The Undergraduate 2014

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The Undergraduate
The Undergraduate

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Letter From the Editors

Welcome to the 2014 edition of The Undergraduate, showcasing the breadth of excellent writing in Saint Mary’s College of California’s Collegiate Seminar Program. Published here are the winners of Newman Awards: representative pieces of student written discourse, sources of inspiration and reflection. The act of writing is a partnership between reader and writer, and we are indebted to everyone at Saint Mary’s for keeping the conversation alive.

None of us ever walks alone; there is always an extra set of eyes to watch over us, always an extra pair of hands reaching out and offering help.

The collaborative spirit—the sharing of ideas and the pursuit of meaningful dialogue among students and teachers, classmates and classmates, and colleagues and colleagues—that undergirds the longstanding tradition of Collegiate Seminar informs The Undergraduate publication process.

Every year, judges review student papers with an eye for analytical astuteness, creative composition, and deductive discourse. This is the third year utilizing a staged editing process for finalists, mirroring what occurs when writers work with professional publications. We invited each finalist to meet three times with a Center for Writing Across the Curriculum (CWAC) Writing Adviser to review issues at both the idea and the sentence-level and refine and resubmit the piece. Winning texts were then selected from among the revised pieces. We extend deep appreciation to all the professors who nominated their students’ writing during the 2013 calendar year, and for all those who gave their time as judges during the selection process.

The 2014 edition marks The Undergraduate’s twenty-fourth consecutive year of publication, and the third edition through CWAC. Additionally, this marks the second year students from the practicum course Communication 190 applied principles of copy-editing and design learned in the classroom. Communication 190 fosters a creative environment for Saint Mary’s students to produce this publication, and we are grateful for the collaboration
and support of the Communication Department, particularly Chair Ed Tywon- 
niak, in helping us shape this course.

We are grateful this year for a new collaboration, with the Department of Art and Art History. The student artwork in these pages was selected by a jury of professors, headed by Peter Freund, and we salute both the jury and the student artists for their generous participation. The department welcomes art submissions for the 2015 Undergraduate, due Dec. 5 in the Digital Art Lab.

Nominations for the next Newman Awards—any Seminar, any style of writing—are due on Dec. 31, 2014, to waccenter@stmarys-ca.edu. Please see the back of this journal for guidelines for both art and writing.

The Undergraduate has always been a student-driven journal; it would not exist were it not for the tireless work of students who are CWAC Writing Advisers or enrolled in Communication 190, in addition to the student writers themselves.

The five Newman Award winners produced engaging writing as well as interesting and significant explorations of Seminar texts. We have asked the winners to share their idiosyncratic experiences of writing, submitting, and revising via “Author’s Notes,” which appear here at the closing of their essays, in order to inspire others to keep working toward the most skillful use of language, deepening the exploration of ideas.

Our cover, by senior Madeline Bell, represents the vibrant beauty of all the work contained within these pages. In both Greek and Christian cultures, a peacock’s feathers represented the “all-seeing eyes” of heaven. The peacock also represented resurrection and immortality to the ancient Christians, who adorned tombs with paintings of these same birds. It is in the spirit of the peacock’s timeless beauty that we offer this year’s Undergraduate to all of you: enduring ideas from enduring texts, from courses continuing Saint Mary’s longstanding tradition of developing a diversity of voices—writers, critical thinkers, and citizens of the world. We invite professors and students to use these pieces as models, in the hopes they will inspire everyone to explore, to create, to stretch, to think, to write.

Jeff Chon & Tereza Joy Kramer
Masthead

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“Love Conquers All, Even Us”
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Instructor: Marylin Abildskov

Johnny Imsand
“Captialism: The Relationship Between Employer and Employee”
Seminar 123: Nineteenth- & Twentieth-Century Thought
Instructor: Susan Parr

Michael O’Reilly
“Emancipating the Natural Spirit”
Seminar 123: Nineteenth- & Twentieth-Century Thought
Instructor: Jeanne Foster
## 24th Annual Newman Award Winners

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George Bernard Shaw, the playwright of *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, admits in his letter of apology that “fine art is the subtlest, the most seductive, the most effective instrument of moral propaganda in the world” (185). Indeed, his play is an effective instrument of social commentary on society’s hypocritical treatment of women. Shaw’s performers act out his criticism of how society is compiled of hypocrites who treat the profession of prostitution with contemptuous disdain while creating the circumstances in which women must turn to prostitution—in one form or another—to survive. By first clearly defining the characters’ roles and archetypes and then eventually toppling those archetypes, Shaw capitalizes on his audience’s tendency to be seduced by the “romantic logic of the stage” (199) and then forces them to uncomfortably and unhappily confront society’s hypocritical treatment of women.

A literary archetype can be an image, symbol, character, or even situation that is recurring and instinctively has symbolic meaning to the reader. In *Mrs. Warren’s Profession*, each character represents a stereotype that is unconsciously understood by the audience. These archetypes are Vivie the Virgin, Mrs. Warren the Whore, Reverend Samuel the Holy Man, Frank the Scoundrel, and Sir Crofts the Gentleman. In some cases these archetypes are used as a tool for humor; for example, the Reverend seems to play the role of the wise Holy Man, yet his actions are not those of the archetype. In fact, he is a drunk and a fraud. While this might not be considered humorous, it serves well as an advisory that people may appear to be what they are not. Shaw delivers his message by intentionally using his characters as an instrument to upset his audience’s expectations.
The most important character dynamic in *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* is the mother-daughter duo of Mrs. Warren and Vivie. Initially, Vivie’s archetype is the Virgin. The audience’s first impression of her, according to the stage note, is of a young woman lying peacefully in a garden “reading and making notes” from “serious-looking books” (213). The garden setting emphasizes her pure, unsullied character and unspoiled feminine beauty, while the books show the audience she is educated. She tells Praed she does not care for romance, emphasizing her virginal archetype. Her life is that of a practical, well-brought-up, educated, independent, and comfortably wealthy young woman. As part of her role as Virgin, Vivie is naïve and ignorant. Despite her education, she admits that she is “a more ignorant barbarian than any woman could possibly be who hadn’t gone in for the tripos [a degree]” (217). While she might consider herself “book-smart,” she knows that women with far less schooling know much more about life.

