SPECTRUM 2009

SAINT MARY'S COLLEGE
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SPECTRUM

A Journal of Student Writing

Saint Mary's College of California

2009
Now in its twenty-third year, Spectrum honors all Saint Mary’s students who take writing seriously, who, in response to course assignments, write essays that are original, thoughtful, and persuasive. We thank the dedicated judges who selected seven essays for prizes and honorable mention out of seventy-nine essays submitted:

Norman Bedford  
Katherine Field  
Bob Gardner  
Alicia Signori  
Mindy Thomas  
Mary Volmer

Thank you also to all the students who submitted excellent essays and all the faculty members who encouraged students to submit their best work. Enjoy the essays in this issue of Spectrum:

- Alex Bettencourt’s First Prize Essay discusses how multiple fragmented narratives and time shifts force readers to seek meaning actively.
- In his Second Prize Essay, Robert Rey Rivera points to core ideas shared by Thoreau and Newman.
- Michael Niebur writes of what it means to be a member of a family of hunters in his Third Prize Essay.
- “While these strides are significant, progress is not equality,” Aurelia Alston argues in an investigation of racism in America judged the Best Freshman Essay for 2008-09.
- Rosealinda Carillo examines how the implied reader and the resisting reader “become one in the same” in a text by Alice Walker.
- “The Irish Enigma” demonstrates that a Jan Term travel course can be both entertaining and educational as Jessica Hitchens learns about four things loved by the Irish: storytelling, silent reflection, America, and Ireland itself.
- “The madness of King Lear is civilization’s dreadful past, and the gospel of Galileo’s The Starry Messenger is its hope for a better future,” writes Thomas Reynolds.
The cover art is by Myha Do, MFA, Saint Mary's College, 2009. Myha writes, "I painted this piece when I took Christopher Sindt's Modernism class at Saint Mary's College. It is a collage of many of the modern manifestos that were discussed and touched upon in that class."

Special thanks to Gail Drexler for coordinating the contest, helping with production of the journal, and innumerable other services without which Spectrum would not exist.

We hope this collection of essays inspires more fine writing from its readers. Please place 2009-2010 submissions in the zebra-striped box on the third floor of Dante Hall, or send them by campus mail or as email attachments to Professor Dave DeRose (dderose@stmarys-ca.edu). All submissions should include a cover sheet with the author's name, phone number, and email address, and the name of the faculty member and course for which the essay was written.

For the English Department,
Carol Beran
Faculty Moderator, Spectrum 2009
Spectrum 2009

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Narrative and Community in William Faulkner’s *Light in August*

by Alex Bettencourt

When reading William Faulkner’s *Light in August* we may feel a sense of frustration because we are used to the stable objective narrative which provides a linear explanation of plot. Scott Romine, author of *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, also recognizes the comfort of a traditional narrative format in which the speaker contains a “coherent narrating subject that frames and attempts to stabilize the social contradictions with which it is confronted” (151). *Light in August* challenges this traditional format and does not confront cultural and social issues in an obvious way. Instead, the third person narration is combined and fragmented with multiple narratives with time shifts leaving hermeneutic gaps. This is meant to challenge readers; we must actively seek connections into the text. Why are fists meant to become clenched when encountering the frequent fragmentation of time and perspectives in the narrative? It forces readers to listen.

Beginning with the narrative of Lena, a stream of consciousness narrative pattern is established and continued throughout the text through several characters. The narrative shifts in focalization function to reflect multiple perspectives of the truth from the community. This effectively brings an abundant number of perceptions which readers are left to choose from to interpret reality. By focusing on several perspectives of Lena, one can see how the narrative structure and time shifts create a collective understanding of her and how we are placed in the role of a citizen in the community, as if we are *listening* to a collage of gossip.

Introducing Chapter 1 with the pregnant and wandering Lena Grove, the narrator observes how she is sitting beside the road thinking. The narrative follows with a glimpse into her
internal monologue and the two thought-processes of Lena are offered and distinguished by italics and quotes:

Sitting beside the road, watching the wagon mount the hill toward her, Lena thinks, 'I have come from Alabama: a fur piece. All the way from Alabama a-walking. A fur piece.' Thinking, although I have not been quite a month on the road I am already in Mississippi, further from home than I have ever been before. I am no further from Doane's Mill than I have ever been since I was twelve years old. (Faulkner 31)

There is a deliberate distinction between the thoughts focused on Lena's fur piece, and Lena's recognition of her distance from Doane's mill. Both emphasize two different thought processes, but the narrative does not offer clear distinctions between the two; readers have to scrutinize the difference actively. In Lena's first thoughts, she realizes she has come all the way from Alabama "a-walking." The narrative specifically surrounds this with quotes, hinting those thoughts are read as Lena's outward or conscious reflections. Because the narrative provides this distinction from the italics, we are forced to read closely and listen to Lena focus on the distance she has traveled from Alabama. Reading and listening to her, readers learn instantly that Lena has a southern background that is emphasized with the twang associated in the colloquial word, "a-walking." Then, the narrative deliberately points out Lena is "Thinking," and transitions into italics, "'a fur piece.' Thinking although I have not been . . ." (3). The adamant change in punctuation mimics a stream of consciousness narrative and establishes a perspective clearly focalized from the viewpoint of Lena. Intimacy between Lena and readers is created with the glimpse into her internal monologue. This pattern of stream of consciousness narrative is established immediately and repeated throughout the novel from other narratives. It leads to recognition of whose interpretation of the truth is being read.

As soon as we become comfortable reading through Lena's perspective and about her background, we are pulled out of her shoes and the narration emphasizes setting. Initially, we read the description of Lena objectively as she decides to sit down on top of a hill and hears a wagon creep towards her: "She went on out of sight, walking slowly . . . until she reached the top of the hill a mile beyond. Then she sat down on the ditchbank, with her feet in the shallow ditch,
and removed the shoes. After a while she began to hear the wagon. She heard it for some time, then it came into sight, mounting the hill" (8). Readers become observers, gazing at her every move waiting for the wagon, which hints towards a subjective perspective because of the strong focus to her every action. This ignites a realization we have already read about Lena waiting for the wagon in the opening scene. It doesn't completely set in until listening for the wagon is emphasized ("she heard it for some time"). The idea of hearing before seeing is highlighted and brings more subjectivity from the narrator. As time shifts in Light in August become apparent, conflicts in sequential narrative are recognized and speculated upon.

Faulkner builds this speculation into the narrative because it exemplifies how "structural freedom in composing Light in August, allows each narrative sequence to expand according to its own inherent logic" (Millgate 34). Following the description of Lena waiting for the wagon, the narrative describes it creeping up the hill. The narrative illustrates a definite biased perspective with its over-determined use of language:

"It seems to hang suspended in the middle distance forever and forever, so infinitesimal is its progress, like a shabby bead upon the mild red string of road, so much so is this that in the watching of it the eye loses it as sight and sense drowsily merge and blend, like the road itself with all the peaceful monotonous changes between darkness and day, like already measured thread being rewound into a spool." (Faulkner 8)

Merging imagery of darkness at night with daytime combines with an infinite quality of a "thread being rewound on a spool." The deliberate attention to a slow moving wagon builds tension and anticipation for a climax. The narrative forces us, like Lena, to wait patiently for the wagon to come. It illustrates how this scene is "one of those moments of arrested time that he [Faulkner] sought so persistently to explore and understand in terms of the full multiplicity and complexity of all of their implications in the present and all of their antecedents from the past" (Millgate 34). The eternal moment of waiting for the wagon reveals Faulkner's complex exploration of time with narrative. We are re-told the same scene in order to grasp Faulkner's implications of the themes of time and patience throughout Light in August.
The concept of re-telling stories and exploring time through shifts in perspective is pushed into the reader continually. Chapter 6 follows this fragmented narrative before focalizing on Joe Christmas; it vehemently thrusts readers into engaging with the text and investigating the perceptions of time. The narrative begins, “Memory believes before knowing remembers. Believes longer than recollects, longer than knowing even wonders. Knows remembers believes a corridor in a big long garbled cold echoing building of dark red soot bleakened by more chimneys than its own” (119). Does this imply that memory makes the most sense, and takes primary placement before remembering because it creates “Knowing” for the character? The concept of this idea is not grasped until reading the entire novel, but does demonstrate how narrative challenges readers. We are challenged because we are recognized a fellow citizens of the community trying to grasp reality. This passage especially challenges our epistemology by blatantly testing our notion of knowledge. How do we prove or interpret something is real? And which narrative is trusted? These questions of identification and interpretation of the narrative are not out of reach, but cannot be grasped as tightly as we are used to—which is exactly what Faulkner wants.

