could have mistaken it for a duchess’. Nonetheless, there was a beauty to his voice. There existed an accent, no doubt, but also a confident grasp of the English language. I later learned he was adept in multiple languages, including French and German. When the gates finally opened, and our spirits mixed, I felt exposed. I felt like a gladiator entering the ring with a force unbeknownst to mankind’s common sensibilities of power and strength. Mishima was a unity of mind and body, an utter master of his contradictions and stories.

“It’s an honor, sir.” I sputtered.

He grinned softly without looking directly at me. “I’m sorry, but I find your suit

very captivating. You’re friends with Jean, no?”

“Oh, yes. Jean’s a good friend of mine.”

Mishima chuckled and retained his smile as he replied, “Only Jean can get suits like that. Come, let me show you my home.”

The sun casted an electric ether over our conversation. It would peek through Mishima’s library of trees and peer over his walls just to catch fragments of our poetic exchange. As I ventured up his front steps and into his house, I released my mind of all I had heard prior. I wanted to give an artist like Mishima a fresh opportunity to conjure an image on a canvas so blank that only the thickest colors could leave their mark. He allowed me to rest my briefcase on his sofa and offered me some tea.

“Oh, sure. That sounds lovely.”

“I must apologize though. I only have Hojicha, a more traditional kind of tea.”

“IN JAPAN, EVERYONE WEARS MASKS. THEY THINK THE CIVILIZED AND PEACEFUL PERSON IS THE TRUE INDIVIDUAL. BUT, WE’VE GROWN TIRED OF IT.”

“Fitting.”

Before he finished his trek to the kitchen, he turned and asked, “Fitting?”

“Well, everyone considers you a traditionalist of sorts.”

Emotions left his person, leaving only pure thought upon his face like the veil of a bride. “I don’t consider myself a traditionalist, Daniel. I consider myself a realist, an artist.”

“Mishima, if you don’t mind, may I see how you make Hojicha? And please continue your thought.”

“Hojicha is a very crude process. If you want to see it, then be my guest.”

Mishima grabbed a porcelain Horoko pot and rested it on the burning stove. The Horoko pot was made from one consistent form with no noticeable breaks or combination of other parts. It was shaped much like a tobacco pipe, except the mouth of the pot was much larger. After I memorized each detail of the simple piece, Mishima gathered a handful of spindly leaves and placed them in the pot.

“Usually, I would stoke this over charcoal or something more primitive. However, I don’t want you to think I’m ‘too traditional.’” He chuckled and continued, “Many people think I do not have a sense of humor or the capacity to laugh. I think my intensity is, however, my more authentic side. In Japan, everyone wears masks. They think the civilized and peaceful person is the true individual. But, we’ve grown tired of it.”

“And, that’s why you think you’re a realist? You think you embrace your identity more authentically than the ordinary person?”

“That is what you say.” He replied.

The tea demanded his attention as he held the Horoko pot and gently guided the leaves in its mouth. They were growing darker with each passing moment, and he told me that they should appear reddish by the time they’re ready for serving. After finishing the tea leaves and placing them in cups of steaming water, he continued his original musings.

"Many people are surprised that I live in such a western style home. They would imagine that my criticisms of Japan's westernization would force me to occupy a hut somewhere in the countryside. Economic progress is good, but we have grown bored of it. Japan, in my eyes, has become ugly. I cannot recognize it anymore."

"And, does that bring you sadness?"

He handed me a cup and waited until I took my first sip before sipping his own. "Sadness can be a powerful emotion. It need not be a disarming feeling that robs us of our strength. In my writings, I present a view of beauty some find frightening."

"Frightening? Why do they think it frightening?"

As he answered my question, he led me up to his balcony for fresh air. While I registered his response, I couldn't help but notice all the western candles and paintings adorning his home. I made a mental note to myself to ask him later what these works mean to him – if there exists any order to his design. "I believe beauty can be a violent thing. It can overwhelm and destroy. It has a sense of reverence that commands – even possesses – the beholder. I tell my actors in my Kabuki plays not to view their sentiments as dualities or dichotomies – black and white. I tell them to express tenderness and wrath simultaneously to create a more authentic, more true sense of human nature."

"Right. And what do you think about those who think you're a right-wing nationalist?"

"I think they are as radical as I am. I am concerned with what they represent, however. I spoke to a crowd of university students who deplored my writings and political views. Many of them were young men who complained I had no coherent politic or worldview. Yet, in my army, my Shield Society, there are many young men who grasp its coherence and train alongside me."

He opened the door to his balcony and welcomed the blinding rays of sunlight. They bled through the open spaces of the door and became just as overwhelming and oppressive as his view of beauty. We sat across from one another and gazed over his garden, his abode, the "palace" of Mishima. I summoned my recorder and notes, supplying Mishima the proper knowledge that our official interview would begin shortly. He stared blankly into the soul of the air before him, preparing his mind and body for whatever questions may emerge. I pressed the necessary few buttons on the recorder and once the wheels of the tape began rolling, he knew the interview had begun.

"I am here with the renowned and infamous personality Yukio Mishima. Mishima has been considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature three times, has participated in numerous public appearances regarding his art and politics, starred in and directed his own films, written, say, 13 books and continues to perplex the world with his mind. Mr. Mishima, thank you for joining *The Underground*." He nodded, and I continued. "Mishima, I want to begin with your childhood and any details no one else may know. What's the side of Mishima

we're missing?"

He sighed, contemplating a heavy and satisfactory response. "I was raised mainly by my grandmother. She was in poor health and wanted me by her side, tending to her pains and anguish. My mother felt powerless in her presence and could not take me home. Many would be tempted to say my childhood was only gloom and loneliness. They would be right in one sense, but my grandmother also introduced me to Kabuki and exposed me to the arts. Growing up, I was a frail and gentle boy who loved poetry and literature. My schoolmates sometimes mocked me for this. For some time, even, I was a poor student. It took finding a writing society and avenues of expression to be liberated. Moreover, my father thought such artistry was only for homosexuals – not 'true' men."

"Right, right." I held my fingers to my lips, formulating my next question. "Would you describe yourself as an optimist or a pessimist?"

"A staunch pessimist!" He slammed his fist on the table, then recoiled in laughter. "I steer on the side of pessimism. I think optimism – like that of the young people – has been largely destructive."

"How do you mean?"

"I don't think idealism is bad. Many people think I'm too idealistic about our feudal past, and perhaps I am. There is a kind of optimism that destroys ideals and leaves a void. I think the optimism towards embracing the western world and the defeat of our beliefs has made us soft and feminine. We will eventually

grow tired of this revolution and begin to rot."

"Isn't that a lonely position to be in?" I cleared my throat. "The position of the critic and pessimist?"

"It depends really. If you desire the affections of others, then you will feel lonely. I only desire the affection of those I deem worthy of making me feel so dependent." His face fluttered for a moment, as if his thoughts had shocked him with shame, and he reached over to pause the recording. "Forget the last line."

"Is there something wrong?" I asked, somewhat offended.

"I've already thought about these questions, answered many of them." He stared out over the high wall of his confines and to the blue skies yonder. His right hand began scratching the side of his face, as if there was a thought tickling to be freed. That's when Mishima faced me and said with dead clarity, "You know, I've run out of stories. I can't bring myself to write anymore, and I can sense the end coming near."

**"WE NEED DEATH.
WE NEED TO CHERISH ITS
POWER AND CLEANSING.
DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?"**

"The end?"

"The end of my career, my art."

"And, what will become of you?"

"I suppose what becomes of all men." He rose out of his chair and leaned forward on the balcony railing. "My life is writing, theater,

body and action. If I cannot write, then I have no life. And if the writing disappears, so too does theater. I think I am only body and action now.”

I stood by him. “What do you mean by body and action?”

“Record this.” He waited for me to fumble out my recording device. “The body is a form of art. It can be constructed, broken, and perfected. But, it cannot return to its original perfection like a broken sentence or botched drawing. I have paraded my body like the driver of a fine sports car. It has made its master pleased. But, what happens when the car’s engine unwinds and fades into dust? It is thrown away and forgotten.”

“Pardon me, are you talking about

natural deterioration or suicide?”

He nodded his head as if I was finally grasping his tangible words. “Do you think elderliness is beautiful?”

“I think there’s elegance in aging – yes.”

“No, I mean the body of the elderly.”

I felt uncomfortable. “Of what relevance is that?”

A boyish grin contorted his face. “It is of no relevance to them, and that is why they allow themselves to decay into ugliness.”

“What’s your point?”

“My point is aesthetics, Daniel. You and I live in a world festering a flagrant disregard of honor, beauty and brutality. Don’t you see how empty our current modes of living are? No one wants to die for some higher ideals, some intangible form of nationhood, and they find that life is ugly. We need death. We need to cherish its power and cleansing. Do you believe this?”

His words struck me as both a madman and poet. At first, the literary side of my brain was processing his vision with full clarity and homeliness, while the ethical or perhaps civilized side of me shuddered before his imposing eyes. I will never forget the intensity of his gaze as he made those comments – how the wind flourished through his attire like waves shattering upon contact with a rocky shore. Mishima held the railing as if he were preparing for my criticism. My words, he must’ve thought, have the power to sweep him into the atmosphere and into the coldness of the universe.

In more succinct idiom – I was stunned.

And he noticed my novice reaction to his philosophy. He popped his knuckles and played with the joints in his hands. “Tell me about yourself, Daniel. I want to know how you see the world.”

“How do you mean?”

“THE TERRIFYING REALITY OF WHO WE ARE DWELLS BENEATH THE SURFACE LIKE A HUNTER PURSUING HIS PREY.”

“I remember how terrified I was to show the world my true face.” He began pacing and softly collecting each word of his solemn memoir. “As a young man, I found the thought of bloodshed and destruction inviting. But, when it came time to register for the Imperial army, I faked an illness. I considered it a great tragedy to watch my schoolmates and friends die so honorably in battle for the sake of our Empire’s ideals while I remained secluded as that same pitiful, pretty boy my grandmother raised. Thus, those experiences with art, violence and my body made me who I am. So, what made you?”

My throat had almost completely dried over the course of our conversation. I paused the recorder as I fetched some tea for my thirst. Meanwhile, Mishima, unmoved, stared over the horizon and into the heart of industrial Japan with utter stillness and, dare I say, grace. By the time I finished my tea and recovered my voice, he had already pounced upon his subject of interest – me.

“I guess I can tell you about my life.”

I consented. “I was raised in the English countryside in a dreamy small town. Most of my young life was spent at the grammar school where my mother and father were both teachers. They were educated, and I was fortunate in that regard. I traveled once to London with my father as he was a travelling minister of sorts, and I saw what civilization truly looks like. At that moment, I felt terribly inferior. I guess that feeling has motivated my entire life. It made me desire high culture and esteem.”

“Inferiority is not the motivator of your life. It was a catalyst of something deeper.”

“Right. I suppose you’re right.” I stared blankly as my fingers danced around my right ear. “I guess I’ve always desired to be superior and praised. I’ve always wanted to get high marks wherever I dwell, either educationally or socially.”

“I can tell you went to some esteemed European university. You try hard to cover your country accent and the mannerisms of your past.”

“Well, isn’t that what you’ve done with your body and alternate persona? Mishima is just a construction of some ideal, isn’t he?”

He chuckled. “The difference between me and you, Daniel, is that I chose to embrace my true principles after enduring humiliation. You abandoned yours.”

“Does that make you better than me?”

“It makes me more honest. My first major published work, aside from the ones of my childhood, was *Confessions of a Mask*. For so long I had existed in this mirage of decency



and civility. But, the terrifying reality of who we are dwells beneath the surface like a hunter pursuing his prey. I think the point of my art and my life is to expose the masks of others. I've chosen to live with my contradictions 'on my sleeve'."

"Fine. Then let me tell you the authentic me – Daniel Godwin. I was born and raised to two educated parents who wanted me to follow a boring, traditional lifestyle. They wanted to remain the sole conductors of my life, and I refused. Upon that refusal, I felt as if I had lost the very mooring that had kept me afloat all those years. When my schoolmates realized how vulnerable I was, they humiliated me. Therefore, I chose the one avenue that made me superior to them – academia, education, culture. Yes, I hate it and I wish I was free to be myself, whatever that means, but it is the only way to choke the life out of my enemies.

"WE NEED SOMETHING RADICAL TO HAPPEN, SOMETHING TO BECKON US BACK INTO ACTION AND POETRY."

And the enemies aren't just the schoolboys of my adolescence but also the snobs of the universities and presses I ventured into. My enemies are the lovers who humiliated my affections and stomped my heart into an embarrassing spectacle of invalidation and suffering. My enemies are the intellectuals and poets who undermine and siphon every connection of mine to the sheltered and serene life I want on some faraway land. That's who

I am – someone raging and bickering at the world with the façade of strength only a child could amass."