It is the knowledge of her mother’s profession that is the crucial point where Vivie’s Virginal archetype is toppled. Vivie sheds her faux identity when she finds out in Act III that her mother is still a brothel-running mistress, even when money is no longer a pressing issue. In all her years of comfort, Vivie never once questioned how her mother acquired the funds. Vivie’s childhood of boarding schools and her college education had been directly responsible for Mrs. Warren’s continued profession in the shadowy world of the sex industry. Vivie admits to Crofts, her mother’s business partner, “I myself never asked where the money I spent came from. I believe I am just as bad as you” (265). Even though Vivie had been unaware of the class of business her mother and Crofts were running, she feels as if she had been an active business partner. The discovery that she had an indirect hand in forcing her mother into prostitution greatly upsets her moral compass. Up until now, Vivie has been portrayed as being unswervingly moral, so far as to seem contrived in her purity. No longer is
she flawless, perfect, and virginal; she has fallen from her pedestal. The fact that her very foundation as a person was funded by lies and dirty money has marred her, and ruined her Virginal Vivie façade.

After the Virginal archetype is toppled, Vivie is shown as more forward-thinking and modern than her peers. She is educated, uninterested in money, and even turns down two offers of marriage. In a time when opportunities for women lay solidly between marriage and back-breaking labor, Vivie refuses to choose either. By looking society’s standards in the face and blatantly saying, “No,” she seems to have found the solution. But even with her modern tendencies, the conclusion of the play for Vivie is not a happy one. Although she chooses to avoid prostituting herself, through marriage or joining the sex industry, her intention to work as an actuary for a living has destined her to work very hard for very little.

Ultimately, Vivie’s choice to abandon her mother because of her disreputable profession, and casting her to a place of shame, is in line with society’s standards. By turning her back on her mother she becomes part of the hypocrisy. Instead of a beacon for change, Vivie is a symbol of the society that Shaw is warning his audience against. Vivie represents the lonely hopelessness and limitations that faced women during her era. She is alone in a world that does not provide opportunities to solitary women. Her new archetype is that of the Victorian woman who is reaching for change but whose fingertips just barely skim the surface. Vivie thinks she has found happiness, but she is merely upholding the status quo.

Vivie is not the only character who is built up in the eyes of the audience and then torn down. While Vivie plays the Virgin, her mother embodies the Whore. When Mrs. Warren is introduced, she is described in the stage direction as “between 40 and 50, formerly pretty, showily dressed in a brilliant hat and gay blouse fitting
tightly over her bust and flanked by fashionable sleeves” (220). It is clear that she has done well for herself, and that time hasn’t blemished her beauty. Her choice in clothing highlights her character as somewhat ostentatious. By openly exhibiting her assets, she subtly indicates her position as a mistress. Shaw calls her a “fairly presentable old blackguard of a woman” (220). A blackguard is a man who deserves to be hated because he is rude and dishonest. This very description tells the audience that she is not behaving the way a woman ought to, and that it is an appropriate and proper reaction to deeply dislike her. The discovery that Mrs. Warren was formerly romantic with the (not so) holy Reverend Samuel and shared a scandalous kiss with young Frank corroborates her established impression as the Whore. Mrs. Warren does an excellent job epitomizing the role of the Whore, both figuratively and literally. She was formerly a prostitute and everyone, except innocent Vivie, knows Mrs. Warren still makes her money by running a booming chain of brothels.

Despite how concrete this role appears to the audience in Act I, Mrs. Warren does not hold her archetypal character’s initial form for long. In Act II, Mrs. Warren sheds her identity as the Whore when she explains how and why she became a member of the oldest profession:

But where can a woman get the money to save in any other business? Could you save out four shillings a week and keep yourself dressed well? Not you. Of course if you are a plain woman and can’t earn anything more; or if you have a turn for music or the stage, or newspaper-writing: that’s different. But neither Liz nor I had any turn for such things: all we had was our appearance and our turn for pleasing men. Do you think we were such fools as to let other people trade in our good looks for employing us as shop-girls, or barmaids, or waitresses, when we could trade them in ourselves and get all the profits instead of starvation wages? Not likely. (249)

The revelation of Mrs. Warren’s difficult decision topples her archetype of Whore. Her explanation of the circumstances that influenced her to turn to prostitution in order to escape poverty and create a comfortable lifestyle for her and Vivie has transformed Mrs. Warren into a new archetype—the Brave Leader. Even Vivie, once cold and distant from her mother, asserts, “My dear mother: you are a wonderful woman: you are stronger than all England” (251). Mrs. Warren is not only stronger than all of England, the traits she demonstrates, especially if manifested in a man, would be considered laudable. She bravely over-
comes the stigma that is placed on prostitution and flourishes in its success. Shaw writes, “Her vitality, her thrift, her energy, her outspokenness, her wise care for her daughter, and the managing capacity which has enabled her and her sister to climb from the fried fish shop down by the Mint to the establishments of which she boasts, are all high English social virtues” (201). Her virtues have allowed her to become a successful businesswoman in a seemingly moral-less profession. Mrs. Warren proudly states, “I never was a bit ashamed, really. I consider I had a right to be proud of how we managed everything so respectably, and never had a word against us, and how the girls were so well taken care of. Some of them did very well: one of them married an ambassador” (251). Under Mrs. Warren’s watch, her business has blossomed and been a good place for her workers, relative to the horrible conditions they could be working in.

The irony of Mrs. Warren’s success demonstrates one of Shaw’s goals: to shock his audience out of dulled acceptance of the status quo. In his preface, he writes, “But dearer still than such simplicity is that sense of the sudden earthquake shock to the foundations of morality which sends a pallid crowd of critics into the street shrieking that the pillars of society are cracking and the ruin of the State is at hand” (183). The idea that a play dares to portray a likeable and relatable woman successfully and properly running such a taboo enterprise must mean the foundation of society is crumbling. At least, that’s what the critics were horrified by and exactly what Shaw hoped to achieve. It is only after the initial earthquake that shakes the foundation of society that the infrastructure can be rebuilt. Shaw was hoping that society’s new infrastructure would be made of opportunities and equality and riddled with less hypocrisy.