In *The Narrative Forms of Southern Community*, Romine acknowledges how “Faulkner’s narrative style so radically and systematically dissembles any Cartesian model of epistemology that any decision regarding how knowledge happens is inherently precarious” (156). It would be a mistake to brush the speaker off as a simple third person omniscient narrator because it carries such a complex and abstract tone: “Narrative voice is the single most unstable feature of the novel’s intricate design . . . [Its] complex shifts in focalization and voice work to undermine whatever subjective stability it might seem to offer” (Romine 151). The narrative purposely merges the ideas of remembering, memory, and believing in order to sustain readers’ interest in these themes. The unorthodox speaker calls out to readers for a focus on the blending of “remembering,” “memory,” and “believing.” As the reader continues to encounter more fragments and time shifts in narrative after Lena’s introduction in Chapter 1, and with the merging of concepts in Chapter 6, it is apparent the narrative’s fluidity intertwines with its complexity. Readers
are prepared to treat the narrative as with flexible functions, but also to treat it as an equally im-
portant member of the community. The narrative is both a collective and individual voice.

As readers finally reach Chapter 21, full comprehension of the speaker’s function is
reached. We realize we have had the privilege of perceiving many different voices, but the con-
cluding narrative especially forces readers to listen. We finish the reading as citizens eavesdropping
on gossip from reading through the perspective of a carpenter and his wife. The carpenter
re-tells his encounter with Lena and Byron to his wife:

‘I thought they was husband and wife at first. I just never thought anything about it, ex-
cept to wonder how a young strapping gal like her ever come to take up with him. It
wasn’t anything wrong with him. He looked like a good fellow, the kind that would hold
a job steady and work at the same job a long time without bothering anybody about a
raise neither, long as they let him keep on working. He looked like except when he was at
work, he would just be something around. I just couldn’t imagine anybody, any woman,
knowing that they had ever slept with him, let alone having anything to show folks to
prove it.’ (496)

We are not offered objective truths in the narrative, instead multiple, torn fragments of a
subjective narration. And just as we think the numerous shifts in the narrative might reach a limi-
tation, and the multiple perspectives threaten to shake intimacy to the story, narrative in Light in
August resembles a powerful giant wave. It gains size with communal voices representing the
tides and currents pulling us in as we try to grasp true understanding of the characters and plot.
All voices collectively create a force of nature and culture in the small town of Jefferson. This
force is recognized by Cleanth Brooks in his book, The Yoknapatawpha Country: “the narrative
is a centripetal power strengthened by the community and the circumambient atmosphere (where
we patiently wait for the wagon creeping up the hill), become the essential ether of Faulkner’s
fiction (Brooks 151). “The narrative structures of Light in August demonstrate the deep interde-
pendence between social cohesion” (Romine 150). Again, narrative is a collective echo of the
community giving the reader many voices to listen to. It clouds over any assumptions made
about a reality in the text and focuses on each subject at specific time in order to offer a full un-
derstanding of all sides and opinions of the subject. The time shifts also thwart our perception of one
true reality. It reinforces Faulkner's idea that there is not one single true reality, but numerous versions and interpretations of it.

Works Cited


Alex Bettencourt is 2009 graduate, English Major and Communication minor. Her favorite author is William Faulkner and she credits all of her learning to the dedicated English Department faculty!
On Thoreau’s and Newman’s Concepts of Knowledge

by Robert Rey Rivera

John Henry Newman’s *The Uses of Knowledge* and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walking* both strive toward a stronger comprehension of knowledge. In his text, Newman addresses how crucial it is for knowledge to be sought for its own end and he explores its relation to universities, learning, professional skills, and religion. Newman’s foundational argument that knowledge should be sought as its own end, and is its own reward, is reminiscent of the Aristotelian concept that the highest good is desirable for its own sake. Similarly, Thoreau’s text reflects Aristotelian belief in that walking must be done for its own sake and the woods must be appreciated in the moment that the walker is there. Both authors address a “readiness” for the pursuit of their respective values: walking in nature and the “knowledge” attained from that and knowledge itself. Stemming from his discussion of walking, Thoreau addresses the common and actual concepts of knowledge in relation to what he calls “Useful Ignorance” (112). Considering the central points of their texts, it seems that both authors share similar core ideas and value knowledge correspondingly. The concept of useful ignorance simultaneously contrasts, critiques, and compliments Newman’s belief in knowledge that is its own end.

In explicating what knowledge is and its use, Newman outlines his concept of knowledge through the lens of the University. His basis of reasoning is that knowledge is its own end in that any kind of knowledge is its own reward (11). His ideal vision of a “University” is a place that teaches universal knowledge, whose object is intellectual, and serves to diffuse and extend knowledge, not “advance” it (1). The university must provide a “Liberal” education in which all sciences are present for study so that “they complete, correct, [and] balance each other” (8). If there is a diversity of sciences in which students pursue their own fields yet live together, then
“learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other” (10). From this, a “habit of mind” or “philosophical habit” is born (10). This habit of the mind entails that students have a natural tendency of intellectual questioning and examination through “exercises of the mind, of reason, of reflection” whose characteristics are “freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom” (10). Thus, the ultimate goal of the sciences taught in liberal education at a University is to seek knowledge for its own sake; the goal is truth. Newman further explains that Reason “informs,” or guides knowledge fecundity. As the knowledge is “resolved,” it develops into “philosophy,” in which case it is Liberal Knowledge (19). This philosophical knowledge rises toward general ideas; thus it seeks universal truth and is termed useful knowledge. He makes a second distinction of “Useful Knowledge,” which is exhausted upon what is particular and external (19). Useful Knowledge has a mechanical end, since it loses the scope of universal truth and internal integration of newfound knowledge by dealing with specific, purpose driven learning that works outwardly instead of pursuing self-enlightenment. Thus, Newman concludes that

knowledge is a state or condition of mind; and since cultivation of mind is surely worth seeking for its own sake, we are thus brought once more to the conclusion, which the words “Liberal” and the word “Philosophy” have already suggested, that there is a knowledge, which is desirable, though nothing come of it, as being of itself a treasure, and a sufficient remuneration of years of labour. (21)

Newman believes that true knowledge is free of Church influence or any secondary ends, for it seeks expansion of the mind through universal truth which is its beautiful, desirable reward. The philosophical end of Liberal Knowledge distinguishes it from Religious Knowledge and Useful Knowledge whose end is directed toward secular objects, such as attaining a job to earn money. Considering Saint Mary’s College, the Collegiate Seminar Courses are a direct example of philosophical knowledge, while the studies conducted in a business course are examples of Useful Knowledge, since the end is not knowledge in itself, but secular success.

In his text, Thoreau makes an “extreme, emphatic” statement in the defense of nature and the art of walking (71). He makes the case for “sauntering,” in which one is “equally at home
everywhere" (72) and "absolutely free of all worldly engagements" (74). For Thoreau, each walk is a personal crusade toward the Holy Land and wildness found only in nature. The walk must be devoid of a specific goal or destination and is crucial to the preservation of his health and spirits, for he believes that "a man's health requires as many acres of meadow to his prospect as his farm does loads of muck" (100). In addition, one must walk like a camel, "which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when walking" because as camels chew on their cud, so must humans "chew" on their thoughts (77). True walkers must be in the moment, both physically and mentally present, yet they ought to be in contemplation. Walkers should not be thinking about their societal responsibilities but ought to have the type of self-reflection that is only possible while in nature.

