

Spring 2004 Winner

Ali Batouli

Instructor’s Foreward

When Ali first came to conference with me about his research topic for my Spring 2004 class, “Writing, Rhetoric, and Digital Culture”, he was very clear about his intent: he wanted to argue that the Internet offered a powerful weapon against authoritarian government. In fact, as he described it in his final reflection letter, “I envisioned a hopeful, anti-State, rhetorically packed argument supporting online dissent.” To this end, he worked his way through an impressive array of both primary and secondary sources: newspaper and journal articles, government reports, full-length books, censorship websites, and numerous weblogs authored by Chinese and Iranian dissidents. What happened then was something that happens to many writers: he realized that the evidence did not support his intended thesis. Instead, it left him with what he later called a “fatalist argument,” one that suggested not only that the Internet is an ineffective vehicle for dissent but that it has in fact actually strengthened the very governments that cyber-dissidents attempt to weaken. This conclusion altered the shape of his entire paper. The extremely passionate language and stance that characterized his earlier drafts gave way to a solid, logos-based argument that used an accumulation of evidence, a detailed analysis of examples, and a careful assessment of the both sides of the issue to move the reader to what he considered the inevitable, if undesirable, conclusion. However, his personal sympathies with the dissidents was not lost from the paper. He decided to cast the central conflict of his argument in terms of the well-known story of David and Goliath, suggesting clearly where his lines of sympathy lie. His revisionist approach to this biblical story is one of the greatest strengths of his argument: in allowing the massive Goliath to win, Ali points to his own—and the reader’s—reluctance to admit the ineffectiveness of the cyber-slingshot against the amassed power of nations. Although the final conclusion may not be as empowering as Ali had originally hoped, his paper in itself attests to the power of rhetoric and writing as an instrument of political activism and change.

Christine Alfano
Against all odds, with nothing but courage of heart and skill of hand, the young, weak David slew the large, daunting monster that was Goliath. How did this unknown shepherd’s son accomplish such a colossal feat and change the fate of his people forever? Simple: he had the appropriate weapon, namely his slingshot, for bringing down such a massive foe. Many modern advocates of absolute freedom and democracy around the globe believe that the Internet is their slingshot, a weapon they can use to topple the large, daunting authoritarian regimes around the world. The Internet provides an open medium for the instantaneous, free exchange of news and opinions. Comparable to a projectile weapon, it can be used to launch information from Washington to Beijing, from Tehran to Berlin or through any other imaginable path. Because it is relatively easy to use and provides a level of secrecy, many believe this tool to be the equalizing factor in the battle for freedom in controlled, tyrannical states. But as it is easily accessible and inanimate, the authoritarian Goliaths that the Internet is aimed at subverting have also gotten their hands on this tool, creating a two-sided Web war. The People’s Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran provide two major examples of this cyber tug-of-war under authoritarian rule. While the former is an example of a relatively developed Internet system, the latter shows a network in the bud, where both dissent and government controls are only developing. Both states have begun not only to use the Internet for their own benefit, but to find ways to counter its use by proponents of democracy. These Goliath regimes have slowly gained their own larger, faster cyber-slingshots that have compromised the sole advantage of the smaller, less resource-rich online dissenters. Consequently, not only has the Internet had little effect in propagating the cause of freedom, but this slingshot of democracy has in many ways increased the power and control of authoritarian regimes.

David’s Slingshot of Freedom

The very name, Internet, connotes a level of absolute connectedness, a structure in which every single node of the Net is in some way linked to all other nodes. This Net, or Web, spans the entire globe in such a way that a node in Brasilia can easily reach and communicate with one in Tokyo. The cyber-world has no boundaries, and like the universe we live in, is constantly expanding. According to political researcher Tiffany Danitz, this technology “permits its users to create and sustain far-flung networks based on common interests or concerns of the members, where none existed before” (Danitz). This global connecting ability is at the core of why many scholars believe in the “great subversive potential” of cyberspace (Taubman 259). Political ideas of freedom, expressed in audio, video or plain text, can instantaneously travel from an apartment on Independence Avenue in Washington DC to the basement computer of a house on Khomeini Boulevard in Tehran. Not only does the Internet allow for the transfer of ideas between countries with completely different political atmospheres; it also facilitates the transfer of “subversive” thought and information within countries. An activist in Beijing
can easily post a website voicing criticism of the Chinese Communist Party or send out e-mails with similar content. He can, from the safety of his own desk, potentially spread his message throughout every home and Internet café in China and the rest of the world. This ideological freedom and decentralization of the Internet represent “a significant political threat to non-democratic regimes whose legitimacy and hold on power depend on a tame domestic ideational climate” (257). Other appeals of the Internet as a medium for dissent and free speech are its amazing speed and its relative anonymity. Cyberspace, in its pure form, is an arena in which anyone can say anything behind any mask to anyone who is willing to listen.

In the case of China, the voice of dissent started creeping into national networks more than half a decade ago, when pro-democracy groups from outside the country began publishing websites and sending e-mails to Chinese netizens, calling for reform and, in some instances, even revolution. One form of Internet use by dissenters is e-mail. Chinese computer software entrepreneur Lin Hai, for example, sold 30,000 e-mail addresses to VIP Reference, a US-based organization of Chinese dissidents (McDonald). VIP Reference later used these addresses to attempt a cyber war for the hearts and minds of these 30,000 Chinese citizens. Dissident English websites that can be read by many Chinese netizens present another form of online dissent. Websites such as grafixnpix.com/buddha.htm are based in the U.S. and call for democracy in China and freedom for Tibet. Perhaps the most effective use of the Internet for dissent occurs when political dissidents from within the country post articles and viewpoints on the Web, in addition to or instead of printed distribution. There are dozens of examples of such cyber dissent including Lu Jiaping, who posted several controversial essays online, and Qi Yanchen, who put up excerpts from his book The Collapse of China (Van Der Made 5-6). Even the now-banned Chinese Falungong spiritual movement used the Internet to proselytize and organize its members (8). Thus many groups and individuals from within and beyond the borders of China have capitalized on the widespread communication powers of the Internet to spread their anti-regime messages.