Mishima looked at me with sympathetic eyes. His brows were soft and defined like he was the same child under his grandmother's care. There was a glint of humanity shining from his soul, and it made me want to recoil. Here I had exposed myself before a man who could very well laugh and stomp my soul further into the hell I psychologically and spiritually constructed. Instead, he reached out his hand as a friend would in offering another his sympathies.

"Come with me."

We ventured out into his garden and around a shrine he had dedicated to some ancient Japanese god. He sat on the fresh grass and I reluctantly joined him as we stared at the altar. My eyes went to the altar and then back on him, wondering if there was some deeper meaning he would conjure.

"Thank you, Daniel. You surrendered yourself when you told those emotions. You've hidden them for a long time."

"Yes." I inhaled the soothing cool breeze. "You're right, Mishima. You're right about everything. We need something radical to happen, something to beckon us back into action and poetry."

"Oh, there is a way." He said. "You have to create those moments and live a life so intimately united with that poetry."

"You know, Mishima, I'm not sure I have much of a story or profile to write on you. My recorder has been off most of the time."

"I can type some statements this evening and give them to you tomorrow morning."

"That sounds splendid." I rose to my feet and gazed at my watch. "I'm sorry that I wasted your hour on this interview."

"MISHIMA HAD SET ME ABLAZE AND I COULDN'T REMAIN STILL. IF HE WERE A RELIGION, I WOULD HAVE WORSHIPPED HIM."

He remained still, only staring deep into the hollow spaces of the shrine. He gathered his thoughts before finally saying, "It will be my last major work."

We both went to the gate in silence and with a heavy feeling in our chests. When I had finally made it through the open mouth of the gate, we shook hands and I told him I treasure his words. He nodded and said nothing more. By the time I reached Aiko, she had already noticed I wandered like a ghost.

"He must've gotten into your head." She sighed and got into the car.

For the rest of the way, I chose to bathe in the silence of the ride. My time with Mishima was so pitifully brief, yet undeniably meaningful. I knew I had to meet him again soon. I couldn't just let my heart leap out of my mouth and not have him there to help me find it again. A deep dependency anchored me to his words and philosophy. On our way back to the embassy, I had Aiko stop at a bookstore and I bought as many of his books as they had immediately available. For the rest of the ride

and even on my bed in the embassy, I couldn't stop. I went through chapters and pages like a string of light travelling through open space. Mishima had set me ablaze and I couldn't remain still. If he were a religion, I would have worshipped him.

I don't even remember falling asleep. I just remember opening my eyes to Jean's maids knocking on my door, notifying me it was time to move. That morning I knocked my pores with a cold dose of water and continued until I felt myself alive again. When I looked in the mirror, I saw how hollow and dull my face had become. It was as if that reading session had absolutely absorbed my entire being and left me prone for a new spirit to become incarnate in my bones and flesh. These thoughts, however, left my mind as I was having breakfast with Jean. He was smoking a cigar and the smell was simply overpowering to me. My eyes sweltered, and I struggled to offer my opinions on Mishima in the face of Jean's destructive pleasure.

"So, who is Mishima?" He would ask.

I would blithely respond, "A very interesting fellow indeed."

And that would be the furthest extent of our sophisticated inquiry. Afterwards, I awaited Mishima's arrival, so I could exchange a final few words and receive his correspondence. I waited for perhaps an hour, trying to read in the hellish lobby of the embassy. When an hour had passed, and I was just moments away from having to leave for my flight, I asked the front desk if they had received anything. The secretary, a beautiful young woman, handed me the document from Mishima and then

struck a conversation with me.

"I'm sure you will finally expose him." She said with a careless smile.

I looked upon her with utter disdain and condemnation. As I walked away, I could feel every old desire of mine for affection and tenderness melt before my raging passion for life. When I read through the documents, however, I found myself disappointed at how mute and secretive Mishima was about his life. He revealed his political opinions, which were much more interesting, but his personal dramas were either only touched upon or tossed aside. That's all they wanted to really hear from him – not his actual story or innermost heart. They wanted his opinions as if he were a machine that delivered entertainment for their consumption and nothing more. I believed there was something intrinsically valuable about him and that his words were basic goods like justice and wisdom.

Jean eventually found me and had his driver take me to the airport. We said some final insincere words and continued down our paths. I was devastated that I was leaving Japan after only being there for a day. Her presence and secrets are enough to endure generations and man's destruction. I only had but a brief taste lather upon the surface of my tongue while my soul longed for the whole. Entering the airplane and flying away into the golden embrace of the sun was tragic. It felt as if the child within me was leaving a friend whom I should know I will see again but is nevertheless filled with remorse upon departure. I filtered through my notes and listened to the recording

of my interview with Mishima, listening to his voice like it were the branch from which the rest of my life would spring. I read through his documents once more and found a small note I had missed. It read:

*It was a pleasure to be in your company.
Perhaps we will meet again.*

I held onto those words with a blind faith that we would meet one another again. But, weeks went by as I sat in my dreary office in *The Underground*. I couldn't tolerate the egocentrism and brashness of the people around me, or dining with old schoolmates who were now ever more concerned with themselves. I began to see the fakeness of the modern world as everyone alluded to ideals and their corresponding traditions, then sought to debunk and discredit them for their sentimentality. I went on dates with a few women and when I told them about my experiences with Mishima and the intimate details of my life, I saw them fade away into their own worlds. Those rejections and unreturned passions left a wound in my heart that could not be filled with romantic affection. I went to the gym after those rejections and began testing my body. It didn't take long for me to realize how broken and untreated my physique was in comparison to Mishima's, but I still wanted to become a man like him. I wanted to live for something that would be worth dying for.

After finishing my reports for *The Underground*, I would rush to finish my letter



to Mishima. I had my secretary organize days that worked for the both of us and arranged to meet him once more before the end of the year. My heart danced at the thought of finally seeing him again without the inauthenticity of work and assignment lingering near. It seemed as if everything was in order, and I would soon escape this terrible escapade of decay and mediocrity.

But, my hopes crumbled one day when my secretary received a letter from his estate. They told me that a change of plans had emerged, and he would no longer be available. To top off that disappointment, the

editor notified me that they would shelf my article until perhaps a more appropriate time, preferably when Mishima would write his next book.

I eventually stopped going to the gym and began going on dates again, this time bowing to every word of the woman who would eventually become my wife. Suzanne probably would not have cared for Mishima. She was a simple secretary who didn't care for the intricacies of art and the sublime. No, she was the kind of woman I only married to satisfy the wishes of my parents. I had proposed to her only a few months after dating and our wedding was ripe for plucking. It was during that time that I read something in the Japanese newspaper to which I subscribed.

MISHIMA COMMITS SEPPUKU AT ICHIGAYA

I read the rest of the story in an electrified shock. He had entered the building with some of his pupils, pretending to have innocent business in the general's office.

"HE HAD FULLY FORMED HIMSELF INTO A CURATED PIECE THAT HAD TO BE PARADED AND ULTIMATELY FINISHED WITH THE UNITY OF PEN AND SWORD."

He then held the general and another man hostage as his pupils barricaded the door with crude supplies from the office. A spectacle had emerged, and 1,000 troops surrounded the building. He stepped out onto the roof and

proclaimed that the emperor must be restored to his rightful position. The writer of the article mentions that it was unfortunate he could not be heard clearly over the ruckus of the troops and helicopters. After finishing his speech and saluting the emperor, he entered the office and disemboweled himself. His pupil was so shaken that he could not behead his master and required the help of another to finish the tradition. That pupil then committed seppuku in dismay at his failure.

I immediately bought tickets and left for Japan again, this time under much more unfortunate circumstances. It only occurred to me once I stepped off the plane why Mishima cancelled our next engagement and what he meant by saying that the document he wrote me was his last major work. It was haunting to say the least.

A memorial had been dedicated to Mishima and people rested flowers before his image. They would bow and walk away; and, some cried while others looked confused on what any of this meant. The papers were obsessed over this incident. Everyone was trying to uncover why he had done such an obscene and egregious act. Some papers postulated he was merely seeking attention, but more claimed it was a political stunt for some higher purpose. It could very well be the case that both of those hypotheses are true, but I thought more deeply about it. From the brief time we shared, I meditated upon what such a brutal and nasty death could accomplish. A soft voice spoke to me and it whispered that perhaps this death was just a completion of

his art and a satisfaction of his life's work. In that instance, he had fully formed himself into a curated piece that had to be paraded and ultimately finished with the unity of pen and sword. Yes, that theory seemed to make more sense to me. But, it didn't settle the uneasiness and pain brimming beneath my cold exterior.

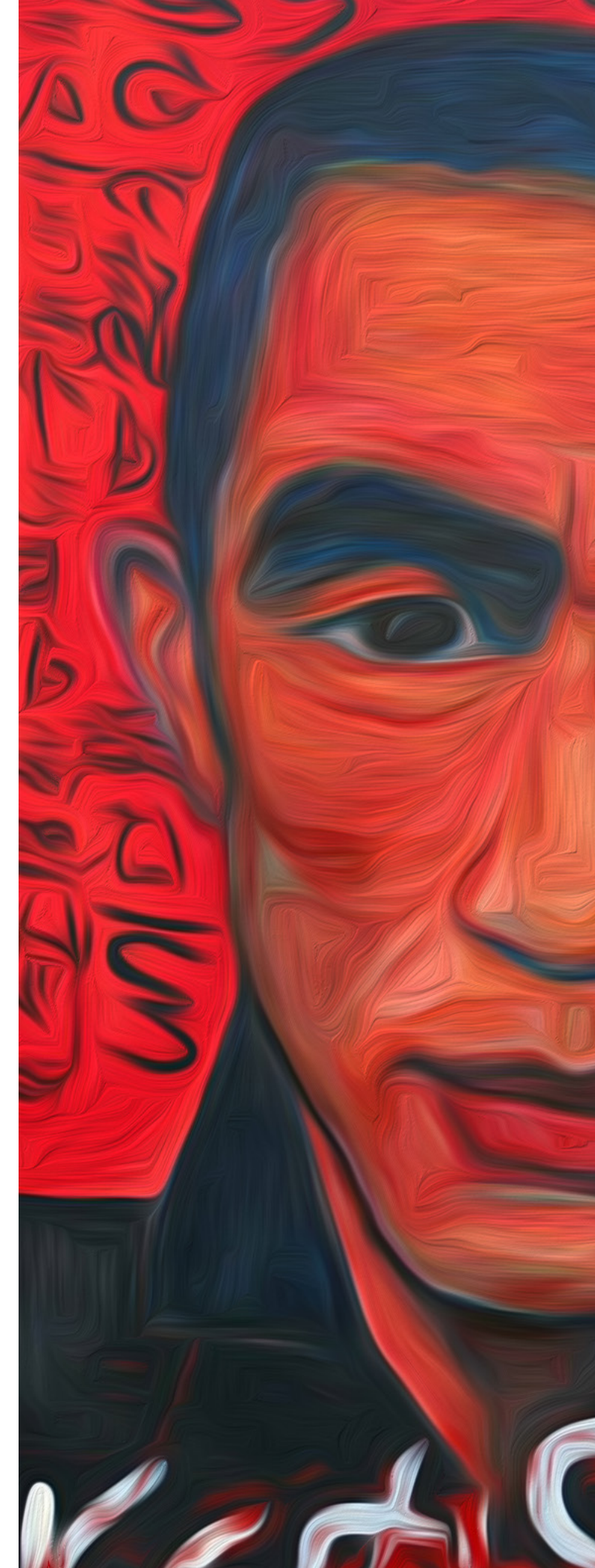
"I WEPT AT THE MERE THOUGHT OF HOW FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I HAD FELT HEARD AND UNDERSTOOD BY SOMEONE ELSE AND THAT PERSON HAD CHOSEN DEATH AS THE MEANS BY WHICH THEY WOULD SATISFY THEIR PURPOSE. ALL AT ONCE, THE UGLINESS OF THE WORLD INVADED MY PRIVACY AND I HAD TO LEAVE."

I felt obligated that night to lay down my life like he did and salvage something from my pitiful existence. I went to my hotel room with a ceremonial dagger and tried to enact my own seppuku. I wanted to see what it would have been like for Mishima in those final moments. As I held the dagger before my bare stomach, I felt sheer terror as my innards squirmed from the mere thought of writhing in such a fashion. Tears began to brim down my face like droplets of blood, and the blade fell from my hand. I simply could not understand how someone so beautiful and immeasurable could end themselves so suddenly.