As the archetypes played by Vivie and Mrs. Warren are dismantled, Shaw underscores his distaste for the society that looks down prostitution while maintaining the status quo in which it thrives. In his preface, Shaw writes, “Nothing would please our sanctimonious British public more than to throw the whole guilt of Mrs. Warren’s profession on Mrs. Warren herself. Now the whole aim of my play is to throw that guilt on the British public itself” (200-201). Hypocrisy requires endorsing standards
with no intention of acting on those standards. Despite prostitution’s dishonorable reputation, the profession still exists because there is constantly a demand. The women who turn to prostitution to survive are not to blame, nor the sirs who frequent the establishments; the blame lies with the society that does nothing to improve the conditions that drive women into the warm arms of prostitution. Shaw guarantees that “every man and woman present will know that as long as poverty makes virtue hideous and the spare pocket-money of rich bachelordom makes vice dazzling, their daily hand-to-hand fight against prostitution with prayer and persuasion, with shelters and scanty alms, will be a losing one” (183-184). Shaw is calling for action greater than empty prayers: action that forces society to look at the root cause of prostitution—desperate impoverishment and limited options available to women.

In the last act of his play, Shaw openly and brazenly indicts society with the crime of sanctimonious hypocrisy. Mrs. Warren says, “What is any respectable girl brought up to do but catch some rich man’s fancy and get the benefit of his money by marrying him?—as if a marriage ceremony could make any difference in the right or wrong of the thing! Oh, the hypocrisy of the world makes me sick!” (249). Mrs. Warren is angry that women can sell themselves into marriage and society applauds, but when they sell themselves for unabashed sex, society places a negative stigma upon them. Mrs. Warren is tired of the pretense: “I can’t stand saying one thing when everyone knows I mean another. What’s the use in such hypocrisy? If people arrange the world that way for women, there’s no good pretending it’s arranged the other way” (251). Mrs. Warren’s statement embodies Shaw’s opinion on hypocrisy. He asks the audience to answer his simple question: what is the reason for pretending women have opportunities for survival outside of prostitution—in one form or another—when everyone knows that is not the case?

Mrs. Warren makes the most economic decision of least resistance and most reward when she selects prostitution. She picks a profession
that will allow her to save part of her income in order to move upwards in life, as well as provide a better upbringing for young Vivie, without working herself to death. Alternatively, the women who choose honorable professions end up “so poor, so dependent, so well aware that the drudgeries of such honest work as is within their reach are likely enough to lead them eventually to lung disease, premature death, and domestic desertion or brutality” (186). The benefits of honest work aren’t tangible enough to sway women who are faced with the question of how to survive; those women “would see reason to prefer the primrose path to the stony way of virtue, since both, vice at worst and virtue at best, lead to the same end in poverty and overwork” (186). There seems to be no way to win for the Victorian woman: she will be prostituted through sex, physical labor, or marriage. In the face of society’s standards, Mrs. Warren chooses sex. Shaw wants society to realize and admit that women are wearing masks that society places on them. *Mrs. Warren’s Profession* can be read as a paradigmatic story that encourages every society to question its social norms and stigmas.
Since day one, college has made me question a lot of things. One of the most important questions I constantly ask myself is this: are we our major? I am an accounting student. But at one point, I was a health sciences student, and before that I was nothing. It was hard finding a place that fit like a nice pair of jeans, snug but flexible.

Then one day I decided that I was going to like numbers and make jokes about being a boring accountant. I chose to be seen as the logical, sometimes awkward, pragmatic student who would positively have a job upon graduation. It doesn’t mean I am boring or that I even like numbers or am good at math. But when I went out and bought a suit and a calculator I chose to depict a certain character.

This idea of identity, of roles, of archetypes, and how they can change on a whim captured my interest in Mrs. Warren’s Profession. Shaw shows us his characters’ identities, and within the short span of an act the characters take on new roles. Or he places people in roles that they do not fit into at all, like the (not so) holy Reverend Samuel. These characters are a lot like college students, swaying from one extreme to another, practicing whom they think they should be.

Shaw’s characters taught me that our roles are not fixed or determined. I am an accounting student. I deal with numbers. But the Seminar program lets me write. When I chose to surround myself with balance sheets and figures I forgot that an integral part of my identity is the part that loves words. I admire Mrs. Warren because she embraces her parts. She isn’t simply a pimp. She shows that she is a caring mother, a strong leader, and a smart businesswoman. In the face of society telling her to choose one, she chooses to be all of them.

I hope that when we audition for our characters, choose our majors, select our friends, and pave our futures we can channel Mrs. Warren and not limit ourselves to play a single archetype.

Veronica Iles
No matter our backgrounds, there will be times when we feel abandoned. Indeed, we may even feel alienated and exiled from our communities, or even ourselves. To surrender hope during these times may be tempting, but doing so would deprive us of opportunities for profound insight and transformation. Whether wisdom comes to us from the well of our own experiences, or through the works of the artists and philosophers that we admire, or from our own sense of spiritual truth, the way to overcoming obstacles is by adhering to the principles we foster within us. For Medieval thinkers such as Dante and Christine de Pizan, these illuminating forces came in the forms of supernatural and otherworldly guides. Both the *Inferno* and *The Book of the City of Ladies* open with the narrator and protagonist in a state of critical distress. Dante is lost in the confusion and darkness of his life; he finds himself at a crossroads and assailed by doubts. De Pizan is confronted by an intellectual legacy seemingly obsessed with her own condemnation. Both are isolated from their peers and surrounding communities. On the one hand, inspiration and encouragement come to de Pizan in the form of the three heavenly virtues of Justice, Reason and Rectitude, while on the other, Dante is visited upon by the spirit of the classical poet, Virgil, having come to the pilgrim from out of the Underworld. While one receives counsel from three abstract principles, and the other from an ideological mentor of sorts, each receives guidance from worlds of thought which correspond with the personal qualities of each, and like both of these writers, we may look to ourselves to receive guidance not from Heaven but from within our own minds.