Dissent in the newer Iranian webspace has followed suit with China. According to Graham and Khosravi, who have studied the Internet in Iran for the past half decade, “There are several sites where the multitude of Iranian political parties and organizations can be accessed” (Graham 232). These sites range from the Communist Party of Iran to the webpage of the son of the late Shah. Even reform-minded newspapers, which have fallen to the recent “crackdown” by the conservative Iranian judiciary, have turned to the Internet to express their views (Feuilherade). The Rouydad and Emrooz papers, for example, which were shut down in 2002 for publishing material deemed anti-Islamic, have created their own online news sites (Sokooti).

A form of dissent that is perhaps uniquely Iranian is the use of weblogs—commonly known as “webs” in Iran and “blogs” in the United States—to post illegal opinions and news countering the current government. As of 2003, there were 1200 weblogs in Farsi (Rahimi). While some are personal diaries and others are strictly political, the majority include an aspect of both. These weblogs are for the most part by Iranians in Iran but a few find their roots in the Iranian diaspora around the world. The website “Blogs x Iranians” (http://blogsbyiranians.com/) contains a listing of many Iranian weblogs, including their countries of origin. The weblogs listed range from that of the Iranian-Canadian Hossein Derakhshian, which expresses a mix of his personal life and calls for political reform in both Farsi and English (http://www.hoder.com/weblog/), to that of the purely politically
minded Tehran-based Iranian Girl, who criticizes her lack of freedom in broken English (http://iraniangirl.blogspot.com/). One weblogger from Tehran who calls herself Shahyad has as her motto, “In the fight for Freedom, we need to be United” (http://tehranonline.blogspot.com/). But perhaps the most famous Iranian Web source of political dissent is the site of the full-time blogger, Sina Motallebi (www.rooznegar.com). Motallebi’s posts are highly professional and filled with reformist rhetoric. Although he formerly posted his views and news from within Iran, he currently keeps up his weblog, which is completely in Farsi, from Germany.

Goliath’s Defense

From the many examples of e-mails, weblogs, websites and other methods of online dissent, it seems safe to conclude that the Internet is indeed a powerful democratizing tool. After all, how would Qi Yanchen and Sina Motallebi have so easily spread their words of dissent had it not been for the Internet? The World Wide Web is a very simple, fast and far-reaching method of spreading democratic information; however, as easy at it is to send information instantaneously through millions of fiber-optic cables, it is just as easy to block the flow of such communications. No physical walls or tanks are necessary to stop online dissent. All the governments of China and Iran have, or rather had, to do to stop the spread of information counter to their cause was to set up a virtual roadblock on the information superhighway.

Through trial and error, China has created a close-to-perfect system of Internet oversight and censorship. First and foremost, the government controls the infrastructure of the Internet, the actual physical cables that connect the Chinese intranet to the information held throughout the rest of the world. Thus the Chinese government has a physical point upon which it has constructed a national “Great Red Firewall,” using software to block all potentially “harmful” information from entering or leaving the Chinese network (Tan 265). “Subversive” material from foreign political sites or newspapers thus has no open pathway to enter Chinese Net-space. China’s control over the tangible Internet does not end at the door to the outer world; the government administrates the four main networks within the country as well. Since it owns these networks, which license and administer the Internet Service Providers [ISP] that provide access to the public, the communist regime can maintain control over the macro-scale spread and use of the Internet (Tan 271). Traffic along these four main lines “can be restricted through the use of Internet filters, software that can deny access to specific Internet addresses” (Hermida). Indeed, the Chinese government currently prohibits access to a list of “500,000 banned sites with pornographic or so-called subversive content” (Hermida).

In addition to using its own censorship software, China requires multinational business partners to help the government in the information filtering process. The “Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for the China Internet Industry,” which has been signed by 130 major web portals including the Yahoo search engine, holds such portals to censor their materials in such a way as not to “jeopardize state security and disrupt social stability” (Hermida). The powerful Google search engine, which was previously blocked by the Great Red Firewall, was also recently allowed to reenter the Chinese market after agreeing to filter search results (Hermida). Thus the censorship attempts of the Chinese government receive help from foreign businesses, which understand the potential for capital gain in China.

In addition to macro-scale monitoring and filtering, the Chinese government employs
more than 30,000 people to control and monitor e-mails, weblogs and chatrooms ("China Online"). One example of the responsibilities of such a police task force is the constant monitoring and deletion of possible anti-government speech in the most popular Chinese chatrooms. According to BBC News, messages criticizing the government "either never appear or are purged from popular chat rooms" ("Chinese"). This level of attention to detail shows the Chinese government's absolute commitment to stripping the Internet of its ability to maintain fast, free communication. The task-force also aids in undoing the anonymity and secrecy offered by Internet communication. By monitoring e-mails and tracking down IP addresses, the Net police can effectively find out the location of origin of anti-government speech, be it on a website or in a chatroom. Thus the popular saying by former President Bill Clinton that trying to censor the Internet is like "trying to nail jello to a wall" does not apply to China's detailed, multi-level method of censorship. The Internet is inherently decentralized and free, but with enough resources and programming ability, neither of which are limiting factors for the Chinese government, much of the Web's content can be monitored and regulated.