For Thoreau, true freedom and goodness are found in nature, and in man's return to his natural life. He explains this when he says: "I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (71). When he states, "in short, all good things are wild and free," Thoreau equates Nature (wildness) with "true" or "real" freedom (106). Continuing his defense of nature over society and civilization, Thoreau explains that some people still have wildness in them and should not be tamed, as the majority of people have been by their inherited disposition toward civilized behavior because not all men are equally fit for society (108). Furthermore, he believes that we are weaned too early from nature, our "mother," to a society, a culture, exclusively comprised of humans, which causes us to be little men while we should still be growing. Segueing into his discussion on knowledge, Thoreau declares, "I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, anymore than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports" (111).
Thoreau desires that the majority of humans, the mind of man, and nature be left uncultivated, in their natural, wild state, free from the confines of society. Only a fraction will be plowed by society while the majority will be left alone to provide immediate natural freedom, but also to afford the "mould," or protective shield, against the future of society's influence (111). In contrast, the characteristics of Newman's "habit of the mind" which are "freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom" (10), are met through the very taming of man's inherent wildness. Ultimately, both men seek the freedom that arises from the expansion of one's knowledge. Nevertheless, Thoreau reaches his freedom through extreme appreciation and pursuit of natural wildness, while Newman attains freedom through extremely civilized education. Newman's habit of the mind also tames humans and produces what Thoreau would consider man's civil, or cultural, concept of freedom which is fraudulent, processed, and manufactured.

Considering the relentless move toward society away from the natural world, Thoreau critiques the goals of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, which asserts that knowledge is power as well as the contemporary concept and value of so-called knowledge (112). Equally important to him, Thoreau believes there should be a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance, otherwise called "Beautiful Knowledge" (112). Since the "knowledge" that most people embrace is nothing more than positive ignorance, Thoreau points out that "most so-called knowledge" is nothing more than "a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantage of our actual ignorance" (112). In other words, he is frustrated with people's displays of positive ignorance in which they may know something about a certain topic, yet claim that they know everything about it. These people are the truly ignorant for they boast of having knowledge and act as "know-it-alls" while they actually know rather little; thus, they rob themselves of the opportunity of actual ignorance—useful ignorance. To clarify: fake, boastful knowledge is positive ignorance in that one claims to know it all while actually knowing very little. In this scheme, people wrongly call this positive ignorance "knowledge" while incorrectly referring to ignorance as "negative knowledge." Yet to Thoreau, that very ignorance, wrongly called negative know-
ledge, is beautiful because the person either admittedly knows nothing about a topic or the person
knows nothing and is conscious that he knows nothing (112-13). The rare person who knows
nothing and is not only aware of it, but even admits he knows nothing is the person who Thoreau
values (113). This person who knows nothing and acknowledges it is the candidate for useful
ignorance because he is the person who is ready and willing to learn more. This person, who
Thoreau values and is himself, realizes that no man can ever grasp the ever growing plethora of
knowledge in the universe. Thoreau himself embodies the person of useful ignorance because his
desire for knowledge is sporadic while his desire to immerse himself in the unknown is perma-
nent. Consequently, he concludes:

The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do
not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and
grand surprise on a sudden revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge
before,—a discovery that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of
in our philosophy. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun. Man cannot know in any
higher sense than this, any more than he can look serenely and with impunity in the face
of the sun. (113)

The term “Sympathy with Intelligence” describes a higher form of knowledge in which one un-
derstands that he knows he does not know everything, yet does know he is intelligent. Thus, he
seeks to know more and expand his limited knowledge toward universal truths, similar to New-
man’s belief. This higher knowledge of sympathy may not be anything more than an eye-opening
realization that the accepted pool of knowledge is extremely lacking because there are things in
the universe which have not been discovered or fully understood. Nonetheless, this “Sympathy
with Intelligence” is still more desirable to Thoreau because having it allows for one’s partial vi-
sion to be cleared and enlightened, thus the lighting up of the mist (113). In essence, humans
have their incomplete wealth of knowledge but should also recognize that they will never know
everything and must struggle to even fathom what is unknown in the world.

For both Thoreau and Newman, one must have a certain degree of readiness to embark on
their respective journeys of knowledge and walking. One must essentially be clear-minded and
free from society’s requirements to be capable of walking and seeking knowledge for the sake of
themselves. For Thoreau, one must be ready to revoke worldly obligations to society. He states, “If you are ready to leave your father and mother, and brother and sister, and wife and child and friends, and never see them again,—if you have paid your debts, and made your will, and settled all your affairs, and are a free man, then you are ready for a walk” (73). One must not run away from societal responsibilities but must work to render himself free of those imposed bonds that he accepts. Similarly for Newman, one must be ready for the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, which is the primary form of mental excellence. Newman agrees with Cicero’s belief that after our physical wants (or instinctual, animal needs) are met, the search for truth is sought out—knowledge. Citing the great orator, Newman states that once our physical and political needs are met and we are free from responsibilities, then we are “in a condition for ‘desiring to see, to hear, and to learn’” (13). So for both men, obligations and inherent needs must be fulfilled to enable a person truly to be ready to take up the endeavors they describe.

The crucial importance for one’s readiness lies in the basis of their arguments: one must do an action for the sake of the action and the act must be its own reward in and of itself. Newman reflects the Aristotelian concept of doing something for the sake of itself in his explicit explanation that knowledge is desirable for the sake of itself. Knowledge is capable of being its own end because it is the search for truth, universal truth, which is its own reward as a fulfillment of natural, human tendency to know. As a result, one must not pursue knowledge to gain a career, a better standing in society, or to pursue mechanical knowledge, which focuses on particular and external things instead of universal truths. Likewise, Thoreau explains that sometimes he walks into the woods bodily, yet he is not there in spirit because his mind is still preoccupied with his societal obligations as he sometimes “cannot easily shake off the village” (78). Thus, he is “out of his senses,” to which he questions: “what business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?” (79). Thoreau is disgusted that during his walks, his thoughts are sometimes “so implicated even in what are called good works” that he is not living in the moment, not relishing nature, and not walking for the sake of walking.
Contrasting Thoreau, Newman believes that to be mistaken, to err, to be ignorant or deceived “is both an evil and a disgrace” (13). Thoreau praises an open, honest ignorance which he calls “Useful Ignorance” and a desire to be enlightened which he calls “Sympathy with Intelligence.” Conversely, Newman believes that one must not be shrouded in ignorance and must strive toward knowledge and not accept his ignorance because “not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the Universe is the boast, or at least the ambition of Philosophy” (20). In this sense, Newman would disagree with Useful Ignorance because it seems that he does not allow any leeway for one to be ignorant or else one is considered evil, disgraceful, slavish, and childish. Yet, it seems that Newman would agree with Thoreau’s concept of Useful Ignorance to a certain extent because a person in this condition accepts his or her ignorance, does not feign fraudulent knowledge, and is ready and willing to know more. Thus, the person’s ignorance is useful because it opens the mind toward the unknown instead of limiting the mind to boastful, relatively miniscule knowledge.

Interestingly, Newman’s idyllic model of a University is a fitting example of useful ignorance in practice. In Newman’s University, a tremendous range of studies must be present in which students focus on their primary science, yet by living amongst each other, they compliment, correct, and enlighten each person’s limited knowledge. For example, a Saint Mary’s College student majoring in English lives and learns among Calculus majors, Business majors, Kinesiology majors, and so forth. These students of different majors literally live together, learn together, and must attend general education classes and Collegiate Seminar, which are outside of their main focus of study and whose purpose is to expand their knowledge. In their mutual and independent pursuit of their education, they realize that they are ignorant of much knowledge. Yet through their interaction, there is what Thoreau finely analogizes as “lighting up of the mist by the sun” (113). In other words, their Useful Ignorance, their Sympathy with Intelligence benefits their ultimate pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in Newman’s Liberal Education in a University. Furthermore, despite Thoreau’s rampant condemnation of society in the face of dying
appreciation of nature, it seems that he would agree with Newman’s ideal explanation of a university’s purpose. Even so, Thoreau would not agree with Newman’s idea of philosophy and its inherent civility.

Herein lies Thoreau’s critique of Newman: *Walking* is a proclamation against boastful, pompous humans who have lost sight of natural beauty and claim that they know everything within their philosophy. Newman’s philosophy purports the boast and ambition of mapping out the Universe, which directly contrasts Thoreau’s condemnation against positive ignorance. It seems that Newman could be the spokesman for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge while Thoreau could be the spokesman for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance. Both men seek to know and experience, thus they work to actively learn more even though they arrive at freedom and truth conversely. For Thoreau, we do not and cannot yet know everything in the Universe, so it would be preposterous to attempt the haughty act of trying to map it out. Yet for Newman, ignorance is inexcusable except for slaves and children. Newman is driven to high intellectualism, or philosophy beyond human’s natural inclination toward knowledge, the pursuit of truth. As Thoreau states, we must admit that we are incapable of mapping out the Universe, let alone begin to fathom it. Only then will the mist of arrogance be allowed to burn away and the light of the unknown to shine upon our knowledge-seeking, usefully ignorant minds.