Incensed by wrongs endured, and prompted by the noble endeavors of de Pizan, Justice, Reason, and Rectitude reveal themselves as a tes-
tament to both her worthiness and the righteousness of her cause. In building a city that will serve to defend the virtues of women, de Pizan is moving against the long history of unjust, and even unholy, abuse of women promoted and defended by all the major philosophers of the time. Contrary to the charges of vice and illicitness raised against women by the dominant philosophers, de Pizan admits that she “could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and characteristics of women” (de Pizan 4). Not only do the three heavenly virtues aid de Pizan in the foundation of the city, but their very presence is a confirmation of the fundamental error of misogyny. One point of slander often raised against women is the idea that men are somehow inherently more reasonable; the presence of Reason at the side of de Pizan directly subverts this misconception. Rectitude has come to her so that she may redress these wrongs and ensure that they are discontinued. Justice has come too, not moved by a subjective affinity, but as “the most singular daughter of God” (13). Justice, along with her companion virtues, are brought to de Pizan not for the sake of vengeance, but because it is their duty by nature to enact cosmic order, which is threatened by the unlawful subjugation of women. This is fitting for de Pizan, in that her direct link to righteousness allows her endeavors to serve a public good. The three sisters grant their aid to de Pizan not only to lift her from despair but also to empower her to extend this grace to others in the founding of the city.

As a male-bodied persona, my sex has never been the target of degradation either in Academia or in popular culture; however, as a homosexual I have often been met with the negative assumptions and stereotypes projected onto me by my greater communities. Like de Pizan, my experience of simply living as myself and the company that I keep among other homosexuals contradicts the negative ascriptions placed upon me. Often, the virtues and values that I have built within myself are honesty, diligence, imagination, which gives me the fortitude to be a part of de Pizan's city.
tude and assurance that I am a person worthy of being not only accepted but celebrated.

For all the courage I’ve managed to gather throughout my life, there are times that I still feel like an outcast, much like the exiled Florentine poet Dante. When beginning his own epic, Dante looks to Virgil, the author of the Aeneid. In not only facing the torments and anguish before which he found his self but also in taking on the task of recounting them, he calls upon his hero. In many ways Virgil appears to Dante as a paragon who has gone before, who knows the mysterious and dark roads, and can lead the poet through his vision and journey towards spiritual union and personal transformation. Virgil, upon finding the pilgrim, assures him:

I shall guide you, taking you from this place through an eternal place, where you shall hear the howls of desperation and see ancient spirits in their pain (I.113-116).

Symbolically, Virgil guides Dante through Hell, which is a Neo-Platonist rendering of the classical Underworld with which the Roman poet was well-acquainted. More than this, Virgil encapsulates much of which Dante values. In this way, it is Dante’s own intimacy with, and faith in, the crafts and studies of his reverence that allow him to find the fortitude to transcend not just the gates of Hell but his own fears and doubts. Virgil seeks out Dante by way of a chain of communication which originates in Heaven but descends down degrees of existence to Dante. The poet feels within himself such a disconnection from his sense of goodness that his guidance must be, in a way, debased of its purity in order to meet him where he is, lending itself to a more internal process and experience of redemption. For this reason, Virgil, regarded as the wisest of the ancients and whose only sin was being born before Christ, is the ideal intellectual, symbolic, and aesthetic mentor for Dante; the guide serves as an affirmation of the poet’s goals. In my own poetry, I have often looked to both Dante and Virgil, both being among the first poets I ever read; I pursue my own excellence and virtue through the presence of poetry in my life, especially the works of Dante and Virgil. My love of the liberal arts originates entirely from reading The Divine Comedy in my adolescence, and my decision to study classics was largely influenced by The Aeneid; I
count both Virgil and Dante as chief among my literary and intellectual guides.

Just as their guidance doesn’t arrive at the sides of Dante and de Pizan through the same route, or come summoned by the same circumstances, so too may the guides in our lives take different forms and courses. For both de Pizan and Dante, the guides that allowed for their journeys of vindication and redemption came in forms that reflected their goals and their attributes. Dante’s course involved the overcoming of inner strife and doubt and, accordingly, his guide came from among his personal inheritance of poetic and cultural tradition. De Pizan embarked on a quest to construct and maintain a place where women would no longer be subject to ignorant slander, not just for her own sake but for other women as well, thus her guides and guardians came in the form of public virtues. Although to us Medieval thought seems so distant, people now have many of the same existential and societal concerns as people then. Wisdom and inspiration need not necessarily come to us from a divine source. We may be moved, liberated, or strengthened by the words of a loved one or a friend. At other times, we may be comforted by the recollection of past achievements or challenges overcome.

There are opportunities for growth and reflection both inside and outside of ourselves; we are both filled with and surrounded by wisdom. Moments of trouble may be the most obvious chance to exercise our inner values and attributes, but they are available to us at all times. By looking to the things that fill us with hope, or remind us of our unique characteristics, we may, like Dante and de Pizan, begin to see burdens, obstacles, and daunting tasks not as roadblocks but rather cornerstones for great accomplishment.

For both de Pizan and Dante, the guides that allowed for their journeys of vindication and redemption came in forms that reflected their goals and their attributes.

After reading *Inferno* and *The Book of the City of Ladies* in my Seminar class during the Fall 2013 semester, the decision to write a comparative essay was an easy one. A strong scholastic passion for the literature of the Middle Ages has remained with me since childhood and has been continuously reinforced ever since. Dante was the first poet whom I ever seriously read, and during the aforementioned Seminar 1, I was introduced to the writing of de Pizan for the first time. In comparing the roles that literature plays in both works, I sought to celebrate and acknowledge what readership has meant to me in my own development as a scholar and writer. The contents of the essay, and those of the sources, are close to home.

I began the revision process with slight reservations; I had always enjoyed writing essays but seldom ever considered that someone would ever read them other than the professor who assigned them. In my revisiting of the paper, however, I was reminded of my own enjoyment of both of these texts, which I hope may serve to aid others in the discovery and pleasure of Medieval literature.