As a result of this expansive system of censorship, the controversial essays of Lu Jiaping and the book excerpts of Qi Yanchen no longer exist on the Internet. Even the US-based pro-Tibetan freedom website grafixnpix.com/buddha.htm is not accessible in China. The site itself boasts at the very top, perhaps in a ploy to rile up emotion, that "this site is banned in China" (See Fig. 1). Thus the Great Red Firewall has suffocated the voice of dissent that may have previously existed on Chinese networks. And as the Internet and the potential voice of dissent grow in China, so will the level of sophistication of government censorship. According to a study conducted at Harvard Law School, Chinese "blocking systems are becoming more refined even as they are likely more labor- and technology-intensive to maintain than cruder predecessors" (Zittrain). So long as the Chinese government continues to adapt to new threats as it has been doing, it will have the upper hand in the battle for freedom on national networks.

Although Iran's system of censorship is not yet nearly as effective or complex as that of China, the Islamic Republic is making headway in controlling the flow of electronic information as well. The infrastructural basis for the Internet is not as simple in Iran as in China. There is no single main portal to the outer World Wide Web in Iran as there is in the People's Republic. The Iranian network is actually composed of more than 1,000 free, commercially run ISPs, with their own privately operated networks (Rahimi). Thus the task of control was, and still is, a bit more daunting for the Iranian regime. However, recently recognizing the political threat of the Internet, the Islamic Republic has begun to crack down on the online freedom it previously allowed. Instead of directly controlling the ISPs as the Chinese government does, the Iranian government now threatens service providers with "court action unless they block access to 15,000 sites deemed immoral" ("Iran Steps"). Since the vast
majority of these ISPs are in the business to make a profit, the possibility of being shut down overshadows any concern their owners may have for keeping the Internet free. Consequently, they have for the most part acquiesced to the government’s demands by developing and implementing censorship software (See Fig. 2).

Thus the more decentralized Iranian Internet corresponds with a more decentralized, and almost as effective, method of censorship. The end result is the filtering of both “pornographic sites and sites produced by political organizations opposed to the government” (Graham 227).

According to the ironically censored Iranian website stop.censoring.us, new websites are added to the filtered list every day. Just this January, for example, the news websites rouydad.com and emrooz.org, which are both “close to the main reformist party,” were filtered and ordered to be shut down by the Iranian Judiciary (Hoder). Payvand.com, a popular news source for Iranians outside the country, listed 43 reformist sites which were recently added to the filtered list (Free). Of the 43, some had been taken down while others were still available for viewing outside the Iranian network. And what about all the innovative Iranian weblogs? What about Iranian Girl, Hossein Derakhshan, Shahyad and Sina Motallebi? All censored. In her broken English, Iranian Girl sent up one of her last posts by stating that "the most important politic websites or famous weblogs [are censored] by many popular ISPs. And it’s a pity that all of anonymously web surfing websites are also filtered” (Iranian Girl). Shahyad also complains with an exclamation of frustration: “What a pity !! My weblog is blocked here in Iran by some filters!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (Shahyad).

Goliath’s Intimidation

Although Iranian Girl and Shahyad stopped posting after being censored, with a quick visit to rooznegar.com one can see that Sina Motallebi, the most politically active and professional of them all, still posts on a regular basis. This phenomenon is due to the fact that the former resident of Tehran was recently exiled to Germany. His exile came after being the first Iranian arrested for publishing anti-governmental material online (“Gagging”). Such arrests are a part of scare tactics, a more effective means of controlling dissent on the Web that has been employed for many years by China and is just beginning to arise in Iran. Scare tactics involve the inducement of fear in the general population in order to promote self-censorship. Such a psychological tool is perhaps far more effective than any surpassable firewall could be.

The Great Red Firewall and the Iranian decentralized method of censorship are by no means foolproof. With a bit of computer savvy, oppressed netizens can access an unrestricted Word Wide Web by linking themselves to a proxy server, a computer outside the country’s own network (Hermida). Such techniques and server lists are often posted online or in chat rooms (Hermida). But then what is the point of all the money and efforts expended by the authoritarian governments to control their webspaces if simple Internet tricks can get around them? Wouldn’t everyone simply connect to a proxy server and access a more open Internet? Apparently not. According to information revolution experts Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor Boas, “although some may wish to access uncensored news or politically sensitive web sites, average users are too risk-averse to do so” (143). The “risk” that impedes the vast majority of Chinese and Iranian netizens from posting and reading pro-reform material online is a direct derivative of governmental scare tactics.

The first and most obvious method of invoking fear in the hearts of dissent-minded Internet users is punishing known online dissidents. In Iran, the case of Sina Motallebi
provides the first and so far only high-profile Internet arrest. In response to this arrest, Ayatollah Shahroudi, the Iranian Judiciary Chief, called for the “establishment of a special committee for legal investigation of Internet-related crimes and offenses” (Rahimi). With the public establishment of such a committee, the Iranian government wants to demonstrate that it is serious about controlling its networks. The regime is trying to show that Internet dissent is indeed a “crime” and that Iranian netizens should be aware of their every step on the Internet.

When compared with Iran, China has a more detailed history of punishing cyber-dissidents and using personal scare tactics to maintain control. Both Lu Jiaping and Qi Yanchen, the previously mentioned online dissenter, were not only censored but also detained by the Chinese government (Van Der Made 5-6). These two are not, however, the only examples of imprisoned Chinese cyber-dissidents. The Chinese government has arrested and made an example of citizens from all walks of life who have dared use the Internet to voice dissent. Guo Qinghai, a freelance writer; Jiang Shihua, an Internet café owner; Liu Weifang, a small business owner; Chi Shouzhu, a laborer; and Wang Zhenyong, a psychology professor, are among the 54 Chinese citizens who have been detained, and sometimes tortured, for posting controversial materials on the Web (5-6). According to the US-based journal *China Rights Forum*, these detainees “wanted to present a critical message and thought [the Internet] was a good way to criticize the government without being found out. They were wrong” (8). The Chinese government, with its 30,000-man-strong Internet police force, tracked down their locations through the use of their IP addresses and various other means. Under Chinese law, once caught, Internet dissidents “could even face the death penalty for posting certain material” (7). This threat of imprisonment and death deters users from even considering the use of the Internet for anti-government purposes.