Works Cited


Robert Rey Rivera is vegan, feels passionately about life, and loves being lost in California’s beautiful forests.
Hunter’s Anxiety

by Michael Niebuhr

“I’d rather get my brains blown out in the wild than wait in terror at the slaughterhouse” (Volk). For as long as I can remember, my family has been a family of hunters. Ever since I was young, my dad has taken me along with my two other brothers to stalk game of all types, from pheasant to deer, duck to boar. In those days, whether it was because I was young or the fact that I never got up close to the animals that were killed, hunting seemed an almost harmless practice. A bird would fly up, a gun would go off, and that was about the last I saw of the animal until its meat appeared on my plate sometime in the next few days. In that way, meat taken from hunting was no different than meat bought at the supermarket; either way, I ended up eating it. The real answer couldn’t be farther from the truth. Hunting is actually one of the most complicated moral dilemmas that anyone can take up regarding their food, as it presents a gut-wrenching obligation that any so-called “civilized” person always grapples with: to get food out of hunting, you must kill. To any worthwhile human being, the decision of whether or not to pull the trigger should present some trouble. Does the race that already controls the planet have the right to kill a practically defenseless animal? After all, people can have all the food they want from the deli at the supermarket without having to kill anything. But that meat had to come from somewhere, so doesn’t the deli’s customer have an indirect role in the death of the animal anyway? Evidently, the choices are not as easy as they seem, and anyone who hunts has run across this dilemma at least once. Making the choice to kill personally in order to eat constantly tests both the conscience and the will, and puts the hunter in an ethical pickle.

I first ran up against hunting’s ethical wall one afternoon in early September. I was a little over fifteen when I went dove hunting with my dad for the first time, and at that point, I hadn’t killed anything before. Sure, there had been a few deer stalkings near Red Bluff, but none
of them had proved fruitful. They all ended up with me walking around in the country with a gun for six hours a day, looking like some unfortunate militiaman who had lost his brigade. So going into this dove hunt, I didn't know just how world-shaking it would be. The trip started out fine enough, with us driving in to an oak-canopied clearing to meet the rest of the group that was hunting with us. We all talked, laughed, and told stories into the night, and eventually headed off to our tents to prepare themselves for the next day's hunt.

The next day, the group loaded their shotguns and marched out to a low pond in a valley to wait for the birds. It was a beautiful day by any standard, and we hadn't waited very long before scattered gunshots filled the air in the distance, and the leftover pellets from shells trickled out of the sky and into the trees around us. Eventually, the birds began appearing overhead, but none were in the area I was covering. Then, a single dove came from the left; apparently the other hunters had missed it. My stomach leapt into my throat as I raised my shotgun to my shoulder, looking down the barrel, keeping ahead of the bird so the shot wouldn't fall behind it. Holding my breath, I pulled the trigger. I didn't hear the shot, and the dove fell from the sky with only the ringing in my ears to see it down, tumbling out of view behind a ridge at the edge of the pond. At that moment, all I felt was a kind of shocked satisfaction; it had all happened so quickly. But I had accomplished my goal. As my dad and older brother shouted congratulations from across the pond, I felt I had come of age. The next task was retrieving the bird. I walked around the pond, gun resting on my shoulder, and walked over the ridge. And that is where I saw my first kill as a hunter. It was still alive. The shot I took must have been a little long, because the dove wasn't killed in the air. Thinking of the graceful brown bird that had just flitted in front of my view a minute ago, I was struck by what I now saw lying a few feet from my boots. The dove's chest heaved up and down in quivering breaths, and its entire body shook with the effort of bringing air into its lungs. As I stepped closer, I saw that the shotgun pellets had shot both of its eyes out, and there were two red droplets in their place. One leg was at an awkward angle, probably as a result of the fall, and several red dots had begun to appear where the bird had been hit. Already, regret
was beginning to flood my system, but I knew that I had to stop the bird from suffering any more than it already had. So, I tried to grab hold of it to knock it out, but every time I touched it, the dove flapped wildly and threw itself from my grip. Eventually, all I could do was look on powerlessly and wait for the bird to die. As I stood there, I couldn't believe that the entire scene was my doing. Thoughts reeled through my head about why I had to kill this dove. I could have let it go; I could have missed. I could have done anything other than what caused the poor animal to be in the state I was looking at now. Finally, the bird stopped shaking, and lay still on the ground. The whole thing was over in about two minutes, but it seemed as if I had been behind that ridge for an eternity. No one was able to see what happened, so when asked why I took so long, I just said that I had trouble finding the bird in the brush. In truth, I actually had trouble finding a good reason for taking a shot at the bird in the first place.

That hunting would have such a wide spectrum of emotions attached to it is something extremely strange. Humans enjoy the thrill of the hunt, but it seems that we can't take the inevitable result of it: the death of the quarry. There is a tug of war between not wanting to go home empty handed, and our human empathy towards the prey. Craig Volk summed up the idea perfectly when he wrote in the magazine *Northern Exposure*, “The killing was the best part. It was the dying I couldn't take” (“A-Hunting”). Hunting produces a sort of primitive excitement that can't be achieved doing anything else. When Volk says that the killing was the best part, he's talking about everything that leads up to, and includes, the shot that connects with the prey; and it really is the best part. Hunting forces a person to step back into the shoes of his ancestors, even if the experience isn't as crucial to survival as it once was. The ancient struggle between man and nature is reenacted for a brief time, and because of some sort of physiological atavism, the experience is nothing short of thrilling. Out in the field, the world seems to change. Every far-off stump looks like some animal's hide, and you could swear that there are antlers in every low-hanging patch of twisted branches. All of the senses become sharper; you can see further, hear better, and move more smoothly, and any cracking twig or rustling leaf makes a bit of adrenaline
rush through your veins. When the opportunity comes to take a shot, there isn’t any time for hesitation; the only thing that matters is accomplishing a goal. Everything up until the shot has no consequences for the hunter. However, after pulling the trigger, everything changes. The death of another creature is now directly on his hands. Volk’s words, “it was the dying I couldn’t take,” refer to his having to face the fact that success comes at the cost of a life.

Coming face to face with killing is something that hunting forces people to do. However, having to experience how an animal turns into a meal is by no means all negative. Even if it does expose the eaters to a more grotesque vision of the meat on their plates, at least they know the built-in consequences of their food choices. Many supermarket-goers will buy meat from a shrink-wrapped package, because the connection between “meat” and “animal” is barely drawn when looking at the sterile, perfectly-wrapped specimen that a supermarket steak is. Customers don’t have to deal with the raising, slaughtering, or butchering of the animal they end up eating. They are completely separated from all it takes to put a piece of meat on their plate; and although the old adage “ignorance is bliss” may hold true here (it’s easier to eat meat without thinking about where it came from than it is to find out how it got there), is it right to eat an animal without the knowledge to appreciate its sacrifice?

If nothing else, hunting makes its partakers lose their “meat apathy.” In other words, hunters learn to be grateful for what the animal gives them. True, there are “hunters” who kill animals for sport as opposed to food, but much like European and American football, these two types of hunters are similar in name only. Killing for the sake of killing isn’t hunting; it’s psychotic. Sport hunters seldom use any part of the animal they kill aside from the head that ends up mounted on a wall somewhere. This goes against one of the most important tenets of an honest hunter, which is to use as much of what you kill as possible. My dad was always followed the “use what you kill” rule to a tee, and demanded that everyone around him follow it, too. Whenever he’d shoot a deer, he would use to meat for steaks, the organs for appetizers, and the bones for stew broths. He probably would have made rugs out of the fur if Mom had let him. Accord-
ing to him, using up the animal was just the right thing to do. If you don’t use what the animal has to offer, what was the point of killing it in the first place? I remember a time when, at a dove hunt, one of the kids shot a woodpecker with a BB gun and ended up killing it. Dad didn’t just give the boy a talking-to; he made him field dress the bird and eat it for dinner. Treating animals with respect was serious business with Dad, and anyone who crossed a line with nature had to deal with him. But as long as you followed his two rules (use what you kill, and respect nature) in the field, things would go just fine.