Terry Taplin
While reading Cervantes’ novel *Don Quixote*, I was astounded at the lengths to which the title character would go in order to live out the stories he’d read in classic chivalric romances. What is especially striking, even shocking, is Don Quixote’s absolute conviction that the things or people he sees around him are the real life manifestations of stock figures (objects, places, and characters) from fantastical novels of knight errantry. For example, he is convinced that the windmills he sees are, in fact, “enormous giants” (58). He seems to live in what appears to be an all-consuming delusion. Yet there are moments when he is perfectly lucid and intelligent, such as when he waxes eloquent on the superiority of a life devoted to arms as opposed to letters. Cervantes seems to be setting up a parallel by which we can observe the noble ideal of knight-errantry and the humanity of chasing a dream that may seem crazy on a superficial level. As the novel progresses, Don Quixote becomes a complex character representing the potential humans have for passion and noble qualities, not just the actions we might take to get there.

In the early parts of the novel, we are introduced to Don Quixote’s apparent delusion of living in the world of a knight-errant as part of his extreme passion and devotion for knight-errantry. The episode of the windmills is often taken as a perfect example of this lunacy. Despite the precautions of his more grounded-in-reality squire, Sancho Panza, Don Quixote charges and attacks the windmills he believes are fierce giants, only to be unceremoniously lifted up and dumped onto the ground by the rotating blades. It appears as if the simple explanation of Don Quixote’s lunacy is sufficient; he is merely deluded by the mistaken belief that he is a knight-errant who is doing “a great
service to God to remove so evil a breed from the face of the earth” (58). From this perspective, he is nothing but a poor deluded fool.

However, on closer examination, his thought-process on the event is surprisingly reasonable. In fact, he rationalizes it in terms that make sense, not only within his own “crazy” logic (the logic of his fantasy of being a knight-errant), but in terms with which any sensible person might agree. For example, he tells Sancho Panza that a knight-errant must understand the volatile nature of war:

Matters of war, more than any others, are subject to continual change; moreover, I think, and therefore it is true, that the same Frestón the Wise who stole my room and my books has turned these giants into windmills in order to deprive me of the glory of defeating them: such is the enmity he feels for me; but in the end, his evil arts will not prevail against the power of my virtuous sword. (59)

On the one hand, this sounds like a rationalization of what may be regarded as pure madness. He concocts a story that explains why what appears to most people as nothing but windmills are, in fact, really giants. Superficially, this is a ridiculous explanation that is consistent with and supports his belief that he is a knight-errant. However, on a deeper level, an intelligence appears in Don Quixote’s attempt to understand what happened to him. There is “a method to his madness” because his understanding isn’t divorced from practical considerations. When he says that matters of war “are subject to continual change,” he is not saying anything with which an actual general or military tactician would disagree. What could be more reasonable than to say that in war, a combatant must be prepared to expect the unexpected? Don Quixote is not simply a lunatic on a rampage. His madness is more complex. He arrives at an explanation for the episode of the windmills that is not only logical, twisted though it may be, but that also relies on a principle most anyone could agree with.

More interestingly, Cervantes’ portrayal suggests that Don Quixote is aware that he is playing the part of a knight-errant, or at least that
he knows his dedication to live out the stories in his beloved books is a performance. To take one example, when Don Quixote sends Sancho Panza to deliver a love letter to his beloved Dulcinea, he feels the need to act out a performance of his being driven crazy by love:

I want you to see me naked and performing one or two dozen mad acts... because if you have seen them with your own eyes, you can safely swear to any others you might wish to add, and I assure you that you will not recount as many as I intend to perform. (203)

He is curiously aware that he must put on the performance of insanity by doing naked cartwheels among other ridiculous acts in order to convince his squire and lady that he is legitimately lovestruck; whether he is actually in love is less important than the appearance of it. Whatever he may feel for Dulcinea doesn’t matter as much as the performance of being in love. The humor of the scene comes precisely from the fact that his play-acting is both premeditated and calculated to impress. It highlights his lack of genuine emotion. But at the same time, it also hints at a deeper awareness of the fact that he is attempting to play a role in his love and in his other exploits. It suggests that he knows, on some level, that his persona of the knight-errant is only a façade.

Despite the absurdities of Don Quixote’s adventures, Cervantes reveals towards the end of the first part just how intelligent and eloquent Don Quixote really is in communicating with others on the subject of his passions. Whereas others assume he is simple-minded or deluded, Cervantes portrays Don Quixote in a new light when he regales his friends on the superiority of a life of arms as opposed to a life devoted to scholarly pursuits:

In this manner, and with these rational arguments, Don Quixote continued his discourse, and no one listening to him at that moment could think of him as a mad man; rather, since most were gentlemen engaged in the practice of arms, they were very pleased to listen. (329)

He is so eloquent that he becomes an object of admiration. In supporting a life devoted to arms, he defends the life he himself has chosen to live, that of the knight-errant who is committed to the ideals of chivalry. The listeners are so moved that they are able to connect with him on an intellectual and emotional level. How can one dismiss his pursuits as sheer madness when he is able to endear and relate to his audience?

Don Quixote truly and passion-
ately believes in the ideal represented by the knight-errant. This belief is deep-rooted, unerring, and genuine, if what he says is indeed authentic. Even with his many failures, the great lengths that he goes to in order to live up to his ideal prove his genuine devotion. Despite all the harm he brings to himself and others, he wholeheartedly means well. One might be tempted to regard such well-meaning as simply naive or foolish.

However, Cervantes may suggest a different perspective by giving Don Quixote on several occasions a platform from which to explain and defend his devotion to knight-errantry. For example, in the same speech in which he impresses his friends with his intelligence and eloquence, Don Quixote argues that part of the superiority of the life of a soldier comes from the fact that a soldier puts his life on the line for his cause:

To become distinguished in letters costs time, sleepless nights, hunger, nakedness, headaches, bouts of indigestion, and other things of this sort. ...but to become a good soldier requires everything required of a student, but to so much high a degree that there can be no comparison, because at every step the soldier risks losing his life. (332)

Don Quixote effectively describes how far he has gone to become the best knight-errant he could possibly be. This suggests his cause is like that of the soldiers he mentions in that he would risk his life for knight-errantry. Don Quixote’s friends agree the soldier’s cause is a noble one. In this way, Cervantes sets up a parallel according to which we too as readers are able to see Don Quixote’s cause as similarly noble.