Many of the above-mentioned Chinese and Iranian dissidents had not tried to spread counter-government news and opinions through nondigital means. They became interested in active dissent only after discovering the apparent secrecy and democratizing potential of the Internet. In all probability, the government would never have caught these would-be dissidents had it not been for the Internet. Although the Web may provide a forum for uncontrolled speech, it also allows a new system by which possible threats to the government can more easily be noticed and dealt with. Because some citizens may see the Internet as a provider of anonymity, they may be more prone to express their inner beliefs and criticisms of the government. Thus the Internet allows the government to find and detain more possible threats to its stability. In this way, the feigned democratizing power of the cyber world directly works against dissident efforts.

In addition to scaring would-be cyber-dissidents, both China and Iran have effectively implemented indirect scare tactics to control their networks. By threatening private ISPs and Internet cafés with fines and closures for allowing their users to visit ideologically “harmful” websites, the governments have added a second, private layer to their control mechanisms. In China, ISPs that detect a user trying to access forbidden material are required by law to “immediately stop the transmission, keep relevant records and report the situation to the relevant state authorities” (Van Der Made 7). If the Chinese ISPs do not obey these regulations, they will face large fines, and in some instances, closures (7). Since such Internet providers are semi-governmental, profit-based organizations, they are motivated to obey these regulations. Thus the ISPs act as a secondary enforcement agency for the Chinese government. In addition to requiring help from ISPs, the Chinese
government has also begun using Internet café managers as secondary police. Since much of
the country’s population uses Internet cafés rather than home computers to access the
Internet, this method is also particularly effective. The same fines and closures that apply
to Chinese ISPs govern the Internet café world of the country. As a result, in most Internet
cafés personnel routinely walk by screens, “reading over the shoulders of clients,” to watch
for illegal material (4). The city of Shanghai recently installed cameras in all its Internet
cafés to instill even more fear in anyone daring to attempt to access illegal material from a
public computer (“Shanghai”). To show that it means business, the Chinese government
has closed down many Internet cafés that have not adhered to government regulations
(“Shanghai”).

The Iranian story is similar to that of the Chinese. Though there are no camera-
infested Internet cafés in Tehran, many such businesses have been closed down for failing
to uphold censorship standards (“Postcards”). Though ISPs are also required by law to
inform the government of attempts to access restricted sites, this law has thus far proven
unenforceable for the Iranian government and its limited Internet capabilities (Rahimi).
The Iranian regime has not yet come close to the level of sophistication of the Chinese
in censorship or effective scare tactics. However, in due time, if the Iranian government
follows the “appealing” (Tan 274) model of the Internet created through trial and error by
the Chinese, they can reach the level of control boasted by the People’s Republic. Indeed,
when the Internet was in its bud in China in the early 1990s, the Chinese government
had a similar “relaxed attitude toward the diffusion of Internet technology” as the Iranian
government did just a few years ago (274). In some ways Iran can develop its control over
the Internet even more effectively and efficiently than China, since instead of needing self-
experimentation, the Iranian government can use China as a functioning model.

Overall, “soft control” of the Internet has proven effective at “promoting self
censorship” in China, and to a lesser extent in Iran (Kalathil 141). New laws creating harsh
punishments for Internet dissent and its tolerance by private companies have created a
general fear among both Internet users and providers. Such a fear is perhaps a better friend
to the authoritarian regimes than the most impenetrable firewall in the world.

David’s Size Disadvantage

We have seen that both the Chinese regime and, to a lesser extent, the Iranian
regime, effectively control the eyes and ears of their respective online communities
through the use of technology and fear. But even in the unlikely event that these control
mechanisms fail and the total potential Internet populations of both Iran and China
are exposed to anti-government material, the regimes will not feel a significant blow.
According to the highest estimates, only 1.7% of the Iranian population (Rahimi) and 7%
of the Chinese population (“Riding”) have access to the Internet. These figures include
those who surf the Net in Internet cafés. Even if an anti-regime message were to spread to
every single one of these users via the Internet, there would be no large effect, for the vast
majority of the population would never see the contents of this message.

Not only are Internet users a small minority in both China and Iran, but they are
not at all representative of the general population. In China, for example, users are
“predominantly male, young and with college or higher level of education” (Van Der
Made 6). Simply said, Internet users are the young upper and upper middle classes,
who have had little economic hardships and are too young to truly remember events
such as Tiananmen Square. In general, these Chinese netizens do not have a great deal
to complain about, so any political message found online most likely will not resonate too deeply within their minds. In Iran, the story is similar. The 1.7% who actually have Internet access are part of the upper class and upper middle classes. A large portion of this population has a vested interest in the stability of the state for their own economic stability. Thus, although many Internet users may enjoy reform in both China and Iran, they are most probably not prone to outright revolt and dissent against the governments which have brought them relative prosperity. Furthermore, according to Kalathil and Boas, it is “questionable whether mere exposure to outside news is enough to sway popular opinion in authoritarian regimes” (143). From constant exposure to state propaganda and media, citizens of such regimes have become “skeptical to all media, international as well as domestic” (143). Thus, merely exposing them to opinions and information that undermines the government’s authority would most probably have little effect.

Goliath’s Own Slingshot

As a result of demographic limitations, censorship and fear, cyber-dissidents have had almost no success in spreading the message of democracy and causing any noticeable reform. Most citizens, who do not actively seek free news and democratic opinions, have not been exposed significantly to such materials. In both Iran and China, the effectiveness of the Internet has thus been limited to organizing groups and events. In the Islamic Republic, a student demonstration in June of 2003 was partly organized via Internet chatrooms and weblogs (Rahimi). Even this Internet aid could have easily been impeded had Iran earlier implemented weblog censorship and the chatroom monitoring program now prominent in China. In the People’s Republic, the Falungong spiritual movement managed to organize much of its member base online (Van Der Made 8). The movement has since been banned and its websites stripped from Chinese networks. These two minor accomplishments are negligible in comparison to the bold goals of many cyber-dissidents. After extensive search in newspapers, journals, and even dissident websites, the student demonstration and the Falungong movement provided the only instances of successful anti-government Internet campaigns.