Unfortunately, most of America doesn’t see things from my dad’s point of view when it comes to supplying the country with meat. Whenever someone who eats meat asks me, “How can you actually kill an animal?” I have to ask, “How can you not?” The fact is, the quality of life afforded to the average American steer is pathetic compared to any animal in the wild. Wild animals roam free with plenty of space; industrial steers are squeezed into crowded pens. Wild animals enjoy a relatively healthy life; industrial steers live in their own excrement. All across the map, the life of an industrial animal is a horrid existence. It doesn’t have to be a steer; chickens and pigs live in under much of the same conditions. Hunters are frequently ridiculed for being heartless Neanderthals who only cause suffering, but how much suffering is caused by the “civilized” world of industrial meat? It would seem that hunting is, at the very least, the lesser of two evils. Isn’t a free existence in the wild a better life than being confined to a cage with dozens of other animals? By any measure, a wild animal has it better off than industrial fodder American companies send to be mechanically slaughtered every day.

Hunting may sometimes be an ugly pastime, but it forces the hunter to come to terms with the obligations that accompany eating meat. By taking down an animal personally, the hunter is able to appreciate every bit of meat that comes from his prey, and probably enjoy it more, too. In the end, hunting is a better deal for both parties: the animal is given a life in the wild as opposed to a cage, and the hunter gets food knowing that the animal it comes from has lived a decent life.
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The Myth of Post-Racial America

by Aurelia Alston

As I sat in my first period class, listening to my friend and classmate relate an experience, I became enraged. Roosevelt began by claiming that racism existed within the walls of our close-knit Catholic high school, and had a story to prove it. As my senior class piled into the auditorium for assembly, the president of our school approached Roosevelt and his friends, who were black, and said, “Nice not to be at the back of the bus anymore, ey guys?” A man I looked up to, a school president, was so ignorant. And as the bell rang, classmates resisted the notion, saying that racism couldn’t exist in our school—how easy to ignore reality if you don’t have to overcome prejudice every day.

Since Barack Obama has been elected, we hear much media and academic discussion regarding equality and prejudice. Many argue that since the American people elected an African American president, racism does not exist anymore. A post-racial America—an amazing concept—a concept that people believe is reality. Minorities have gained much ground in the past few decades. The black middle class, for example, has grown considerably, and race doesn’t hold people back from gaining economic and governmental power. And indeed, the fact an African American man can be president of the same country that one hundred years ago would have enslaved him is momentous.

While these strides are significant, progress is not equality. The overwhelming statistics convey how unequal America is—for example, a white family of the baby-boom generation will make an average of $650,000 more over a lifetime than their African American counterparts. However, the logic is clearer than numbers and statistics. While President Obama was campaigning for election, he could never bring up the racial inequalities our country faces for fear of being
accused of “playing the race card”—an accusation no white president has faced. In the past election, America went from a white president who barely spoke proper English to an accomplished black president. The fact that someone never discriminated against has the ability to say we live in a post-racial America scares me. White privilege allows such assertions. As a white person, I was never taught to acknowledge the advantage of my skin color—white privilege. And although it is idyllic to believe we live in post-racial America—until equality is reached, post-racial America remains a goal, not a reality.

People who deny racism are unaware of research that documents racial inequalities in America. And while it is easy to write off another’s opinion, numbers—in fear of sounding cliché—do not lie. Tim Wise, one of the most prominent anti-racist writers and activists in the U.S., has dedicated his life to educating Americans about racial realities. In his essay “What Kind Card is Race?” Wise discusses the issue of the race card, and provides compelling evidence:

How many have heard that according to the Justice Department, Black and Latino males are three times more likely than white males to have their vehicles stopped and searched by police, even though white males are over four times more likely to have illegal contraband in our cars on the occasions when we are searched. (7)

It would be very simple to deny that these inequalities happen everywhere in the U.S., but as someone living in the Bay Area, arguably the most liberal area in our country, this statistic makes sense. I cannot count the number of times a white friend has told me that the previous weekend they were caught with marijuana by the police. As someone who has never interacted with illegal drugs, I assumed they would receive punishment at juvenile hall—this was never the case. Often, all that happened was the teen received a slap on the wrist and the parents were notified. I could never understand why so many youths sat in jail or detention centers for drug possession, that is, until I read Wise’s article. From the moment we are born, racial superiority is pounded into our brains—so much so that we cannot even distinguish right from wrong in terms of skin color. Any intelligent human should be able to see the statistics and realize the vast inequalities of our society—but this is not the case. The fact white males are actually more likely to possess contraband,
yet less likely to be punished displays deeply embedded racism. This white-superiority seeps into all aspects of life—not just crime.

If we examine the quality of life minorities have as the direct result of not having white skin, we see this discrimination affects everything from housing, to employment, to everyday activities. For example,

... a 2001 rental audit study in Houston, using forty paired white and black testers, found that racial discrimination occurred in 80 percent of the attempts to rent by the black testers. This racial mistreatment took the form of openly stated discriminatory policies, misinformation about the housing, and differential treatment in regard to appointments, applications, and terms of contracts. (Feagin and Mckinney)

Affordable housing is hard enough to find as it is, without being turned down because of skin color. This malfeasance is common when a person of color attempts to rent or own a home. But before a home is purchased or an apartment rented, unequal pay and employment becomes an issue: “... one study in Los Angeles found that about 60 percent of more than a thousand black respondents reported discriminatory barriers in workplaces in just the previous year. Those with more education, like many of our respondents, were more likely than those with less income to report such discrimination at their workplaces” (Feagin and Mckinney). Not only is it difficult to obtain decent housing, but moving up in the workplace or earning a salary on par with white peers is daunting. Our country prides itself on equal opportunity—yet nothing about life seems equal in America. Even if we put the disparity of housing and work environment aside, we are still left with the fact that non-white Americans are reminded of their racial inferiority with almost every interaction they have with society:

One recent national survey found that more than 80 percent of the black respondents reported facing hostile racial acts in public spaces or public accommodations; these acts by whites included poor service, racial slurs, fearful or defensive behavior, and lack of respect. Another recent survey of 131 black alumni of the University of Florida found that most had been victims of discrimination while traveling. They experienced discrimination while shopping, dining, or staying in a hotel. (Feagin)

Just to clarify, if we’ve rationalized our way out of treating those of color fairly in terms of housing and employment, we surely can’t ignore that to people of color, every part of life, including
going to the grocery store, is rife with discrimination. Not for one minute of one day do average minority Americans experience freedom from their skin color—not in the home they struggled to obtain, not with the unjust paycheck they receive from their employer, and definitely not when they are trying to dine out or enjoy a day at the mall.

All of this racial inequality talk has taken off with the election of President Barack Obama. Since his historic election, Americans have united in a way. The past eight years have left our country in shambles—war, economic crisis, etc.—but Obama has re-instilled a great deal of faith, and, hopefully, with faith will come progress. The election of a black president, although remarkable, is not the end of racism. Period. During Obama's rigorous campaigning, many racist remarks were made—remarks that revealed just how racist America still is. While covering the Ohio Democratic primary, JoAnn Wypijewski was told by a white man in a bar in Springfield, “I'm not going to vote for the nigger.” Another man from across the bar exclaimed that he knew he wasn't voting for ‘the nigger’” (Rothschild). And according to Kevin Merida of the Washington Post, Obama campaign workers “were startled by the racism they encountered . . . During the Pennsylvania primary, one woman working the phone bank to voters in Susquehanna County, which is 98 percent white, barely got anywhere. One caller told her: ‘Hang that darky from a tree”’ (Rothschild). Aside from the overt racism Obama’s election brought out, there are much more serious deeply rooted issues lurking.