He had become an obsession and idol of all the things I have ever striven for –

authenticity and self-mastery. And, in the face of his death, I could not help but admire how he satisfied his vision. He did not shudder away from this terrible fate like he had prior to the war. But, amid my praises, I thought about what it would have been like had he died in the war and acted upon his convictions. We would have never met. And, I thought about how our next meeting could have been. I wept at the mere thought of how for the first time in my life I had felt heard and understood by someone else and that person had chosen death as the means by which they would satisfy their purpose. All at once, the ugliness of the world invaded my privacy and I had to leave.

My stomach growled for some food, so I went to a diner and ordered a sizeable dinner for myself. On the side, I had the same Hojicha tea Mishima had made me. As I ate away at my meal, I saw Aiko sitting not too far away. Our eyes met, and I invited her to join me. We exchanged a few soft glances, stories of the past few months and then I asked her what she thought of Mishima. She looked across the table with sullen eyes and I knew at that moment she had finally delved deep into his philosophy. There was a warmth in her gaze that allowed me to know I was finally understood. I felt my heart move towards her in full honesty. ~



“TERROIR”

Caitlin Radonich
senior | english & history

A young woman living in Kansas struggles with a growing sense of homesickness for her childhood home in California, and comes to a new understanding of her relationship to the places she inhabits when her family decides to start a vineyard.

Keywords: California, homesickness, Kansas, nature, wine

Terroir (ter'wār):

n. the characteristic taste and flavor imparted to a wine by the environment in which it is produced.

THE TOWN she now lived in was tiny, a mere blemish in the broad fields. Those travelling along the highway between the two cities of any account in the area would hardly even notice it, if it were not for the momentary inconvenience of having to slow down as they passed through.

The house she now lived in was crushed between the Factory and the parking lot for the Factory's trucks. The Factory was the only thing of note within the town; most of the people she knew in the area worked there or had worked there, or would work there as soon as they were old enough. The steady hum of the machinery and fans formed a base-track for her life, punctuated by the crunch of tires on gravel and the flash of truck lights through the windows at all hours of the day and night.

A cheap candle flickered on the bookshelf beside her improvised desk, fending off the reek of the Factory with an artificial memory of hyacinth. She sighed, fingers resting on the keys of her laptop, waiting for inspiration. The shrill screams of the cicadas filled the summer evening, drowning out the Factory like an over-eager children's choir.

Her mind drifted far away, to the scent of fresh roses and the crisp breeze off the ocean. Memories of other summer days floated before her, the crash and tug of the Pacific upon her ankles, the spray of the sea upon her face. The

delicious solitude of standing at the edge of the earth and looking out across the grey and gold abyss...

The hoot and roar of the train – distant now but clattering ever closer – disturbed her reverie. She had moved four times in the past four years, each time creeping closer and closer to the tracks, till now the thundering engine passed only a few yards from her bedroom window, rattling her little world with its sound and fury. Perhaps there was a subconscious comfort in living close to the tracks, to that wood and iron artery that wound from coast

“WHY KANSAS?’ THE QUESTION HAD PLAGUED HER EVERY TIME SHE WENT HOME ON HOLIDAY, VOICED ALTERNATELY WITH AMUSEMENT, CREDULITY, AND GENUINE INTEREST.”

to coast. She remembered the shipyards of San Francisco, watching the huge ships come in from the Pacific stacked high with the colorful containers. They looked so big as they clattered past her window, but on those giant ships they seemed as small as children's blocks.

“Why Kansas?” The question had plagued her every time she went home on holiday, voiced alternately with amusement, credulity, and genuine interest. Certainly there were practical considerations – the lower cost of living, her choice of college, the friends she

had made out there, etc., etc. But how could she explain to them how the smaller infinitudes of the corn fields had captivated her, how the wide open abyss of the sky, stretching out on all sides with nothing to hedge her impudent gaze from seeking out the horizon, had filled her with a feeling akin to standing on the edge of the sea – the smallness of a single life in the infinite

“SHE ACHED WITH HOMESICKNESS, AND FELT EVERY MILE THAT STRETCHED BETWEEN HER AND THE COAST.”

sweep of space and time? These sensations were difficult for her to understand, and even more difficult to communicate to others. So she shrugged and fended off the question with the usual, dull litany.

There were times – when the sun unfolded all its glory against the evening sky with lazy magnificence, or when the fields about the town were clad in their baptismal gown of snow - that she loved living where she did. But then there were times, times like this, when the reek of the Factory refused to be dispelled and the broad, imperious sky crushed down from above like a thumb upon a tack, wedging her in place. That was when she ached with homesickness, and felt every mile that stretched between her and the coast.

Her plane touched down with the usual skipping jolt. She was back in the Valley



again, between the mountains and hills that had bookended her life until four years ago. The mountains had always seemed small to her, and their lack of snowy crags had disappointed her as a child; but now, viewed with eyes refreshed by absence, they seemed huge and lush, crowding out the horizon and narrowing the sky to a comprehensible expanse. The hills were brown from years of drought, but the mountains retained their verdant coat of redwoods and oaks, broken by regimented patches of vineyards. And beyond

the mountains, hidden behind their back like a child's surprise, lay the ocean. Even though she couldn't see it, the knowledge that it was near pleased her.

Her grandparents lived on several acres in the mountains. It was a long drive to their property, on a narrow winding highway lined with orange poppies and yellow yarrow. Some of the happiest hours of her childhood had been spent adventuring amongst the fruit trees of the orchard that covered the majority of their land; in her absence, however, the orchard

had been removed and grapevines planted in its place, as her family became the newest member of the growing coterie of vineyards in the area.

“The land is good here,” her cousin said, as they stood on the back deck of the house and surveyed the ranks of infant vines that spread out from them like ripples on the gently sloping mountain side. “The terroir. It’ll be a few years till we can harvest though.”

She felt a curious mix of the old and new within her. A piece of her childhood was gone forever, and she had expected to be saddened, but she was not. In a few years, there would be wine that tasted of her childhood, and of her mountains. It would be imprinted with the sense of place just as deeply as she was.


Holiday was over and she was back in the tiny town, in the house crushed between the Factory and the trucks, back in the company of the cicadas, back under the infinite sky. The

“PERHAPS PEOPLE ARE LIKE WINE. THEY PICK UP THE TASTES AND TEXTURES OF THE PLACES THEY’VE BEEN AND MAKE THEM A PART OF THEMSELVES. OR, PERHAPS WINE IS LIKE PEOPLE.”

homesickness she had felt before was replaced by a new sensation within her. The land is good here, she thought to herself, as she turned out the light and crawled into bed. The terroir.

Lying in the darkness, she turned this thought over and over in her mind, like a pebble caught in a rushing stream, smoothing and polishing it. Perhaps people are like wine. They pick up the tastes and textures of the places they've been and make them a part of themselves. Or, perhaps wine is like people.

She pictured someone pouring her out and seeing ocean waves, corn fields, poppies and sunflowers. What other places, she wondered, would the current of life bring her to? What other tastes and textures would she absorb? Perhaps a time would come when she would miss this tiny town as intensely as she had missed the ocean. Outside in the darkness the train rushed by, leaving echoes in its wake of the places that had made her. ~



***OUTSIDE IN THE DARKNESS
THE TRAIN RUSHED BY,
LEAVING ECHOES IN ITS WAKE
OF THE PLACES THAT HAD MADE HER.***

HIDDEN STRENGTH

Selena Badami

freshman | fine arts

A woman can be fierce and should not be restrained. She should not be ignored, but instead cherished. Every woman has a powerful spirit that is often forced into hiding, but the strength a woman poses is enough to pierce through whatever may hold her back in life.

Keywords: photography, digital, black and white

*Digital photograph
Canon EOS Rebel T6i*



LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S TRANSCENDENTALISM

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Transcendentalism discovered the keys to happiness long before modern psychology confirmed them. This is evident in Louisa May Alcott's enduring novel, *Little Women*, as well as her other works. This paper explores the ideas of happiness found in Alcott's works, and how her ideas were influenced by transcendentalism at large.

Keywords: Transcendentalism, happiness, literature

*Modern-day society is fascinated with the idea of happiness. How can it be achieved? Countless self-help books have been published on the subject in the last few years. As it turns out, twenty-first century thinkers are not the only ones to have pondered this question. Indeed, nineteenth century transcendentalist thinkers not only attempted to achieve happiness, but anticipated many scientifically-approved methods for improving life. Louisa May Alcott's ideas of happiness are expressed in two of her novels: the enduring *Little Women* and lesser-known *An Old-Fashioned Girl*.*

THE RECENT New York Times bestselling book *Happier* (2007) by Tal Ben-Shahar has been lauded by readers and psychologists for expressing cutting-edge scientific research on how to be happy and fulfilled. The study of happiness, otherwise known as "positive psychology," has found that helping others, immersing ourselves in meaningful work, and practicing gratitude will ultimately make us all happier. Scientific thought hasn't always agreed with this claim. Decades ago, the prevailing belief was that happiness came from material success, health, status, pleasure, and power. But there was a small enclave of influential writers who disagreed: The Transcendentalists. They claimed that happiness came from working hard in service to others and developing your personal spirituality. Ben-Shahar (n.d.) directly quoted Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Happier*, saying "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can

sincerely try to help another without helping himself".

Author Louisa May Alcott wrote during the peak of the transcendental movement. Her enduring children's stories, such as *Little Women* (2004a) and *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1996), clearly contain transcendental influences and lessons from her father Bronson Alcott and others. But Louisa offers her own version of Transcendentalism, one which combines the then-seemingly competing ideas of spiritual development and pragmatism. Her philosophy was built on what worked, and centuries later, science has finally caught up with her observations.

Transcendentalists generally held to several key tenets: first, that human beings are inherently good and pure. Through proper education, nutrition, and hard work, people can return to the pure state of being. Second, that nature was the ultimate mediator and expression of God. Most transcendentalists were unitarians, rejecting the idea of the trinity in favor of one God who was present all around: in every good thing, person, flower, leaf, and change of weather. The best way to experience God was by finding him in nature. Third, transcendentalists valued individualism and self-reliance. Conformity, in their eyes, was the worst possible course of action. Being true to oneself was the highest goal. Self-discovery and reflection, then, was very important – hence the volumes of journals and essays produced by the transcendentalists at the time (Goodman, 2018).

Louisa May Alcott was serendipitously

surrounded by the greatest thinkers of her time and transcendentalism in general. Her father, Bronson Alcott, showed her an idealistic and ultimately unworkable version of the movement. One of Bronson's essays showcases his idealistic notions by discussing the person of Jesus, and how the ideal of Jesus' humanness must be brought forth. "It is the mission of this Age, to revive his Idea, give it currency, and reinstate it in the faith of men. By its quickening agency, it is to fructify our common nature, and reproduce its like . . . it is to reproduce Perfect Men" (Alcott 2000, 170).

Throughout Louisa's childhood, Bronson pursued philosophical ideas by establishing the Temple School where he sought to teach children according to his transcendental ideas. His goal was to teach students to "learn to feel rightly, to think rightly, and to act rightly" (Alcott 2000, 58). The Temple School, like most of Bronson's experiments, ultimately failed due to lack of parental support. Some of Bronson's ideas were too much for parents to handle (Alcott 2000, 80). He was simply not practical enough to make his ideals last.

Soon after the closing of the Temple School, the family moved to a farmstead to establish a utopian society dubbed Fruitlands. There, they attempted to live off the land, follow a strict vegetarian diet, and more fully implement the ideas that Bronson deemed important (Matteson 2007, 126). Fruitlands was a terrible failure. The Alcotts were subjected to backbreaking work but barely survived the winter. After a little less than a

year on the homestead, they left (Matteson 2007, 163). Although Louisa had seen her father's transcendentalist projects fail, she still believed in the philosophy as much as he did, and blamed the setbacks on poor planning and execution. In her books, she would correct his mistakes.

It was after this that they moved to Concord, Massachusetts – the hub of transcendentalism. Poet and essayist Henry David Thoreau lived down the street, Ralph Waldo Emerson was close by, and Nathaniel

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Hawthorne often visited. Louisa frequented the library of Emerson and learned about nature from Thoreau. Bronson was close friends with Emerson for over forty-five years (Matteson, 2007, 6).