Thus the voice of online dissent, after running through the powerful filters of censorship and fear, has failed to reach far. Cyber dissent has accomplished almost nothing in the ways of change and reform. The governments of China and Iran have effectively, though not completely, suffocated this online voice of reform and revolution. Recently, these governments have even begun to drown the remaining whispers of dissent in a sea of pro-government propaganda on the Internet. In Iran, government-supported news publications such as Etelaat (etelaat.com) and the Islamic Republic News Agency (irna.com) have established homes on the World Wide Web. Political figures have also set up their own websites. The president of the Islamic Republic, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, has created his own website at president.ir. The site has a warm, smiling picture of the president set upon a backdrop of the Iranian flag as its banner (See Fig. 3). Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader and the most powerful man in Iran, has his own website (wilayah.org) in which he expresses his views on Islam and politics. Even the vice president, perhaps in an attempt to seemingly lessen the distance between himself and the Iranian people, has created a weblog (webnevesht.com) with personal links such as “about me” and “pictures.”

![Fig. 3: The banner of President Khatami's website, http://www.president.ir/](http://www.president.ir/)
Similar websites are also available in China. *The People's Daily*, the official newspaper of the Chinese government, has a fully functional and aesthetically pleasing news site (peopledaily.com.cn). The People's Republic of China also boasts its official “Government Homepage” online at www1.cei.gov.cn/govinfo/english/default1e.shtml. In fact, one does not have to search long at all to find Chinese government rhetoric on the Net. Just typing the word “China” in the Google search engine yields a plethora of government-sponsored sites on the very first search results page. One such site, for example, is that of the China Internet Information Center (china.org.cn), which claims to be the “authorized government portal site to China, offering news and searchable texts of government position papers as well as basic information about Chinese history, politics, economics and culture.” Not surprisingly, the first page of the Google search results contains no dissident websites whatsoever.

In general, both the Chinese and Iranian government sites and weblogs seem much more professional and detailed than comparable sites holding opposing viewpoints. Furthermore, unlike dissident sites, these websites are actually advertised legally throughout media other than the Internet. Thus the Iranian and Chinese governments can and have used the Internet to convey their own messages much more strongly than their opponents.

**Goliath’s Unique Weapon: The Economy**

In addition to allowing authoritarian governments a new portal to voice their own propaganda, the Internet has aided the stability of such regimes in a more subtle, indirect way. The Internet has ignited a rapid economic boom in both Iran and China. Through the introduction of Internet and computer-based hardware, software and service companies, private businesses have grown and thus helped the Iranian and Chinese economies. Indeed, the Internet has allowed developing countries that have introduced the technology into their economies to “leap forward into the Information Age, [translating] into great economic benefits” (Tan 264). This economic benefit was most probably the initial reason that such governments even allowed the introduction of such a potentially subversive technology into their countries.

But what do economic conditions have to do with dissent and stability in authoritarian regimes? Are not the causes for democracy and freedom ideologically driven? It is true that the principles of freedom and equality play an important role in the reformatory and revolutionary process; however, for the most part, revolutionary change only occurs during times of economic instability. Political change of great magnitude under authoritarian rule is more often than not ignited by economic problems rather than purely social ones. The great rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that arose from the American Revolution had their roots in a people's discontent at taxation more so than in any social ideology. Similarly, the bloody French Revolution that boasted *Liberté, Égalité e Fraternité* arose from widespread peasant starvation. Indeed, Karl Marx described the main cause of civil strife to be economic oppression (Anderson). Even according to Crane Brinton and Ted Gurr, both revolutionary scholars who stand against Marx's purely economic model, political illegitimacy alone does not cause civil strife; rather a perception of “economic deprivation” is necessary for a populace to revolt (Gurr 14). Thus a successful economy that readily and candidly benefits the populace acts as the most important tool for maintaining order and control under an authoritarian regime.

The Internet has aided the creation of exactly such a successful stabilizing economy
in China and, to a lesser degree, Iran. With the introduction of the Internet, China “is moving from an information-scarce economy to the fastest-growing emerging player in the global market for Internet services” (Rao). In fact according to USAToday, Chinese Internet stocks are currently leading the US’s own Nazdaq technology stock index (“China Sentences”). As a result of this Internet boom, the national economy is growing at the almost-unheard-of annual rate of 10 percent (Lev). Even “cautious” Chinese government officials believe that this information-induced boom will lift “hundreds of millions out of poverty over the next two decades” (Schmid). This Internet-induced economic success and lift from poverty is undoubtedly having the opposite effect of the destabilization craved by online dissidents; it is helping the country grow and making the government’s policies ever more popular.

Though the Internet boom is not as strong in Iran, it is still significant. Computer stores are popping up all over Tehran and other Iranian cities to feed the population’s hunger for the Internet (Hammersley). This Internet “fever” has also led to widespread development of classes that teach web surfing and other useful skills related to the Net (Hammersley). As a result, the Iranian government “estimates that 800,000 jobs will be created in the Internet field in the next five years” (Hammersley). These new jobs will undoubtedly help lower the country’s 12% unemployment rate (Hammersley). The Internet is clearly not spreading as fast or currently benefiting as many people in Iran as in China, but even in a country where only 1.7% of the population currently has Internet access, its positive effects on the economy are undeniable. By helping better the living conditions of millions throughout both countries, the Internet is and will undoubtedly continue to be a friend of the authoritarian regimes that originally introduced it to their countries.