Most troubling is the racism that goes practically unnoticed—no matter how blatant. Obama’s supporters were numerous, and, as the votes show, the majority of the country fell to his undeniable charisma and immense intelligence. One of the coined terms praised his ability to ‘transcend race.’ The question should be, why should he have to transcend race? Shouldn't his character and capability set him apart? But no, people flocked to this idea of racial transcendence. As Wise says,

If whites view Obama as having transcended his blackness, and if this is why we like him so much, we are saying, in effect, that the millions of blacks who haven't transcended theirs will remain a problem. To praise the transcending of blackness, after all, is to imp-
ly that blackness is something negative, something from which one who might otherwise qualify for membership ought to seek escape, and quickly. ("Uh-Obama")

Wise couldn’t be more effective in this comment. Instead of focusing on how non-black Obama is and praising him for it, we should be focusing on how much diligence it took for a minority to get into office. This unrealistic standard that we as a country have now set for all future presidents of color is the most upsetting of all. In the future we will compare all other black, Latino, and Asian presidential prospects to Obama’s racial transcendence—and if they don’t measure up, they will be out of luck and back to being another marginalized minority. What kind of message is this sending? Are people no longer supposed to take pride in their ethnicities? According to Joe Feagin,

Many Latinos and Asian Americans have felt pressured to give up their real identities in order to be as white as they can be. . . . Yet the effects of this conformity to whiteness on them and their children have often been negative, with significant numbers facing great personal distress, painful self-blame, physical or mental illness, or alcoholism and drug addiction. Some have committed suicide as a result of pressures ultimately grounded in white racism. Today, there is often much pressure on Asian American youth to assimilate to whiteness that comes from the media and peer groups, especially in white majority suburbs, as well as from parents or other relatives. (Feagin)

The implications of white-America’s love of Barack Obama and his ability to transcend race are clear: if you aren’t white, you should try to be. In reality, white America does not gain anything from having a president that transcends his blackness—America gains by having the best man or woman in office to do the job. Therefore, all Latino, Asian, and African American citizens are suffering due to ethnocentric tendencies that have no validity.

Barack Obama—intelligent, compassionate, articulate and trustworthy. However, his success points to the reality of racism. Unlike Barack Obama, the majority of non-white people will go through life paid unfairly, struggling to find housing and dealing with racism on a day-to-day basis. Americans have made leaps in the past hundred years in terms of racial equality—and, hopefully; true equality will be reached, but until then, the racism that runs deep in our country’s veins cannot be ignored.
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Aurelia Alston found that her first two semesters at Saint Mary's have broadened her horizons significantly. She plans on being a psychology major, and one day hopes to do research and run her own practice.
“Porn” for Women

by Rosealinda Carrillo

Alice Walker’s enticing and erotic “Porn” could possibly leave a reader feeling a little naughty and in need of a shower by the end of the story. However, it is her writing style and not just her subject matter that is almost more interesting than the taboo topic she tackles. The resisting reader, introduced to us through Judith Fetterley’s book perfectly titled The Resisting Reader, is described as one who rebels against the perspective the text would seem to impose upon the reader. In offering a literary critique of the story “Porn,” there are two perspectives from which a resisting reader could be classified. First, we must identify who the resisting reader of “Porn” might be. It is also imperative to understand that there is also a resisting reader—or in this case resisting watcher—for the actual porn within the story. It is in these two resisting readers that an analysis of Alice Walker’s “Porn” is born.

The story opens by appealing to female readers. It begins, “Like many thoughtful women of the seventies, she had decided women were far more interesting than men” (77). The narrator intentionally states the female character’s opinion of men, which presents the story to the reader as a chit-chat between two girl friends. Although it seems that Walker’s initial intention is keep no gender from feeling like a resisting reader, with flowery and in-depth language such as “distances of stars” and “the touch of his fingers” (78) it is apparent that this story would appeal more to women. “Porn” and the naughty details of the story may initially appeal to men, but the overall themes are more female-friendly. The narrator mentions that the female’s lover’s mind, which she respected, was “also a mind curious about nature and the hidden workings of things” (78). The descriptions of their sexual encounters are soft and sensual:

They would admire the rich candle glow on their wet, delectably earth-toned skins. Sniff the incense—the odor of sandal and redwood. He would carry her in to bed.
In these images, it as though an intimate and sensitive connection needs to be established for the readers so that it could be better understood that it was not just a sexual relationship, but a friendship as well. The implied reader, from these initial instances, would be female. In the descriptions of sexual encounters, only women would be brought into the story by concentrating on the feelings and sensuality of the situations, or more importantly, by focusing on the feelings of the female. The poetic, sensual, and emotional language seems to be inserted by Walker for the purposes of drawing in a female reader.

By excluding much of the imagery of the exact sexual contact between the couple, rather than the feelings, it seems that the resisting reader would be male. If no other part of this story would turn a male reader away, this part would make any man do a confused head-tilt and maybe even put the story down for awhile: “But sex together was incredibly good: like conversation with her women friends. . . . The touch of his fingers—sensitive, wise, exploring the furthest reaches of sensation—were like the tongues of women, talking, questing, searching for the true place, the place which, when touched, has no choice but to respond” (78). To describe sex like a conversation between friends is something that men would almost never do. In a way, it is almost insulting to insinuate that what women do in conversation men can only do in sex. It makes women sound like more intellectual human beings, while men are depicted as primal beings acting only out of instincts. When we are finally presented the male’s perspective in the story, he is portrayed as arrogant and obnoxious. The narrator explains, “He watches her face as he makes expert love to her. He knows his technique is virtually flawless, but he thinks perhaps it can be improved” (83). Although some men might identify with a character like this, to depict the male as egotistical seems like a mechanism to draw women into the story. It’s that moment in the story
when most women would roll their eyes, breathe a collective sigh, and think If I had a nickel for every man that ever thought that. . . .

The second half of the short story offers its audience real pornography, just as the male character is offering the porn to his female lover. As the female reads the descriptions, the audience is also offered her thoughts: “A young blonde girl from Minnesota [probably kidnapped, she thinks, reading] is far from home in New York, lonely and very horny” (80). It is clear that the female is the resisting reader of the porn because it is not appealing to her. These descriptions of sexual encounters are not the same as the ones presented to the audience from the female’s perspective:

In their gratitude for her peacemaking they take her to their place and do everything they can think of to her. She grinning liberally the whole time. Finally they make a sandwich of her: one filling the anus and the other the vagina, so that all that is visible of her body between them is a sliver of white thighs. [And we see that these two pugilists have finally come together on something.] (80)

She attempts to let go of her resisting reader label and embrace the porn that was offered to her, but it does not have the desired effect on her. Instead, her thoughts about the porn make her retreat from the situation more and become distressed during their love-making. The narrator explains, “Now, when he makes love to her, she tries to fit herself into the white-woman, two black men story. But who will she be? The men look like her brothers, Bobo and Charlie. She is disgusted, and worse, bored, by Bobo and Charlie” (83). She is the resisting reader to the pornography, while the male lover is the implied reader.

The male asks his female counterpart, “Did I ever show you [he knew he hadn’t] my porn collection?” (79). It is clear, by the descriptions of the porn that it is meant to appeal to a male. The descriptions are quick, blunt, and offer next to no emotions in between: “they strip and begin to fondle each other” (80). The pornography gives no real feasible plot line and seems to fulfill a male fantasy of the willing female, lonely and up for anything with any guy. The women in the short descriptions seem to be very in control of their sexuality, just as a man would want, and although it is almost empowering for women, the porn women are still being objectified in a way.
only a man could do. It seems that although his porn collection might be a turn-on for himself, it does nothing for the woman and they both lose interest. Instead, he “realizes he is moving in her desperately, as if he is climbing walls of a closed building. As if she reads his mind, she moans encouragingly. But it is a distracted moan – that offends him” (83). No one responds well to the pornography and the sex loses the initial sensuality and intimacy it once had.

Toril Moi, in her book *Sexual/Textual Politics*, explains that the field of feminist literary studies is concerned with “raising the individual consciousness by linking literature to life, particularly to the lived experience of the reader” (43). In terms of Alice Walker’s piece “Porn,” this statement holds true. Walker is taking what sounds like an authentic experience, a man attempting to turn on his lover with porn, and offering it to her audience in a way they could relate to it as females. The actual pornography being offered, however, does not resonate with most women’s lived experiences, as most porn objectifies women as mere sexual objects. Very few people have experiences where young Southern girls decide to explore their sexuality on a strange tourist at a bar. Instead the story ends on a grim note, “He feels himself sliding down the wall that is her body, and expelled from inside her” (84). The implied reader has now become the resisting reader within the story, identifying with the female and trying, but failing, to place herself into such a situation. Despite the final influence of the porn, the implied and resisting reader become one in the same. Some “Porn” is just more effective than other porn.