In the end, Cervantes makes the very cause of knight-errantry seem much more rational, understandable, and more importantly, admirable than he initially appears to with Don Quixote’s laughable adventures. One of the best examples of this sympathetic portrayal comes at the very end of the First Part. While caged and being carted home by his well-meaning friends, Don Quixote explains how his devotion to knight-errantry has made him a better person:

For myself, I can say that since I became a knight-errant I have been valiant, well-mannered, liberal, polite, generous, courteous, bold, gentle, patient, long-suffering in labors, imprisonments, and enchantments, and although only a short while ago I saw myself locked in a cage like a madman, I think that with the valor of my arms, and heaven favoring me, and fortune not opposing me, in a few days I shall find myself the king of some kingdom where I can display the gratitude and liberality of my heart. (430)

Although he is still in the grips of the belief that he will one day become a
king, the specific qualities he identifies with are admirable and ultimately make him a sympathetic character with a relatable ideal. Qualities such as generosity, selflessness, and courage are generally recognized as noble traits that everybody aspires to. Don Quixote was able to demonstrate these qualities and recognize his personal fulfillment and achievement. Cervantes’ emphasis, in the passage, is on those positive and admirable qualities and thus on Don Quixote’s fundamental decency as a human being.

But the question remains: why create a sympathetic and even admirable character when he is seemingly foolish and laughable? For all his redeemable principles, Don Quixote appears to most other characters as a failure, especially when he is carted home against his will. In what terms can we best account for what Cervantes accomplishes through his portrayal of Don Quixote?

Perhaps, just like Don Quixote, we all seek fulfillment from our most fundamental passions and hope to achieve an ideal form of ourselves. This is a universal characteristic of all humans, but only some aspire to it with the commitment of Don Quixote. What is truly admirable about Don Quixote is that he doesn’t simply want to be a glorified hero for the sake of his pride or personal vanity. He truly aspires to be a good human being. If we look past the ridiculousness of the surface of Don Quixote’s exploits (e.g., the princesses, magical helmets, dragons, potions, and enchantments) and focus on the qualities he aspires toward, we can better appreciate what Cervantes thinks is worthy of respect. By simultaneously making fun of and redeeming the ideal of the knight-errant, Cervantes humanizes the character of Don Quixote and leads us as readers to question what our core beliefs and ideals should be.

I believe that is the true accomplishment of Cervantes’ novel. There is a value in the passionate attempt to do and be good. Moreover, by making Don Quixote sympathetic and admirable, Cervantes leads us to
ask how we should live our lives and to consider what is worth living and dying for. Ironically, it is only through what passes for complete madness that we come to arrive at such an insight. It may be, therefore, that the ultimate message of Don Quixote is that we have to be willing to take the risk of madness in order to achieve our highest potential as human beings.

Madeline Bell, “Redwood Grove”
Author’s Note

Choosing to write about *Don Quixote* was not a difficult decision at all. Right from the beginning of my Seminar class discussions, I knew there was more to Don Quixote than just parody. I loved his passion and zest for life. Most of all, his dedication was what made an impression on me. I related to it personally in my own attempts to live out my dreams. I suppose that was where I drew the strength of my essay from, even if I didn’t realize it.

Being focused more on the scientific and mathematical academics, I never considered writing to be my strong point. Throughout my academic years I’ve struggled with confidence in my writing abilities. So, needless to say, it came as a huge surprise when my Seminar teacher, Julie Park, told me she wanted to nominate my essay for a Newman Award. I was shocked that it even got an A. Even after my essay was nominated, I was even more surprised that it was chosen as a finalist. I was incredibly excited and honored but still unsure on how I managed to get that far in a writing competition.

It was only though my three editing sessions at CWAC that I finally managed to let go of my writing insecurities and see the value in what I had written. I saw my arguments as strong and persuasive, albeit a little rough around the edges. It really only took one editing session to open my eyes to the potential of what my paper could be. After that, I worked tirelessly on tying everything together, sharpening up my sentences, and even agonizing over specific words to hone in on my argument. I had never worked on a piece of writing so intricately. I became more vocal in my editing sessions as they progressed because I realized that I really do have valuable input into what sounds best in my essay. For me, that was my greatest accomplishment. I love what I wrote about and how I wrote it, which is something that I never had the pleasure of feeling before.

Daniela del Pinal
Romance as We Know It: Thoughts on an excerpt from the *Lais of Marie de France*

Ruth Sylvester

This year, our sophomore Seminar class had the opportunity to read an excerpt from the *Lais of Marie de France*, a collection of stories of courtly love presented in the form of verse poems. When my class discussed this excerpt, several interesting and highly emotional conclusions appeared. Some members of the class wondered aloud about the logical reasoning behind the inclusion of the excerpt in the Seminar curriculum. Others openly dismissed any possible significance of the writing style and time period because the text was romantic in nature, and some expressed disappointment because a woman wrote a story in which female characters were objectified. These conclusions beg a meditation and a dialogue on the manner in which we define romantic themes, whether those themes belong to the late Medieval period or the modern one.

The romantic themes presented in these stories may offend modern sensibilities about gender and empowerment because they follow a paradigm that divides men and women into specific role groups. Two of the tales share common narrative elements: in both, a knight of status finds himself reduced to extreme illness, and he discovers that the source of his ailment is a lack of true love. The key romantic plotline centers on his secret physical love for a woman who is married to someone else; the initial conflict of the story lies in the period of time between his confession of love and the consummation of his desire. Later conflicts occur when the secret love is discovered by outsiders, such as the lady’s husband or other members of the court.

The success of these romantic plots as stories can be measured in terms of characterization and motiva-
tion. In the story titled “Guigemar,” a knight, Guigemar, accidentally kills a mystical deer who, before dying, curses him with a magical wound that will not heal. The only cure is the gift of true love from a worthy woman whom he must love in return. At first, his prospects are bleak: he has never had a lady love, and his wound will not stop bleeding. A young married woman takes pity on him and offers to nurse him back to health, not knowing the circumstances of his wound. Her ministrations inspire him with strong amorous feelings. As his physical condition continues to deteriorate, he decides to reveal his love in the hope of a cure:

...I’m dying because of you; my heart is full of anguish. if you won’t cure me, I’ll have to perish sooner or later. I beg you to love me – fair one, don’t deny me! (157, lines 501-506).

