Maria Bettina Hager
Dreams
Acrylic and ink
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In its sixth year of publication, Spectrum presents some of the finest achievements of student writing across the curriculum at Saint Mary’s College. We congratulate the three winners of the essay contest and the seven students who receive honorable mention. Their essays demonstrate the commitment of Saint Mary's College to "the liberation of the mind, which is the essence of the liberal arts tradition" and which "requires that students in all disciplines develop the habits of looking twice, of asking why, of seeking not only facts but fundamental principles."

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Carol Beran and Phyllis Stowell
Faculty Advisors
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"You know, if you are being forced to be confirmed and you really don't want to, please tell us. We understand. We're here to help you and guide you with your faith. We'll explain it and talk it over with your parents. Maybe you just aren't ready for this type of religious commitment. Just tell us."

Right. Wouldn’t that be fun to go home to? That would be a fun argument:

I don’t know why I said it, Mom. I just don’t know anything anymore. It was probably because these are the years where I am most vulnerable and I should trust authority to guide me towards the right path in life. I am sorry. I’ll go back.

* * *

#4. Why do you want to be confirmed?
(Ooh, the four million dollar question . . .)
Because my parents are forcing me?
Because if I don’t, I’ll forever shame my Catholic family?
Because I’ll be put on the biggest guilt trip if I don’t?
Because I made a deal with my parents that if I got confirmed, I wouldn’t be forced to go to Mass every Sunday?

AAEEH. SORRY, WRONG ANSWER, PLEASE TRY AGAIN.

I know! Because I have nothing better to do every Wednesday for the next two years of my soon to be damned life?

AAEEH. I'M SORRY MISS, PLEASE TRY AGAIN.
(Hm . . . something convincing . . .)

I wish to be confirmed in March of 1988 because I read the Bible twice a day and I strongly believe in every word it says.
(No, too much . . .)

I want to be confirmed because I’ve been going to Catholic schools all my life and I feel that I know enough about this faith to truly say that I believe in it. I wish to be confirmed out of my own choice.

What a bunch of bull.

* * *

In the middle of the first year of Confirmation class, my boyfriend broke up with me. For some odd reason, I thought that I
"Hi."
"Hi! . . . What's wrong?"
"Nothing-Well, something. We need to talk."
"Oh? So talk."
"Well, um, I really don't know how to say this . . . ."
"Go ahead."
"Um, well, I know that we've been going out for a little while now-"
"two and a half years this Thursday."
"Huh? Well, yeah, two and a blah blu blah . . . . well, maybe we should start seeing other people for awhile . . . Aren't there any other guys that you're interested in? . . . Hello? . . . Are you there?"
"Yes."
"Well, you know, just for a while."
"That's fine."
"You're not mad?"
"No."
"Well, do you mind if I take Laura Kinsling to the Junior Prom? She asked me last Sunday."

Do you mind if I remind you of what a goddamn coward asshole you are who had to dump me over the phone because you don't have the guts to dump me to my face after almost three years? Hell, the slut can borrow my stupid prom dress.

"No, that's fine."
"I'm glad that you understand. Thank you."
Click.

I didn't get along with my sister. Well, I could have, but for some reason I didn't want to. She was always so damn happy.
"Hi!"
"Hi."
"What's wrong?"
"What's not?"
"What's that?"
"It's a goddamn merry-go-round. What the hell does it look like?"
"Kinda like a gun."
"You're kinda brilliant."
"What are you doing? You're not gonna--oh no--MOM!!"
"Shut up. I'm not gonna do it."
"Are you trying to give me a heart attack? Are you trying to kill this family?"
"No, actually, I had myself in mind when I considered shooting my--"
"You're crazy."
"Thanks."

* * *

2
"Maybe you should talk to someone."
"Are you a figment of my imagination?"
"You know what I mean. I think you need help."
"I don't want to die."
"So don't. Things'll get better. Trust me."
"O.K."

Right. Trust her. Trust Miss Smile-God-Loves-You. She wouldn't know depression if it fell off one of those goddamn trees that she's always drawing, and hit her in the head. Some people have all the luck.

* * *

"Why can't you be more like your sister?"
"Because I'm not her, Mom."
"She loves going to church. She sings gospel hymns all day long. She wanted to be confirmed. Now why do you think that is?"
"Because she has no life and really doesn't have enough brains to think otherwise of whatever any authority tells her?"
"Because she doesn't have those punk atheist friends that you have, to influence her every act."
"Ooh, don't look now--there's a punk atheist chasing us right now! AAHH! Help us! Save us! Oh no! She wants me to join her evil cult and chop the tails off of puppies with her . . . the tail-less puppies cult . . . oh no! Should I? Well, maybe I will since I have no brain of my own and can't think for myself and forever want to be everyone else because I have no personality of my own. Wait. Stop the car. I need to follow her."
"You are really sick. I think we better talk to your father."

* * *

"Why do you do this to me?"
"I'm not doing anything to you, Mom."
"Every single Sunday, why do we have to go through this every single Sunday? You just have to argue."
"Mom, I don't argue just to argue. Please don't cry. I argue because I don't believe that Christianity is something that I should be forced into. It's something that I need to decide for myself."
"Oh, Sara, why do you do this? Would it really be so bad to be confirmed? . . . o.k., if you promise to be confirmed, I promise that I won't force you to go to mass every Sunday. You can go whenever you want."
"O.K."

* * *

I had to do eighty "CCS" (Christian Community Service) hours for the high school that I went to. This meant I had to volunteer somewhere that I'd be helping people. My best friend, Kim, and I worked as teachers' aids at Harmony House, a home for mentally handicapped adults.
The first time we went there, all fifteen of them sat around us and just stared. After about five minutes, they started getting curious.

Bonnie raised her hand sky high, going about sixty miles an hour. Her hand finally stopped at about five feet over her head. "I know, I know, I KNOW!!!"

"Bonnie, nobody has asked a question yet." Cathy Teacher said this. I don’t know what her real last name was, but that’s what everyone called her.

That one sentence shot all of poor Bonnie’s esteem to pieces. She was left with no more dignity, no more happiness. "I’m sorry." She looked down miserably. Her lower lip pouted as she chattered her teeth. Her shoulders sulked in her plaid polyester blouse. Her matching pants held her shaking legs. This was definitely the end of the world.

Diane With One "N" spoke next. Her huge eyes blinked continuously through her magnifying glasses. "I don’t think that was very nice you taught us to be nice but that wasn’t nice at all nope nope nope Cathy Teacher when are those two girls gonna talk when will they talk do they know how to talk are they deaf? They’re deaf."

I didn’t think she’d ever shut up. "No, Diane, they aren’t deaf. They haven’t said anything because we haven’t started today’s class yet."

We walked into the dining room so that everyone could sit at a table. As Kim and I passed out worksheets on how to count money, Rickie entered the room.

His eyes were shut tight as he concentrated on the music blaring out of the small radio that he held on his shoulder. He marched in and didn’t even notice we were there.

When he started dancing, he didn’t care who or what got in his way. Diane With One "N" joined him. I stopped and watched two mentally retarded thirty-year-olds disco to the Beatles.

Dianne With Two "N’s" clapped with the few fingers that she had. She looked at me, "Vare toing te blet mabbied."

"Sorry?"

"VARE TOING TE BLET MABBIED!" this time about twenty times louder.

Diane With One "N" hollered across the room, "SHE SAID, RICKIE AND I ARE GOING TO GET MARRIED!!" "That’s great! Are you gonna have kids?" "NO, JUST BABIES."

Wow, what a day.
I started working at an ice cream store. Mom was thrilled. I couldn’t understand a word my boss said to me, so I spent a lot of time smiling and nodding.

"Doeyo light key tototo doeyo light deworkie here go to churchie."

I’d smile and nod.

My mom loved the girls I worked with. Most of them went to church, one even wore a cross around her neck.

"I like your new friends from work. They’re nice, polite, and friendly. Why don’t you invite them over and rent a movie?"

"Why don’t I invite my old friends and we’ll have a jolly Friends and Family Jamboree?"

"Oh Sara."

* * *

"Why are you so rude to Mom and Dad?"
"Because it makes me feel gleeful inside. It’s a wonderful sensation, you should try it sometime."
"You’re so twisted. It’s because of that devil music that you listen to."
"Simon and Garfunkel are a bit harsh, aren’t they?"
"No, that other stuff you listen to . . . Hot Peppers and Scorpions."
"That’s just the satanism in me."
"Twisted."
"Holy roller."
"Weird."
"Pathetic, lifeless nerd who has nothing better to do but pray all day."
"You’re inhuman."

I knew that was cruel. Why did I do things like that? Why did I say things like that? I attacked Miss Sing-Along-Songs because she was happy. Because she has had a perfect life with no flaws. She didn’t need to question anyone because she knew what she believed in and what she wanted out of life. Look at me. I would argue with anyone. I worked at a stupid ice cream store for $3.61 an hour. If anyone was pathetic, it was me. My best friend was a cruel (atheist) gossip. I had no money, no boyfriend, no feelings, and no goal in life.

* * *
My aunt died during my second year of confirmation class. I didn’t know how to react. After we first heard about her sudden death, my cousin threw her baby in my arms and ran to the rosary set up in our hallway. My mother joined her. They prayed for hours as I watched silently. The baby and I cried together.

* * *

"Hi, Rich!"
"Hello there! Have you been practicing your rhythms?"
"Yeah, kinda."
"Let’s hear them, don’t forget the quarter note rest on the snare drum after the second bass drum beat in the eighth bar."
"Rich, can I ask you something?"
"Sure."
"Do you believe in God?"
"Yes, do you?"
"No, are you Catholic?"
"Yes."
"Do you go to church?"
"Well, not always ... well, not usually, but that’s just me."
"Why does God allow so many bad things to happen?"
"I don’t know."
"I don’t get it. Why do people believe in this particular book full of dumb, boring stories? It could be totally fiction, written by some old idiot."
"Well, I kind of doubt that."
"And why does the Pope get to make up all the rules? Who the hell is he to say when we should pray or how or when we should fast? What makes the Catholic religion the right one? There are so many other religions in the world. Each of those believers think that their faith is THE one. How do we know which one is right?"

"It’s not like that. It’s not about which religion is right, it’s about faith. You’re sitting here telling me that you don’t believe in God when you obviously do ... or else you wouldn’t be making such a big deal about it. You’ve obviously put a lot of thought into this. You’ve spent so much time thinking about being an atheist, making a decision of whether there is a God or not seems so important to you. Why would you put so much effort into trying to prove His existence if you don’t believe in something that needs to be disproven?"

* * *

One day we had Movie Day at Harmony House. Stevie, a four foot tall thirty-five-year-old, ran up to me and screamed in my ear, "LET’S WATCH A MOVIE!!!" Stevie wore a hearing aid but never turned it on.
We started watching "The Couch Trip," a comedy with Dan Akroyd about psychiatrists or something.

"OOH, WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?" Ron was yelling. There was something about this room that just wasn't right. Maybe the house was at a different sound level or something.

Diane With One "N" looked at Ron like he was the biggest idiot on the planet. "It's about a couch . . ." she shook her head and paused for emphasis, "that took a trip!"

The room filled with "oh's" and "duh's."

Eleanor, a sixty-year-old who had spent all her life in homes like this, waddled over to me. She fell to the floor as if she'd been pushed and held my hand.

"I thinks you're nice to like us. We's not as smart as you's. You's my friend." Her wrinkled face lit up like she had just told me the most exciting secret in the world. Her eyes were bright as she looked around the room to see if anyone else had heard.

** **

"Sara, nobody ever said that you had to believe in everything the Bible says. No one said that you have to go to church and pray constantly. It's not like that. It's deeper. It's a feeling."

** **

My sister listened to the sound track to Les Miserables constantly, so I could not help but hear it at least ten times a day. I usually tried not to listen, but occasionally I'd give in. She always sang along to the line, "To love another person is to see the face of God."

** **

"Do you want to go to mass with me tomorrow?"
"You're going to mass? You haven't gone since Confirmation."
"I know."
"You want to go? Oh, because that cute guy'll be there, right?"
"No."
"You're trying to get something out of Mom and Dad?"
"No."
"You like the bread and wine?"
"Fine, never mind, I'll go by myself."
"You're serious?"
"Yeah."
"You want to go?"
"Yes."
"You never did before."
"So, now I do."

* * *

#5. What is the Catholic religion about?
(I can’t say that I really know what it’s about, but I do know what it is not. It isn’t about weekly congregation visits where you sit bored out of your mind and occasionally chant a verse or two. I can pray more outside of church but I still go because it makes me feel good. It’s not about if God really and truly exists or not. It’s about my belief that he exists and what I’m gonna do with this belief. It’s not about old, stereotypical, weak, ignorant, lifeless, debateless followers, it’s about people and love.)
The Catholic religion is about Miss Peace-Be-With-You and Harmony House.

BING! GOOD ANSWER.
A SENSE OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

by Marie-Therese Ellis '94

By many Hume is heralded as a great philosopher who, among other accomplishments, proved that no one has a sense of personal identity—that is, that no one can have an idea of himself as distinct from beings exterior to himself. However, having read Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I remain unconvinced by his attempts to show that no one has a sense of personal identity. Here is Hume's reasoning:

If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same . . . since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable . . . It cannot therefore be from any [impression] . . . that the idea of self is derived. (228)

With this quick argument Hume hopes to dispel any possibility that we have any one impression giving rise to an idea of identity. For Hume's principles to stand, it is imperative that we do not have such an idea of identity. If we had an idea of identity arising from some one impression, it must be separable from all our other perceptions, for "every idea that is distinguishable is separable by the imagination and . . . every idea that is separable by the imagination may be conceived to be separately existent" (50). But if our idea of identity be separable from all other perceptions, we must attribute an existence not dependent on ourselves to all our other perceptions. But Hume says that

philosophy informs us that everything which appears to the mind is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted and dependant on the mind; whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects and attribute a distinct continued existence to the very things they feel or see. (177)

Thus, if Hume were to find a particular impression of identity, he would not be heeding philosophy and would nearly be reduced to the opinion of the "vulgar." He would not necessarily be compelled to attribute a continued existence to perceptions, but certainly a distinct existence. Therefore at this point in the *Treatise* Hume rejects the possibility of an idea of identity arising from any one impression.

Hume concludes that "consequently we have no such idea" (228). But Hume's conclusion seems a bit hasty. When he examines our ideas of space and time, Hume determines that neither can arise from any one particular impression. Both of them, rather, are derived from the manner of our perceptions, and are not separable
from the perceptions. Could an idea of identity arise from the manner of our perceptions?

It could not arise from the successiveness of our perceptions—this aspect of the manner of our perceptions gives rise to the idea of time or of space. Could an idea of identity arise from the vibrancy of our perceptions? It seems that the more vibrant our perceptions of pain, of pleasure, or of reflection are, the more we consider the perception to be related to ourselves. Ideas of emotion are thought to exist in others; impressions of emotion are thought to exist in ourselves. And yet, as for most perceptions of sensation, it seems that the more vibrant the perception is, the more we consider it as existing outside of ourselves. Ideas we consider to be figments of our imagination, entirely dependent on ourselves, but impressions we consider to be objects in the exterior world. And since "as far as the senses are judges, all perceptions are the same in their manner of existence" (176), we cannot easily discriminate between perceptions of pain, pleasure, or reflection, and other perceptions of sensation. Thus, it seems that the vibrancy or lack thereof of our perceptions does not give rise to an idea of identity.

Is there any other way by which the manner of our perceptions can give rise to an idea of identity? I believe that there might be one way—a way which Hume does not in any way consider.

Hume says that "self or person is not any one impression but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference" (228). Therefore, for us to have a true idea of identity, which implies no fiction, the idea must arise from every perception, for "[i]deas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are derived, and can never, without a fiction, represent or be applied to any other" (35). According to Hume there is one idea which arises from every perception—the idea of existence. "To reflect on anything simply, and to reflect on it as existent are nothing different from each other. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being" (61).

Perhaps we could argue, consistently with Hume’s principles, that all our existent perceptions must have a place where they can exist—that is, a complex perception in which they can be located—and that this perception constitutes our idea of identity. Hume says,

An object may be said to be nowhere, when its parts are not so situated with respect to each other, as to form any figure or quantity; nor the whole with respect to other bodies so as to answer to our notions of contiguity or distance. (214)

Hume implies that any object which does not meet these two criteria must exist somewhere.
If our perceptions do not meet these two criteria, they cannot be said to exist nowhere. Certainly, they do meet the second criterion. The whole of our perceptions is not so situated with respect to any other body to answer to our notion of contiguity or distance. For "everything which appears to the mind is a perception" (176), and, therefore, the mind can never see its perceptions as situated next to any other body, for it knows no other body.

What about the first criterion? Are our perceptions so situated with respect to each other as to form a figure or quantity? Some of them must be, for otherwise we could have no idea of figure or quantity. Of those perceptions giving rise to an idea of figure or of quantity, the "place" of the impressions is supplied by the fiction of exterior existence. Our ideas, however, are not supposed to exist in any exterior world. Must we not suppose our ideas to have a place, and, once we recognize that exterior existence is only a fiction, must we not also suppose our impressions to have a true place?