**Works Cited**


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I was not without preconceived notions when I stepped out of Dublin Airport, blinking into the uncharacteristically sunny sky. My vision of Ireland consisted of green hills, rainbows, and Michael Flatley, and my understanding of what it means to be Irish was all but nonexistent. As Phil, the class’s playful driver and guide, drove us into Dublin I met glittering new buildings and countless cranes crowding the outskirts of the old, grey city. The rest of my trip introduced me to Belfast, Derry, Galway, the Dingle Peninsula, Killarney, Kilkenny, and countless monasteries, castles, and coastlines along the way. At every pub in every town and in every city, I saw an Irishman sitting on a barstool, silently sipping a pint of Guinness. He occupied my thoughts as something surely occupied his. While other Irish people talked and laughed animatedly about us, I sought to read this Irishman by guessing his thoughts. He might have been wistfully dreaming of America or he could have been trying to decide whether he should have another pint of Guinness. Something tells me it was the latter. After a long and happy day of touring the country I sometimes sat next to him and through conversation discovered the hidden gates that led to the core of this man’s Irishness. These conversations, in addition to my exposure to Irish literature and entertainment, politics and history, economy and culture, have led to my understanding of what it means to be Irish. The Irish people are nothing short of enigmatic to the unsuspecting traveler, as to be Irish is to revel in storytelling yet appreciate silent reflection, and to dream of America and yet adore home.

One crucial element to understanding the Irish culture is its celebration of the art of storytelling. Father Pat Moore, in his address to the class at the Devon Inn in Templeglantline, poetically stated that “story is the stuff of dreams.” To the Irish, story does encompass dream-like mythical tales of everlasting youth as well as enchanting tales of America, the mysterious land of
opportunity. However, Irish tales also celebrate the everyday Irish experience and in so doing create art out of the everyday, seemingly boring or mundane objects or chores. Brian Friel, in his introduction to *The Last of the Name*, asserts that "Meentiagh Glen is an important place, not of itself but because an astute man observed it and his observations bestowed an importance on it, elicited its importance from it. And that simultaneous bestowing and eliciting is the act of art" (Friel 4). Because the Irish take time not simply to notice but to celebrate the seemingly small objects, people, and events around them, Irish stories are unique in that they glorify the Irish experience by relating simple events in a very profound style. John McGahern exemplifies this style in his book *By The Lake*, where he relates the everyday life of a village in rural Ireland. In addition to animatedly illustrating the turns of the seasons, McGahern breathes poetic life into his characters through the profundity with which he highlights their thoughts and observations:

Completely alone though a part of the crowd, Mary stood mutely gazing on her son and his wife as if in wonderment how so much time had disappeared and emerged again in such strange and insubstantial forms that were and were not her own.... it was as if she ached to touch and gather in and make whole those scattered years of change. But how can time be gathered in and kissed? There is only flesh. (141)

Any other person standing in this scene may or may not have noticed the look on Mary’s face that must have betrayed her thoughts. However, the observant Irishman such as McGahern will observe, note, and bestow importance upon the look Mary’s face held for little more than an instant, transforming a look into art. Story is indeed the stuff of dreams, but story may also be the stuff of life: storytellers like McGahern enhance life’s beautiful everyday rhythms to create distinctly Irish art.

Intimately connected to the Irish style of storytelling is the Irish love of silent reflection. One may reflect anywhere one finds peace: John B. Keane, in his short story "Matchmaker," facetiously recommends his reader "repair to the shady side of the ditch or the privacy of their own rooms, or indeed the toilet" to "contemplate upon his future with coolness and detachment" (212). In his work "Bohareens" Keane also portrays the bohareen, a path through a peaceful place of abundant natural beauty, as the ideal place of "refuge, a haven for harried souls who like to amble
along safe from the noisome jarring of car horns and the sudden death that their absence precipitates" (207). Keane further observes: “this is the age of racing because people are always in a hurry these days and I doubt if many know where they are really going” (207). This so-called “age of racing” necessitates the need for walks down bohareens or retreats to the “shady side of the ditch” (Keane 212, 207). The Irish love taking advantage of these peaceful times for reflection because it forges an intimate bond between them and their natural surroundings, which provides ample material for stories. Vibrant stories about the ordinary happenings of life can only be revealed through much reflection in the shady side of the ditch. Indeed, one may know the world without traveling very far if one repairs to the shady side of the ditch or indulges in a peaceful walk down the bohareen (McGahern 333). Though the bohareen highlights nature’s abundant beauty and facilitates peaceful reflection, some have found an aching longing to be elsewhere during such reflections.

Many Irish still hold a deep fascination with America, the land where many before them had migrated in the hope of prosperity. Roughly one million Irish migrated to America during the potato famine, when many were “seized by a panic to get out of Ireland” (Green 226). Even in modern Ireland, where many Irish now enjoy higher living standards than those in the mid-nineteenth century, America still beckons from across the Atlantic. During a conversation with Donald, the hotel bartender in County Mayo, he revealed that he has “always wanted to go to America.” He said he has “always held a sort of fascination with the country,” though he hasn’t gone yet. When pressed about why he has never gone, he was reluctant to answer and the conversation shifted to another subject. Sean, a gentleman I met in a pub in Galway, was actually shocked that I would want to come to Ireland in the winter when I could enjoy the “California sun.” When I explained that my Irish heritage inspired me to learn more about the origin of my maternal grandfather, Sean playfully answered, “Well, I’m full Irish and I wanna get the Hell outta here!” While visiting the Blasket Heritage Center on the Dingle Peninsula, I noted a rather poignant quote taken from a book by Muiris O Suilleabhain, Twenty Years A-Growing:
I looked west at the edge of the sky where America should be lying, and I slipped back on the paths of thought. It seemed to me now that the New Island was before me with its fine streets and great high houses, some of them so tall that they scratched the sky; gold and silver out on the ditches and nothing to do but gather it. I see the boys and girls who were once my companions walking the street, laughing brightly and well contented... The tears were rising in my eyes but I did not shed them. As the old saying goes, 'Bitter the tears that fall but more bitter the tears that fall not.'

Donald, Sean, and O Suilleabhain all express the same Irish sentiment of longing for prosperity abroad in America. If their longing inspires such passionate reflections, why don't they leave? What keeps the Irish rooted on the island? Though practical reasons like cost must surely factor into the decision to stay, there is another consideration that keeps the Irish in Ireland: home.

When America and the prospects of prosperity beckon from abroad, the Irish turn a blind eye to temptation and remain at home, grateful to live in their small corner of the world. Rejoicing in the beauty of life's small pleasures at home is the key to happiness, for indeed, "what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his immortal soul?" (Joyce 110, alluding to Mark 8:36). When elegant roads and tall ships call the Irish dreamer abroad (Joyce 246-47), he remembers the bohareens of his youth, he hears the "lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore" in his "deep heart's core" (Yeats 793). The heart and soul of the Irish are in Ireland, not America. Though the Irish, along with many other immigrants, have built America, they know that home is not in the bustling city of New York or in the sunny paradise of California. The Irish know their home, and it is in Ireland.

The beautiful elements of this Irish home are best illustrated through my experience at Betty’s house. After an exhausting and wet bogwalk, I welcomed the gracious reception I received upon entering her home. I recall the kind, smiling faces of Betty and her son Ollie as they excitedly ran from room to room to serve what I now consider the most delicious meal I had in Ireland. Comforting vegetable soup was ladled into a mug, which was best complemented with amazingly delicious soda bread. Puffy, creamy rolls melted in my mouth with slices of deli ham and cheese. Perfectly sweet scones were passed around with butter and strawberry jam. And who could forget the wonderful apple tart? There were other elements to the time spent at Betty’s
beside the meal, though. The moment our class entered her home, she noticed our wet shoes and shivering forms and immediately sought to make everybody as warm as possible. She approached me and asked if she could dry my socks. Betty asked this with the expectation I would say yes, which shocked and surprised me; most hostesses I know would either not ask (let alone even think to pay attention to such a small detail) or ask in the hopes I would say no. However, Betty’s question lies at the heart of Irish hospitality, which I firmly believe is the best in the world. Indeed, how can strangers and family members alike converse and create happy memories if one party is even slightly uncomfortable? This Irish hospitality also lends itself to building the loving and supportive community all Irish people appreciate in their homes. The support and love found in the Irish family teaches the Irish to better appreciate the minutiae of daily life, thus supplying them with beautiful stories in addition to keeping them home in Ireland.