The woman responds that she reciprocates his love, but she delays fulfilling his plea for physical intimacy: “I’d be ill advised to act too quickly/ in granting your prayer./ I’m not accustomed to such a request” (157, lines 510-512). The woman refers to his confession as a request, not a demand, and the knight begs her for her love. These word choices are easily overlooked when viewed by a 21st Century audience all too familiar with basic Western formulas of romantic rhetoric, but they are significant in an examination of the text as a Medieval narrative. In this scene, a bedridden knight employs language that suggests humility on his part. The knight himself is characterized as pitiably incapacitated, while the lady who tends his wounds is characterized as possessing power over him, a power he acknowledges by begging. The language of the lady’s response indicates that she understands the position he has ascribed to her. She takes advantage of that position with a diplomatic reply that stipulates delay.

This delay between the knight’s confession of his love and the consummation of his desire is easily overlooked because the outcome (consummation) is expected and considered trite from a 21st Century perspective. However, in the context of the plot itself, the delay provides a key initial conflict which, regardless of its outcome, succeeds in raising the audience’s emotional stake in the ongoing narrative. In addition, this particular delay emphasizes the power of
the female character in a subtle but significant way: the audience, along with the suffering knight, is forced to wait for the lady to give her consent. The plot is suspended, and for a moment the focus rests completely on the female character. In that moment the impetus of the story turns on her decision: if she refuses, the knight will die and the story will be quickly and mundanely finished and disappoint the reader. But she does not refuse. The audience, like the knight, remains under the power of her charms and is entertained sufficiently to retain interest in the story as it moves forward.

These subtle dynamics of power expose the flaws behind a summary dismissal of Medieval works, such as this one, whose main themes are romantic in nature. Are women oppressed and deprived of agency in the course of the narrative? Yes, if their oppression is represented by their consistent consent to relations with men who are not their husbands. Are women empowered in the course of the narrative, and do they act as agents for themselves? Yes, if their empowerment can be explained by their ability to make men who are not their husbands wait for them to consent. The premise of each argument is defined in the same terms. Either way, true courtly love, as the narrative conceives it, depends upon the lady’s consent. The narrative’s emphasis on the female character’s ability to choose empowers her as a character.

The volatility of the discussion proves this excerpt’s efficacy as a Seminar text. The text itself can be interpreted through many different lenses, but its strength lies in the ambiguities that arise from each interpretation. Where one audience member sees objectification, another may consider nuanced progressive tendencies. All who engage with this text must consider that the structure by which a character’s agency is judged in the 21st Century cannot apply to a document from the 12th Century. Acknowledging this disparity can guide a discussion toward new interpretations of romantic themes.
This piece began as a response to a particular Seminar class session. I had enjoyed reading our assigned excerpt from the *Lais of Marie de France*, but when we discussed it in class, I didn’t notice much enthusiasm for the text among my fellow students, and I wondered why. Our discussion that day focused on the excerpt’s shortcomings, as my classmates saw them. I felt that the assumed “shortcomings,” the elements most attacked by the students, were the same elements I had appreciated most on my first reading of the excerpt.

The suggestion that this text did not belong in the Seminar curriculum was put forward by several classmates. I didn’t have the opportunity to refute that assumption to my own satisfaction during class, so I wrote an angry essay instead. I wanted to address the contrast between the qualities we look for and approve of in a story with romantic themes today, in the 21st Century, and the qualities which were valuable to a 12th Century audience. I wanted to explain the frustration that my class felt about this reading in terms of those qualities.

The framework of the 21st Century sensibilities in which my class interpreted this text is not the framework it was originally designed for, and no amount of elision can force it to fit into that framework. Efforts to do so—as evidenced by the classmates’ experience—will undoubtedly cause frustration. It is my hope that this text remains a part of the Seminar canon long enough to provoke a new kind of discussion, a discussion that evaluates the *Lais* on its own terms.

Extra support and inspiration for this essay came from my Seminar professor, Ed Tywoniak, from the enthusiastic staff at the Center for Writing Across the Curriculum, and from my best friends on campus, who listened to draft attempts, offered opinions, and brought me food (you know who you are). My utmost thanks to all of you.

Ruth Sylvester
Joseph Takehara, “It Isn’t A Camp, It’s A Time Machine”
Throughout the course of human writing, authors and readers have grappled with and questioned their personal and social identities. These struggles have been described in and echoed through both ancient and contemporary literature; we seek to understand who we are as individuals and our purpose in the larger community. Ultimately, these inquiries into the greater scheme of life stem from a common feeling of anxiety among humans: by lacking omniscience, we fear the unknown, whether that be in our present world or in the hereafter. Society has constructed an idea in order to comfort us when we do not have the answers. Having faith is, in essence, giving up one’s domineering logic; it requires the believer’s investment in what cannot be seen or understood in our purely physical realm. Biblical authors and Art Spiegelmen both understood that having faith in something beyond oneself is a large factor that drives humanity to either rise up or fall in times of desperation. Faith motivates us to survive when we feel powerless to the universe’s mysteries; the characters within *Maus* and the Book of Genesis demonstrate ways in which they find power through their individual understandings of faith.

In Genesis, faith is often prompted by a direct interaction between the protagonists and an image they interpret to be God. Genesis 6 describes the moment in which God first encounters Noah; He gives Noah a deadly premonition about the world He has created: “The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth” (6:14). Though Noah is fearful of his God’s destructive nature at first, he becomes motivated by the promise God makes: to save the lives of Noah and his family. Noah reasons with himself but never has a moment of doubt toward the deity’s omnipotence, agreeing to complete the task bestowed upon him.
(6:17-22). Noah’s blind faith provides him with the drive to fulfill his life’s purpose, as bestowed by God; here, the authors of the Bible suggest that when an image of God intervenes directly in a character’s life, that person must rely on a sense of trust in God alone in order to survive.