But, even if we could arrive at an idea of identity because of the necessity of a place, there is a difficulty. According to Hume, "An object may exist, and yet be nowhere," and "the greatest part of beings do and must exist after this manner" (214). If most perceptions can be said to exist nowhere, an idea of identity would arise from the lesser part of our perceptions. But we are looking for an identity to which all of our perceptions have a reference (228), and ideas can never be applied without a fiction to objects from which they are not derived (35). Thus, if we could arrive at an idea of identity after this manner, although the idea itself would be a true idea, it could be applied to most of our perceptions only with a fiction. And the perceptions to which it could not be applied without a fiction—perceptions which can be said to exist nowhere—are the very perceptions which we suppose most intimately connected to ourselves—"passions," "moral reflections" (214).

It seems, then, that even in this last manner we cannot arrive at an idea of identity. Hume accounts for our notion of personal identity, as for any identity, by an elaborate chain of "fictions" (Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses, Book I, Part IV, Section II). We acquire the idea of time from a succession of perceptions. Then we apply a fiction of time to an unchanging perception. The perception gives us the notion of unity; the fiction of time gives us the notion of number. We merge these two contrary notions and obtain the idea of identity. We then apply the fiction of identity to changing ideas because, via the natural associations of the imagination, the thought feels the same looking at changing ideas as it feels focusing on one idea. We then extend the identity among the ideas to their correspondent impressions, and "identity is . . . merely a quality we attribute to them [changing perceptions] because of the union of their ideas in the
imagination" (235). Thus, the relations of contiguity, resemblance, and causation prompt us to ascribe a fictitious identity to successive perceptions and to ascribe to the whole of our perceptions a notion of personal identity. As Hume says, "our notions of personal identity proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas" (235).

Hume's contention that we have none but a fictitious notion of personal identity does not seem thoroughly compatible with Book II, Of the Passions. First of all, Hume's argument to the effect that self cannot be both cause and object of pride or humility is weakened. Hume says,

But though that connected succession of perceptions, which we call self, be always the object of these two passions, it is impossible it can be their cause. . . . For as these passions are directly contrary and have the same object in common; were their object also their cause, it could never produce any degree of the one passion, but at the same time it must produce an equal degree of the other; which opposition . . . must destroy both. (252)

But if the self be no more than our successive perceptions, this argument does not hold. The "self" could at one time give rise to one passion and not the other, and later do just the opposite, for the self is always varying. New perceptions are always being added; the relative vibrancy of each perception is always changing. Depending on the overall sum of the perceptions, the self could sometimes give rise to pride, sometimes to humility. Hume is not justified in insisting that the cause of pride or humility be different from the object. He could rather say that both the object and cause of pride--self--must be different from the object and cause of humility--self--and that it is the variations in the perceptions, which constitute self, that make us sometimes feel proud, sometimes humiliated.

There is another sense in which Hume's fictitious identity does not square with Of the Passions. Hume says,

It is evident that these passions [pride and humility] are determined to have self for their object not only by a natural property, but also by an original property . . . Now these qualities, which we must consider as original, are such as are most inseparable from the soul, and can be resolved into no other; and such is the quality which determines the object of pride and humility. (255)

How can it be "an original property" or a "primary impulse" of the soul to have as the object of two passions a fictional notion? If
it is in the very primary constitution of nature to link a passion with a certain concept, that concept must be more than a fiction which is acquired only after considerable experience.

And, indeed, Hume says

that nature has given to the organs of the human mind a certain disposition fitted to produce a peculiar impression or emotion, which we call pride: to this emotion she has assigned a certain idea, viz. that of self, which it never fails to produce . . . and the passion . . . naturally produces a certain idea. (261)

In this quote it seems that Hume is contradicting himself. For in Of the Understanding he says, "it cannot be from any . . . impression . . . that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea" (228). Perhaps, however, there is some explanation of this apparent contradiction.

In the book Of the Understanding Hume says that "we must distinguish betwixt personal identity as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves" (229). In Of the Understanding Hume looks for an identity "to which our several ideas and impressions are supposed to have a reference" (228), and he does not find a true idea. But, perhaps, the idea of identity he accepts in Of the Passions is a true idea arising from an impression. For regardless of any distinction Hume might like to make, there "must be some one impression that gives rise to every real idea" (228), whether we are in the world of passions or in the world of thought.

Hume says that self is "that individual person, of whose thoughts and actions each of us is intimately conscious" (260). This notion of self clearly does not apply to all our perceptions, as the other is supposed to, for we must be able to contrast it with those persons related or not related to self, which are themselves only our perceptions. How, then, can the mind identify, from among its many perceptions, which constitute self and which constitute others?

Hume says, "it is absurd to imagine the senses can ever distinguish betwixt ourselves and external objects" (174). Thus, a just distinction can never arise from impressions of sense or from their correspondent ideas. Nor can a distinction arise from impressions of reflection--"passions, desires, emotions" (8)--for it seems that these impressions cannot operate until we already have a notion of self as distinct from others.

Perhaps, then, the "self" of the passions, like the "self" of the thoughts, is only a fictitious idea. And, when Hume seemingly contradicts himself (by asserting that we do have an idea of self after he has already denied the possibility of such an idea), he is
merely using the term "idea" loosely to mean "fiction."

But Hume says,

It is evident that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that it is impossible to imagine that anything can in this particular go beyond it. (288)

Here Hume explicitly states that we do have an impression of self. Later Hume calls that impression "the impression or consciousness of our own person" (289) and seems to hope that he can present it as something other than an impression. But "nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions" and "perceptions resolve themselves into two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas" (413). If we have a vibrant "consciousness" of self, it is nothing but an impression. And since "any impression, either of the mind or body, is constantly followed by an idea, which resembles it" (5), we must have a true idea of ourselves. Hume contradicts his former statement that "there is no impression constant and invariable . . . It cannot therefore be from any [impression] . . . that the idea of self is derived; and consequently there is no such idea" (228). Hume's attempt to distinguish between the personal identity regarding our thoughts and the personal identity regarding our passions is useless. If the passionnel self is "always intimately present with us" (288), it will be present whether we are thinking or experiencing passions. And its correspondent idea will be present in the imagination for any reasoning we might engage in.

There is no justification for Hume's initial rejection of an idea of identity and his subsequent affirmation of it. The only reason I can see that Hume would reverse himself so is that in Of the Understanding an idea of identity is detrimental to his argument (primarily concerned with disestablishing the existence of an exterior world), and in Of the Passions an idea of identity is crucial to his account of "sympathy." Hume wishes to give an account of sympathy which is analogous to his account of causation, for he considers that analogous accounts give credibility to his system. As he says,

What is principally remarkable about the whole affair, is the strong confirmation these phenomena [of sympathy] give to the foregoing system of the understanding, and consequently to the present one concerning the passions, since these are analogous to each other. (289)

In order to make this analogy, Hume needs a component of sympathy which corresponds to the "present impression" of causation. This component Hume supplies by an impression of self.
The contradiction regarding personal identity in Hume, useful as it might be to his various arguments, makes it impossible for us to judge what are the principle tenets of Hume's philosophy regarding the sense of personal identity. And thus we cannot look to Hume to resolve the question of whether or not one can have a sense of personal identity.
VOICES: PROPELLED THROUGH TIME AND SPACE

by John Windsor '93

Prologue:

It has been seven score times seven centuries since the quest began. The date: four thousand, two hundred and sixty-seven years of our lord. Time has changed. Progressed to a broader and more encompassing era. It is a time where the Universe is now obtainable. There are thousands of races, each with its own beliefs, environment and governmental power. Of all these, one has claimed absolute authority, the Gk*gu(ea)rfk. They are a race of warriors that probe the depths of the Universe in order to conquer. Although seen as the "landlords" of all that is infinite, the Gk*gu(ea)rfk are not a violent breed. They are an intellectual society that feeds on power of control which is gained not solely by force, with some exceptions, but rather by presence and by their superiority. They are looked upon as leaders, a race that pursues power. The Gk*gu(ea)rfk are the everlasting power and these are only a portion of their journeys through the final frontier, SPACE.

CAPTAIN'S LOG

Stardate 11202.344:

It has been 72 hours since we have left the mother ship. Our fleet of 600 ships has been divided; they are now presently orbiting various planets and moons in this tiny system. I, Captain Hurl';876^dtr (translation: Cistaro), am the proud commander of this small scout ship. Code named the KJ**655jkl, this very elite and modern vessel holds twenty members of the regime comfortably. Our ship contains not warriors, only scientists searching for the perfect, complete, and ultimate finding that may be key to our survival and the key to the final door of Power and all that it entails.

Our skylab, which is our mothership, has sent us on this simple but important mission to a planet long dead. Over two thousand years ago, it once supported a colony of organic substances much like us, but with attitudes and technology far primitive to our own. It was the only planet in this solar system which was capable of supporting life. That was before the atmosphere became unbearable with temperatures exceeding that of -2400 degrees Fahrenheit. This is the planet called Earth and
their inhabitants called Homo Sapiens or humans.

Stardate 11202.345:

The travel has gone well. The ship is activating with no hitches and our two engineers foresee no flaws. We have reached earth's atmosphere and are now orbiting. We are preparing to descend and explore.

Stardate 11202.346:

I am now recording our event on a portable unit. Lieutenant sjkHJU^7, 1st Captain sertEER§6, 1st medic ^&*YUI768 and I have trekked 4,234 kilometers across the desolate plains once known as Munich, Germany in 2132. We have just entered a tomb of some sort. It seems to have a significance to the race that built it. My Lieutenant says he has found an archive of some sort. After a brief analysis, I concluded that it was a literary vault where many important and original manuscripts survived. A language scanner has been brought down and is now in the process of translating all 421,678 volumes into our own language. This takes approximately 34 seconds. The scanner has now quickly outlined each book in search for those which may hold the answers we seek, the answers to inevitably perfect our utilization of power.

Stardate 11202.347:

Several half hours later, we have separated three volumes that according to our scanner holds great importance: Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. We record all the information held in the vault and destroy it. There is no need to preserve such irrelevant information except for the three volumes. After all, with an I.Q. over 12200 by Homo Sapien standards, what could they teach us? The books are only taken as a needed sample. They will be thoroughly observed, recorded, and then destroyed.

Stardate 11202.348:

Problems have risen. Nothing dangerous to the ship or life aboard. The problems are far worse. The crew has analyzed the books and are now in conflict on how to interpret them. This has not happened before. It will not be reported to the mother ship until solved.

Stardate 11202.349:

We are now orbiting planet earth. The majority of the crew have been posted back to their positions on board. All that remain are the Lieutenant, the 1st Captain, and myself. The dire problem still cannot be solved. We have 78 hours until we report back to the mother ship. The problems have to be solved or the inevitable
consequences will take place. Our race has progressed too far to be hampered. There are no such things as problems . . . or are there?

LIEUTENANT'S LOG

Stardate 23456.237:

I have been carefully analyzing each volume. In the past 232 minutes, I have read each 65 times. I am convinced that Machiavelli's scripture holds the most promise. The Captain thinks of Shakespeare's Othello in the highest regard and the 1st Captain's choice is Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Analysis

Machiavelli offers several important perspectives on how to use power in order to retain and gain control. He speaks of cunning, deceit, and force of intellect. All of these can relate to our own superior race. The conflict is present only when the 1st Captain and the Captain insist that their volumes are relevant. How can this be? Their volumes present a particular situation which is completely foreign to our race; that love and emotions affect power and vice versa. The fact that our race has not encountered or thought of this before proves this theory invalid, and so we must only utilize the information given in Machiavelli's The Prince.

1st CAPTAIN'S LOG

Stardate 02983.042:

I have ignored all opinions of the Lieutenant and the 1st Captain on their volumes and the information they contain. Shakespeare's Two Gentlemen of Verona without a doubt holds the most valor, importance, and outright significance. Although a short and suspiciously simple reading, this play holds a key that I think our race has been neglecting too long. I may be risking my existence in stating so but after close reading and language adjustments, I still found that emotions such as love, hate, and jealousy influence the utilization of power. Our race may be 1000% better than perfect, but I am convinced there still are traces of emotions. With this in mind, Gk*gu(ea)rtk's government must try to understand what Shakespeare says and it must be included in the final theory of the retention of power: already comprised of donations from 236 races, and the document alone is 132 million, 12 inch by 10 inch individual pages.

CAPTAIN'S LOG

Stardate 11202.350:

Both the 1st Captain, serEER$%6, and the Lieutenant, sjkHJU^7, have
expressed their opinions on the volumes. Frankly, I’m surprised at their ignorance. It is blatantly obvious which holds one of the many keys in order to unlock the final door of power. Shakespeare’s OTHELLO is the choice I, as Captain of the prime scout fleet, have made. My position alone should support what I believe, but in order to be thorough, I have recorded the necessary information to led me to victory in this debate. Othello expresses a situation which is needed to obtain power. Through manipulation and deception, one of the main infamous characters is able to infiltrate the power in order to obtain its riches and strengths. This is priceless information which must be further observed.

Through the thousands of journeys that this starfleet of Gk*’gu(ea)rtk have taken part in, this is the first that posed any real threat to the existence of their race. The information uncovered has presented a debate among three important scientists that the regime holds dear. If word were to escape about the incriminating evidence, that there is actually a conflict on the use of power which has been fueled by knowledge from a long dead race which was obviously far, far primitive to the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk, there would be a universal breakdown and ultimately a self-destruction of the Universe. To solve this problem now turned to catastrophe, the Captain, the 1st Captain, and the Lieutenant all entered their thoughts, opinions, supporting statements, and direct evidence into the mainframe computer, DOSRAMROM1234.

CATALOGUE BY DOSRAMROM1234

Analysis

The three individual tastes have all valid points. Before making a conclusion, this program will state the evidence, the ideas, and the opinions.

(Catalogue 1)

To begin, Machiavelli’s The Prince will be discussed. Machiavelli throughout his 26 chapters emphasized how power is very important and gave explicit guidelines in order to retain this power. He announced ways in which a clever "prince" could deceive his people, a vital part of a society, and utilize his forces in order not only to be able to defend the power but to acquire new strength from weaker establishments.

The first and seemingly foremost characteristic in order to retain a given power and to expand upon it, is to gain the
appreciation of its people or in the Gk*gu(ea)rtk’s society, to gain the appreciation of its servants. The following will support this insight:

1. On page 35 - "You will always need the favour of the inhabitants to take possession of a province."

2. On page 64 - "the aim of the people is more honest than that of the nobility."

3. On page 108 - "it is much easier to gain the friendship of those men who were contented with the previous condition and were therefore at first enemies, than that of those who not being contented, became his friends and helped him to occupy it."

These quotes are among many which obviously show the importance of the people to the government. The categories continue with Machiavelli to also include that armament (the strength of the military) brings peace. This holds grave importance because for the past two thousand years, this is how Gk*gu(ea)rtk’s race has survived. No other race has emphasized this point and so this must be discussed further.

1. On page 81 - "The chief cause of the loss of states, is the contempt of this art . . . evils caused by being disarmed . . . . He ought, therefore, never to let his thoughts stray from the exercise of war; and in peace he ought to practise it more than in war, which he can do in two ways."

For many centuries, people of all races, creeds, and beliefs have always felt that in the exercise of preparing for war, inevitably there will be peace. To the present day, no other manuscript preceding The Prince has captured this point so brilliantly. Machiavelli has shown that arms not only are used for destruction but also for the preservation of peace. If a society is able to encompass this, they will be able to flourish and channel their resources and time to other categories of their community. Machiavelli is confident with his advice and goes on to explain other factors needed to retain and use power to the point where there is a median between controlling and utilizing it to the fullest. Deception and disguising of morals and principles have always been a part of governments, great and small. What is called wrong must sometimes be done in order for the ultimate "good." In the words of Machiavelli, "the end justifies the means" (94).

1. On page 84 - "Therefore it is necessary for a prince, who wishes to maintain himself, to learn how not to be good, and to use this knowledge and not use it, according to the necessity of the case."

2. On page 85 - "some things which seem virtues would, if followed, lead to one’s ruin, and some others which appear vices result in one’s greater security and wellbeing."
Is it not obvious from these quotes that Machiavelli is stressing the usage of both good and bad to obtain the ultimate good. There is even a discussion influenced by these quotes that queries whether evil must be present in order to aid the finalization of good. In other words, without evil, would there be good?

Last but not least (a Homo Sapien contribution to this computer’s log), a power must seem to be many things and encompass several important traits, but does not necessarily need to be all of them. This is helpful to any powerful regime because in every society there is a chance for flaws, even in Gk*gu(ea)rtk (where the chance is equated to be .00001476), and this is a method in utilizing this flaw to one’s advantage.

1. On page 93 - "It is not, therefore, necessary for a prince to have all the above-named qualities, but it is very necessary to seem to have them . . . to seem merciful, faithful, humane, sincere, religious, and also to be so: but you must have the mind so disposed that when . . . to change to the opposite qualities."