A Revision: Goliath’s Victory

From its origins in the Eastern Mediterranean to its modern-day worldwide expanse, the story of David and Goliath has remained prominent in the hearts of humanity because of its strong message: With the correct combination of will, tool and skill, the underdog can defeat his seemingly indomitable oppressor. The very appeal of this story is in its improbable and inspiring outcome. The tale provides hope for the weak and small. It allows marginalized groups and individuals, such as those fighting for absolute democracy, to have faith. It allows such people to think that perhaps, with the correct weapon, they may overcome their overbearing enemies just as swiftly as David. In the case of the Internet’s use in modern-day power struggles, however, such an improbable outcome as that of David and Goliath is rare. The Internet is no slingshot. It is no revolutionary weapon of democracy. The Web is not completely free. It has become a tool that is controlled, monitored and even used to advantage the state. Just as any other weapon, the powerful Goliath governments of this world have cleverly utilized it to save themselves from defeat by dissident Davids. Such regimes have reversed the outcome of the story: Goliath has defeated David with his very own slingshot.

“Idealism is what precedes experience; cynicism is what follows” (David T. Wolf qtd. in Moncur). Those who still believe in the revolutionizing powers of an ever-free Internet are, in a word, idealistic. They choose to ignore the unwanted teachings of experience. They choose to ignore the effectiveness of the State’s power to control its networks through censorship and age-old policing tactics. Perhaps believing that the State has all but won the Internet tug of war is cynical, but it is the truth. Cyber-dissidents must understand
that the Internet is no different than any other tool, be it television or print media; simply put, the regime has more resources, more power, and therefore the advantage. Internet hopefuls must understand that the Net is no equalizing and revolutionizing slingshot of dissent in the face of large overwhelming State power. This weapon, the World Wide Web, is only as worldly and wide as regimes such as China and Iran want it to be. In the end, the Internet has provided only one benefit to proponents of change and democracy: it has taught them the valuable lesson that no single weapon, no matter how seemingly equalizing, will win the fight for freedom.

Works Cited


Spring 2004 Honorable Mention

Shannon Donahue

Instructor’s Foreword

As a researcher and writer, Shannon Donahue demonstrates integrity, creativity, and grace. Her analysis of “greenwashing”—the growing practice of ecological advertising campaigns on the part of petroleum and other heavy industries—draws on an impressive range of primary materials (such as print advertisements depicting Shell Oil’s environmental conservation projects). Indeed, the depth and originality of Shannon’s research sets her essay apart throughout. Further, her argument—which reveals unexpected similarities between the aesthetic and even political strategies of “greenwashing and non-profit ecological advertising campaigns—is supported with careful analysis. For example, she effectively contextualizes her findings, explaining how non-profit campaigns, like the one sponsored by Heritage Forests, are funded (in part) by corporate entities. She also shows that these “green” campaigns, regardless of funding, use corporate marketing strategies to appeal to increasingly media-savvy audiences. What makes Shannon’s essay particularly compelling is her ability to develop complex arguments. Thus, while her research reveals common tactics on the part of “greenwashing” and “green” campaigns, Shannon shows her reader the important differences between those campaigns’ purpose and ethos. Ultimately, then, Shannon’s essay is itself an exemplary piece of rhetoric, one that has a lively sense of purpose, engaging arguments, multi-faceted evidence, and a compelling ethos.

Allison Carruth
How Clean Are Green Ads?
Evaluating Environmental Advertising in Contemporary Media
Shannon Donahue

Introduction

Today, print and television commercials air environmental awareness advertisements that address such ecological issues as land conservation, recycling, and energy/water consumption. At the same time, “Greenwashing” (or “dirty”) corporations, run pseudo-environmental ads. Masking their harmful actions against the environment with propaganda-driven rhetoric, dirty businesses strive to deflect negative publicity and to project a facade of ecological know-how and concern. The campaigns of environmental groups, which confuse casual audiences with mixed messages and forge unexpected corporate partnerships, compete with Greenwashers for audience attention and sympathy. Consumers may not understand the motives behind such seemingly innocuous partnerships, like those of C.A.R.E., which, contrary to its acronym, counts some of the world’s largest environmental degraders as its partners. Similarly, ad campaigns produced by environmental non-profit organizations, like Environmental Defense, may receive funding from major polluters. The sometimes dissimilar creators of today’s “Green campaigns” address audiences via print and television, while the recent growth in the number of such ads overwhelms the average reader with confusing information. Often, groups hide self-seeking motives behind Green facades. A multitude of organizations and companies present mixed messages on ecological issues, thereby challenging both the plausibility and the effectiveness of the promotion of Green issues in the media today.

Partisan Politics and the Environment

Partisan and monetary motives influence environmental media campaigns crafted by both large corporations and nonprofit environmental organizations. Many of today’s well-known environmental movements are connected to partisan political campaigns, making it difficult to separate political and environmental motives. For example, Al Gore’s declaration of his environmental record of “clean air, clean water, and action against global warming” contradicts his actual actions (Perry 22). In reality, Gore, as Vice President, denied the breaching of the Snake River Dams. The continued existence of these dams, according to environmental groups such as Trout Unlimited, promises extinction to the “already dwindling population of steelhead and trout in the Snake River” (Perry 23). Too often, political aims undermine the efficacy and minimize the imminent danger of fragile ecological conditions. President Clinton’s Roadless Area Conservation Rule, supported by “nearly two million public comments” (Greenpeace 1) apparently saved many “protected” pristine areas from logging and deforestation. However, according to Earth First!, the monthly publication of a radical environmental conservation group, the Rule did little but give Al Gore a Green-friendly facade in the 2000 election (Time 2). Not only is the Rule impermanent, but it allows for “grazing, mining, drilling…”
in the nation’s forests and does not cover forests “in the Pacific Northwest” (Time 1). Furthermore, the rule is ineffective as the United States Forest Service, along with logging corporations, can and will circumvent it to protect profits (Time 2). Indeed, President Bush’s December 2003 exclusion of the Tongass National Forest from the Rule sparked much political and environmental debate and criticism. An article by Greenpeace not only blames Bush’s conservative administration for the Tongass decision and the consequences of this omission but also emphasizes his administration’s lack of environmental concern in policy-making. According to Greenpeace, “Americans will not sit idly by while our natural heritage is sold off for short-term profit and our rights are trampled” (Greenpeace 2). Here, the organization solicits broad support and concern, assuming that most people will feel that the environmental policy and actions of the Bush Administration violate their rights as American citizens. Greenpeace argues that as the national forests are our national “heritage,” it is our “right” that they are preserved. However, the declaration of Earth First! that Clinton’s rule caused “more logging, not less,” suggests a tug-of-war between the interrelated issues of partisan politics and environmentalism (Time 2). The real problem—the welfare of the nation’s forests—is lost in a mire of partisanship and negative propaganda.