Like Noah, Spiegelman’s protagonist finds the inspiration to live through an experience with divine intervention. Vladek is also faced with the upheaval of his personal world when he is taken to a German labor camp after being captured as a prisoner of war (49). Trying to cope with the pains of his struggle and the imminence of his death, Vladek has a dream in which his deceased grandfather gives him a prediction of his freedom: “It was so real, this voice: ‘You will come out of this place--free!... on the day of Parshas Truma’ ” (57). Vladek finds that the Jewish holiday is three months away, a considerably long amount of time to spend remaining in prison; however, the information in the dream is enough to prompt Vladek to not relinquish the idea that he will eventually be liberated from the camp. Spiegelman highlights that Vladek’s undying sense of hope, facilitated by faith in a dream alone, aids his will to survive more than any piece of factual evidence could. Decades after being released, Vladek continues to connect the Parshas Truma holiday to the luck that he has later on in life (59). Although these may seem like coincidences to the outside audience, Vladek’s interpretation of his life underscores Spiegelman’s greater point: that Vladek, in the same way as Noah and other humans, alters his interpretation of negative circumstances through the beneficial effects of his faith.

Spiegelman shows in later scenes how a person’s understanding of faith can be influenced by forms separate from religious sensibilities. Although she is indoctrinated in the Jewish faith, Anja, Vladek’s wife, decides to rely on a different type of spirituality to get the peace of mind she needs after her time at Auschwitz. Without a message from Vladek en-
suring his safety, Anja visits a gypsy fortune teller, who ends up having the answers she needs to hear. Blinded by her fear for her husband’s life, Anja decides to fully believe the psychic’s predictions; Anja is assured she will “get a sign that he’s alive by the time the moon is full” (133). This portion of Spiegelman’s book seems a bit hypocritical, considering that the author describes other instances of divine foreshadowing that can be directly tied to organized religion. Yet Anja’s willingness to put her faith in the gypsy is an identical action to that of her husband and of Noah. Spiegelman indicates that, in times of great fear and desperation, humans have the determination to give deeper meaning to phenomena that are otherwise not confirmed by any physical manifestation. Indeed, Anja’s belief, much like Vladek’s and Noah’s, gives her the ability to emotionally survive for her husband, especially when the world beyond her faith is overwhelmingly pessimistic (134). Spiegelman proves that faith is blind; so long as we believe, we will be safe.

Anja’s faith in the gypsy’s prediction motivates her to continue living through the uneasiness of Vladek’s absence. In the conclusion of *Maus*, however, Anja’s emotions have been manipulated by her idea of faith, especially when the fortune teller’s premonition does not come to fruition quickly. Having faith offers protection in some instances of Genesis and *Maus*; yet the authors deliver warnings to their readers, suggesting that faith can be misdirected and therefore detrimental to the user. The Tower of Babel story has often been regarded as an instance within Genesis that demonstrates the dangers of humanity’s temptation to be a god. When God realizes the all-powerful strength of humans working together, He deems that “nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them” (11:6). Threatened by the overbearing challenge of human influence in His kingdom, God decides to intervene and separate them through language forever (11:8-9). Although God’s actions have been interpreted as cruel, the compelling part of the story comes from the human perspective of the events: the humans, tempted by a desire to be closer to Him, overstep their boundaries by attempting to enter God’s world (11:3). Unlike Noah’s tale and Spiegelman’s story, the Tower of Babel seeks to show how these humans were motivated by
selfish desire, not divine influence; therefore, they used their faith for disobedience rather than attempting to endure through the struggles on earth. Spiegelman and Noah show reliance on mystical experiences, rather than a misuse of their faith. Therefore, Noah, Anja, and Vladek are able to help themselves cope with uncontrollable situations and ultimately succeed.

Furthermore, Spiegelman and the Genesis authors show the dangers that befall their characters once they lose their sense of faith in something greater than themselves. In Genesis 4, the violent story of Cain and Abel is described. Even though many exegetical writers analyze this story based on the implications of jealousy that often befalls humanity, there is an added element that suggests how Cain’s lack of faith relates to his decision to murder his older brother. When God denies the offering that Cain provides Him, it is described that “Cain became very angry and his countenance fell,” suggesting that Cain has lost his faith in God’s decision to favor Abel’s efforts (4:5). Nevertheless, God suggests that success is not based solely on praise; however, Cain loses his sense of a relationship with God and can therefore disobey Him easily (4:6-8). Cain’s motives to kill his brother are not prompted by faith, or even misdirected faith, but by his extreme hatred towards Abel. In essence, Cain’s disillusionment towards God and his own abilities leads to the loss of his sense of humanity and contributes heavily to his downfall in the conclusion of the tale. When we are emotionally vulnerable, faith has the ability to encourage us to reassess our volatile nature to make positive choices for ourselves and our neighbors.

Faith is a projection that is used by humans when analytical thought and mundane knowledge are simply not enough.

Humanity has created faith in order to better understand the tragedies of our existence, whether they be through the unavoidable disasters or the everyday struggles we face. Faith is a projection that is used by humans when analytical thought and mundane knowledge are simply not enough. The authors of both texts, though not directly admitting it, want us to use this same principle while reading their
works. In a sense, every reader is a Noah, a Vladek, an Anja; although we have no knowledge of the validity behind any of the words on the page, we believe them to be true. Whether the stories are based upon fact or fiction, Genesis and *Maus* both use a sense of human truth that helps us understand who we are, why we have been placed in our bondage, and how we can live through it.
Works Cited


When I first entered Saint Mary’s College as a transfer student, I was not thrilled to be enrolled in a theology & religious studies course. Being an individual without strong ties to any organized form of religion, I assumed that there would be nothing to gain from reading supposedly true, ancient texts that had no obvious relevance to my philosophy. I quickly found that many New Testament stories reflected the disappointments and questions I had regarding my illusive faith. I began to realize, through deeper analysis of these myths, exactly what these stories were trying to express: human truths that could be expressed to all audiences throughout their unstable realities. In my first Seminar course, a fellow student asked whether or not Vladek’s journey in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* could be considered factually accurate or not; I admit that, at times, the graphic novel leads itself into the realm of the fantastical. But I pose another question to all readers: does it matter? If we acknowledge that a work speaks to us, helping us understand something hidden within our human condition, can it not be considered “true” in some fashion? If we acknowledge that undeniable reality through fiction, then we become the agents of faith in the literary universe, gaining just a bit more certainty when we surrender ourselves to the art of written language. With this idea of relinquishing inhibitions to faith in my mind, I set out to write my first draft of “Filling Emptiness.” I hope that, upon reading this finished product, these words have been rendered true to you. Thank you.

Brittany Hatter
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