Within this quote, there is a hidden statement. Machiavelli calls for an individual in the position of power to try not solely to deceive but also to face this individual’s own flaws and work around them. In Machiavelli’s The Prince, the guidelines in order to retain, utilize, and expand power are definitely evident, confident, and well laid out. Among the points discussed, Machiavelli also includes information on pages 92, 93, 94, and 111, which all bears relevance to this case of query, the problem which must immediately be solved. The following two catalogues will discuss Shakespeare’s Othello and Shakespeare’s Two Gentlemen of Verona. View with discretion and the conclusion will follow to sum this matrix of information into a brief statement that is both legible and obvious to the fact.

(Catalog 2)

Shakespeare’s Othello is not as extensive as Machiavelli’s volume. However, the pursuit of power through manipulation and deception by one of the main characters, Iago, brought Othello’s ancient downfall, a point our race must avoid at all costs. This must be analyzed thoroughly to obtain a stable perspective of power through Shakespeare’s point-of-view.

1. Iago deceived Roderigo to gain money and to have someone to assassinate Cassio - Othello’s Lieutenant.

2. Iago manipulated Othello to gain the rank of Lieutenant and to move him into a position such as the point where Othello killed his devoted and beautiful wife Desdomona. (120)

Shakespeare’s Othello is also very important to a race that needs
the definition of power because the entire plot and story line revolve around the quest for power and dominance.

1. On page 51 - "Despise me, if I do not. Three great ones of the city,/In personal suit to make me his Lieutenant,/Off-capped to him; and by the faith of man,/I know my price."

2. On page 163 - "This is the night/That either makes me, or fordoes me quite."

Although it is only a pursuit of one character in a small kingdom, it still can apply and is extremely relevant to our quest. You see, Shakespeare’s intention was not to keep the play within its own limitations but to apply it to real life situations on any scale. This includes the Gk*gu(ea)rtk’s massive community. Shakespeare goes on to mention many instances in order to build up to the final deception and manipulation.

In summary, Othello has proven that although the manipulation and deception succeeded, it inevitably turned a complete cycle and devastated the originator of the problem, Iago. The Gk*gu(ea)rtk should take this and expand in order to accommodate the race. The governing body should understand that used cleverly, deception and manipulation works and works well. I feel that Shakespeare included the downfall of Iago in order to express that there is always a chance, but that it is unlikely. As an additive, I’m sure Shakespeare included the Iago event in order to complete the story line, but that is irrelevant. However, the Gk*gu(ea)rtk should experiment to find a type of balance in order to obtain the full utilization.

(Catalog 3)

The last volume to be analyzed before a conclusive statement and solution to the dilemma is Shakespeare’s Two Gentlemen of Verona. Although the second play by Shakespeare to be observed by this mainframe, it is evident from the start that a different sub-issue has been emphasized. In the previous two readings analyzed, The Prince and Othello, each dealt with the use of several traits (i.e. deception, manipulation, cunning, confidence, controlled cruelty) in order to gain, retain, and effectively utilize power. However, in this short volume, Shakespeare reveals another trait that influences power. The power that has been gained is modified by emotions such as love and hatred. It is difficult for this computer to discuss this topic due to the fact that my creators never successfully described what an emotion or feeling is. However, using my sense of logic, I am, on the whole, able to decipher needed information.

1. On page 93 - "A woman sometimes scorns what best contents her./Send her another; never give her o’er. . . /If she do frown, ’tis not in hate of you,/But rather to beget more love in you."
This quote describes a situation where one way of winning the emotions of a woman is to gain her love. It seems that love is very important. It gives someone self-confidence, valor, and, in effect, power. Love through this can be seen as a power. Sometimes people are victims. Where the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk come into fault is that "people" such as themselves can fall victim to emotions, especially love, which to the Homo Sapiens seems most important. Although slightly evident in Othello, it is not to important due to the fact that there is a far larger dilemma taking place, the fight for power through deceit. In this play, Shakespeare seems to have grasped another threshold. Throughout the storyline other types of power have been described. One is to win a female gender, composing 61.2345% of the Gk*’(ea)rtk’s population, with words and the swift movements of the tongue. This is all new. Revolutionary. Impossible ... temporary shutdown.

RECALIBRATING SELF-REPAIR UNIT

... on line ... Similar to the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk society, women are not very important, but once acquired, women according to their beauty and intellect are seen as treasures of power. Unlike the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk, women go out of their way to become men to establish power. This shows that women contribute to the role of power in a society and must therefore be regarded as important.

1. The situation where Julia disguises herself as a page named Sebastian.

This is all of great importance to the definition of power. Unlike in Machiavelli’s The Prince, here women seem important to a society. In Othello, emotions also influenced the use of power such as the situation where Othello loved Desdemona so much he would kill for her, a clouded waste of his power that he has achieved through life. In human terms, "he would be throwing it all away." If the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk do not realize this soon there may be potential problems within the society. This would show weakness in the government to not only its own people but to all of the Universe.

FINAL CATALOG SUMMARIZED BY DOSRAMROM1234

Each volume has its own value. However, to conclude which is best offers a difficult decision. What is being looked for? There are many thousands of questions that could be answered in order to single out a volume as being victorious. That is not appropriate when considering the quest that has been continuing for 2000 years.

Utilizing logic, I found that Machiavelli’s book would serve the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk best. It is very thorough with its explanations and offers numerous ways to not only retain and gain power but also to expand upon it in the most effective way. It concentrates on
relevant information in order to confirm its goal. People and arms are among the two. It uses true to life experiences that the Gk*’gu(ea)rtk’s governing body could study. Throughout each chapter, Machiavelli was specific enough to be thorough, but also general enough to be used as a model. The Gk*’gu(ea)rtk’s community structure is similar to that of the primitive Homo Sapien’s social structure. This would ensure The Prince’s success in the community. However, in analyzing the other two volumes, Othello and the Two Gentlemen of Verona, emotions seem to play a substantial role. In Machiavelli’s masterpiece, it didn’t seem to be important, the people’s support yes, but their individual feelings, no. This is where the conflict remains. Shakespeare’s volumes channel some of the storyline towards emotions as an influence upon the usage of power. Love and jealousy are emphasized. To utilize one must understand. This is a simple concept, but for a society that hasn’t felt in over three millennia, it is an impossibility and poses a threat. However, from the storyline, the examples, and this mainframe’s interpretations, emotions are important in gaining, retaining, and expanding the power. The Gk*’gu(ea)rtk government must reconstruct their utilization of power in order to be on line with the universal definition of power. As any society begins its regime, government, or empire, not only should the obvious be concentrated on, but also the inorganic and the mental. These are the emotions and feelings of all living creatures.

This mainframe, DOSRAMROM1234, is unable to make a choice. The only solution would be to create a documentation that would combing all three volumes. However, since the three primary crew members, Captain Hurl’;876’dtr, 1st Captain SertEER$%6, and Lieutenant SjkHJU’7, all disagree and a chance for a unanimous decision is a microscopic possibility, this mainframe is at a loss. The definition of Power: to include all that is physical and mental, then to adjust the empire’s strength to each of these to perfect this power and to utilize it effectively.

. . . DATA CONCLUDED - MAINFRAME REORGANIZATION - PREPARING FOR ANY NEW DATA. . . . INPUT?

Epilogue:

The 78 hours were up. Captain’s Hurl’;876’dtr vessel mysteriously could not be contacted after the suspicious delay. The mothership searched Earth’s atmosphere and the surrounding moon. No starship could be found. Scanners provided the answer. The wreckage was found in the bottom of Earth’s deepest valley, once the Pacific Ocean. It took many hours to reveal the exact site for rescue operations because of all of the
ice. There were no survivors. The crash will always remain a mystery. No one is sure why the mothership didn’t receive a distress signal. Some say there was a fight or a harsh disagreement. It proves that in Space . . . no one can hear you scream.
SAME PLACE AS BEFORE, AFTER LAST ONE.

NOT IN NEED TO PUT IN SHADOWS
LOOKING OUT WINDOW
(LISTENING TO ELECTRIC JAG.)
Myths and fairy tales are stories which embody truth. These stories are popular and entertaining, as they contain the common elements which define the genre of fairy stories. The elements of atmosphere and conflict, as well as the literary devices used to convey these elements, link together stories such as The Once and Future King, Dances with Wolves, and the Gospel of Mark.

Although one is a novel, the second a motion picture, and the third Scripture, each contains the basic formula of a story. The hero must struggle with conflict, and this struggle leads to resolution and/or moral message. David Barr, author of New Testament Story, suggests three stages of development central to all stories: commitment, struggle, and accomplishment. The beauty of mythological stories is that they are at once varied and universal.

The hero in T.H. White’s The Once and Future King is King Arthur, who establishes the Knights of the Round Table in his efforts to fight evil both within and outside of his kingdom. Arthur also admirably endures the love affair between his wife and his best friend. Within Arthur’s story, there is another hero: Lancelot. Lancelot, though he is the one who loves Queen Guenever, is the best knight, always winning battles and honors. The hero of Dances with Wolves is clearly John Dunbar, an Army Lieutenant with a conscience who discovers the beauty of the Sioux Indians and their way of life. Dunbar, later named "Dances with Wolves," fights the Pawnee tribe and U.S. Army in defense of the Sioux land and rights. The "hero" of the Gospel of Mark is Jesus, who must struggle with the sinners as well as the Pharisees. (In many Christian circles, it is emphasized that Jesus is not a hero, rather he is the Suffering Messiah. In terms of the story, however, by literary definition, Jesus is the hero in the Gospels.)

The atmosphere or setting is perhaps the most recognizable element of the fairy story. Often the setting is one of a fantasy-land. It is also common to have a fairly realistic setting, though still distant. The distance of the faraway setting, whether it be region, chronological time, or fantasy-land, is crucial to the mythological feel of the fairy story. The Once and Future King takes place in a fictional world, though it is called England. Dances with Wolves takes place in the United States, but the time is over one hundred years ago. Today’s society is even further removed from the setting of the Gospels, by nearly two thousand years and thousands of miles. The faraway setting contributes to most of the fascination, perhaps, that the audience feels for the story.
Another characteristic of the fairy story is that of names. Names tend to be especially significant in these stories, and often the title is a description. King Arthur is referred to as "the Once and Future King," a biblical reference to emphasize regal greatness. The Sioux names are descriptions, as shown in the name "Dances with Wolves." Dunbar's new name is especially significant, as it describes a rare and admirable action. The same is true for "Stands with a Fist," whose name describes a woman of admirable courage. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is frequently referred to as the "Son of Man." This title emphasizes the humanity of Jesus, in contrast to the title "Son of God," which emphasizes the divinity of the Messiah.

These three stories each contain a prophetic figure: a wise thinker, often a teacher to the hero. Young Arthur's teacher is Merlyn, the great magician. Merlyn is an especially fascinating character, as he experiences Time backwards; therefore, he is blessed (or cursed?) with foresight (or hindsight?), making him all the more knowledgeable (and confused). In Dances with Wolves, Kicking Bird serves as the prophet, the Medicine Man to his tribe. It is he who first senses that John Dunbar is not the wicked white man to be feared. He opens the door for the hero, takes him under his wing, welcomes him to his family, and teaches him the ways of the Sioux. In the gospels, John the Baptist is the prophet who, like the prophets of old, paves the way for the One to Come.

Perhaps the feature most characteristic of the myth and fairy tale is the presence of miracles. The presence of Merlyn, the great magician, clearly identifies this element in the beginning of The Once and Future King. It is amazing and miraculous that Arthur is able to draw the sword from the stone. In Dances with Wolves, John Dunbar miraculously survives his suicide attempt. His rifles are a blessing to the tribe as they fight the Pawnee warriors. And his saving the young child from the charging buffalo is an amazing and miraculous event. The gospel stories are filled with the miracles of Jesus. The curing of the man possessed by an "unclean spirit," the raising of Jairus's daughter, the foretelling of Peter's denial—these are signs in of a holy man.

Another element common to fairy stories is that of romantic love. In The Once and Future King, romantic love exists between Arthur and Guenever, married King and Queen. But Guenever and Lancelot also share romantic love, though she is married to his best friend. In Dances with Wolves, romantic love exists between Dances with Wolves and Stands with A Fist. A strong bond unites them, as both are born of the white man's culture, yet they have found truth in the ways of the Sioux.

The Gospel of Mark does not offer this idea of romantic love (not all myths do). Instead, a different kind of love, religious love, is described. It is similar to romantic love, in that it is all encompassing and overwhelming. Yet it is vastly different, for
the relationship is between the individual and God, as well as the individual and others. This new dimension certainly complicates things; now love is not simple. (Was love ever simple? The triangle of the Arthur story proves otherwise.) Love is now filled with new paradox. Jesus says, "Whoever would preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will preserve it" (Mark 8:35).

All three of these stories contain a resolution of sorts. The endings leave some things hanging in the air. All is not perfect, yet there is hope in the passing down of the story. As The Once and Future King ends, Arthur tells the young Tom the story, so that Tom can tell others and all can learn from Camelot. In fact, the novel finishes not with the words "The End," but the words "The Beginning." As Stands with a Fist and Dances with Wolves prepare to leave the tribe, Smiles A Lot brings them the journal. Possession of Dunbar's journal ensures that it is not in the hands of enemies; it is again the valuable vehicle which will be shared with those who will listen. The original ending of the Gospel of Mark leaves the women in the story and the reader/listener in the same situation: hear the Good News, and profess to others!

These three stories encompass the elements of myths and fairy tales. It is the nature of these stories as well as the literary devices used within them that categorize them as myths: stories which embody truths. Moreover, the very fact that such stories are written and told is both a promise and a hope. With each retelling of the story, it is both continued and fulfilled.
"All things are confounded into one through some inexpressible essence," in Marquartie Duras' novel, The Lover. While the title may be misleading at first, the story is not merely about a young girl and her wealthy Chinese lover. In fact, it is a novel that only uses the image of the lover to allow the narrator to express her unusual feelings and desires towards her dysfunctional family. He is only a vehicle for her intentions. In order to understand how each of the narrator’s relationships with her family are entangled with that of her lover, one must first examine each family member separately. This amateur’s version of psychoanalysis may clarify the narrator’s confounding essence of the lover and perhaps compel the reader to discover an expressible intent behind her words and actions.

The personality of the narrator’s mother is an erratic one and is possibly a main cause for the narrator’s inability to express love for her family or anyone else. The mother is described as "haunted" and "awkward." She frequently falls into modes in which she would suddenly be unable to wash [her children], dress [them], or sometimes even feed [them]." This "madness", as the narrator calls it, emotionally scarred each child. They are "the children of a candid creature murdered by society . . . because of what’s been done to [her] . . . we hate ourselves." Having no stable parental figure, the narrator is left to fend for herself and to "know things" before she "experienced them." Her mother’s blatant neglect allows the narrator to attempt any scheme that might help her please her family. When she dresses in gold lame shoes and low-cut dresses, the mother simply says, "not bad, they quite suit you, make a change," while others think that she is "a little white whore," her mother is "innocent" and unaware because of this madness. The mother is unable to see any of her children in reality and take notice of what is happening to them. She has her children "photographed so that she can see if [they] are growing normally." Her mother is only able to look at her family from a removed point of view. It is seldom when she breaks away from the alternate reality that she dwells in and "comes out of her despair" to glance briefly upon the welfare of her daughter. She wants her daughter to be "head of the class" in math, so that she may escape the meager fate that has become her. During these brief moments of realization, the mother tries to encourage the narrator to "get away from where you are" because she fears that she might have "access to that madness . . . in the blood." Yet the mother is so twisted that she allows the daughter to take desperate measures in order to escape. "That’s why the mother lets the girl go out dressed like a child prostitute . . . that makes her mother smile." She ignores her daughter’s affair with the Chinese lover and makes excuses for her behavior. When the boarding school
informs her that her daughter does not come home nights, "she's a child who's always been free." The mother disregards what her daughter does so that she may "keep her." The narrator thinks that her mother would "kill her if she found out the truth," but the truth is that her mother chooses to cling to an act of ignorance so that she can somehow keep her daughter close to her. She describes her daughter as "a little white tart . . . shacking up with this millionaire Chinese scum, with a diamond on her finger just as if she were a banker's wife." This erratic behavior, one day wanting her child to escape and the next wanting to possess her, helps to form her daughter into a creature incapable of experiencing genuine emotions for another person. The mother provides nothing but an unstable environment in a home that breeds violence and neglect.

"The final decisive knowledge that their mother was a child . . . [She] never knew pleasure," lends to the narrator's self-hatred. She is raised by a woman whose warped mentality tarnished everything it touched. Her irrational fears, expectations, and neglect corrupted her children. Perhaps the best analogy of her capabilities as a mother are illustrated in the following passage:

She buys some electric incubators and installs them in the main drawing room. Suddenly she's got six hundred chicks, forty square meters of them. But, she made a mistake with the infrared rays and none of the chicks can eat, all six hundred of them have beaks that don't meet or won't close, they all starve to death and she gives up.