Being Irish means celebrating the beautiful minutiae of daily rituals and loving the small corner of the world in which they have been blessed to live. America, the larger world, always tempts the Irish abroad with distant dreams of glorious prosperity almost too dangerous to contemplate (McGahern 256). When life is but a “puff of wind out on the lake,” what is the use in losing one's soul to gain the world as a “disheveled wandering star” (McGahern 130, Joyce 126, Yeats “Who Goes With Fergus?”)? Better to stay at home in Ireland, with the lake water and bohareas, with the family and friends, than to realize too late that life never grants anyone a chance to turn back Time. To be content extracting the beauty from a seemingly small event and transforming it into a story is to be happy. To be at peace in a small, comfortable spot for reflection is to be happy. And to be happy at home is to be Irish.

Works Cited


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Identity is as much a subjective quality as it is an objective fact. The concept of theatre depends on disengaging from the actor's personage to that of the character. Conversely the aim of science is to explain through experiment-tested hypothesis, and is constrained to maintain objectivity at all times. Yet the same human race that engages in both of these activities still gazes at the same night sky, making constellations and stories from the same set of stars. Or do they? William Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear* exhibits a people in thrall to the traditionally mysterious heavens, but Galileo's *Starry Messenger* shows that truth lies in the mind of man, not the movement of the stars.

The Shakespearean cosmos fills a combined role of controlling and justifying the seemingly insignificant comings and goings of man. The former Duke of Kent best enunciates this when he states that "it is the stars, the stars above us govern our conditions; Else one self mate and make could not beget such different issues" (IV.3.34-46). Obviously Kent is referring to this direction in both mundane and royal life, a power that quietly mocks mortal efforts to circumvent it. However, Kent's brief revelation of Shakespearean astronomy also touches on the justifying function of the heavens. When he contends that "one self mate and make could not beget such different issues," he points the metaphorical finger of discontent at the stars for producing Goneril and Regan. These daughters, the "issue" of Lear, are unlike their sister Cordelia to the point of apparent absurdity. Who would have the power to pervert human nature, heaving parent and progeny into the throes of war? Shakespeare would say the stars, and he manages to kill off those characters who would dare disagree.

Indeed, *King Lear* casts the heavens as more than just stage setting; Shakespeare collectively elevates them to the role of fellow playwright. While all the men and women are merely
players, the cosmos actively guides the action of the play. From the outset, Gloucester remarks that “these late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us” (I.2.104-105). One would logically conclude that a brief, completely foreseeable occlusion of either celestial body should have as much overall effect as an ant falling headlong into the Pacific. However, the characters (or victims) of Shakespeare’s tragedy perceive these changes in the heavens as signs of impending disaster, spiraling out from some perturbation of nature and leaving human “nature scourged by the subsequent events” (I.2.106-107). Shakespeare’s cosmos acts as a window in the dramatic fourth wall, dropping hints to the characters that everything is about to go very much awry.

Away from the stage and across a few centuries, The Starry Messenger does more than observe the heavens overhead: it examines them. This is the crucial difference between this scientific treatment of the empyrean and the theatrical worldview. To illustrate this point, consider the warning Galileo leaves for his readers that “it will be necessary to have a very accurate telescope such as we have described at the beginning of this discourse” (30). The Starry Messenger does not contain casual observations by the layman, and Galileo does not consider serious astronomy to be such a base interest. He presumes that the reader, unlike either the Shakespearean characters or their audience, already has a scholarly familiarity with such matters. More importantly, Galileo’s audience is more willing to invest the resources necessary for research. The Starry Messenger places the overarching cosmos under a microscope (figuratively, of course), out of the dramatizing theatre and the grasp of the uneducated masses.

What Galileo finds populating the firmament is about as cataclysmic as the growth of moss. His optical wandering amongst the heavens sums up as “four stars which wander around Jupiter as does the moon around the earth, while all together trace out a grand revolution about the sun in the space of twelve years” (53). Galileo makes no outlandish claims about Jupiter’s accompanying stars (or moons, as they are now known to be); instead, he presents a neat and orderly theory for the occurrence of these “stars.” Where Shakespeare’s cosmos is rife with drama-
tizing manipulators, *The Starry Messenger* speaks of an all-encompassing sky that is very explainable, logical, and scientific.

Yet there is dissonance in this supposedly clean-cut duality between The Bard and The Father of Astronomy—simply put, not everyone has read his lines. In *King Lear*, the bastard Edmund openly derides cosmic control and condemns it as

> the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behavior, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers [sic] by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars and adulterers by an enforced obedience of planetary influence. (I.2.119-125)

While the rest of *Lear*'s world watches the progress of the heavenly spheres with awful anticipation, Edmund gives the cosmos some rude hand gestures and tries to rewrite the script of life in his own image. Call it hubris, call it empowerment: the unavoidable truth is that Edmund defies the Shakespearean conception of the heavens. Concurrently, Galileo seems to credit a most unscientific influence on his research. He explicitly states that "all these facts were discovered and observed...with the aid of a spyglass which I devised, after first being illuminated by divine grace" (31). This is where the audience should be soundly dumbfounded. *Illumination by divine grace?* If the holy powers that be have directly interceded with Galileo’s science, then surely there must be a nonscientific influence on the celestial machine. Additionally, is this divine grace not another form of celestial control? By his own admission, Galileo puts a barrier between the godly heavens above and the Earth of man below, instilling doubt in his systematic cosmos.

These are all true points, but ultimately moot. While Edmund consciously subverts the celestial paradigm, Shakespeare makes him the tool of the stars anyway. When a nameless gentleman proclaims Goneril and Regan dead, Albany commands him to “produce their bodies, be they alive or dead; this judgment of the heavens that makes us tremble, touches us not with pity” (V.3.235-237). The two daughters’ passing, having died in conflict for Edmund’s love, forces him to admit that he “was contracted to them both. All three now marry in an instant” (V.3.233-234). Goneril and Regan’s intrigues against king and country are thus poetically punished, as
their greed compels them to their own destruction. By playing through his chosen role as the cosmic usurper, Edmund is ultimately the stars' unwitting agent of justice. Shakespeare uses Edmund to demonstrate that freewill is nothing and resistance is futile: the governance of the heavenly spheres is absolute.

But what of Galileo's quandary? Can Earthbound science and empyrean splendor be reconciled? Yes, but not in the expected way. In direct defiance to the contemporary worldview, he aims to "prove the earth to be a wandering body surpassing the moon in splendor, and not the sink of all dull refuse of the universe" (43). Rather than change the facts of the argument, Galileo simply turns the world on end. The Earth is not the static, vulgar prison of humanity. The species is not trapped to this rock, constrained to observe the heavens from afar. The Starry Messenger places the Earth in its rightful place amongst its planetary brethren, transforming it from tainted dross to wondrous marvel. In turn, the people of Earth are elevated from celestial captives to residents of the cosmos, freely watching all and rationally afraid of nothing above. There may be more things in heaven and Earth than is dreamt of in man's philosophy, but The Starry Messenger puts them within the reach of rational understanding. Galileo's stars do not determine the breadth of knowledge or the course of destiny; they are instead guides to draw and grow the dreams and courage of man.

Since these immortal words were penned, the scientific cosmos has undoubtedly taken hold. Man has left his terrestrial cradle to walk on other worlds; eclipses are greeted with delight rather than terror. But has the nature of man adapted at all? Is this not the race that once beheld its world with trepidation? Does humanity not shrink from what it does not understand? Though knowledge has changed the world, it has not changed man. Shakespeare fears the stars, while Galileo reaches for them; nevertheless they are still ruled by the same human condition. The madness of King Lear is civilization's dreadful past, and the gospel of The Starry Messenger is its hope for a better future. This is the union of these two very different texts: the only thing humanity has to fear is neither the stars, nor the unknown, but only fear itself.
Works Cited


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