Biographer John Matteson notes the uniqueness of Louisa's situation, and expands on it: "It was far from the rule for a mother of four children to work outside the home, but, from time to time, Louisa's mother did. It was also uncommon for a father of that time to take a strong interest in educating his daughters, but Bronson Alcott's desire to give his girls the perfect education was, for him, a consuming obsession. And it is rare indeed for a family of any era to involve itself in almost

every conceivable movement of social reform: from vegetarianism to communal living and from abolition to women's rights, the Alcotts got involved. In their activism as well as their personal circumstances, the Alcotts were anything but ordinary" (Matteson 2016, 28). Louisa was immersed in transcendentalism. She lived and breathed it, heroicized its leaders, and was the subject of its experiments.

Louisa's mother Abba was as radical as her husband in terms of her belief in the values of transcendentalism and the need of social reform. "My life is one of daily protest against the oppressions of abuses of Society," she wrote to her brother, Samuel May (Matteson 2007, 212). She became mentor and provider for many "lost girls, abused wives, friendless children, and weak or wicked men" (Matteson 2007, 212). She was a strong advocate of women's suffrage, and it was her lifelong dream to vote. But after Fruitlands and the Temple School, Abba had gone through much at the hands of Bronson. She had less interest in a complete ideology and more in what practical tools transcendentalism offered to achieve happiness. It was her attitude of cheerful perseverance that inspired Louisa most of all. "Two of Abba's favorite maxims were: 'Love your duty and you will be happy' and 'Hope, and Keep busy,' an instruction she tucked into Louisa's journal in 1845 and which the March sisters adopt as their motto in a moment of family crisis in *Little Women*" (McFall 2018).

Abba wrote in a letter to Elizabeth Peabody, "If trial and friction make strong and bright, I shall be strength and brilliancy

personified, in the next state of existence, for my spirit has been through all sorts of graduated furnaces in this last one... [I will] rise to the occasion..." (Alcott 2012, 72). The idealistic notions of Bronson sounded good until they were put into action. *Fruitlands was a failure. The Temple School too radical.* Abba wanted a more practical philosophy, saying "Give me one day of practical philosophy; it is worth a century of speculation and discussion..." (Alcott 2012, 114).

Louisa saw the implications of an overly-idealistic philosophy. Anne Boyd notes "Alcott has mixed emotions about Transcendentalism. Intrigued and inspired by the ideal of self-reliance, she still knew from first-hand experience that 'self-reliance really meant reliance on others and required the self-sacrifice of family members'" (Wester 2005, 16). However, Louisa still wanted more: she wanted a way to tie Abba's tools together. Like Bronson, she wanted a philosophy, but unlike him, she insisted on one that worked.

This drew her to Ralph Waldo Emerson's theories and ideas, as they presented a more complete way of living out the transcendental philosophy. Her journals illustrate her love for his philosophies, calling him "the man who has helped me most by his life, his books, his society" (Wester 2005, 17). As put by Bethany Wester, this appreciation for Emerson's ideas "tended to draw her 'away from her father' and more toward Emerson's more practical, although masculine, form of Transcendental thought" (Wester 2005, 17).

Emerson's essay says "love, and you

shall be loved. All love is mathematically just, as much as the two sides of an algebraic equation. The good man has absolute good, which like fire turns everything to its own nature, so that you cannot do him any harm; but as the royal armies sent against Napoleon, when he approached cast down their colors and from enemies became friends, so disasters of all kinds, as sickness, offence, poverty, prove benefactors" (Emerson 2013). Emerson writes of the "Law of Compensation," which is the idea that doing good works brings happiness and satisfaction into your own life. This idea appealed greatly to Louisa, and is evident through her writings.

But perhaps most telling are Emerson's comments on putting ideas into action during his address to the "American Scholar." He says, "The mind now thinks; now acts; and each fit reproduces the other. When the artist has exhausted his materials, when the fancy no longer paints, when thoughts are no longer

"HARD WORK AS THE PATH TO MEANING AND SELF-RELIANCE, AND ULTIMATELY, HAPPINESS, IS EVIDENT THROUGHOUT LOUISA'S WORKS OF FICTION."

apprehended, and books are a weariness, he has always the resource to live. Character is higher than intellect . . . A great soul will be strong to live, as well as strong to think" (Emerson 2000, 204). These words could easily be Louisa's life motto; in moments of discontentment or despair, she turned to work.

Emerson continues, "I hear therefore with joy whatever is beginning to be said of the dignity and necessity of labor to every citizen. There is virtue yet in the hoe and the spade, for learned as well as for unlearned hands" (Emerson 2000, 204).

Louisa lived through the idealized experiments of Bronson and his cohorts. She had watched her mother be the workhorse of Fruitlands and the constant bridge between Bronson's ideas and their family's survival. She valued the ideas of transcendentalism, but valued still more the practical method of applying them. This was more akin to Emerson's ideas than Bronson's; and also tied in her own experiences.

To her, self-reliance and self-reform were the fruit of work. Self-reform was the active method of becoming self-reliant, and work would provide both values. Louisa herself was something of a workaholic, and understandably so—she nearly single-handedly kept her family financially afloat when she was old enough, and was able to provide a comfortable retirement for her mother and pay back her family's debts (Matteson 2007, 388).

This value of hard work as the path to meaning and self-reliance, and ultimately, happiness, is evident throughout Louisa's works of fiction. It's woven into her novels and outright argued in many places. She uses children's' stories as the platform to improve upon the transcendental ideas ingrained into her and focus on their true outcome, that of happiness. Specifically, *Little Women* and *An*



Old-Fashioned Girl, published within a year and a half of one another, showcase Alcott's ability to translate transcendentalism into a children's novel without losing the integrity of either subject matter.

“NEVER ONE FOR PREACHY ESSAYS OR EVEN POLITICAL ACTIVISM, [LOUISA] TURNED TO HER WRITING TO MAKE A STATEMENT.”

The circumstances surrounding the creation and publication of Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, her first published novel, were unique. At first, Alcott didn't even want to write such an insufferable girls' story, as she “never liked girls or knew many” (Alcott 2004b, 413). Girl's fiction, like the *Elsie Dinsmore* series of the time expressed Christian ideas such as being persecuted for doing right, or forgiveness in the face of an enemy, or obedience to authority (Finley 2012). Alcott wanted something that felt more real, and she drew on a lifetime of transcendental experiences to create it. She ended up with a thinly-veiled autobiography that largely drew from Abba's wisdom and Bronson's child-rearing methods, with Louisa's own methods for good measure. But for the second half of *Little Women*, often known as *Happy Wives*, Louisa was more intentional – and it shows. The themes she inserted in the first half of the book become more deliberate and drawn out in the second half, from subversions of gender roles to independent womanhood to education.

An Old-Fashioned Girl was published after Louisa's rise to fame with *Little Women*. Now, she had a platform and ambition to match it. Never one for preachy essays or even political activism (she left that to the Margaret Fullers and John Browns of the world), she turned to her writing to make a statement. Louisa had to pay the bills. But she also had things to say.

Louisa invited her readers simply to feel as she felt through her writing. A reader who understood and believed Alcott's message accepted transcendentalism, even if they didn't know the term. Her writing is a form of literary activism, promoting progressive ideas about women's rights, gender roles, and the best and most healthy way to live (Lenahan 2012, 28). Alcott's writing is full of people experiencing happiness by changing their emotions rather than changing the world around them – the basic message of anti-intellectual transcendentalism.

The first chapter of *Little Women* opens with Jo, the main character, lamenting that “Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents” (Alcott 2004a, 11). The rest of the sisters proceed to air their personal grievances, complaining that they wish their father was home from war, or that they didn't have to work, or that they could have luxuries like the other girls. Marmee proposed an antidote: on Christmas morning, the girls wake up to find little “guidebooks” under their pillows, records of “the best life ever lived” – most likely a New Testament. But soon after that, they are asked to put into practice the high-minded ideals

written in those pages.

There is a poor family, the Hummels, who Mrs. March finds have no food for Christmas morning. She asks the March sisters to give them their food, and they agree. The result of this labor of love is, surprisingly, happiness. “That was a very happy breakfast, though they didn't get any of it; and when they went away, leaving comfort behind, I think there were not in all the city four merrier people than the hungry little girls who gave away their breakfasts, and contented themselves with bread and milk on Christmas morning” (Alcott 2004a, 23). This is the paradox throughout the rest of the story: that in giving of their time and effort to others, they find themselves more fulfilled than before.

“WORK WAS VALUED LESS BECAUSE OF THE PHYSICAL CHANGES IT CAUSED AND MORE BECAUSE OF THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF THE ACT.”

This lesson is compounded as the story follows John Bunyan's allegory “Pilgrim's Progress”, with each girl being presented with specific “burdens,” and chapters following them learning to bear their burdens and face their trials. Jo's burden is her temper; she faces it when her anger causes Amy to come to harm. Meg's burden is her vanity, and she learns her lesson while living a lavish lifestyle away from home and finding it empty. Beth's burden is her passivity and fear, which she conquers to thank Mr. Laurence for a gift. Amy's burden is

her desire to be likable.

Following this “Pilgrim's Progress” allegory, Mrs. March tells her daughters: “Then let me advise you to take up your little burdens again; for though they seem heavy sometimes, they are good for us, and lighten as we learn to carry them. Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for every one; it keeps us from ennui and mischief; is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion” (Alcott 2004, 99). From a transcendentalist point of view, *Pilgrim's Progress* is an allegory about pursuing ideals through hard work. Christian labors along the path to get to the celestial city with a large burden on his back – but as he approaches the city, his burden becomes lighter. Alcott's allusion to this allegory in her work fulfills the tenets of the transcendental movement. Hard work allows one to be self-reliant, fulfill individual passions, and diverge from the culture and society at large all at the same time. It was the remedy for selfishness and envy, greed and anger, and, like Christian's burden, the girls' burdens lightened over time.

Work was valued less because of the physical changes it caused and more because of the spiritual value of the act. The remedy for discontentment was not to conform to the world and chase wealth, but rather to look within and find gratitude, improving oneself in order to be worthy of the gifts of life. As put by Hayley Miller Lenahan, “the key to happiness in Alcott's books is doing meaningful and rewarding work, whether or not it is a financial necessity” (Lenahan 2012, 67). One of Abba's

favorite maxims echoes this, counseling those who hear it to “Love your duty and you will be happy” (McFall 2018).

Marmee, who is modeled after Abba Alcott, instructs the March sisters to “think over your blessings, and be grateful” when they are discontented (Alcott 2004a, 43). She tells a parable-like story in which the characters learned that “money couldn’t keep shame and sorrow out of rich people’s houses... another that though she was poor, she was a great deal happier with her youth, health, and good spirits, than a certain fretful, feeble old lady, who couldn’t enjoy her comforts; a third, that, disagreeable as it was to help get dinner, it was harder still to have to go begging for it; and the fourth, that even carnelian rings were not so valuable as good behavior” (Alcott 2004a, 43). The girls learned to be grateful, and thereby find purpose even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Emerson’s “[Self-Reliance](#)” (n.d) builds on these ideas of purpose and gratitude as ways to become self-reliant as well as fulfilled. Alcott’s most beloved heroine, Jo, embodies this idea of self-reliance. In *Little Women*, Jo takes up writing to provide for herself. She ultimately leaves home and travels to New York to work as a governess for two small children and write sensation stories for the local newspaper. Alcott could be writing a transcendental essay when she analyzes the effects of wealth and hard work: “Wealth is certainly a most desirable thing, but poverty has its sunny side, and one of the sweet uses of adversity, is the genuine satisfaction which

comes from hearty work of head or hand; and to the inspiration of the world. Jo enjoyed a taste of this satisfaction, and ceased to envy richer girls, taking great comfort in the knowledge that she could supply her own wants, and need ask no one for a penny (Alcott 2004a, 215).

Transcendentalist views held that people were inherently good and that society was corrupting. Following current trends is problematic, and does not allow for a person to be properly independent, or happy. Becoming self-reliant is the key to this problem. Emerson writes, “But man postpones or remembers; he does not live in the present, but with reverted eye laments the past, or, heedless of the riches that surround him, stands on tiptoe to foresee the future. He cannot be happy and strong until he too lives with nature in the present, above time” (Emerson, n.d.). Emerson believed that following current trends was detrimental, and instead calls people to “live in the present” by living values that transcend fashion and trend.

Alcott expands on this Emersonian idea throughout *An Old-Fashioned Girl*. She contrasts Polly Milton, the main character, with the Shaw family. Polly is from the countryside, and visits the Shaws, an upper-class family in the city. During her time living with the Shaws, she has experiences that reveal a new side of the world. Polly finds she is in a “new world,” where the “manners and customs were so different from the simple ways at home that she felt like a stranger in a strange land” (Alcott 1996, 33).