Just as the mother mutates the baby chicks by changing the lighting, she mutates her children's emotions by poisoning them with her madness. Just as the baby chicks can not eat, the daughter can not love. Just as the chicks starved to death, so does each child become starved for love. In each case, the mother gives up her chicks and children for dead.

The younger brother of the narrator appears to be the only person in whom the narrator can find comfort. Even this form of love, though, is not normal by any standards. Since neither has the stability with their mother nor the guidance of a father, they cling to each other for support. The younger brother is "helpless" and the narrator tries to raise him as if he were her own child. She says that "her younger brother's body was [her's] as well." They are as if they share two halves of the same body. They share the fear of the elder brother, the "murdered," and pity their insane mother. "They are the first to remember" that this happiness that emerges when their mother is not lost in despair, is merely a diversion from the truth. The narrator is able to love the younger brother in a way that she cannot love herself. In him, she puts forth her efforts to overcome the spreading madness of their family, and when he dies, that loving side of her dies as well. "I'm haunted by the killing of my brother." She claims that it was her mother's and elder brother's fault because "his heart
gave out." The younger brother is controlled by them and they steal from the narrator the one person she can find pleasure in. His fragile demeanor is crushed by the domineering ways of the elder brother. Her mother only encouraged this behavior, so she too is an "accomplice." With his death, the narrator has to face the fact that "immortality is mortal, that it can die." She sees that life is not only bitter, but also short. Once the younger brother is dead, she has no one to try to protect. "I can't fight my brother's silent commands... I can only when it concerns my younger brother." This version of love is the way the narrator tries to compensate for the love she never receives from her parents. By viewing her younger brother as an extension of herself and by shielding him from harm, she tries to recover for him what is lost to her. This love, however, and the desire to protect her brother does not seem to arise out of simply sisterly love. She occasionally expresses an eerie appreciation of him physically. Even the body of my younger brother... is as nothing beside this splendor." Perhaps her other reason for sheltering him is based on an unnatural desire or obsession to keep him safe under her control.

The elder brother, on the other hand, has a completely different relationship with the narrator. She repeatedly refers to him as a "murderer" and a "thief." He appears to be an abusive substitute for a father to her. His domineering ways attempt to suffocate any efforts that either the narrator or her younger brother might make to regulate their own actions. The narrator claims that the elder brother is chiefly responsible for her "lack of innocence" resulting from an incident that took place over the course of seven years. It is through his greed and lust that she is forced to have "knowledge of things beyond her years." "When he's young he tries to sell [her] to customers at the Coupole." He "cannot bear not being able to do evil freely, to be boss over it not only there, but everywhere." He is a man bent on the destruction of those in his family. Oddly enough, the narrator knows that she has a small amount of control over him because "the only person my elder brother is afraid of... is [her]." Yet, she is still caught in his intricate web of obsessive and apparently incestuous desire. She is aware of "a sinister attraction he exerted on everyone." She loses awareness of her Chinese lover. When her brother is near, "he's no longer anything to [her]." Her elder brother is like a merciless intruder in her life, "breaking in everywhere, stealing, imprisoned, always there, merged and mingled with everything." She is unable to break from his spell. His presence consumes everything in its path. It is as though he is able to possess the narrator's mind and body so that she becomes "prey to the intoxicating passion" of his control. He had to be got away from the other two children" because he is somehow corrupting what is left of their innocence. "The presence of a killer" lurks in the shadows whenever he is near.

The narrator's mother and elder brother are also entangled in
a relationship carrying an undercurrent of incest. He is "the object of love," but it is not the normal kind of mother and son love. She is constantly striving to "provide for the elder son as long as she lives." Meanwhile, her other two children's emotional well-being deteriorates. Everything the mother has is sacrificed, "all for the sake of the elder son." They are both alike in that they strive to gain control over others in the family and "looked down on the weak." They both abuse the other two children, each encouraging the other, "his voice is lowered, confidential, coaxing." The mother is not unaware of the elder brother's obscure and terrifying intent." Even the mother's will "favors the elder one too much at [the narrators] expense." The mother has a bizarre, deep affection for her son who only takes pleasure at others' expense. "She treated the fact that she was his mother as if it were a crime," because she desires him in other ways than as just a son. He rules over the family as if it is his kingdom, and his mother only indulges him in this pursuit. "When he lost [his family], he lost his real empire." Both mother and son are buried together, "both in the same grave . . . just the two of them . . . as it should be.

The family as a whole is a prime candidate for a study on dysfunctional relationships. Everyone wants to escape, but they are always drawn back to each other, whether it is because of money, power, or obsession. The narrator claims that her mother "ought to be locked up, beaten, killed," yet she can't leave her mother "without dying of grief." Her mother is everything and nothing to her. Jealousy is a common denominator in each person's reasons for staying together. The mother is jealous that her daughter might "manage to escape" while she would be left behind. The two brothers are jealous of having to "share" their sister. The statement "they had nothing in common but her, their mother and especially their sister," can be interpreted rather as incestuous or as sibling rivalry. However, normal rivalry would not ordinarily include one brother trying to sell his sister's virginity while the other wants to become a part of her physically. The family is aware that any man who "has" her will eventually have to "give her back to her brothers." No verbal communication exists within the family, so that these thoughts have to be interpreted by another's actions. They "never had any celebrations . . . not a Christmas tree . . . not so much as a flower." Intimacy, in an emotional sense, is nonexistent. They are only intimate in a physical sense, "all four of [them] slept in the same bed," because the "sluggishness that had overtaken [their] mother had overtaken [them] too." The disease spreads throughout the family, so that each of their hearts will "give out," just as the younger brother's does. They may have been breathing, but they are not living; they are merely "burned-out shells."

The Chinese lover is the embodiment of each of these people in the narrator's life. In essence, he represents her mother, elder brother, younger brother, and the father she never knew. Since it
is impossible for her to love any of these people in reality due to certain circumstances, she attempts to express her desire for them through the lover. She is controlled by her family, more than she is willing to admit. Therefore, she chooses a man who will not only satisfy her family's perverse expectations of duty, but also will draw her closer to them. "He lacks the power to understand such perverseness," she says of the lover, but she knows completely all that the relationship entails. Although she feels that by going away with the lover, she is excluded for the first time and forever" from her family, in fact, as long as she remains with the lover, the stronger her bonds become to her brothers and mother. Her mother recognizes this and that is why she dutifully ignores what supposed "shame" the daughter is casting on the family. Only his money is desirable to her mother, and the narrator follows in her footsteps. She likes to control the lover and "knows he's at her mercy." He is fearful of authority, just as the younger brother is afraid of the elder. "He becomes a burned-out shell . . . he's on the brink of tears." This intimidation excites her. She finds comfort in knowing that he is a weaker vessel that can be manipulated just as she is by her family. She never looks at the lover when she is with the elder brother. It would be a betrayal if she did. It is evident in the love scenes with the man from Cholon, that she is not merely with him, but also with the "shadow of a young murderer . . . the shadow of a young hunter." The murderer is obviously the elder brother, as he is referred to several times previously and the hunter is the younger brother with whom, when she was little, she would "go hunting in the gardens" behind their house. The narrator fantasizes that she was with both of her brothers while she makes love to the body of the lover. Other times, she is lost in the reconstruction of the father she has lost. The lover is frequently paralleled to her father. He bathes her, dresses her, "he adores [her] . . . the darling of his life." The narrator gives in to his indulgence because she is starved for the affection of an adult male in her life. Yet, this fantasy is corrupt, as well, because it takes on incestuous tones. She can only find this fatherly fulfillment sexually. She is his "child," but only in a perverse way. The love she finds through this affair only feeds her corruption. She does not go to the lover to find escape, but only to try to live out her incestuous desires in a "socially acceptable" way. While she is an outcast for choosing a Chinese man, he is the lesser of the two evils. He is the perfect essence of everyone that she desires but can not have in her life. In him, she can envision her mother's indulgence that she craves. She seeks only the tender, weaker nature of her younger brother. The violence and abusive nature that the lover sometimes possesses, "he shouts to her to be quiet, that he doesn't want anything more to do with her," reminds her of the "young murderer" in her elder brother. Lastly, the lover protects and coddles her like her father would have.

The narrator's memoirs in The Lover takes quite a different twist if one analyzes them as more than merely a description of
"the incandescent relationship between two outcasts." The novel is not about a young girl's relationship to her lover, but her relationship to her family and search for escape. That escape, however, is impossible because she is mired in the madness of her family's relationships. Each is dependent on the other's abuse and neglect. They thirst for "a place that's intolerable, bordering in death, a place of violence, pain, despair, dishonor," just as others thirst for love. None of them are capable of love because of this dependence on pain. They can only find pleasure in controlling each other's moves. "The common family history of ruin and death" keep them bound together, even in death. The narrator needs to be possessed by her family. She knows no other way of life. The only way she can be completely possessed by her family is to be sexually possessed by a man who reflects each person in his personality. So, in essence, the image of the lover is the "virtue of representing" her mother, father, and brothers. He is the inexpressible essence of her desire for her family.
Katherine E. Schneider
Submission
Pen and ink
At the beginning of *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles presents us with a character at the pinnacle of his society, Oedipus, king and hero, esteemed by all. By the play’s end, despite his best intentions, Oedipus falls to the bottom of the mountain, losing his crown and his queen. He is reduced to a blind beggar in exile, an abomination to his people and himself.

As an audience, we are distressed that such an apparently good man comes to such a bad end, and we look for a gross character flaw or crime to justify this outcome. We wonder if Sophocles is showing us an innocent character solely at the mercy of outside forces or if Oedipus’s own actions contribute to shaping his end. To what extent is Oedipus responsible for his misfortunes?

If responsibility assumes blame, it is difficult to find enough culpability in the character or actions of Oedipus to balance the scales of justice. In the opening scene, a spokesman for the people addresses Oedipus as "noblest of men" and that is a good indicator of how Sophocles portrays him (5). Oedipus is the benevolent ruler "in tears" over the plight of his people (5). He does not send a messenger out to relay his subjects’ grievances, but comes out personally to comfort them and pledge his services. His words of comfort are not hollow. He is also a man of action, a doer, a fixer. In fact, before their supplication, he has already acted in their behalf by sending for word from the oracle. When instructions come for lifting the curse, Oedipus is the picture of good intentions and innocence as he aggressively searches for the murderer.

We don’t see the duplicity of a man who knowingly, out of some perversion or lust for power, murdered his father and married his mother. He receives reports from Creon, the Messenger, and the Shepherd openly before others. There isn’t even any evidence of the lesser crime of murdering a stranger. Oedipus volunteers a story of self-defense against three men who had "forced him off the road" and attacked "his head" with a "double goad." There is no hint of guilt as he admits he "killed them all" (41). The idea that the stranger may have been Laois is not skirted by Oedipus. Instead, he is the one who initiates the idea and judges it. "What defilement!" (42).

Although Oedipus is portrayed as a basically good man, he is not perfect. Sophocles has given him a measure of impulsiveness, pride and impiety. We see this impulsiveness certainly in his on-the-spot proclamations, but also in his conclusions about Creon.
He puts the message and the messenger together and accuses Creon of "desir[ing] in secret to destroy" him (20). Choragos feels it necessary to counsel him, "a prudent man would ponder it" (31). Oedipus’s pride is in his own superior intellectual ability. He is the man who solved the riddle of the Sphinx. There is almost a tone of grandstanding as he declares, "Then once more I must bring what is dark to light" (9). His complete confidence in his ability to solve the mystery makes him so focused on the deciphering of it that he is blind to the riddle of his own destiny. Oedipus’s tendency to impiety is seen in his disrespectful treatment of "Apollo’s servant," Teiresias, calling him a "decrepit fortune-teller" and badgering him into telling his secrets. But are these flaws critical enough to warrant his terrible misfortunes?

They are, if Sophocles is using the backdrop of a nearly faultless man to emphasize the seriousness of the flaw of impiety. A strong man, confident in his own abilities, who is toppled before the gods would be the ideal character. Also, concern over a lack of reverence to the gods seems to be a theme throughout the play. The chorus is worried that "reverence for the gods has died away" (45). And the final words of the play remind us not to "presume. . . good fortune" until our lives are over (78). In other words, we can’t control our destiny and are always at the mercy of the gods. Although Sophocles is, no doubt, making a point about the need for piety, if the purpose of his play were a moralistic cause and effect lesson, we wouldn’t see an Oedipus who petitions the oracles for help, or one who constantly invokes "O Lord Apollo" in prayers for assistance (6). Instead, Oedipus might be portrayed as Iocaste is, sure she has "proof" that no man "gives knowledge of the unknowable" (36). But Oedipus gives so much credence to the oracles that he builds his life around the predictions, even leaving home and family to avoid their fulfillment.

The ultimate proof that this is not a moralistic lesson of cause and effect is shown in the type of play Sophocles has chosen. This is a tragedy, which means we feel the characters do not get what they deserve. We do not feel justice has been served when Oedipus is punished. Sophocles could not teach us that impiety deserves gross misfortune in a tragedy where we feel the character’s actions do not warrant the outcome.

Then if Oedipus is not to blame for his misfortunes, is he simply a puppet of the gods, acted upon with no free will to shape his future? There is no question about whether the gods pull some strings. The fate of Oedipus is set, and the word Creon brings from the oracle shows a god’s hand in sending the plague. "It was murder that brought the plague wind on the city" (7). Without the plague to bring his situation to light, Oedipus might have gone on happily married to his mother and wearing the crown of the father he killed. The gods are most certainly catalysts that shape his life. The question is whether they pull all the strings.
His fate may be set, but there appears to be some play in the way it is realized. It was Oedipus's fate to kill his father, we assume by the sword. But when he is told his father has died, it makes sense to him that his father's death could be from a broken heart due to his son's absence, and thus fulfill the prophesy. Also, the main events of the play, Oedipus discovering his parentage, Iocaste committing suicide, and Oedipus blinding himself, are not dictated by the original prophesy. This leads us to believe they could be products of the characters' free will.

It is true that the discovery and the blinding are both foreseen by Teiresias. This raises the question of whether the gods or their representatives merely predict the future or whether they act to accomplish it. The gods don't try to direct Oedipus by forcing their knowledge. In each case he petitions them. He has to goad Teiresias into revealing his secrets. The exception to this is the plague. It forces Oedipus to act or he will be the ruler "over a dead city" (5).

The will behind Oedipus blinding himself is also debatable. When he is asked what drove him to do it, he says it was Apollo who brought his "sick, sick fate" upon him but "the blinding hand" was his "own" (70). He goes on to explain why he felt he had to blind himself, which makes it appear to be his own action. But a witness to the event assumes that "surely one of the gods was in control" (66). These variables throughout the drama suggest that the gods do not orchestrate every detail of men's lives.

It is within this area of play, this window, that free will can operate. Oedipus plays a large role in what happens to him if responsibility means acting within this window to bring about events. He is the vehicle through which his fate is accomplished. It comes out of his personality. One aspect of that personality is a drive to pursue the truth. This quality spurs him to seek out the oracle at Delphi and so learn his fate, to wrestle with the riddle of the Sphinx and so end up in his mother's bed, and to pursue the identity of Laios' murderer and so discover the damaging truth of his parentage. Another facet of his personality is honor. He is careful to do the right thing, and this also drives him toward his fate. It is for this reason he leaves the safety of his foster parents' home only to kill his father enroute. It also means he will not leave his people to suffer because, as their king, he would be "heartless" (4) if he didn't do whatever "duty God reveals" to lift the plague (6). Both of these qualities are facilitated by a third. He is a man of action. Wondering about the truth or giving rhetoric to honor would not accomplish Oedipus' fate. But he causes things to happen; he inquires, leaves, and interrogates. This man is certainly not a robot of the gods. That would make for a very dull play and diminish the human spirit.

In fact, the last scene is a tribute to the power of the human spirit. Oedipus is faced with the realization of his acts of
parricide and incest. He has just lost his wife-mother by her own hand, and the blood is still dripping from his empty eye sockets. And yet, he makes no excuses, points no finger of blame, and never relinquishes his power to act. He has the strength of character to look clearly at his own guilt by examining each of his sins and pronouncing them so evil that "no tongue can say/ How evil" (72). He takes that guilt upon himself with the typically superhuman expectations which have been his standard. "Of all men, I alone can bear this guilt" (72). He sets in motion his own punishment, ordering Creon to kill or banish him, and declares the punishment he has "laid upon" himself "just" (71).

Oedipus cannot control what the gods send him. He just assumes he is a man "whom the gods hate" (70). But he still exerts his will upon those circumstances, no matter how dismal. Even in these terrible conditions, he is a man of action, exercising his free will to arrange for his wife's funeral, his children's care and his own exile.