The History of Greenwashing

The Greenwashing movement’s relatively long existence, a testament to the ongoing public relations battles issuing from the world’s most powerful companies on ecological issues, is today spurred by both public image demands and profit opportunities. Following the first Earth Day in 1971, Keep America Beautiful (KAB), a coalition of polluting companies in such industries as tobacco, glass, and solid-waste, ran television spots urging consumers to dispose of their trash in a responsible manner. The commercials, which featured an American Indian actor crying against a landscape of roadside litter, played to American ethos and pathos while it portrayed the companies as environmentally “concerned”. However, at the same time, KAB was vehemently opposed to a national recycling bill, the approval of which would have cut their profits (Helvarg 2). The problem, according to the Container Recycling Institute, lies in KAB’s ongoing promotion of “Clean Community Systems and litter taxes as replacements for container deposit laws and other government regulations” (Container Recycling Institute 1). The Institute “respects the efforts of well-intentioned groups and hard-working individuals across the country that enlist in programs sponsored by Keep America Beautiful” yet wonders whether these people are aware that they have “aligned themselves with a trade group rather than an environmental organization” (Container Recycling Institute 2). Hence, today’s consumers are required to be increasingly conscious of ecological issues and corporate alliances, or they risk unknowingly supporting Greenwashers.

Unfortunately, this objective is not a reality in environmental marketing. Partnerships between nonprofit Green organizations and major corporations proudly tout their combined efforts at environmental conservation. However, the underlying belief espoused by many corporations and even certain Green groups that economic development and profitability are compatible with environmental protection may be more a way of “putting the best public face on corporate irresponsibility” (Helvarg 1). Author David Helvarg contends that some companies form high-profile partnerships with mainstream environmentalist groups as they simultaneously lobby against green laws, which would restrict their profits. For example, Environmental Defense (ED), which, for many years embraced a public
assault on McDonald’s Styrofoam wrappers, joined with the multinational giant in 1990 to cut down on the company’s waste. ED accepted funding from McDonald’s while the company in exchange improved its public image and profits. Today, campaigns produced by the Environmental Defense Foundation frequently receive funding from such polluting corporations, an ironic source of income for a Green group. It seems that Green groups like ED feel forced to adopt a practical attitude to do “the most right” action and sometimes contradict their fundamental ideologies.

**Corporate Irresponsibility**

The false claims produced by Greenwashers have generated significant negative attention from various critics. Some censors go so far as to term the epidemic proportions of Greenwashing as “ecopornography” (Karliner 2). A 1989 poll showed that “77% of Americans said that a corporation’s environmental reputation affected what they bought” (Karliner 2). In light of such consumer interests, many corporations and “eco-partnerships” focus solely on image maintenance and do not in fact address ecological issues. While mottoes like “Clear the Air, Don’t Cloud the Issue” and “We’re Returning the Favor,” suggest a commitment to renewable energy sources, Shell, the creator of these slogans, spends only 0.6% of its annual R&D budget on “environmental” projects like its newly formed Center for Sustainable Development at Rice University (CorpWatch 2). Though the world’s third-largest oil company presents itself as Green-friendly, it consistently sullies the environment. Take, for example, Shell’s refusal to clean up what has become the world’s largest underground oil spill in Durban, South Africa, where to date “over one million liters of oil have been dumped” (Weissman 1). Moreover, the corporation’s involvement in partnerships like the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), comprised of such “dirty” giants as BP Oil, Shell, Chevron, General Motors, and U.S. Steel, contradicts its claims of efforts toward environmental conservation. NAM, which at the 1997 Earth Day celebration in Washington D.C. promoted renewable and energy-efficient technology, in reality uses such campaigns as “ecopornography.” In fact, “NAM members consistently pay millions of dollars in environmental fines, sponsor anti-environmental front groups such as the Global Climate Coalition and the Business Network for Environmental Justice, and oppose environmental laws in Congress” (Karliner 2).

The eco-pornography produced by such companies is an attempt at what some term “Astroturf,” defined by Sharon Beder as a “grassroots program that involves the instant manufacturing of public support for a point of view in which either uninformed activists are recruited or means of deception are used to recruit them” (3). These appeals by major corporate interests advance their questionable agendas (Helvarg 3). Indeed, the National Association of Manufacturers and its major members routinely produce ecopornography in their “Astroturf” public relations campaigns. General Electric, one of NAM’s largest and most influential member companies, runs ads about its “cleaner, greener power machines” (General Electric). However, while GE’s new H-System Turbine reportedly produces fewer emissions, it is relatively unclear: the system simply “produces fewer greenhouse gas emissions compared to other large gas turbines” (General Electric). GE’s ad, featuring a large, shiny, clean-looking turbine and simple text against a white background, has every element of an attractive, responsible Green ad, yet the advertisement assumes that viewers are unaware of its membership in NAM, many of whose members are global polluters. GE hopes that viewers instead will regard it as the “cleanest” gas company. Today, it seems both GE and the American public are satisfied with the “Greenest” solution. However,
this means that a new technology is often an image ploy and not a Green solution at all. Likewise, on its website, the NAM tells readers in its “About Us” section that “*Fortune* rates NAM as one of the top ten most influential advocacy groups in the country” (National Association of Manufacturers). This status is detrimental to the environment, for the organization wields much power over major environmental proposals and Congressional decisions. One such bill, S.8, suggested a rollback of “Superfund.” This program, initiated in 1986 to make oil companies pay for and inform the public about the nation’s worst toxic waste sites, has been hotly contested by polluters like DuPont and industry trade associations such as the American Petroleum Institute. Shell, along with other “dirty” conglomerates, has to date given over $4 million to the campaigns of the proponents for reducing the “Superfund,” including congressmen Trent Lott, Bob Smith and John Chafee (U.S. Public Interest Research Group 2).