She goes to the theater, follows Fanny to a girls’ school, and attends parties. Polly enjoys

the theater – up until the point where girls rush onto stage to dance suggestively in tiny costumes, making Polly feel ashamed for them (Alcott 1996, 15). At school, the girls overlook her as they gossip as if they were twenty instead

**“IS IT SO BAD, THEN, TO BE
MISUNDERSTOOD? . . .
TO BE GREAT IS TO BE
MISUNDERSTOOD.”**

of twelve; at the parties, Fanny Shaw gallivants with the “big boys” and then begs Polly to keep her secret. Each of these situations ends with a conversation or reflection where Polly contrasts her own upbringing with what she’s experienced, finding that her “old-fashioned ways,” which are decidedly against the trend, are more wholesome and satisfying in the end.

Ultimately, Polly finds she is happier as a result of being individual and not conforming to society. However, along the way she is greatly misunderstood. She is taken for a naive country girl, not a “true lady,” and even a “rampant woman’s rights reformer.” Emerson’s “Self-Reliance” also discusses the trouble and triumph of being misunderstood. “Is it so bad, then, to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood” (Emerson n.d.). Through the character of Polly, Alcott also promotes being misunderstood as a badge of honor. Her characters are misunderstood as they endeavor

to become better versions of themselves, and eventually act as examples for those around them.

Alcott consistently pits rich against poor and “traditional” values against newfangled trends to communicate to the reader that conformity can be devastating. This idea is echoed in Thoreau’s famous essay “Walden.” “Richness is a hindrance to the good life - Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind” (Thoreau 1995). To Alcott, the vice of wealth is not only in its materialism, but in how it removes agency and purpose from the lives of the wealthy. Fanny Shaw is the personification of this problem.

Fanny seems to have all a girl would need to be happy - nice clothes, a trendy circle of friends, and plenty of parties to attend. But, she feels discontented and disposable. Alcott paints her as a character whose wealth has removed her dignity by taking away the need for her to work or produce anything of value. She has become “so tired of everybody and everything” (Alcott 1996, 151).

Polly stands in direct contrast to this, as she is full of purpose and drive and independence. She must work as a music teacher to make her living, and she surrounds herself with other women who work as well. She tells Fanny that whenever things worry her, her course of action is to “catch up a broom and sweep, or wash hard, or walk, or go at something with all my might, and I usually find that by the time I get through the worry

is gone, or I've got courage enough to bear it without grumbling" (Alcott 1996, 151).

Fanny can do these things, but there is "no need of it." In a moment of foreshadowing, Polly advises that "a little poverty would do you good, Fan; just enough necessity to keep you busy until you find how good work is" (Alcott 1996, 151). Doing work that is needed, and being needed yourself, is a key component of a happy and fulfilling life – and also a tenet of transcendentalism.

The idea that poverty is helpful in developing self-reliance was indeed divergent from the culture at the time Alcott wrote. She herself knew the sweet fruit of completing work that sustained herself and her family, and this idea was very important to her as well as transcendentalism.

Upper-class character Fanny Shaw learns this lesson, as she is brought by Polly Milton into a circle of poor, yet self-sufficient, working women. Alcott juxtaposes Fanny's feeling of listlessness with a group of self-reliant, industrious women to show the result of hard work. "They were girls still, full of spirits fun, and youth; but below the lightheartedness each cherished a purpose, which seemed to ennoble her womanhood, to give her a certain power, a sustaining satisfaction, a daily stimulus, that led her on to daily effort, and in time to some success in circumstance or character, which was worth all the patience, hope, and labor of her life" (Alcott 1996, 244).

Alcott views this sense of purpose as more valuable than any number of "fashionable" clothes or luxury items. Without

purpose, Alcott believes, a lavish lifestyle amounts to nothing. The rich families in *Little Women* and *An Old-Fashioned Girl* are not often happy families – yet the Marchs and Polly Milton, despite their poverty, are happy.

This comes to fruition after the Shaw family loses their money. Fanny Shaw "shouldered the new burden, feeling that at last necessity had given her what she had long needed, something to do" (Alcott 1996, 286). Over time, the work that Fanny accomplishes improves her by making her more aware of the important things in life, and less engrossed in temporary and meaningless pleasures.

The transformation of character Tom Shaw follows this trend. Tom is the love interest for Polly, and the older brother of Fanny Shaw. Tom begins the story as a "dandy" and is rather

**"ALCOTT REPEATEDLY
EMPHASIZES OBTAINING
HAPPINESS THROUGH WORK."**

impetuous and impulsive. Polly returns to the family to find him engaged to Trix, a woman of the world in every sense. However, after the Shaw family falls from power through a business deal gone bad, Tom must decide what to do. He is left with a mountain of debt after his wild escapades at college. He goes West to perform some nondescript labor – and comes back purified and perfected, a much better man (Alcott 1996, 336).

Work is the antidote to an unhappy spirit, as Alcott determines nearer the beginning of the novel. Miss Mills, a "brisk

little lady" who owns the house where Polly lives, provides an example of loving one's duty: "But Polly didn't get a chance to be miserable very long, for as she went upstairs feeling like the most injured girl in the world, she caught a glimpse of Miss Mills, sewing away with such a bright face that she couldn't resist stopping for a word or two" (Alcott 1996, 162).

Miss Mills sees that Polly is unhappy and provides the antidote: hard work for those around her. This does Polly more good than complaining or wishing her situation was different. This is acknowledged in the next paragraphs. "Not till long afterward did Polly see how much good this little effort had done her, for the first small sacrifice of this sort leads the way to others, and a single hand's turn given heartily to the world's great work helps one amazingly with one's own small tasks. Polly found this out as her life slowly grew easier and brighter, and the beautiful law of compensation gave her better purposes and pleasures than any she had lost" (Alcott 1996, 207). Alcott uses the medium of story to effectively translate a transcendental philosophy of hard work, duty, and personal development into a heartwarming lesson that permeates the minds of readers.

Alcott repeatedly emphasizes obtaining happiness through work. In Louisa's essay "Happy Women," directed to single women searching for meaning in their lives apart from husband and family, she writes "The world is full of work, needing all the heads, hearts, and hands we can bring to do it... Be true to yourselves; cherish whatever talent you

possess, and in using it faithfully for the good of others you will most assuredly find happiness for yourself, and make of life no failure, but a beautiful success" (quoted in Eiselein and Phillips 2004, 35). Work is presented time and time again throughout *An Old-Fashioned Girl* and *Little Women* as the remedy for sadness, despair, or discontent.

**"CHILDREN – AND ADULTS –
READING ALCOTT TODAY . . .
ARE ENCOUNTERING NUANCED
IDEAS OF HOW TO BETTER THE
WORLD AROUND THEM,
AND ULTIMATELY, THEMSELVES."**

Today's world needs Alcott's messages more than ever. Even 150 years after the publication of *Little Women*, our society still struggles with meaning, fulfillment, and achieving happiness. We strive to find our "dream" and follow it with a passion, creating a societal landscape filled with individuals walking alone. Alcott's transcendentalism calls us to turn to ourselves in a different way: in order to find gratitude, self-reliance and inner strength, that we might help those around us and provide service.

Louisa's books are more realistic than Bronson's heady notions, and even more so than Emerson's essays. Scholar Bethany S. Wester writes "G.K. Chesterton asserted that Louisa May Alcott 'had anticipated realism by twenty to thirty years' . . . yet reality did not quench, but rather enhanced, the Transcendentalist spirit that her father and

Emerson had instilled in her because the challenges she faced as a woman seeking self-reliance trumped the obstacles these men faced” (Wester 2005, 18). Alcott latched onto the most important and fundamental aspect of Transcendentalism: happiness, and ran full-steam ahead with it. Children—and adults—reading Alcott today are not only encountering a charming, wholesome family story. They are encountering nuanced ideas of how to better the world around them, and ultimately, themselves. These are timeless lessons that extend far beyond the transcendental

movement and into modern thought.

Over a century later, mainstream psychology has finally caught up. There is a large body of scientific evidence agreeing that happiness is a side-effect of self-reliance and hard work for something bigger than yourself—and rejecting the idea that happiness is caused by material gain or status. Like a true transcendentalist, Alcott surpassed the logical, formal essay in favor of the emotional, intuitive novel, and communicated the same ideas as modern-day psychology. And as a result, her ideas will linger in the hearts, as well as the minds, of those who read them. ~

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“HAPPINESS IS A SIDE-EFFECT OF SELF-RELIANCE AND HARD WORK FOR SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF.”

OVERCOME

Rachel Hermes

senior | fine arts

A female form is encapsulated by vegetation in a languid yet stoic position. Nature is used to indicate the suffocating feeling caused by the many stressors of modern social life. The image represents the emotional toll of living in a technological world of ceaseless information which is often morally challenging and psychologically draining, and how there is no easy reprieve without embracing apathy.

Keywords: intaglio, etching, nature, print, figurative

*Copper etching with Chine-collé
5 x 8"*





AN ARGUMENT FOR THE ABSURD

John Dotterweich
senior | secondary education

Feed, *The Society of the Spectacle*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus* help answer the question: how do you live authentically in an inauthentic world? Being a reasonable and happy member of society requires neither total rejection nor total acceptance of its norms but a middle ground that balances the two. By making small concessions, you can lead a more fulfilling life.

Keywords: spectacle, authenticity, Camus, Feed

Feed, *The Society of the Spectacle*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus* help answer the question: how do you live authentically in an inauthentic world? Keeping up with latest trends, news, and social media not only is exhausting but disjointing from meaningful experience. Total rejection of technology and norms can lead to isolation from those who do keep up with them. It can be said that being a reasonable and happy member of society requires neither total rejection nor total acceptance of its norms but a middle ground that balances the two. Following people on social media and liking pictures may not have any inherent value but it keeps you involved enough that you can make meaningful connections with others. Posting pictures of yourself allows people to see what you are doing and stay involved in your life. By making small concessions, you lead a more fulfilling life that keeps you meaningfully connected in a disconnected world.

TODAY'S WORLD is fast-paced and filled with cutting edge technology that connects us in ways we would have never thought possible. However, this advantage is not all that it seems. As we become increasingly connected, our ability to have authentic experiences has seemingly diminished. Novels like M.T. Anderson's *Feed* (2002) warn us of the dangers of commercial influence on our lives and technology's perpetuation of that danger. Anderson's concerns parallel those of philosopher Guy Debord, who wrote *The Society of the Spectacle* in 1967. Both authors present bleak outlooks on consumerism,

technology and authenticity. The concerns found in these works can be alleviated through an exploration of absurdism as presented in Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). To combat inauthenticity and the despair that accompanies it, we must embrace aspects of society that we find individually dissatisfying. Doing so will allow us to achieve happier and more fulfilling lives.

Feed is a dystopian novel that explores adolescent life in a world full of corporate power, advanced technology, and consumerism. The book takes place in the near future, in a world where technology and corporate greed have led to societal upheaval and environmental degradation. Most people have a "feed," a device that allows people to access Internet sites and other services mentally. Titus, the protagonist, is on a trip with his friends when his feed is hacked and cannot access its services—services he had known his entire life. Violet, one of Titus's friends, also had her feed damaged. She is unable to get her feed completely repaired, causing it to deteriorate and negatively affect her health. Violet then introduces Titus to the idea of rebelling against the feed by taking interest in unrelated products revealing no pattern from which a consumer profile could be made. As Violet's condition worsens, her family is unable to pay for her medical expenses and petitions to Feedtech's Corporation. Their petition gets denied because Violet is deemed a "poor investment" due to her prior rebelliousness. Violet's condition worsens, and her eventual death leaves Titus shaken as he copes with

the grief of her passing. Titus tries to continue Violet's ideas of "rebellion", but quickly reverts to his old ways and conforms to society and the feed.

In *Feed*, we see that the characters' lives are dominated by technology. While there are many examples of technological advancements in the novel, the most notable is the feed, which is integrated into the brains of the characters. This allows for instant access to the Internet, texting, and benefits corporate interests. Anderson sees technological advances like the feed in a negative light. His novel critiques our obsession with modern technology and our addiction to consumerism. Through his characters, Anderson shows how instant-access Internet takes away from authentic human experience and that the commercialization of modern society has invaded all parts of our

lives, leading to separation from authenticity. The principles described by Anderson in *Feed* reflect the ideas of Guy Debord.