Sophocles is saying something about his world, that it is one in which tragedy can take place and one in which we are subject to the gods. As hard as we try, we cannot change fate, cannot control what is to come, but, at the same time, there is room for human will in our reactions. Oedipus isn't to blame for actions beyond his control or knowledge, but he is also far from a puppet of the gods devoid of human will.
In his poem "I Sing the Body Electric," Walt Whitman constructs two distinct sets of polar aspects of humankind. First, he addresses the duality between body and soul. The main argument of the poem pertains to this division: that the physical body is a tap into the spiritual soul, that a physically healthy body is essential to a healthy soul. The poem, however, makes another very distinct division; the female and male are separately acknowledged and described. Thus we see Whitman's affinity towards polarization. He lays out, quite clearly, the body/soul duality and the female/male duality. Furthermore, he stresses the importance of both sides of each of these binary groupings: the body relies on the soul just as the soul relies on the body; the male and female aspects of humanity are equally essential. He meets with varying degrees of success in reconciling these two dualities.

The formation of binary opposites and the insisted reconciliation between them is a relatively rare approach in Nineteenth Century Western literature. Western Christian thought is full of polar distinctions, such as good and evil, God and Satan, but the one is invariably favored over the other. One pole is celebrated; the other, scorned. Whitman's celebration of both opposite ends of these binaries is more akin to Taoist philosophy, which he surely studied. Consider this formation of binary opposites in this passage of the Tao Te Ching:

The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the good as the good, yet this is only the bad.
Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;
The difficult and the easy complement each other;
The long and the short off-set each other;
The high and the low incline towards each other;
Note and sound harmonize with each other;
Before and after follow each other. (II.4-5)

The Tao is passive and at rest, its main energy going into the reconciliation of these contrasting aspects of human life. "I Sing the Body Electric" seems to aim at this state of harmonic balance, especially in its approach to the problematic concepts of body and soul.

If someone asks you whether you value your soul or your body
more, you would probably respond that your soul is most important. Christianity has taught us to think this way. I think Whitman would refuse to answer the question. For him the two are too intrinsically bound, too delicately balanced, to be separated. Their functions overlap; they rely on one another for identity; they become, ultimately in the poem, identical. In the first section he poses a number of questions:

Was it doubted that those who corrupt their own bodies conceal themselves?

And if the body does not do fully as much as the soul?
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?

These questions are, for all purposes, rhetorical; it is just a matter of time before Whitman states his belief, that the body and soul are connected to the point of being identical, in a more conclusive form.

A curious portrait of "a common farmer" is situated in the middle of the poem. Whitman dedicates a full section to this portrait and goes into great detail. The emphasis is on the farmer’s age, his progeny, his physical fitness, and his overwhelming appeal to others. This is Whitman’s example of excellent human health and its immediate effects. That this man is very old and still full of vitality and passion for life is a greater testament to the attributes of a healthy life than that of a young, physically fit person. The physical is paramount to a long and healthy life; moreover, the physical is paramount to a healthy and eternal soul. The human body, the sensorium, the words, the touches—these are the intermediary between human beings. For Whitman life is a social endeavor, and only through the human body can human souls interrelate.

There is something in staying close to men and women and looking on them, and in the contact and odor of them, that pleases the soul well.
All things please the soul, but these please the soul well. (253)

Whitman ends the poem with an extensive catalogue of body parts. The detail is enormous, emphasizing the importance of the particular. The minutiae of the human body are listed, in no order of importance, for together they comprise the soul. Only at the end of this inventory of body parts can Whitman directly say what was all but said in the poem’s opening questions: "O I say these are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul, / O I say now these are the soul!" (258). Whitman has indeed reconciled these two dual aspects of the human being—body and soul—to the point where the dichotomy between them is nearly indistinguishable. His approach to the other duality found in the
poem, between female and male, is quite different, however.

The two sexes do not seem to overlap in this poem. One section is spent in discourse upon the female; another section, the male. Maleness is one thing, femaleness is quite different. Still, Whitman is aware of the need to define the two and to reconcile them. His technique, though, of defining the female in one section and the male in the next fails miserably. He grows vague (even for Whitman!) and desperate—not that defining the sexes is particularly easy to do. His attempted portrayal of "the female from" is pitiful. "Ebb stung by the flow and flow stung by the ebb, love-flesh swelling and deliciously aching" (253). His problem, simply, is leaving his own maleness out of it. He starts the section attempting to define the female form; he ends up talking about his "love-flesh" and the "bridegroom night of love working surely and softly into the prostrate dawn." He cannot depict femaleness out of the male perspective, out of a sexual context. After lapsing into sexual intercourse, orgasm, and post-coital philosophy, a belittled but no less proud Whitman offers this disclaimer:

Be not ashamed women, your privilege encloses the rest, and is the exit of the rest,
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul. (254)

It is almost as if Whitman is the ashamed party. Sex, he is saying, is nothing to be ashamed of, for it is the "nucleus" of birth. And, as we saw in his portrayal of the "common farmer," nothing is more important than progeny.

Ironically, it is Whitman’s infatuation with progeny, which he thought of as being expansive and the physical representation of eternity, that reveals his sorely limited scope of the human condition. Women are, almost invariably, portrayed in the context of motherhood. In the second section he gives us one of his slices of common life. The first line portrays women nursing babies. Following lines depict women in similar motherly roles: "Girls, mothers, house-keepers, in all their performances" and "The female soothing a child" (251). These lines are interspersed with dominant images of beautiful males swimming and wrestling and putting out fires. This might be an accurate representation of men and women in Whitman’s times, but, for someone who is attempting to define the sexes and form some sort of reciprocity between them, Whitman fails to portray women in any role outside of motherhood and the home. There are no images of women as individuals, no expansion of personality, no portrayal that reflects in the least that Whitman has an understanding of the feminine aspect of humanity. He celebrates, rather, the function of women as mothers. And he is not complacent with uncertainty in this poem. He needs to sound sure of himself. He needs to project. He needs direction.
At this point Whitman parts ways with the Tao. He is, after all, a product of Western philosophy, of Christianity. There are many Taoist influences in his work, as was seen in his construction of dualities and his successful reconciliation of body and soul; but ultimately he is unwilling to let all his dualities come to such neutral ends. This is seen in his handling of the female/male dichotomy. He has no problem with the male—the images of male life are beautiful, accurate, and confident. With the female, however, Whitman cannot fully extract, even for one lucent moment, the male. Thus the female is constantly seen in the phallic light of sex and the directed light of progeny. There lies, scrawled across this poem and the whole of his canon, a male vector, pointing westward.

Understandably, Whitman's method of making sense of the opposites of the human condition fall under the male-dominated influences of Western civilization. His attempt at reconciling dualities, yet ultimately needing direction, is much more influenced by Logos and Christianity and Manifest Destiny than any Eastern influence, such as Taoism. And Whitman does fail in accurately reflecting the complexities of the human being in this poem, most blatantly in his muddled, restricted view of women. A definite misogyny underlies the history of Western civilization and philosophy, and, unfortunately, Whitman buys into it. Logos is considered, by many, the Western equivalent of the Tao—only the Tao is at rest, Logos has direction. As seen in "I Sing the Body Electric," one way to give philosophy direction is to keep it unbalanced, to grossly limit the feminine so that the unreciprocated thrust of the masculine causes unchecked direction and movement. I believe this is the nexus of Whitman's love of the human body and nature and his love of the terribly destructive expansionist movement. His love of sensual detail, coupled with a truncated vision of the feminine (which he seems to believe is whole and accurate), easily fits into the more general philosophy of Manifest Destiny and the martial need to expand and conquer. Maleness remains unreciprocated in his poetry—with sometimes beautiful, sometimes obnoxious results.

I expect so much of Whitman. That, in this poem, he attempts to link the body and the soul, male and female, shows the breadth of what he was trying to accomplish. He is representative of the Western thirst for knowledge, need for expansion. More importantly, though, he is representative of the emotive side of humanity—sensual detail, varying tones, longing. "You would wish long and long to be with him, you would wish to sit by him in the boat that you and he might touch each other" (253). This tenderness might just be the closest he gets to understanding the feminine, for he feels it in himself. We saw his external, logical attempt to define the "female form" fall into "limpid jets of love hot and enormous" (253). He cannot ever completely understand the feminine—he is a man under the influence of logic, Logos, and Western narratives. He should be content with a few uncertainties.
Walt Whitman is just a man, though he may claim to be more. Our
discovery of this erring man forms the third major duality of the
poem, slightly hidden: the limited, imperfect Whitman versus the
ebulliently confident Whitman who tries to even write such an
ambitious poem as "I Sing the Body Electric," Whitman the man
versus Whitman the Kosmos.
Edward White
Italian Clown
Pencil
THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

by Lori Gelvin '92

The "feminization of poverty" is a term coined by Dr. Deana Pierce in the 1980 Report to the President of the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity to describe the dramatic increase in the proportion of the poor living in female-headed households (National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986). According to S.A. Levitan and R. S. Belous (1981):

Female-headed families are not a recent invention of the feminist movement. With high death rates in the past, it was not uncommon for a wife and mother to find herself a widow at a relatively young age, forced by this grim reality to take on the responsibilities of heading a household. (p. 105)

However, the acceleration of female-headed households is staggering. "At the start of the 1970’s, nearly one of ten families was headed by women; this ratio rose to one in seven families by the close of the decade, when over 8 million women headed families" (Levitan & Belous, 1981, p. 109).

In 1983, 15.3 percent of all Americans - 35.5 million people - were officially classified as poor; that is, living below the poverty line. . . . In 1984, the poverty rate had dropped to 14.4 percent with 33.7 million Americans officially designated as poor, but a new pattern of poverty which developed over the last quarter century did not change. A dramatic shift has taken place in the composition of the poor: the number of people living in poverty in white male-headed families has declined markedly and the number of poor families headed by women has risen sharply. While families maintained by women today account for 16 percent of all families, they account for 48 percent of all poor families. Nearly 40 percent of the American poor are children, and over half of them live in female-headed families. (Sidel, 1986, p. xvi)

These statistics have prompted me to choose this topic. The increase in the numbers of women and children living in poverty is a national tragedy. This paper will explore the reasons and causes for the increasing number of women caught in the web of poverty, the social aspects which relegate some women to this plight, suggested social reforms, and personal reflection.
The reasons and causes for the number of women living in poverty are varied. Some women become poor as a result of their marriages, or rather, as a result of the breakup of their marriages. This breakup translates directly to a reduction in the income level of the family unit. According to a study conducted by Robert S. Weiss:

The previous male head of household provided 80 percent of the family’s income, while the wife or other family members contributed 20 percent. Following the marital break, incomes of the newly-formed single-mother households were reduced in every income category—lower, middle, and higher—the reduction being the greatest where the marital income had been the largest. In the upper-income level, separation and divorce reduced the income of the single-parent households to about one-half of what it had been in the last married year; in the middle-income level, income was reduced to about two-thirds; and in the lower-income level, income was reduced to about three-fourths of its previous level. These declines persisted for as long as the family was headed by a female. . . . The decline in economic status is also harsh for those families on the edge of poverty during marriage. The drop in income pushes them over the edge of poverty without benefit of private transfer payments such as child support, which is received more often by those whose marital incomes were in the upper and middle-income levels. (Mulroy, 1988, p. 20,21)

In the breakup of the family unit, it is the mother who traditionally remains the caretaker of the children. She is likely to have the primary responsibility for child care and child rearing; thus her ability to work long hours or to change places of work are severely constrained (Kamerman & Kahn, 1988). In one group of poor women interviewed by Ruth Sidel, she found they "became poor as a result of their marriages. They had children to care for, and none of them had the financial resources or skills to be able to support themselves and their children at a decent standard of living" (Sidel, 1986, p. 33). Even if a woman is able to obtain employment, the day care situation can be intolerable and out-of-reach. Sidel continues:

During the first three years of the Reagan Administration, federal programs that supported child care were cut dramatically. Title XX, the largest program providing federal support for child care, was cut 21 percent; the Public Service Employment Program of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which helped to provide staff for child-care center, was abolished. As a result, thirty-two states provided care to fewer poor children in 1983 than 1981, and thirty-
three states cut child-care spending. . . . The group most severely hurt by these cutbacks are poor families headed by women. . . . There is little doubt that the absence of a high-quality coherent, comprehensive day-care policy is a key factor in the perpetuation of poverty among women and children. Without access to affordable day care, women with young children are frequently unable to enter the labor force. Without adequate day care, how can a mother receiving AFDC hope to acquire skills or get a job in order to get off welfare?. . . . If we are serious about. . . . stemming the feminization of poverty, and about giving every child a fair chance educationally, emotionally, and economically, one of our first priorities must be accessible, affordable, high-quality day care. (1986, p. 127, 131, 132)

Wage discrimination against women and the types of jobs available are also major factors behind the high rates of poverty among women, and most especially for women with children. According to Elizabeth Mulroy (1988):

By 1985, the median income for single mothers of children under 18 was only $10,076. Mothers with at least one child under 6 averaged an even lower income ($6,472 in 1985), mainly because fewer of these women are able to participate in the labor force and their only sources of income are child support and public assistance. Despite the barriers to working outside the home, over two-thirds of women heading households with children under 18 were in the labor force. Over half of these women worked full-time year-round. How can we reconcile the high labor force participation of single mothers with their low median income? The answer lies in the nature of the jobs they perform. Single mothers most frequently work in service and blue-collar jobs that offer low pay, unstable employment and few opportunities for advancement. (p. 99, 100)

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops contends:

Many women, though employed, remain poor because their wages are too low. Women who work outside their home full-time and year-round earn only 61 percent of what men earn. Thus, being employed full-time is not by itself a remedy for poverty among women. Hundreds of thousands of women hold full-time jobs but are still poor. Sixty percent of all women work in only ten occupations, and most new jobs for women are in areas with low pay and limited chances of advancement. (1986, p. 88)

The term "pink-collar ghetto" is used to describe the sector
of jobs in which many women are employed. These include retail, manufacturing, and clerical. The sector is characterized by low wages, few or no benefits, and unstable employment. Work is often part-time, temporary, or seasonal. Low educational attainment contributes to female overrepresentation in this sector (Mulroy, 1988). Mulroy states:

Eight out of ten female workers are high school graduates compared with only 65 percent of women maintaining households. Still, even if single mothers had higher educational attainment, it is not likely that they would be able to earn ‘breadwinners wages’ in today’s labor market. Female college graduates who worked full-time, year-round in 1984 earned only slightly more than male high school dropouts ($20,257 compared to $19,120). (1988, p. 104)

The treatment of women in the court system regarding divorce is another contributing factor to the impoverishment of women. It is women who are most seriously disadvantaged. Mulroy continues:

Whether the single mother is a married women seeking a divorce or a never-married woman seeking to enforce child support, she comes to court with three strikes against her: she is a woman, she lacks the resources to obtain adequate counsel, and her issues are those with which the legal system would prefer not to deal. (1988, p. 39)

It is not a national secret that lawyers are expensive.

Women as a group are poorer than men, and even women who apparently are well-off are usually poorer than their husbands if not totally dependent on them for their economic status. Single mothers are also denied meaningful access to the courts because of the Reagan Administration’s attack on funding for the Legal Services Corporation. Two-thirds of Legal Services’ clients are poor women seeking legal assistance for matters such as welfare, housing, domestic violence, divorce, child support, and social security. . . . The legal services first cut were those for family law matter, because scarce funds had to be dedicated to criminal defense work. (Mulroy, 1988, p.41)

Gender bias is not a new concept in society or in the court system. Its effects are many. Mulroy claims:

It encourages stereotyped thinking about the nature and roles of women and men, society’s perception of the value of women and men and what is perceived as women’s and men’s work, and myths and misconceptions about the economic and social realities of women’s and men’s lives.
Each aspect of gender bias creates problems for women in the courts, particularly for single mothers. A judge's stereotyped belief that a good mother is at home full-time, may cost the mother in the paid work force custody of her children. Devaluation of women as individuals is revealed in judicial indifference to domestic violence and the enforcement of support awards. Devaluation of women's unpaid work as homemakers and mothers is reflected in division of marital property at divorce in which the wife is awarded a much smaller share than the husband. Myths and misconceptions about women's access to well-paying jobs and the costs of child raising result in minimal child support awards that impoverish women and their children. (1988, p.42)

The division of marital property and alimony are, indeed, factors not advantageous to women. According to Mulroy:

Many judges do not see the unpaid work a women performs as homemaker and mother as having contributed significantly to the acquisition of marital assets and as being equal in value and importance to a husband's paid work outside the home. . . . The fact that most women today work full- or part-time outside the home and thus hold down two jobs, as wage earner and homemaker, also often goes unrecognized. Even when husband and wife do the same work, the wife's effort may go unrewarded. Farm wives find that some judges disregard the fact that the wife has labored right alongside her husband to make their farm viable. (1988, p. 45, 46)

With regard to the issue of alimony, it is a myth that most women receive alimony. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, only 19 percent of women divorced before 1970 had an agreement or award to receive alimony. In 1985, only 14.6 percent of the 19 million ever-divorced or currently separated women in the country had an agreement or award to receive alimony. For women divorced since 1980, the figure is 13 percent. The Census Bureau also reports that of the 840,000 women due to receive alimony payments in 1985, half received the full amount due, one-quarter received partial payment, and one-quarter received nothing. The mean amount received was $3,733 which, after adjusting for inflation, represented a decrease of more than 25 percent in purchasing power from the mean amount received in 1978, when the Census Bureau first began collecting such data (Mulroy, 1988, p. 47).

Inadequate or non-existent child support is also a factor in the poverty of female-headed households. According to Kamerman and Kahn(1988):

Of all women potentially eligible to receive child support in 1985, only 61.3 percent were awarded it. Of
those expected to receive it, 74 percent. . . . actually received some payments. Less than half received the full amount, and over one-quarter received nothing in 1985. In effect, even among those who were supposed to receive child support, less than half received any. . . . Child support is clearly an essential component of family income for single mothers. Nevertheless, the Census Bureau's analysis indicates that even if all the poor single mothers awarded support had received it, there would have been no significant change in their poverty rate. A child support system cannot by itself provide enough income for families to manage unless they have other resources, even among those receiving support let alone for those who do not. (p. 18, 19)

The improvement of the plight of women and their children living in poverty will take social reform and a recognition of the many causes of this national crisis. Court mechanisms must be changed to allow women equal access to the system, and more equitable distribution of marital property and assets. Alimony and child support payments must be set at a level which allows both women and children to maintain a decent standard of living, and enforcement of such payments must take place. Wage discrimination and the barriers that exist for women to attain decent wages/jobs must be eliminated. Federal programs aimed at assisting women and children must be supported and funded appropriately. Mulroy (1988) states:

The plight of single-parent families has become so serious and so complex that basic changes are needed in social and economic conditions--changes brought about by a combination of social programs, tax policies, and economic policies. For example, these families need housing, day care, job training, medical service, nutritional programs, safe neighborhoods, access to predictable job markets, and an adequate income that derives from some combination of children's allowances, wages, tax rebates, and support payments. In order to meet single parent families' needs, social reform must look beyond traditional concerns of public welfare to economic inequalities and to the institutional arrangements that reinforce these inequities. . . . (p. 277)

Thus far, this paper has been dedicated to various facts and figures regarding the immense issue of women living and suffering in poverty today. I have chosen to add my reflections subsequent to this research. The facts are fairly clear. The odds that a female-headed household will indeed be one of deprivation, in many different ways, are extremely high. It is evident that it benefits women to marry and remain married. And yet the divorce rates continue to escalate. The fact that more and more women are
divorcing or separating may suggest that changes in marital status are not frequently the result of women's choice, or that the various costs of remaining in some marriages are so high that women are willing to accept the economic loss that accompanies a divorce.

I find this disconcerting as it is a reflection that many women are not entering marriage with their eyes wide open. Are the young women of today preparing themselves for the possibility that their ideal of the American dream may be shattered, whether it be by death or divorce? The house, the husband, the two-car garage, and all the trappings of our culturally-sponsored ideal can be here today and gone tomorrow. It is a pessimistic thought, but it is reality.

I am not suggesting that women enter the state of marriage with the negativity of impending doom based on statistics. But rather, that women should be prepared to be "independent" instead of "dependent" in a marriage situation. It is a shedding of the myth that "being taken care of" is a benefit of marriage. It is not a benefit but rather a detriment, as can be evidenced by the numbers of once-married women unable to provide a decent lifestyle for themselves or their children once the marriage ends. The reality of surviving in a society still struggling with and debating about the rights of women, is a rude awakening, and one that comes a bit too late for many.

Indeed, societal reforms are required to allow women to live, work, and be self-sufficient, whether they choose to marry or not. I have chosen to concentrate mainly on once-married women in this paper, but this is not to dismiss or discount the alternative choice that some women make to remain single. Should they not also be afforded the same right to live a particular lifestyle consisting of self-sufficiency and economic well-being?

To contribute to the remedy of our "cultural ill" in which the economic well-being of women is an issue takes not only societal reform but also "attitudinal change," a change which not only must take place in our levels of bureaucracy, but a change that must be fostered in our young people today so that more effective and efficient strides can be made at a faster pace. If Mary Jo has a wonderful education, only to find the door closed when she goes a-knocking, what then? Changes in our society with respect to the opportunities or choices available to women, whether married, once-married, or never-married, occur at a snail's pace. But must our attitudinal change follow the same path? I hope not.

I certainly don't profess to have the answers, but I would like to suggest that an attitudinal change begin with women and the investments they make regarding their future. It is a well-known fact that women are normally the primary care-takers of the family unit. That is to say, whether they work outside the home or not, they still retain the primary responsibility for management of the
home. Are the choices that we make regarding educational pursuits or jobs unduly influenced by this concept? Do we make choices influenced by future home and childbearing/rearing responsibilities that negatively affect our marketability when we need it most? Personally, I believe there is some credibility to this notion. Because women are conditioned to the cultural norm of the woman being the domestic manager, and thus may at some time be required to leave her career temporarily or even permanently, there is an influence that is reflective in the investment she is willing to make in training and job choice. And then, when the apple cart is upset within her world, she has few resources to call upon in the ensuing struggle to survive.

We must not fall into the trap of believing that marriage is the economic savior for women. It is hard to fathom that in 1990 this philosophy exists, but indeed it does. Women must begin and continue to make choices that will contribute to their economic, physical, and emotional well-being regardless of their marital status. The ability to make these choices must be taught at an early age. Government and societal reforms are not the only answers to the alleviation of the dramatic increase in the poverty of women. I realize that there are a multitude of causes for this dilemma, but is it not also conceivable that if women were socialized to be independent rather than dependent human beings, our ability to hurdle the hardships associated with single-parent households, widowhood, or single life by choice would be enhanced? In my opinion, it is not just a possibility, it is a must.

References


VISIONS OF CAUOREK

Alex Green '92

"In high school, football, which led me (via scouts) to Columbia Varsity but I quit football to write (because one afternoon before scrimmage I heard Beethoven fifth symphony, and it had begun to snow and I knew I wanted to be a Beethoven instead of an athlete) . . ."

---Jack Kerouac, Biographical Resume, Fall, 1957
(From Heaven & Other Poems)

Jack Kerouac ended up being a prolific, genius wild composer of remarkable symphonies in the form of novels, poetry and unguarded thought. Like the great composer Beethoven, his work was dark and moody, hosting a revolutionary beat which was met with praise and enthusiasm. However, Beethoven was deaf, and after performing a brilliant piece, he would look to the triumphant faces in the audience, see their hands moving, their lips trembling with excitement and praise, but sadly he could hear nothing.

Kerouac, on the other hand, heard everything. Going beyond normal sounds, like conversational praise from peers, cars speeding by, and the melodic dialogues of birds from treetops, Kerouac went deeper. He was in tune with the night, and heard things that couldn't be heard by everyone. He felt the electricity of the darkness, and listened to its sad jazz rhythms floating tormented in the air. The sounds of the street, the silent patter of sweat dripping off the neck of a tenorman in a smoky nightclub and falling to the lonely floor, and the whines of the night echoing sad and forever--Kerouac didn't miss anything, he felt and sensed all and everything and he used this keen sense to breathe life into words and make them skip across the page.

The hardest thing in the world is to write about someone you love because there is so much to tell, and after telling a story or exploring an incident, there is always another story or incident that is just as important which needs to be told. The works pile up, and are seemingly endless, and they must be acknowledged because nothing can be left out. So I guess I should say, it's actually very easy to write about someone one loves, or in this case, a spiritual advisor who has spoken to me posthumously through his writing. However, the hard part is feeling as if the picture attempting to be painted is not deficient in red, or lacking in blue. In other words, it must be felt that justice has been given completely and wholly, with the absence of oversentimentality and indulgence.

Jack Kerouac is the single most important writer for me and my writing, and rather than launch into a biographical look at the
writer and his life, I would rather focus on why I find him so valuable and revolutionary. If I get to the point where I think I have left something out, I will stop, unbeknownst to you, and insert the necessary insertion. So if you are reading this now, I am satisfied and happy, or running behind you trying to take this from you before you go any further.

The first book I ever read by Kerouac was On The Road, an uninhibited, wild tale of two friends' numerous scattered trips across the United States. Published in 1957, and Kerouac's second book to be published, the novel recounted the experiences of Kerouac, (disguised in the guise of narrator Sal Paradise), and Neal Cassady (neatly tucked into the identity of Dean Moriarity): their non-stop wild binges into San Francisco Jazz dives, dark hotels, sexual ascendency, and the search for the "IT" in life that so many people ignore or never know about.

At the time I was working as a parking attendant for a local music club, and in between directing cars where to park, I began On The Road. On my break I came across a sentence which made me stop reading, look up and smile at all bodies in the cafeteria hustling to finish their sad meal consisting of hot dogs, hot pretzels, hot tamales, and coke.

I was smiling because it all made so much sense. The sentence was:

She was in one of the buses that had just pulled in with a big sigh of airbrakes; it was discharging passengers for a rest stop. Her breasts stuck out straight and true; her little flanks looked delicious; her hair was long and lustrous black; and her eyes were great big blue things with timidities inside. I wished I was on her bus. A pain stabbed my heart, as it did every time I saw a girl I loved who was going the opposite direction in this too-big world. (68)

Kerouac explained to me in a few sentences why my heart broke every time I saw a beautiful woman. The world is just too large, and people too many, so in the average lifetime we barely meet even a meager percentage or two of the people walking the earth at the same time we are. It was more than just a sad teenager in an orange parking suit realizing that he wasn't going to sleep with every beautiful woman in the world; it was coming to terms with the fact that everyone I wanted to meet, or thought I'd like to spend time with, male or female, were are always going somewhere else, and not counting, of course, chance, or fate, I really would never meet anyone.

However, what excited me was the introduction of "IT" into my life. In a conversation between Paradise and Moriarity, Dean in a shining moment reflects back to the previous night in jazz club in
which time, the universe, God, and love are explained in one of the most unforgettable passages I’ve read. Kerouac’s magic ear is at work here, and the dialogue transcends any normal dialogue; it becomes a spiritual realization and energetic consumption of all and everything now and forever:

"Now man, that alto man last night had IT—he held it once he found it; I’ve never seen a guy who could hold it so long." I wanted to know what "IT" meant. "Ah well"—Dean laughed—"now you’re asking me impon-de-arables—ahem! Here’s a guy and everybody’s there, right? Up to him to put down what’s on everybody’s mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas, people, yeah, yeah, but get it, and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden somewhere in the middle of the chorus he gets it—everybody looks up and knows; they listen: he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He’s filling empty space with the substance of our lives, confessions of his bellybottom strain, remembrance of ideas, rehashes of old blowing. He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it’s not the tune that counts but IT." Dean could go no further, he was sweating telling me about it. We were telling these things and both sweating. The car was swaying as Dean and I both swayed to the rhythm and the IT of our final excited joy in talking and living to the blank tranced end of all innumerable riotous angelic particulars that had been lurking in our souls all our lives. (172)

Now maybe my IT is different from the IT Kerouac was talking about, but, nevertheless, he was the first writer who even knew that I had an IT and was trying to unearth it from the clutches of the abstract and unleash it into the physical world. I can still remember standing on the second floor of the Santa Cruz library with a copy of Mexico City Blues in my hand. It was the first book of poems I had read by Kerouac, and after finishing one of the choruses, I got so excited I had to check the book out and read the rest alone somewhere quiet and outside.

What was so exciting about the choruses was that they were alive. They weren’t just poems with a good line every now and then, they were moving words with a musical life. They made me excited even more than I already was about becoming a writer because they fused my two loves, poetry and music, together. The book begins with a little note from Kerouac:

I want to be considered a Jazz poet blowing a long blues in an afternoon jam session on Sunday. I take 242 choruses; my ideas vary and sometimes roll from chorus to chorus or from halfway through a chorus to halfway into the next.
Kerouac’s fascination for jazz put the bop into his work and as a result the songs he sang were sweeter than the night, operating on two levels, one lyrical the other musical. The lyrical aspect is Kerouac’s ingenious marriage of words and feelings resulting in whirlwind exciting reading. True confessions of the soul, his ecstasy and sadness are so acute it’s hard not to stop the reading and soak up the descriptions again and again. I know that sounds like perhaps maybe my first jump into sentiment, but looking at the following passage, it’s easy to see what I mean:

Besides which Lucille would never understand me because I like too many things and get all confused and hung up running from one falling star to another till I drop. This is a night, what it does to you. I had nothing to offer anybody except my own confusion. (104)

This is a great example of Kerouac as a lyricist. I was talking to a bass playing friend of mine once, and he told me that he always wanted to become a writer because one could accomplish many things with the correct use of words. One could seduce, entrance, anger, or persuade with the correct placement of words and phrases, and he was obsessed by this aspect of writing. He was fond of calling writers "wordsmiths." As a result, when he talked, he always tried to put words in the right order. He had the right idea, but Kerouac’s strength was his rushing quality which couldn’t be achieved with calculated arrangements of words, it had to happen within the moment, suddenly and extemporaneously. Kerouac was known for bringing a pad of paper everywhere he went and scribbling furiously in a corner.

Studying the dichotomy between lyrics and musicality even more, the jazz side of Kerouac’s writing is equally as important as his lyrics. His harmonies operate on a very different level. What is so wonderful is that when listening to them read aloud, it doesn’t matter if you aren’t even listening to the words themselves; the beat is the most prevalent aspect verbally, and can be appreciated just for its sound. For example, read the following passage aloud:

Am now typing up my entire book of sketches, 250 pages of just as written in breastpocket notebooks, for 2 years, the scribblings stranded in streetcorner riverbottom Mexican California blues of Oh the white eyes the blue eyes and worn shirts of this good (Heaven And Other Poems)

Taken from a letter to his editor friend, the passage smacks of vintage unguarded Kerouac, making music on the page. To hear him read passages of his work on record is truly an amazing experience. His prose is poetic, and after hearing him read On The
Road, I came to the conclusion that it is in a class by itself as an amazing novel under any circumstances and when read aloud, a rocking twentieth century epic poem.

When I first got turned on to Kerouac, I became turned on to the entire Beat Generation thing and I checked out the three main biographies on Kerouac to learn more. They were interesting and informative, but they were thoroughly depressing. None of the books talked about Kerouac as a writer, but instead focused on his tragic chaotic life, which was filled with non-stop drinking binges, homosexuality, madness, and wild unpredictability. Not one of the biographies examined Kerouac's style and sound. It became depressing reading paragraphs that chronicled Kerouac's misery and sexuality. That can all be found within the texts themselves. Kerouac knew that he was living hard and excited, and he made no effort to change.

I am only a jolly storyteller and have nothing to do with politics or schemes and my only plan is the old Chinese Way of the Tao: "avoid the authorities." I am a bibulous old jolly drunk and I love everybody.
(Biographical Resume, Fall 1957)

The death of Kerouac is too depressing to even go into, but the amazing thing (and I know it sounds cliche) is that he really is everywhere, way beyond the Whitmanesque, "look for me under your bootsoles" natural immortality. Kerouac really is everywhere, his sadness, loneliness, and jumping ecstasy are felt by everyone all the time. Lucien Carr said of his death, "He ain’t dead to me by a long shot. And I mean it, not only in terms of a man, but in terms of someone that scribbles, scribbles, scribbles, a scrivener, a writer. Jack is very important to me, and he’s just as alive today as he ever was. Unfortunately, he can’t come down here and crack his head on the floor with us."

I would never try to eulogize Kerouac, because that is totally worthless. The biographers jumped on the racy parts of his life and turned it into a typical biography. If I ever write a book on Kerouac, I’d want to focus on his happy/sad, absent/present emotional erratic behavior. Kerouac felt lonely like everyone always does, but he was also very prone to feeling very excited and ecstatic. To understand Kerouac one has to understand what makes him full of joy and what makes him unbearably lonely. The following is a good Kerouac moment, and perhaps my favorite passage. It has the hugeness and harmony that Kerouac is best at, and it is a very beautiful section:

And for the moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows, and wonderment in the bleakness of the mortal realm and the sensation of death kicking at my heels to move on, with
a phantom dogging its own heels and myself hurrying to a plank where all the angels dove off and flew into the holy void of uncreated emptiness, the potent and inconceivable radiances shining in bright Mind Essence, innumerable lotuslands falling upon in the magic mothswarm of heaven. I could hear an indescribable seething roar which wasn’t in my ear but everywhere and had nothing to do with sounds. I realized that I had died and been reborn numberless times but just didn’t remember especially because the transitions from life to death and back to life are so ghostly easy, a magical action for naught, like falling asleep and waking up again a million times, the utter casualness and deep ignorance of it. I realized it was only because of the stability of the intrinsic Mind that these ripples of birth and death took place, like the action of wind on a sheet of pure, serene, mirror like water. I felt sweet, swinging bliss, like a big shot of heroin in the mainline vein like a gulp of wine late in the afternoon, and it makes you shudder; my feet tingled. I thought I was going to die the next moment. (144)

Kerouac keeps living and dying, and I can see him now in a jazz club digging the sad sounds of jazz throbbing in the lonely night. I can see him with a sweet smile on his face, soaking up the wet notes and scribbling in his mind, words of bop and true prose. Natalie Merchant, vocalist of the band 10,000 Maniacs, in the song "Hey Jack Kerouac," sings,

Hey Jack now for the tricky part when you were the brightest star who were the shadows?