In his well known work *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord (1994) describes how images and the economy have replaced authentic experiences and that our consumer-driven society is overly saturated with advertisements, pop culture, and appearances. He calls this the Spectacle. Debord argues that inventions like television have changed the way we interact with others, creating a "social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (1994, 12). Our relationships and interactions with others have become mediated by the images we see on television or other consumable media which in turn creates shallow, [inauthentic experiences](#). In addition, the neoliberal economy has become



so dominant that it has pervaded all parts of life previously thought to be separate from the economic activity. His critique of the capitalistic economy resembles Karl Marx's ideas about wealth and commodities (Marx 1959). When the market dictates how you conduct yourself, being becomes having. The clothes you wear, the car you drive, the house you live in suddenly define who you are; the things you own end up owning [you](#). Even rebellion from the Spectacle is commodified. Debord says that "dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material" (1994, 38). Buying a punk rock t-shirt doesn't make you a rebel but shows that you "fight" against the system through the buying and owning of the



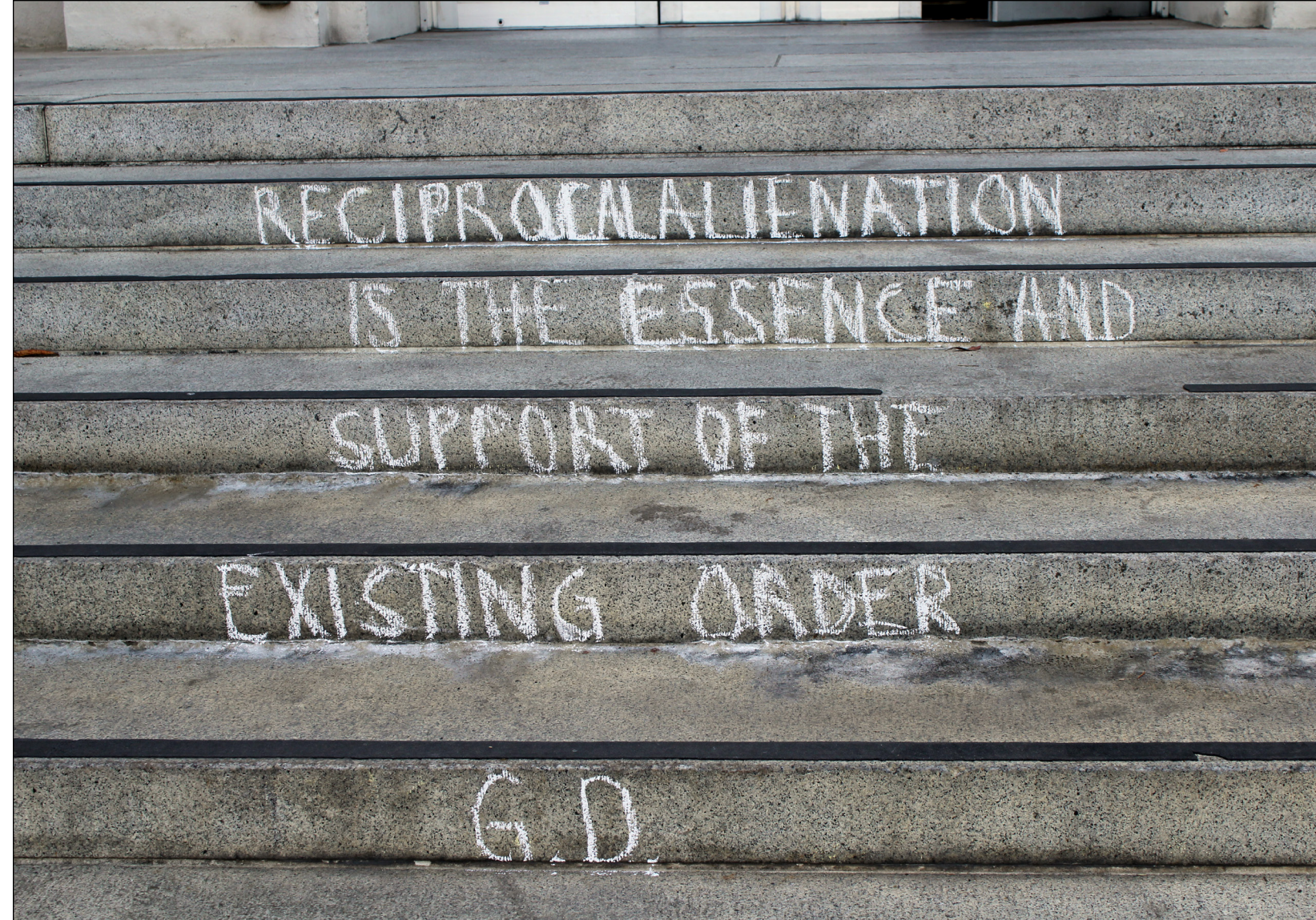
merchandise which corrupts the very message the t-shirt attempts to give. While Debord lived in a time where the advent of extreme consumerism and marketing was beginning to take form, his work is even more relevant today. Debord's essays can be applied to *Feed* and the world we live in by looking at the influence that technology and consumerism have on our daily lives.

People embrace the technology that makes their lives easier, and with our globalized world and fast-paced technological turnover, they strive to stay ahead of the curve so that they remain connected. In our commodified world and consumer culture, we are pressured to participate by buying commodities that keep us relevant to others. The Internet and cell phones have made possible the exploration of

the far reaches of our known world without taking a step. Social media has allowed us to consume each other's lives without actually being together. These developments create the grounds on which the Spectacle is formed. To Debord, "All that was once directly lived has become mere representation" (1994, 12). In other words, everything that what once directly experienced by humans has become an illusion of an authentic experience. If the Spectacle is the presentation of authentic experience, then technology and social media are catalysts of the Spectacle. Rather than experience things directly, it is far easier to browse through social media and see things that we would like to do. Relationships are mediated through images, which replace authentic communion and in turn disconnect us while maintaining the feeling of connectedness. This creates a culture where people must live inauthentically in order to participate at all while at the same time it is not necessary for people to vigorously participate. But even shallow

"REJECTION OF TECHNOLOGY NOT ONLY ALIENATES YOU FROM OTHERS BUT CAN ALSO MAKE YOU AN OUTCAST IN THE EYES OF SOCIETY."

participation requires resources. Someone who owns a flip phone cannot hope to "keep pace" with someone who has all the modern functions of an iPhone. A person who keeps up with sports, entertainment, and their friends through new, "smart" technology is going to



be able to navigate the social world much easier than someone with a flip phone. In *Feed*, Violet learns that connected, technological participation is necessary to remain relevant in a society that ardently values indirect involvement. Rejection of technology not only alienates you from others but can also make you an outcast in the eyes of society. Violet learns the hard way that it is better to just accept participation as a necessity rather than a matter of choice. Anderson argues that at our current pace of advancement, we will see a future where technological participation is not only necessary but so interwoven in our society that it will be inescapable.

ourselves of those connections prevents us from living fulfilling existences. While it may be a positive thing to reject technology, it does not do much good if no one else thinks the same way.

"ONCE YOU REALIZE THE ABSURDITY OF THE WORLD WE LIVE IN, YOU CANNOT GO BACK."

The Spectacle creates an environment where disingenuous actions thrive and relating to others through this can be a seemingly pointless exercise. Why try to relate to anything if it's not going to mean much anyhow? Realizing that there is a distinct lack of meaning in the things we do and the struggle to find meaning where none exists is called Absurdity. Drawing from *Feed* and our own experiences, it can be said that absurdity is an endemic part of our lives.

Themes in *Feed* align with Debord's point that the Spectacle has allowed us to feel connected to everything while at the same time being disconnected from authentic experience. For a person to participate in a society caught in the Spectacle, they need to make concessions regarding any negative beliefs about technology. Following reality T.V., pop culture, or sports allows you to communicate with others that follow the same T.V., pop culture, or sports that you do. This allows you to not only relate to other humans but also to remain socially relevant to them. Human interactions are what allow us to have meaningful connections in our lives. To rob

What connects *Feed* and *The Society of the Spectacle* to a the forming of a meaningful existence can be found in the ideas of Absurdism introduced by Albert Camus. His experiences in France during German occupation in WWII and the horrors that emerged from it were formative to his development of Absurdism. Camus defined absurdity as the struggle and eventual inability to find inherent value and meaning in life due to the actual lack of any absolute meanings or values. Not everyone agrees with Camus and many believe that life does have intrinsic meaning. But if Camus is right and our universe has no intrinsic

meaning, then we are led to the absurd. Once you realize the absurdity of the world we live in, you cannot go back. This “undermining” of existence leads Camus to the belief that suicide is a viable option and in fact a reasonable response: “There is but one truly serious

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philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (Camus 1965, 1). From this perspective there is a profound absence of meaning in life, meaning that the needless suffering and agitation of daily life is simply not worth it. However, in *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus argues that there is another alternative. It is imperative for those who have encountered the absurd to know that to cope with the meaninglessness of the universe they must take no stock in illusions or religion. They must embrace that they alone have control of their fate (Camus 1965, 128). Since the absurd takes away all intrinsic meaning in our universe, illusions like religion have no effect on dispelling the absurd and do not offer solace in the face of meaninglessness. Camus uses the myth of Sisyphus to highlight his philosophy and create an answer to coping with absurdity. Sisyphus, who was doomed to

roll a boulder up a mountain for all eternity only to have it roll back down time and time again, must be imagined as happy as he toils at his necessary task. This is because in the face of a pointless existence there is no alternative other than to resist it. Camus believes that we need to imagine ourselves as Sisyphus, stoutly facing eternal meaninglessness. The rejection of distraction as a way out of the Spectacle is key and leads to an understanding that without facing the absurd you will not find happiness in a world surrounded by despair.

In the world of *Feed*, technology serves as the ultimate distraction while the world deteriorates seemingly unnoticed by characters. Preoccupied with the feed and their daily lives, people seem apathetic to the world that is outside what they buy and consume. People are satisfied with their lives despite the world dying around them. For someone who doesn’t have the feed, seeing the world falling apart around them and being surrounded by a disinterested population would be a terrifying experience. The despair that follows can be compared to the absurd and how one copes with it. In *Feed*, Titus explains that with technology and corporate greed comes complacency:

“Of course, everyone is like, da da da, evil corporations, oh they’re so bad, we all say that, and we all know they control everything. I mean, it’s not great, because who knows what evil shit they’re up to. Everyone feels bad about that. But they’re the only way to get all this stuff, and it’s no good getting pissy about it, because they’re

still going to control everything whether you like it or not” (Anderson 2002, 29).

This feeling of helplessness in the wake of forces greater than our own leads us to acceptance of the status quo. The Spectacle emerges when we cope with this complacency through the ownership and presentation of goods and experiences. You might take a skiing trip in Colorado, but does the experience really matter if you haven’t bought a resort shirt and taken the pictures so that others know what you did? The high-end shirt that was in season two years ago doesn’t carry the

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same status as a shirt that was in season this year. For some, the realization that living that lifestyle is unfulfilling is a crippling experience, comparable to the absurd. Eventually, these individuals conclude that the things you own and the pictures you take ultimately do not matter. The principles found in Camus’s writing show us a solution to overcoming the spectacle found in our daily lives.

Camus teaches us that consciously embracing the Spectacle and its inauthenticity can be a path to meaning and that if it is done for

its own sake, it will become meaningful to the participant and made so by the connections that were formed. Seeing that the Spectacle exists and recognizing that it allows us to fruitfully participate in society and make connections with others, even if they are mediated, allows one to become happier. The principles found in Camus’ philosophy can answer the question of how we can live relatively happily in an inauthentic world. Like Sisyphus, we roll the heavy stone uphill, making concessions to the Spectacle, and when it rolls back downhill we cheerfully walk back down, knowing that the concessions made ultimately allow us to interact with others. Choosing to do this is up to the individual. ~

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AN INSPIRATION FOR CONSERVATION

Ian Burrow
graduate (dec. 2018) | political science

Ian: Now I've found what will be the next chapter of my life; my service and my civic duty is far from over. I owe it to my nation to advocate on behalf of land and wildlife conservation. I want to keep the wild places, wild.

Keywords: conservation, hunting, civic duty, military service

I LET MY RIFLE HANG as I reach up to try and slide my gloved finger up my forehead. I'm looking for that never-ending itch under my helmet. I don't know why I bother. Habit maybe. I don't know where my skin ends and my uniform begins; the sweating never stops. That's what happens when the heat index hits 120 degrees Fahrenheit by the time the sun crests the horizon. The natural gas and oil refineries pump cloud after cloud into the sky. It's the fact that the haze in the sky catches a glimpse of orange that I know the sun is making its climb again. That, and the heat. The heat is a pretty good indicator.

It's range day. About once a week we make the two-hour trek off our little camp out into the designated tract of land both governments have deemed to be the ideal place for hard-charging, apple pie-eating, barrel-chested freedom fighters to get some trigger time. As I stand behind the firing line at "the range," watching my soldiers shoot, trying to reach that itch, something clicks. This place sucks. I already knew that—we all did—but for the first time I came to that conclusion from a whole new perspective. There are no amber waves of grain here. There aren't any purple mountain majesties. Spacious skies? Sure, if that means inhaling about a million carcinogens with every breath.