Kerouac is in the shadows now, a true son of the night dying and laughing in between loneliness and jacked up ecstasy.
WE SITTING ON SOFA IN MY ROOM LOOKING BEFORE ME 2.14.92 (1:50 PM)

LISTENING TO ALASKAN EDDY/82

03:27 PM
Thomas Dierkes
Boot
Pen and ink
prologue
A Day at Franklin High School

7:54 AM

David Pierson coughed.
The icy morning air always seemed to make breathing difficult. Standing at the bus stop, shivering under his thick coat, he couldn't help feeling weary at the thought of another monotonous day of high school. After all, the eleventh grade wasn't easy, even though his parents would like to think so. His dad had said, Son, getting good grades at school is your ticket to a better life. It was almost as if he was saying that David's grades were more important than David himself. He knew this to be untrue, especially when he tried to make a connection between the cold, sterile classrooms and the rest of life.

What does memorizing all this stupid math and history have to do with my life?

His speculation was interrupted by the arrival of the yellow school bus that would transport him to the educational institution known as Franklin High School. As he shuffled aboard and found a seat, he wondered if any of the popular kids felt as insecure as he did. It was difficult to tell; they all wore their masks of self-assurance so well, with bright white smiles and sparkling eyes.

I wish I looked confident. . . .

At school, it was as if they were all playing some game. Only nobody knew what the grand prize was. Freedom, perhaps? It was as if somebody wanted them to believe that there existed some thing capable of unlocking the doors of happiness.

The bus finally rolled to a stop in a large oval loop. Franklin High School, it read, A Tradition of Excellence. David frowned wistfully.


He mentally recapped his schedule for the day: first period, Math; second period, English; third period, History; fourth period, P.E.; fifth period, Biology; and sixth period, Psychology.

Damn. Math test in Mr. Wagners class. Great. And I forgot to study. Who was the idiot who decided that math should be taught in the morning?

He filed off the bus with the other kids and followed them into the gaping mouth that was the main school entrance. He shuffled off in the direction of his locker, which was in C hall. The noise inside was truly deafening. The clamoring voices of hundreds of jabbering teenagers swirled around him as he pushed further down the hallway.
He was now passing through the infamous Senior Hall. He watched as coy blonde girls flirted with muscular athletes. The ordinary kids stepped by respectfully. David hated the popular kids, yet he also saw within himself a deep yearning to be like them.

God, I'm pathetic.

As he continued on, a vision materialized in his mind uninvited. A huge crowd of people, all laughing maniacally as they advanced toward a murky, sinister doorway. A putrid stench was emanating from the gateway, reeking of infection and sickness. And at the front of the mob was David, being forced inexorably in the direction of the portal. Even as he fought desperately to free himself, David knew it was hopeless. He sighed.

I will never escape.

8:37 AM

Mr. Wagner was one of the people that David couldn't help feeling sorry for. He seemed like an OK guy, but he just couldn't communicate. Nobody kept up with him when he started off on one of his math lectures.

At least I'm not alone on this one.

Everybody in the class had silently vexed as Mr. Wagner began describing, in detail, the concept of polynomials. Most of the kids still hadn't grasped the basic algebra required for this section, yet they continued on.

Let me get this straight: you put a bunch of numbers in to this equation and it vomits out a lot more. Great. So this is math.

10:03 AM

English had gone as expected, with Mrs. Peterson droning on about Ernest Hemingway and how he was such a genius. No surprises there. She was always pontificating about this or expounding about that.

Does Mrs. Peterson know that nobody's listening to her? As if anybody cares about this crap.

10:27 AM

David was afraid of Mr. Fletcher, his History teacher. Known to his students as Mephistopheles, he looked subtly demonic with his peaked hairline and glaring eyes. Only after being enrolled in his class had David realized that his nickname wasn't about his appearance alone. Mr. Fletcher, a strict disciplinarian, had an obsession with exams. He saw them as an opportunity to grill his students on the minute details of his lectures, to make sure that they had been listening. What is the significance of the year 1838?, his tests would demand.

I wonder if anybody has ever answered with something like the year Benjamin Franklin invented sliced bread? Probably not. But that would be interesting . . . .

11:15 AM
Physical Education. One of the only real opportunities that the kids had to release some of their frustration, and this usually included much goofing off behind the teacher's back. Unfortunately for the kids, goofing off was at an all-time low this semester. Ms. Polk, the P.E. teacher, was the epitome of cold-blooded, and she didn't take crap from anybody. Built like a linebacker for the New York Giants, and with even less tolerance for wimps, she represented a true challenge to any self-respecting human being. Rumor had it that she secretly took steroids, but David doubted it. Even so, that would explain her peculiar mustache and curiously broad shoulders.

1:41 PM
Fifth period had been a typical day in Biology with Mrs. Delaney, who was trying to intrigue the class with the notion of dissecting frogs. And it wasn't as if the students had a choice.

Just another hoop to jump through.
Mrs. Delaney was one of those teachers who was always in a bad mood. Her favorite form of discipline was sarcasm. Occasionally, though, something happened that gave the students some respite. This day, one of the popular girls had turned a lovely shade of green when the frogs were brought in. The two jocks behind her were betting on how soon she'd throw up. The guy on the left won; it had taken her four minutes.
Finally, something worthwhile.

1:50 PM
David daydreamed as Mr. Manheim continued with his lecture on Freud's anal stage of human development.
God. Only 45 minutes to go. Time always seems to crawl when you want it to go fast.
David wasn't quite sure what this anal and oral stuff was all about. Perhaps it had something to do with this penis envy he had overheard the other guys talking about. He doubted they would actually hear about it in class.
As if Mr. Manheim would actually say penis out loud. It doesn't matter. Freud's a nut anyway.
The textbook was no help. Not that they ever were. David wondered who actually wrote the damn things. They were all the same; only the covers looked different. He was certain the authors were just like the textbooks themselves: dull and unimportant. Besides, who assumed he was interested in the first place?

2:35 PM
Finally, the bell rang. He was almost overcome with exhaustion. As he filed out of the classroom and into the hall, he was washed over with a sense of relief knowing that he would be away from this place.
Until tomorrow.

introduction
The State of Our Schools

While not every parent, teacher, administrator and student would agree that our schools are a failure, one thing is unmistakable: our public school system is riddled with problems. That’s the easy part. The real difficulty is in agreeing upon what the actual problems are. One group will assert that we need more discipline. Another one will claim that funding is the problem. And a third will say that all we need is to get back to the basics. Within this framework of opinion, though, some generalizations can be made.

Let’s look at it from the parents’ perspective. Parents want their children to be safe, in an environment that keeps them out of trouble, and they want them to obtain an education. Understandably then, they are alarmed when presented with evidence that violence in schools is becoming more widespread, truancy is on the rise, and some high school graduates can’t read or write.

Teachers are frustrated with a system that, if salaries are any indication, values them much less than most other professions. And because of this financial disparity, many talented would-be teachers move into other fields. Consequently, students don’t have the excellent teachers they deserve. Unfortunately, there is a significant percentage of teachers who are burnt out. They are disinterested, disillusioned, and uninspired. For these people, teaching is a burden, not a privilege.

Administrators are concerned with falling test scores and statistics that indicate that schools are often failing to teach kids fundamental skills like reading, writing and arithmetic. This apprehension comes as no surprise when one considers that the job security of an administrator is directly related to the test scores generated by the students under his or her supervision.

And what about the students? It seems truly sad and ironic that the one group for which the whole system exists has never had a voice in deciding how that system should function. If one were to ask students to describe their feelings about school, their responses would probably range from submission to indifference to hostility. Not surprisingly, any reference to a fascination with mathematics, excitement about history, or even feeling comfortable in their school is likely to be missing from their descriptions. Unfortunately, many students come away from high school with little more than feelings of mistrust, apathy, and inadequacy.

Realistically, students are unwilling participants within a system that offers them few real benefits. Teachers, many who find their jobs unrewarding, are asked to act as the foundation upon which the learning process is built. Parents are afraid of and disenchanted with a public school system that they perceive as unnecessarily bureaucratic and ineffectual. Regrettably, unless
they can afford the stiff tuition of a private school, they and their children have no choice but to submit to the public schooling system in their community.

Sadly, administrators are nervous about test scores, statistics and the worsening reputation of their schools. This is not to imply that administrators are merely politically-minded bureaucrats, although some would allege this. Rather, it is to assert that most administrators seem to have lost touch with the primary function of school: learning.

The Purpose of Education

The schools' purpose has been debated for years to no definitive conclusion. There are some who insist that an education is necessary to deal with the hazards of life, or that an education allows an individual to get a good job and earn money. Granted, one of the primary missions of the public school is to teach its students the skills necessary to survive in our society. In its simplest form, education is supposed to prepare a student for "life in the real world." But while this is true, it only addresses the question, What advantage does an education confer? It does not speak to the question, What kinds of people are being produced by our educational system? When thinking of school in these terms, the discussion takes on a different tone with far reaching implications.

Children generally attend school beginning with age five and ending at eighteen. So, for seven hours a day, five days a week, and for the majority of their formative years, kids attend school. Because of this, the school has the unique distinction of being one of the few institutions in our society that actually molds personalities. To a large extent, our schools determine the psychological nature of our children. Of course, when thinking about education in this way we begin to realize the immense responsibility that schools have.

The issue is not whether schools should play such an utterly influential role. The reality is that they do play it, and we must take great care. The question begs then, What kind of people shall we help create? Everyone will have a slightly different answer, but one thing is irrefutable: whatever other skills or abilities with which we endow our children, we must attempt to create happy, emotionally secure human beings.

At present, our schools may actually contribute to the reverse. Certainly, many ignore the whole issue, renouncing their responsibility. This is simply unrealistic. Like it or not, schools are powerful institutions, uniquely influencing the very core of our society. Our schools, as collaborators in the process of human creation, have a great opportunity and a tremendous obligation at the same time.
We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness--that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed--that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

This excerpt, taken from the Declaration of Independence, delineates, in clear and simple terms, the essence of democracy and freedom. When examining this passage within the context of education, we realize that our schools exist because we have chosen them. Let's translate some of the above quotation into educational terms.

If we were to say, "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all human beings are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," we would realize that our schools are often violating this principle. The reality is that students are treated as second class citizens; at times their dignity trampled and their rights, as human beings, are ignored. Nowhere else in our society do we allow our children to be treated in this way. We assume that schools have our children's best interests in mind. And this self-perpetuating paradox originates within the schools. The power disparity between teacher and student demonstrates to our children that might is right. It fails to teach the concepts of equality, mutual respect, and merit based upon intrinsic value. Worst of all, students are denied the most fundamental right within a democracy; the freedom of choice.

Let's extrapolate some more. To secure these rights, learning is instituted among students, deriving its just powers from the consent of the people. . . . The truth is, the students haven't consented to this system, and the acquiescence of the parents is achieved because most are either unaware, or don't feel they have an alternative. It is crucial to realize that this educational system exists only because we, as a society, allow it to. Suppose we wanted to change it. . . .

Whenever any form of education becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new education, laying its foundation on such principles,
and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. As the society that gives this educational system legitimacy, it is our prerogative to alter or abolish it. And most importantly, we need a school system that guarantees our safety and happiness.

Tabula rasa is Latin for "clean slate." It refers to the process of starting over with our schools. Our current system is, in many ways, inadequate and requires a fundamental rethinking by parents, teachers, and students.

What follows is the description of the learning process at a hypothetical school designed from the ground up. This school would give its students an education far deeper and more significant than that given in our current schools; an education focused on experiential learning, human relationships, and the encouragement of individual thought. This model does not preclude reading, writing and arithmetic, but augments them by transforming the learning process from a conventional, discipline-oriented system into a holistic, experience-based learning environment where equality and respect are cherished.

the process
The Learner

The underlying principle at the tabula rasa school is that the learner comes first. By definition, education exists for the benefit of the learner, not the teacher, parent, or administrator. The tabula rasa school focuses the learning process on the student, creating an environment where everyone has the opportunity to be successful, both academically and emotionally.

The first question one must ask when designing a new school is What kinds of human beings are we trying to shape? Some aspects are unequivocal; as a society, we want our students to be given an education that enables them to survive comfortably and happily in our society. But beyond that, what do we want our students to be? Ideally, I think we want our students to be model citizens. Therefore, I suggest the following framework:

We want our students to be independent thinkers. When confronted with a choice, students consider the options by virtue of their intrinsic value, rather than basing the decision on what others are doing, what the conventional wisdom happens to be, or what others expect of them. Independence is the key to empowerment.

We want our students to be sensitive to others. Only within an environment that demonstrates equality can the principle do unto others as you would have them do unto you thrive. Cruelty, bigotry and racism cannot survive within an environment that establishes that all
human beings, regardless of race, gender, religion, or sexual preference, have the right to equal treatment and respect. Tabula rasa states show, don’t tell.

We want our students to ask questions. This doesn’t mean merely asking questions to obtain information. It also means questioning those things that are unethical, unrealistic, or equivocal within an individual’s own moral framework. All too often, people either deny or aren’t aware of the corruption and injustice around them. Questioning is the fundamental basis of democracy.

We want our students to be compassionate. There is much value in giving for its own sake, yet in our society greed and selfishness seem to rule the behavior of most. The tabula rasa student would be a good Samaritan.

We want our students to be aware of the world around them. There is much to be known about the happenings in our world. In the age of modern communication, our world is becoming smaller and smaller. Consequently, the events occurring in other countries are affecting us more and more. Awareness is the foundation of wisdom.

We want our students to be honest. Dishonesty is similar to drug use. It’s an extremely addictive behavior that makes it virtually impossible to lead a happy life. Furthermore, dishonest people can be truly harmful to those people around them. Honesty makes life comfortable.

We want our students to communicate skillfully. We live in an interactive society. Thus, the student is able to read and write effectively, as well as communicate very well verbally and non-verbally. And most importantly, the student listens. Communication is at the very core of our human society.

This list, while incomplete, outlines some of the qualities that I deem important. And while all people are going to value different characteristics, the objectives listed above are probably acceptable to most people.

Finally, it is vital to note that the things that I have outlined above must be learned; they cannot be taught per se. Students, like other people, cannot be coerced into believing these concepts.
The Teacher

Research has shown that people learn most effectively when they want to. How many parents have wondered why their kids can concentrate so intensely on Nintendo or baseball, yet receive reports from school indicating that they can't focus on a task for any extended period of time. Unfortunately, the child is usually blamed for this, not the teacher or the school. Research has shown that memory retention is enhanced significantly when the information is directly related to a real-life experience. Again, we find these basic elements of the learning process conspicuously missing from many schools. Simply put, most students don’t want to be in school, and they perceive their learning experiences as having no relevance to their lives. Conversely, tabula rasa dictates that the learning process be founded upon experiences, rather than verbiage.

At a typical school, History will be taught from a textbook, where children hear about people they’ve never seen, places they’ve never been, and events that are perceived as having no applicability to their lives. At the tabula rasa school, students don’t accommodate the learning process, they command it. Within this context, a History class would experience it by visiting historic sites, talking with guest speakers, or perhaps engaging in a class simulation—aany activity that would bring history into the realm of personal involvement. It is the goal of the tabula rasa teacher to maximize the diversity, satisfaction, and feeling of learning.

For example, let’s assume that a History class is studying World War II. The class would include trips to historical sites in the area. Guest speakers would also be prevalent. For example, a Jewish woman who survived the concentration camps, a bomber pilot who was in the U.S. Air Force, a Japanese-American who was forced to live in an internment camp, or a woman who worked in a munitions factory during the war. All these people would relate their stories, giving the students a close-up view of history. Classroom activities would include simulations, slides, films and videos, audio tapes, or any other material that makes the history real.

Some history classes may dabble with a few of these concepts, but the tabula rasa theory mandates that these activities are the fundamental structures around which the entire learning process is shaped.

What kind of person is the tabula rasa teacher? He or she always protects the dignity, respects the maturity, and encourages the independence of the student. These people are courageous enough to treat the student like a partner, and not a subordinate. Furthermore, a teacher in the tabula rasa mold is unreservedly devoted to the learner’s enrichment, exceptionally motivated to seek out memorable learning experiences, and adamantly pursuant of
the ultimate ambition of school: learning. And most of all, they love teaching.

The Parent

If one examines current schools, the lack of parent involvement in the learning process is immediately apparent. Granted, with the hectic schedules of most parents it would be unreasonable to demand that they spend time at a school at the negligence their career. However, it does seem acceptable to ask a parent to spend one day every month at school.

Some might ask, What's the point of having a parent in the school? This is an excellent question to ask. The tabula rasa model maintains that there is more to be learned at school than reading, writing, and arithmetic. There is life to be learned. Referring to our goals as a school, we want our kids to survive comfortably and happily in our society. Who is a better teacher than somebody who's been there?

Simply put, a parent has his or her lifetime of experiences to offer. It is tragic that this wealth of life experiences goes unused in the schools of today. Since the purpose of school is to prepare children for the future, it seems altogether fitting that people who are familiar with what lies ahead should share their experiences.

For instance, let's assume that at our school we have a class that discusses meaningful life experiences. In today's class the issue is birth. While a normal school may ostensibly cover this topic, its approach would be to read out of a biology textbook. Apart from slightly entertaining anatomical trivia, this holds little value for most learners. The tabula rasa class would be based on experiential principles. A midwife would be invited as a guest speaker and videotaped births would be shown. Also present would be several mothers, all of whom would be asked to share their birthing experiences. Again, this environment gives the information meaning. The students aren't scrutinizing bland textbooks anymore; they're studying real human beings with genuine feelings and experiences.

So, in conclusion, a parent can play a very significant role in the learning process. And the students aren't the only ones who benefit. Often a parent learns just as much, if not more, than the students! More important than any other reason, however, is that the parent is now an active participant in the school that shapes his or her own child.

The Principal

Every school needs a principal is a belief shared by most educators. While I might agree that a principal may be necessary,
my idea of a principal is unconventional at best. In plain terms, tabula rasa states that a principal should be bored silly. Or, in more elaborate language, a principal should primarily concern him or herself with the mundane organizing duties and other routine details that full-time teachers don’t have time for.

The tabula rasa principal is a coordinator, troubleshooter, and evangelist. Some common tasks might include funding acquisition for the school, organization of all-school functions, recruiting of new students, or any other issue that may arise. However, one facet is crucial to the role of the principal; a principal is required to teach every day, unequivocally. It is vitally important that the principal always understand why he or she is there.

In today’s schools there is a deep division between teachers and administrators, with the administration wielding the power. Consequently, most significant decisions regarding the learning process are made by administrators. This situation is irrationally backwards in the most profound way, especially when one considers that administrators don’t teach at all. Teaching is such a rewarding experience for good teachers that most can’t imagine doing anything else. Likewise, those who are more proficient at politics and bureaucracy tend to move into administration because teaching has little to offer them.

Within the tabula rasa hierarchy, the administrator comes last, while the learning process remains focused, as it should be, on the learner. This concept is intended to keep the school concentrated on the purpose of education: learning.

The Environment

Now that we have the learning process, we need a site for it to take place. And this is no trivial matter. Typically, junior high and high schools are enormous facilities that house upwards of 3,500 students. Some people have likened modern high schools to prisons, and it is rare to find a student who speaks of them with affection.

The tabula rasa model is built on the assumption that smaller is better. The biggest problem with having a student body of 3,000 is that students feel as if they are merely one grain of sand on an endless beach. It is rare for a student to have a relationship with his or her teacher that is more than formal acquaintance. These feelings of insignificance and insensitivity are what frustrate the learning process. Students at large schools feel that they are unimportant in the overall scheme of things, that their actions go unnoticed, which they often do. This effect can only multiply a teenager’s feelings of insecurity and vulnerability.

Dr. John Calhoun’s famous rat studies in the 50s and 60s
revealed the debilitating effects that population concentration has on animals. In his research, Calhoun discovered that intense crowding caused aggressiveness, sexual deviancy, maternal neglect, and an overall rise in violence. In commenting on Calhoun’s rat study in his book *The Hidden Dimension*, Edward T. Hall states, "Crowding disrupts important social functions and so leads to disorganization and ultimately to population collapse or large scale die-off." Later studies conducted during the 70s and 80s seem to indicate that humans may also react similarly to these factors, and large schools could be considered characteristic of what this research reveals.

Therefore, the first thing to be done under the *tabula rasa* theory is to scale back the school size, drastically. It seems odd that elementary schools are almost always small (usually under 350 students), while junior high and high schools are so large. The *tabula rasa* model states that the ideal school has a student population of roughly 150. We must concede, however, that this is not always possible. Generally, a school dedicated to the *tabula rasa* concept of learning will not exceed 250 students, with an average student-to-teacher ratio of 20 to 1.

The contraction of the student population significantly changes the learning process. Students now know their teachers on an individual basis, and the feeling of being lost in a sea of people vanishes. Furthermore, students and teachers begin to feel that they are part of a community including both kids and adults. This small step of limiting school size helps students to feel more comfortable in their school.

Additionally, large schools tend to be austere, colorless places constructed with durability in mind, not learning. It seems likely that these grim surroundings contribute a great deal to the gloomy feeling one gets when within them. Most students that have been to a large school are familiar with the enfeebling effect that the dismal classrooms can have on the mind and spirit. Simply put, big high schools aren’t pleasant places to be.

Also, the *tabula rasa* school will have access to good transportation. Since the curriculum is based on experiential learning, buses should always be available for field trips and other excursions. Classes should be able to pick up and go at a moment’s notice. In fact, these buses should be used as often as possible. After all, learning is done best in the field.

The *tabula rasa* school would be a vibrant place that makes the learner feel warm and safe. What is more important, the students would feel like the school is theirs—that it is an extension of their cooperative selves. Accordingly, they would be permitted to own the school by painting it, shaping it, and enhancing it in virtually any way they see fit, assuming it doesn't violate safety codes, of course.
The point is, the school is for the kids. The teachers, parents and principals should step aside and allow the students to make their school the best they can.

Conclusion

Tabula rasa is more than a change of curriculum or school size. It's a fundamental change in the way that we think about learning. At the tabula rasa school, students don't fear their teachers. Students don't feel like they must please the teacher to get a good grade. They don't feel like nobody cares.

At this school, teachers are always conscious of the fact that they are there for the students, and not the other way around. These people know that learning is a cooperative process, and not a punitive one. And teachers at the tabula rasa school don't perceive teaching as a burden; they are excited about the tremendous opportunity they have to positively affect the lives of their students.

Lastly, parents are content to know that their children are spending their days in a safe, challenging learning environment that is making them better learners and human beings. Most important of all, they know that their children are learning more than reading, writing, and arithmetic. Their children are learning about life.

epilogue
A Day at Seahaven School

6:32 AM

Michael yawned and gazed out the bedroom window. Even though it was early in the morning the loop in front of Seahaven School was busy with activity. A dozen kids and adults were loading three school buses with tents, sleeping bags, food and other camping materials. Michael looked on with satisfaction, knowing that the day would be good. A few moments later he was dressed and heading outside.

He took a deep breath of cool morning air and observed the business around him. There was a sense of harmony and well-being present that couldn't be described, but could be felt in every bone of his body. Michael and the other kids had always liked the all-school trips they took every few weeks. Today, they were heading to the Fort Johnston campgrounds and wouldn't be back until tomorrow evening.

Michael glanced around and noticed the new boy leaning against one of the buses, jacket tight around himself and hands in pockets. There was a look of dejection and nervousness about him. He looked as if he felt very out of place. The boy looked as if he could use some companionship, so Michael decided to stroll over and say hello.
Halfway there he was intercepted by Jolene Higgins, one of the moms going on the trip. "Michael, could you help me with these grocery bags?"

"Sure, Mrs. H." Ten minutes later the group of thirty-five students, five faculty members and ten parents departed in two buses, heading north on Highway 120.

9:12 AM
They arrived at the campground a few hours later and unloaded the buses. Like the loading process, this one was a cooperative effort. After unpacking the supplies and setting up a base, the kids were invited to participate in an exercise by Chris Taylor, Seahaven’s math teacher. Eleven students accepted his offer while the others chose to stay at the camp and get settled.

The group of students accompanied Chris to the creek a short distance away. There Chris outlined the task at hand.

"Here’s the deal," he explained, pointing across the creek. "We need to get over to the other side and we only have this equipment to work with." On the ground in front of him were several lengths of rope, a dozen short boards and a few basic tools.

The kids were intrigued, so they began attempting to construct a model that would stretch the bridge from one side to the other. After about fifteen minutes of meager progress, Chris spoke up.

"If you want, I have a few math formulas that might be of assistance." He quickly sketched out the information on a small chalkboard. The figures proved to be useful within an hour the bridge had been constructed and was in use.

3:23 PM
Later in the day, Susan Nichols, the school’s history and social studies teacher, began showing the students a sketchbook about Native American food. After about fifteen minutes, the crowd of interested persons had grown to about twenty. Shortly thereafter Susan voiced an idea.

"I have some of the materials for a Native American meal. If you like, we can make a traditional meal." The group voiced their approval.

"Great. However, there are still some things that we need. Fortunately, they can be found in the wilderness around us." She explained what they needed and how to find it. The group broke up and began searching for the materials.

An hour later, they had gathered a variety of berries, wild carrots, roots and other natural foods. Susan showed them how the food was to be prepared and several cooking pits were dug. The components were cooked in the traditional way and the entire camping group took part in their consumption. As they sat around the campfire feeling warm and well fed, Susan began to talk about the specific Indian tribe from which the meal’s inspiration had come from.

... but anyway, it’s pretty boring and you probably don’t want to hear about it, she finished. Several kids around the fire protested. Michael was the first to speak up.
Actually, Susan, I was just getting into it. Keep going, please. The other kids concurred his opinion and she was persuaded to continue with her story. She told them about the Iroquois Indians who lived in the Northeastern United States before the arrival of the European settlers. They were amazed to find out that the Iroquois Nation, comprising several different Indian tribes, was practicing democracy long before the white man came to North America. The students were fascinated by what she had to say, and soon were asking many questions.

So wait a minute. The Iroquois Indians were the ones who wrote the predecessor to the Constitution of the United States?

Essentially, yes. It's sad to note that they aren't really credited for many of these ideas. Originally, the settlers and the Iroquois traded extensively. Yet, despite their peaceful appearance, the Iroquois were ferocious warriors. There's this story about a band of 200 warriors engaging over 1,500 British troops in what is now New Jersey, but it's really pretty boring. The combined voices of thirty-five kids responded immediately. "SUSAN. . ."

7:09 PM

Carlos Hernandez had studied psychology and sociology in college, and he enjoyed making these sciences truly useful to the kids and parents. After Susan's stories had slowed down, he asked if anybody was interested in taking a walk to a fort down the coast about half a mile. 1 The response was emphatically positive.

"Okay, there are some rules. Everybody must pair off. And one of the people in each pair must wear a blindfold." There was the murmur in interest—their curiosity had been piqued. The goal is trust.

Every person grabbed a partner—the adults were mixed up within the pairs, making for some unusual situations. Some of the parents felt a little odd being led around by a child, but they were generally accepting.

The group set off down a trail, each couple including one guide and his or her blindfolded partner. They moved along the coastal path and the guides were encouraged to have their comrade touch the tree bark, feel the barnacles on the rocks and caress the flowers beside the path. The blind companion was in a completely trusting position. They arrived a short while later and explored the fort by twilight. The band of explorers then returned to the camp, this time reversing the blindfolded role. As they gathered around the fire, they all shared the feelings and sensations of their journey.

Tired, but happy, the kids and adults soon made their way to the numerous tents set up around the camp. As the last people drifted off to sleep, all that could be heard was the quiet crash of waves on the nearby shore.

7:12 AM, the next morning

Michael awoke with a start. There was a boisterous commotion coming from outside the tent. Somebody was bellowing loudly in a language he couldn't understand. He crawled out of his sleeping
bag and looked out the tent with his three other friends. It was
morning outside and standing in the middle of the camp was a
gathering of what looked like Indians. But this was no ordinary
group—they were all magnificently dressed with brilliant feathers,
face paint, and dazzling garments. Three disheveled teachers
stumbled out of their tents and approached the Indians and began to
talk to them in low tones. After a few minutes, Susan spoke.
"They say that we must go with them. Hurry, get dressed." Michael
looked at the others in his tent and they all shrugged. A
moment later the whole school group had assembled in the center of
the camp. Susan was translating.
"Apparently these folks are from the Tulalip Indian tribe and
they insist that we must follow them." With that, the leader,
attired in deerskin, feathers and beads, headed toward the
seashore. The group of campers followed.
Parked on the beach were six dugout canoes.
"He says that we should all get into a canoe and grab a paddle."
They all boarded and picked up a paddle. With a whooping cry
that echoed in the morning air, the leaders dugout cast off into
the ocean while the others followed. Michael was seated behind
Susan in the lead canoe. As he paddled he noticed that the leader,
who was seated behind him at the rear, was watching him. He spoke,
but in a language Michael couldn't comprehend. Fortunately, Susan
translated.
"His name is Tooyalaket, which means White Bird in their
language, and he says that you're paddling wrong." White Bird held
up his own paddle, showing Michael and the rest of the group how he
grasped the handle. He dipped it into the water, edge first, and
then rotated it out, pushing to rear. Michael and the others tried
it and the canoes surged forward. He smiled.
After they had reached the middle of the channel, White Bird
raised his hand and they all stopped paddling. Ahead of the canoes
by about fifty yards several Orca whales surfaced and blew. White
Bird pulled a short stick from the bottom of the dugout and began
to beat on his oar rhythmically, which he had pushed into the
water. The other Indians followed suit, all drumming with the same
cadence. Michael wasn't sure what it was supposed to mean, but he
assumed it had something to do with the Orcas. A moment later,
three of the whales surfaced and blew about five feet away.
Michael was so startled he almost fell out of the boat!
For the next ten minutes the whole Orca pod circled the canoes
as the Indians continued their rhythm.

8:28 AM

The flotilla of dugouts reached the other side of the channel
thirty minutes later. There they found several huts and more
Indians. During the next hour, they were treated to an authentic
Tulalip Indian meal consisting of fire-baked salmon, clams, oysters
and other mussels cooked in a seaweed covered fire pit. Also
included were various greens and berries. It was fantastic.6

The kids soon found out that White Bird and the other Indians
could speak English just fine, and they spent the next few hours
listening to them tell stories of the Tulalip people, their legends and the coming of the white men. Michael and the others were completely enthralled; White Bird had a manner of speaking that was totally absorbing.

Later, after the group had eaten and listened to many stories, Chris stood up and explained that their visit had come to an end. "We should also think about compensating these folks for sharing their time with us. Since they are just starting the construction of a new community center they could use some financial assistance. So, we'll need to head back and get started on some fund raisers so that they can hire some workers." People started to get up.

"Wait a minute." It was Derrick, one of the older kids. "Why don't we help build the community center? It's only 10:30, we could get a lot of it finished if we all helped."

The other kids murmured their approval.

"Hmmm. Now that's an idea. We'll have to talk to the Tulalips and see how they feel about it." Chris, White Bird, and some of the other Indians spoke together in low voices.

After a few minutes of discussion, White Bird looked up and pondered for a moment, contemplating the people situated around him. To the whole group he spoke. "I would be honored if you would share your time with us."

The rest of the day was spent working on the construction of the new Tulalip Indian Community Center. Everyone participated, with the older kids doing the heavy work and the youngsters helping with the lesser tasks. At the end of the day, most of the major external work had been completed; the interior would have to be finished over the next few weeks. The Tulalip Indians were very grateful, as were the kids, parents, and teachers. The school bid farewell to their new friends in the Tulalip tribe and boarded the buses. As the buses drove off, both the Tulalips and the Seahaven kids were left with a sense of happiness and exhaustion.

6:32 PM

During the return trip Michael finally had a chance to sit quietly and think. He smiled, reflecting back on what had happened over the last 48 hours. He felt emotionally full, as if he had just eaten a delicious, wholesome meal. His mind wandered and he recalled the new boy. During the trip Michael had noticed the slow opening of his feelings and thoughts; it was obvious that this adventure had had an invigorating effect on him.

They arrived back at Seahaven later that evening and as Michael stepped off the bus he saw the new boy walking ahead of him toward the bunkhouse. He trotted to catch up.

"Hi there, I'm Michael." The new boy surprised him with his response, smiling at him.

"Hello, my name is David, David Pierson."

"Sorry I didn't have a chance to say hello earlier. Hey, what did you think of the trip? Did you have a good time?"

David thought for a moment and then laughed.

I don't know what to say. I've never felt like this before. It's a little disappointing to know that tonight we'll go to sleep
"and the fun will end."

Michael finished the sentence for him.
"... until tomorrow."

Notes

1. The buses were owned by the school.
2. Chris spent three hours preparing the exercise, and three hours buying the supplies.
3. Susan spent two hours preparing her activity, and six hours locating and purchasing the ingredients.
4. Planned beforehand by Carlos and a few of the parents.
5. Susan had coordinated the entire Tulalip Indian incident a few weeks earlier, when the school had finalized the trip. The "script," canoe trip, and meal were the collaboration of Susan and John Tooyalaket (White Bird). The Tulalips had agreed to show up in full regalia and play the part. They were honored when Susan asked if they would share their stories and heritage. In compensation for the whole affair, Susan offered the school's assistance for anything they needed.
6. Chris had spoken to Derrick earlier that day and asked him if he would offer to help with the community center when the time came, assuming that nobody else spoke up before Derrick did. Derrick agreed.
7. Several parents had stayed behind at the camp, and Susan had arranged for them to pack up the camp gear and drive the buses over to the other side of the passage. It took one hour to clean up, and two hours to drive.