This land is your land, this land is my land

I learned the value of the land as a kid growing up in the Midwest. I didn't know it at

the time, but that's what was happening when I spent all those hours pulling weeds, feeding livestock, and competing in the county fair to have the best damn tomatoes this side of the Mississippi. I was very fortunate as a kid and I got to see a lot of different places around the U.S. traveling on family vacations. My old man even took me to Rocky Mountain National Park to live out of a tent for a weekend and eat noodles "cooked" by water boiled over the campfire. I accepted all of this as the norm. America was just the geographic depiction on the map that I called home; chock-full of different places to go, things to see, and a t-shirt for each and every one of them. It wasn't until Uncle Sam was kind enough to drop me into a region of the world, void of any sign of life, completely and entirely polluted by man's hand, that I realized just how special America is. How beautiful the Rockies are, the way they reach up and kiss the sky in a manner that would make Jimi Hendrix proud. The way a person can get the overwhelming sense that they've been swallowed up by an M.C. Escher painting by standing on the edge of the Great Lakes. There isn't a place on this Earth that will ever come close to the incredible natural heritage that all Americans share.

From sea to shining sea

In 1804 Lewis and Clark departed for the unknown, heading West, under the auspices of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I'd probably sell my first kid to get a chance to jump on that expedition. There's something unapologetically American about

tromping off into the unknown like that—beaver fur cap and all. This adventure wasn't an entirely novel concept. Without ideas like this, North America wouldn't have found its way onto a map in the first place. There's a certain piece of spirit, the tireless drive to peek over the next ridge, that I firmly believe runs through the veins of the American Dream. But the harsh reality is that this character trait is a double-edged sword. The same unquenchable thirst for adventure and westward expansion that inspired Thomas Hart Benton today fuels lobbyists in Washington as they push for public lands to be auctioned off for the sake of one more mining operation.

I recognize the importance and value in development, growth, and expansion. I'm an American after all—that's our bread and butter. However, that doesn't mean I can justify a lack of ethics in matters of man vs. land. Just the fact that I place it in the context of "vs." ought to show how many Americans perceive the natural world today. Aldo Leopold did an incredible job putting it into words for us:

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community in which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."*

I'm not advocating that we all go out and buy a dilapidated Volkswagen van, complete with a tattered copy of Leopold's *A Sand County*

* Leopold, Aldo. 1949. *A Sand County Almanac*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, viii.

Almanac on the dash, and hold hands in the forest. That's not what this is about. It's bigger than that. We cannot afford to squander our natural heritage and deprive our grandchildren of what is rightfully theirs. Do you really want to someday take your grandkids to an abysmal parking lot and tell them about what it looked like before all the concrete suffocated the soil and uprooted the wildlife?

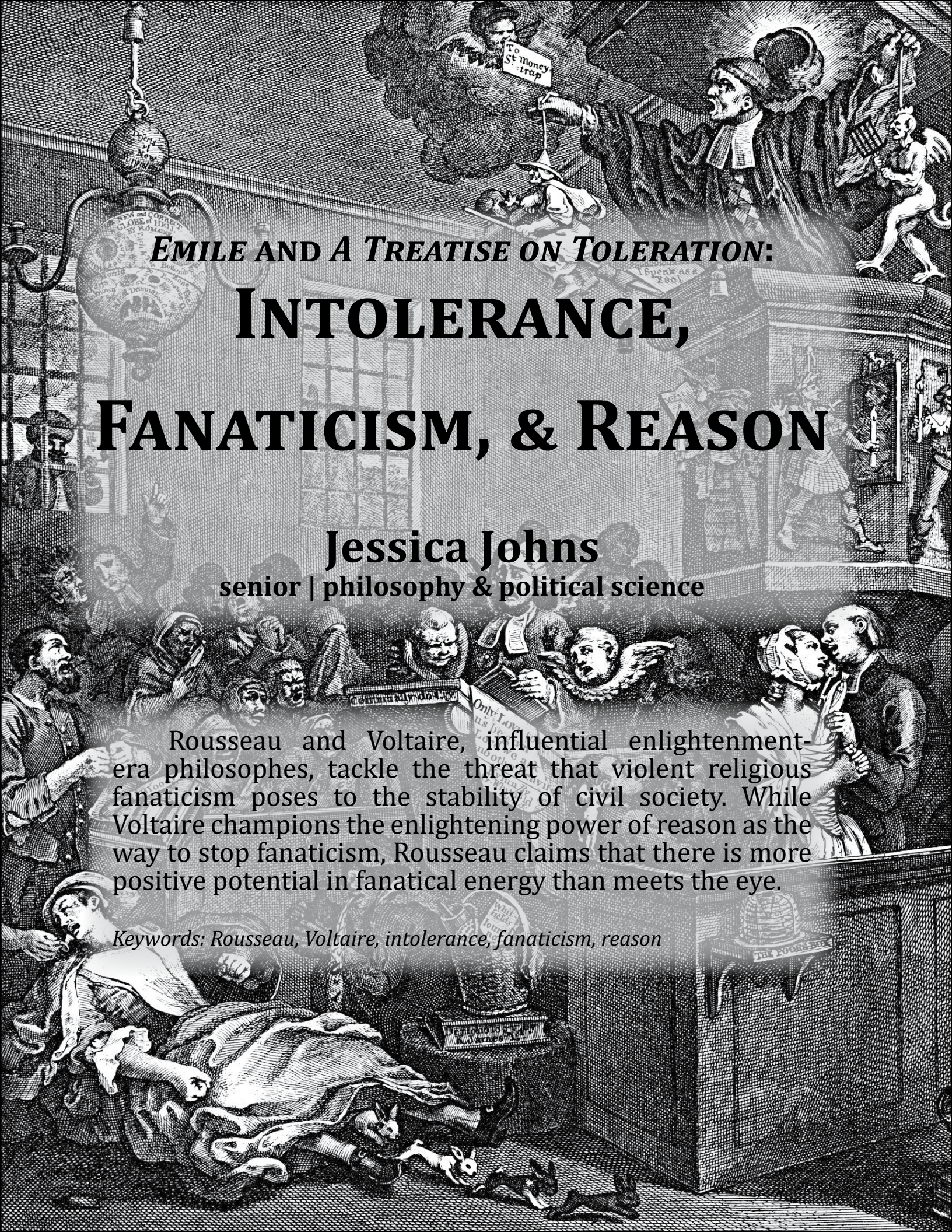
Looking Forward

My dress blues now hang in the back of my closet. They're dry-cleaned and pressed with every accoutrement polished, every ribbon pinned to the 1/8th of the inch, neatly sealed away in a garment bag. Running the zipper up to its apex renders a tempest of emotion. I've now tucked away years of my life. Years full of my greatest experiences, my most potent memories, and a bunch of stuff I won't even try to dictate. Now I've found what will be the next chapter of my life; my service and my civic duty is far from over. I owe it to my nation to advocate on behalf of land and wildlife conservation. I want to keep the wild places just that—wild. ~

All photos in this piece were taken by the author.

Visit Ian's hunting website, [Public Pursuit!](#)





EMILE AND A TREATISE ON TOLERATION: INTOLERANCE, FANATICISM, & REASON

Jessica Johns

senior | philosophy & political science

Rousseau and Voltaire, influential enlightenment-era philosophes, tackle the threat that violent religious fanaticism poses to the stability of civil society. While Voltaire champions the enlightening power of reason as the way to stop fanaticism, Rousseau claims that there is more positive potential in fanatical energy than meets the eye.

Keywords: Rousseau, Voltaire, intolerance, fanaticism, reason

As notable Enlightenment era philosophes, Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau both present arguments for tolerant political societies that are devoid of violent religious fanaticism. However, their respective means to this end differ importantly on their characterization of the role reason plays in human societies. For Voltaire, reason can eradicate fanaticism by enlightening man's mind and making him moral. Rousseau, however, argues that fanatical energy is necessary to maintain man's natural virtue in a society corrupted by reason. In this paper, I consider Voltaire and Rousseau's arguments for religiously tolerant political societies in *A Treatise on Toleration* and *Emile* and present a comparison of the work that reason does in each conception.

A Treatise on Toleration

VOLTAIRE WRITES a *Treatise on Toleration* as a scathing denunciation of Catholicism, religious intolerance, and fanaticism in the wake of the French Revolution and millions of people slaughtered in religious warfare. As the head of the *philosophes*, Voltaire's argument for the adoption of religious toleration in France is driven by his view of reason as an enlightening and progressive power. He posits that toleration is prudent, feasible, just, and, importantly, required by a proper understanding of Christianity. Finally, he concludes that through reason alone can humanity be persuaded to be compassionate toward their fellow humans and turn away

from the grave injustice that is fanaticism.

First, Voltaire supports his claim that religious toleration is prudent by appealing to the irrationality of fanatical intolerance. Presumably, a zealot's goal is to convert the greatest possible number of people to his faith to strengthen his own religion while subverting his enemies'. Voltaire asserts that not only is religious persecution inept at inspiring conversions, it is destructive to the persecutor's cause. Worse than merely being futile, persecution entrenches a martyr's cause in his people and urges them to redouble efforts against their shared oppressor. Therefore, Voltaire asserts that toleration is the prudent choice, because as intolerance breeds political instability, so does tolerance breed stability (Voltaire 1994, 159, 162-165).

“PHILOSOPHY,’ VOLTAIRE NOTES, “HAS DISARMED THE HANDS THAT SUPERSTITION HAD SO LONG STAINED WITH BLOOD; AND THE HUMAN MIND, AWAKENING IT FROM ITS INTOXICATION.”

Second, Voltaire's argument that religious toleration is finally feasible in France, where historically it was not, is couched in his progressive view of human nature as developing slowly over time through advances in reason. He claims that in previous centuries, reason had not yet adequately prepared man's mind to understand or value the political and social outcome of tolerance compared

to intolerance. Moreover, reason had not yet awoken compassion in man's heart and taught him to feel remorse for past atrocities. "Philosophy," Voltaire notes, "has disarmed the hands that superstition had so long stained with blood; and the human mind, awakening from its intoxication, is amazed at the excesses into which fanaticism had led it" (Voltaire 1994, 161).

Further, Voltaire argues that toleration is just according to natural law, while fanaticism and intolerance are unjust. Intolerance violates the natural law of reciprocity that obligates man to do unto others as he would have done unto himself; the intolerant man denies reciprocity and instead asserts an asymmetric right to persecute without the threat of just retaliation. Because human law must accord with natural law in Voltaire's view, he asserts that "the supposed right of intolerance is absurd [,] barbaric," and fundamentally unjust (Voltaire 1994, 168-169).

"FANATICISM . . . WEAKENS SOCIETY BY OCCUPYING ITS CITIZENS WITH KILLING ONE ANOTHER IN NEEDLESS RELIGIOUS WARFARE."

Finally, Voltaire asserts that rather than justifying intolerance, an accurate account of Christianity teaches man to value martyrdom and forgiveness. He points to the example of Jesus as a man who met hatred with "gentleness, patience, and indulgence;" he

taught his followers that the strongest faith is found in he who forgives his enemy, and not in someone prone to violent disagreement. "If you wish to follow Jesus Christ," Voltaire suggests, "be martyrs, not executioners" (Voltaire 1994, 202). The story of Socrates' demise supports this conclusion; an enlightened man who embodied rational thought, Socrates chose to die for his cause with forgiveness for his executioners on his last breath. Voltaire uses this example to further his assertion that not only is tolerance supported by Christianity correctly understood, but it is also supported by those who value the power of reason. (Voltaire 1994, 198-203).

In summation, Voltaire's argument is that generation by generation, reason is slowly improving human nature and making humanity more moral. He posits that "The great means to reduce the number of fanatics . . . is to submit that disease of the mind to the treatment of reason, which, slowly but infallibly, enlightens man. Reason is gentle and humane. It inspires liberality, suppresses discord, and strengthens virtue" (Voltaire 1994, 166). Fanaticism breeds intolerance, which fundamentally weakens society by occupying its citizens with killing one another in needless religious warfare. Reason is the cure for this disease – it eradicates fanaticism by opening man's eyes to the injustice of intolerance and awakening a sense of compassion for others (Voltaire 1994, 161). Compassion, driven by reason, motivates virtuous relationships between citizens and becomes the foundation for their commitment to obey the state on Voltaire's account.

Emile

Rousseau's discussion of intolerance, fanaticism, and reason occurs in "The Profession of Faith of the Savoyard Vicar" in Book IV of *Emile*. *Emile* is the result of Rousseau's project to understand the psychology of human development in a corrupt civil society, and the role that education plays in preserving humans' natural goodness despite their circumstance (Delaney n.d.). In the "Profession of Faith," the vicar introduces his conception of an intensely individualistic and natural religion to a young Emile (arguably a young Rousseau) who is struggling to square his belief in Christianity's God with the existence of evil in the world. In Rousseau's view, the vicar's natural religion provides the tools to imagine a tolerant, religious state that can adequately motivate citizens to lead moral lives.

A brief reconstruction of Rousseau's view of human nature and society is necessary to understand what gave rise to intolerance and fanaticism on his view and to further advance my interpretation of the role of reason. In part one of his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau posits that man is naturally simple, good because he lacks knowledge of evil, and prone to pity fellow humans' suffering (Rousseau 2004, 3-26). Opposed to Voltaire's progressive view of human history, he asserts that the move from an individualistic state of nature into cooperative society corrupted man for a variety of reasons; two of these reasons are particularly relevant to my discussion.

First, the close proximity and necessary cooperation of society awakens in man the other-regarding sentiment *amour propre*. Fredrick Neuhouser posits the following: "What *amour propre* seeks is some form of *recognition*, an acknowledgement by others of one's status as a valued subject ... [and is the] desire to be esteemed [or] admired" (Neuhouser 2014, 65). This selfish desire to make oneself worthy

"AMOUR PROPRE DRIVES ONE TO ESTABLISH THE PREEMINENCE OF HIS RELIGION OVER ALL OTHERS, OFTEN BY VIOLENT MEANS."

of esteem, coupled with the rational ability to achieve one's ends, overrides natural man's pity for his fellow humans. Necessarily, *amour propre* is a "positional" sentiment that makes one think about one's own success, status, or failure relative to that of others (Neuhouser 2014, 67). In terms of religious intolerance, *amour propre* drives one to establish the preeminence of his religion over all others, often by violent means.

Second, society engenders a degree of dependence on others that makes humanity epistemically lazy. Here, Rousseau is especially concerned with the dogmatic nature of Christianity that requires man to rely on past people to provide him with the content of his faith and which relieves him of any responsibility to independently seek or verify religion. The *philosophe* is skeptical of a psychology that encourages unverified belief

in centuries old teachings about a god who has been silent for the same amount of time. This kind of dependence necessarily breeds intolerance and fanaticism (Rousseau 1979, 301-310). On this, Rousseau says the following:

If the son of a Christian does well in following his father's religion without a profound and impartial examination, why would the son of a Turk do wrong in similarly following his father's religion? . . . to what absurdity pride and intolerance lead, when each man is so sure of his position and believes he is right to the exclusion of the rest of mankind (Rousseau 1979, 306).

However, it is important to note that though Rousseau condemns dependence as opposed to human nature, he concedes that it is a necessary evil to preserve man's natural virtue given that he must exist in a civil society corrupted by reason (Rousseau 1979, 306, 312fn).

The interaction between *amour propre* and dependence foundationally informs Rousseau's story about the emergence of religious intolerance and violent fanaticism. Dependence allows one to believe absolutely and uncritically in his religion. Fueled by an esteem-seeking desire to prove the superiority of his religion above all others, he becomes intolerant of any who deny this claim. Inevitably, this cycle devolves into the kind of religiously motivated slaughter that Rousseau was privy to most of his life.

Given his story on the rise of intolerance

and fanaticism, Rousseau offers a much less charitable account than Voltaire of the effect reason has on these phenomena. Reason, he argues, does not make one compassionate, as Voltaire suggests; rather, it magnifies *amour propre*, dulls the ability to feel pity for others, and emotionally isolates citizens from one another (Rousseau 1979, 312fn). Rousseau's negative view of reason is in the context of his overarching argument in favor of unifying religion and the state. He argues that religion is fundamentally important to human nature because it creates a worldview in which this life has purpose and has consequences for

**“MORAL ENERGY CAN BE
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the fate of a person's salvation in the next life. This is a powerful source of moral motivation that Rousseau believes the state can harness to create a more stable society. This view drives Rousseau's defense of fanaticism. He denounces the historic brutality that religious fanatics committed but defends fanaticism by arguing that those acts were the consequence of poorly directed moral energy:

. . . fanaticism, although sanguinary and cruel, is nevertheless a grand and strong passion which elevates the heart of man, makes him despise death, and gives him a

prodigious energy that need only be better directed to produce the most sublime virtues (Rousseau 1979, 312fn).

Further, he argues that this moral energy can be redirected toward caring passionately about treating others justly and supporting a government that accomplishes this. The energy and dependence that drove fanatics to commit to a cause absolutely and without reservation can be replicated with respect to a moral state and ought to be preserved on Rousseau's account (Rousseau 1979, 312fn).

Voltaire's argument for the eradication of fanaticism through reason fails on Rousseau's view because philosophical reason alone cannot sufficiently motivate citizens to function effectively in a political society. Further, more than just lacking motivation, reason makes the kind of absolute commitment that Rousseau's redirected fanaticism engenders unlikely. It robs man of his passion for right and wrong, his appeal to an eternal life, his pity for fellow humans, and leaves his heart cold and indifferent with nothing but earthly intellectual motivation to lead a virtuous life. Rousseau fundamentally denies Voltaire's claim that the human capacity for rationality and reason is capable of producing the same degree of commitment to being a moral people that redirected fanatical energy can (Rousseau 1979, 312fn).

As philosophers writing in a period characterized by politically and religiously motivated violence and unrest, Rousseau and Voltaire share a common goal in their

arguments for a religiously tolerant society. Both view religious fanaticism as deeply destabilizing and a threat to natural justice but differ importantly on their proposed treatment for this disease in civil society. Driving this difference is the philosophers' fundamentally contrasting view of reason: while Voltaire champions the enlightening power it has over human history, Rousseau likens reason to "philosophic indifference" to the "tranquility of death" (Rousseau 1979, 312fn). ~

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remember

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junior | fine arts

A letter to our drunk selves.

Keywords: self care, humor, alcohol, Adele

remember

When you find yourself drunk
Angrily stuffing scarves
Into your closet
In December.

Remember not to listen
To Adele.

When you find yourself drunk
Verging on sleep
Above three empty bags
Of Hot Fries

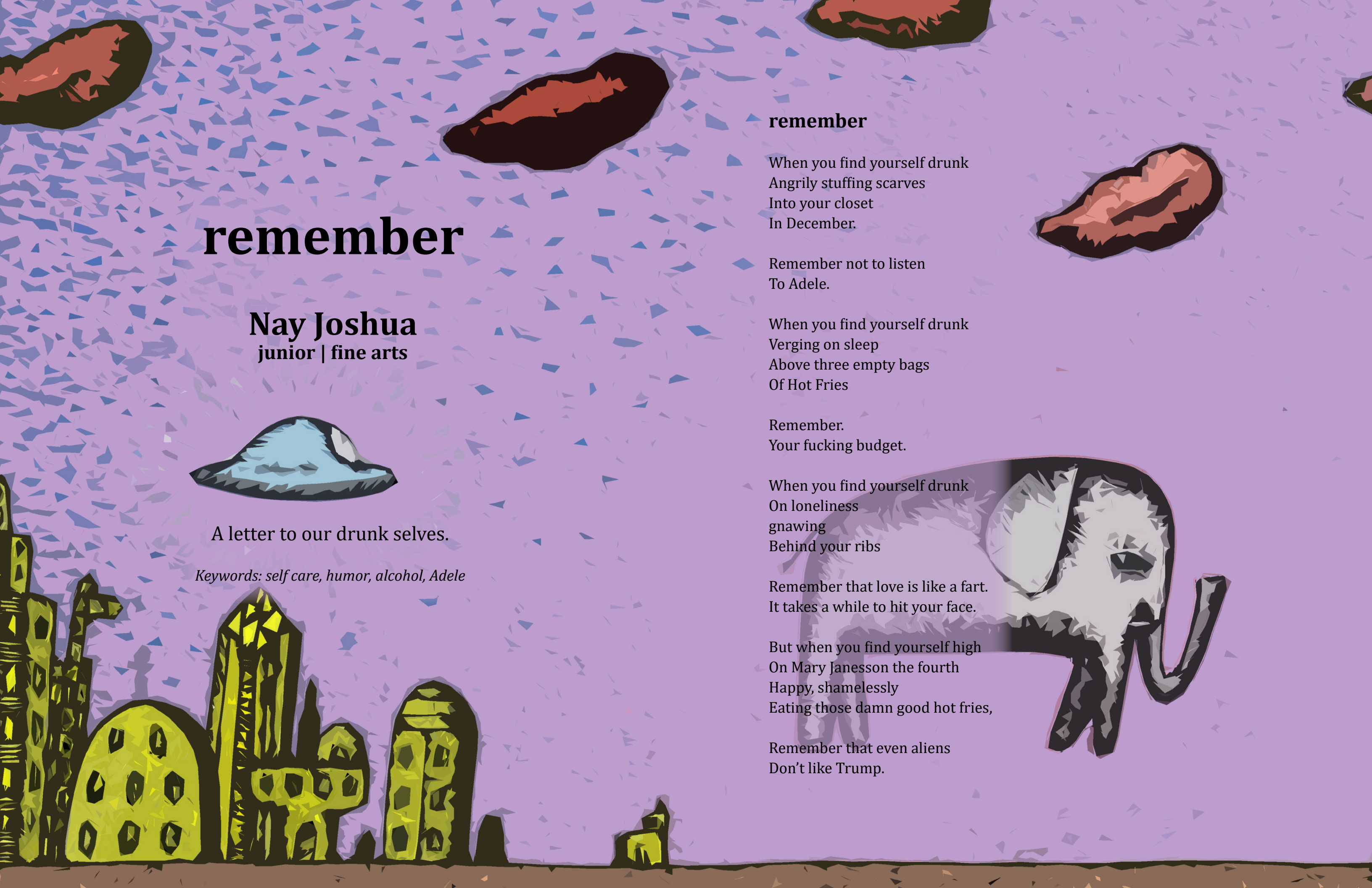
Remember.
Your fucking budget.

When you find yourself drunk
On loneliness
gnawing
Behind your ribs

Remember that love is like a fart.
It takes a while to hit your face.

But when you find yourself high
On Mary Janesson the fourth
Happy, shamelessly
Eating those damn good hot fries,

Remember that even aliens
Don't like Trump.



POKING THE PARADIGMS

Jakob Hanschu
senior | anthropology & geography

Paradigms construct the lenses through which we view the world. These fundamentally-orienting assumptions need to be reflected on, challenged, and most of all, poked. De- and re-construct them. Always, continuously.

Keywords: paradigms, social change, critique

EACH OF US observes and defines the world differently. Our way of doing so is the paradigm that dictates many (if not all) of the elements of our lives. It provides a lens through which we interpret, evaluate, and subjectify the “objective” world around us, bridging our individual selves with social and other structures. Paradigms allow us to quite literally make (as in construct) sense of our world. Projected onto a larger scale, one may begin to see how an ideology can shape an entire community, society, or even the world.

However, not all paradigms can or should stand the test of time. Paradigms are and are constitutive of power. When left unchecked, they place a cap on what we are willing to consider—forming a type of “paradigmatic ceiling”—hiding consequences in plain sight and barring subscribers from recognizing any potential alternatives, even ones that may be more just or sustainable. It is in this way that our paradigms discipline us more efficiently than any military or police force ever could, holding us in our societal places.

The world is a fluid and constantly evolving place; our planet continuously changes with time. Today is drastically different than the world of 5,000, 500, 50, or even 5 years ago. We must adapt to these transformations, metamorphize even as the world becomes. If not, we get lost in the dust, swallowed by the tides, whacked by the protester’s bat, or infected by the radiation of an ignorant faith in the stability of our paradigm. Society must tell itself lies to facilitate its existence, but these unrecognized lies must move with time,

else become recognized false-truths sowing seeds of societal self-destruction rather than social integration. An unravelling. Given this, it becomes increasingly important to challenge the age-old paradigms that are currently embedded within our lives and systems. We should.

In a world where change is inevitable, our worldviews and ideologies should be malleable as well. We cannot unconsciously assume that we are at a final state of human potential, because nothing is further from the truth. Without conscious and careful examination, our assumptions about who we are, where we are going, and how the world works could—will—lead us astray. We must poke the paradigms, thoroughly evaluate and criticize them, reflect and ruminate on them, otherwise they will control every bit of our future. Doing so can help us shed our individual and collective “chains” and free ourselves from our “iron cage,” ending our ideological enslavement to tyrannous forces, whatever they may be. ~

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