A recent DuPont print campaign features an ad with a “cuddly” polar bear while in another, the Great Wall of China dominates a pristine wild environment (DuPont). However, DuPont has “paid out an estimated $1 billion on some 1,400 claims since 1990 when their fungicide Benlate 50 DF destroyed crops and land” (Hladky 3). With a slogan of “To-Do List for the Planet” headlining their print advertisements, DuPont promotes itself as an earth-science pioneer. Also remember DuPont’s involvement in lobbying against Superfund: clearly, the corporation’s main achievements have not been environmental conservation. The ads’ check-list of environmental goals ironically frames their glowing portraits of animals and nature. According to European Association of Communication Agencies for Sustainability board member Mike Longhurst, the problem with companies like DuPont is that “there is a disconnection between what advertisers are saying and doing on the issues and what they are communicating through advertising” (Longhurst 2). Although these companies appear environmentally friendly through simple ads showcasing “cute” animals like polar bears, they just hide their real actions, such as NAM membership and lobbying against environmental protection bills.

**Nonprofit Green Groups’ Advertising Campaigns**

Consequently, nonprofit responses to harmful environmental actions and partisan agendas work to spark public interest and pique the attention of a certain segment of the population. The Heritage Forests Campaign, for example, vilifies the Bush Administration and incites public support against the President’s exclusion of lands from Clinton’s Roadless Rule. The ad’s brightly-colored image of logged trees combined with a succinct, all-caps message, aimed at multiple audiences, appeals to both educated persons who already know about the issue and the lay reader attracted by catchy aesthetics. Even if a reader has never heard of the Roadless Rule, he or she will likely be concerned by the felled trees or will feel slightly angered by the “April Fools!” message (Heritage Forests Campaign). Yet the ad assumes preexisting knowledge in that neither the Roadless Rule’s details nor the implication of a quote from Agricultural Secretary Ann Veneman are explained. The ad purposefully overlooks the shortcomings of the Roadless Rule from its 1998 creation by President Clinton. Instead, it focuses on Conservative Agricultural Secretary Veneman as an environmental villain comparable to Bush. Her decisions have “severely restricted future wildlife protection” (Center for Native Ecosystems) and the Heritage Forests ad clearly highlights her negative involvement in the Rule’s recent exclusion. Again, the emphasis is on the inadequacy of Bush’s administration in addressing apparently popular environmental concerns. Magazines printing the ads, such
as *Stanford Magazine, Outside* and *Reader’s Digest*, reach multiple audiences with different educational levels, demographics, and interests. Displayed in mainstream magazines, these ads incite immediate audience sympathy, or at least consideration, for uninformed readers may easily fall prey to mawkish ploys about the tragic situation of the forests.

Despite endorsement or design by a non-profit organization, such campaigns seek to advance political agendas through environmental issues. The Heritage Forests Ad focuses more on a viewer’s perceptions of President Bush and his political decisions, rather than the environmental issue of the forests at stake. The ads, then, play to dual audiences: an informed readership cognizant of party politics and history, and an unassuming public capable of being swayed by popular media on television and in magazines inspired to develop activist sentiments and sympathy. Similarly, the Heritage Forests campaign, composed of diverse organizations and people, promotes the cause to various groups yet publicly maintains that they all seek the same goals: “The Heritage Forests Campaign is an alliance of conservationists, wildlife advocates, clergy, educators, scientists, and other Americans working together to uphold protection of our National Forests” (Heritage Forests Foundation). United under the slogan “Once they’re gone, they’re gone forever…” (Heritage Forests Campaign), the movement threatens all readers, uninformed and activist-minded, with a sense of inevitability and impending doom. In repeated ads, they highlight the Bush Administration as responsible for brutal environmental harm. Although the Heritage Forests Campaign is a nonprofit, its partisan political undertones make it appear similar to Greenwashing advertisements that blatantly promote a certain political or corporate stance. Hence, while the Heritage Forests Campaign seeks a green agenda, they procure funding from “dirty” corporations and thus debase their stated goals of conservation and restoration.

Another Heritage Forests advertisement is a play on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. Its macabre colors, busy graphics and text immediately draw the viewer’s attention. The ad is “produced” by the “timber, oil and logging companies” and has text located in a giant chainsaw image (Heritage Forests Campaign). Again, we are influenced to develop negative opinions not only of President Bush’s actions regarding the Roadless Rule but of his environmental policies in general. The nonprofit group’s ad appears angrier for the environmental issues it addresses, while the Shell ad actually resonates with a calmer image of harmonious restoration. Heritage Forests’ design actually promotes a more partisan-political-laden, chainsaw-toting message than does Shell’s Astroturf attempt. After viewing such ads, it is nearly impossible to resist developing subjective partisan political and ecological viewpoints. Emotional and ethical appeals trump fact to enforce arbitrary attitudes that favor each campaign’s goals.

**Creating Confusion: Green and Greenwash**

The recent growth of Greenwashing media campaigns further complicates the efforts of nonprofit Green organizations to mount a successful and united front while it quiets criticism of underhanded environment pollution by multinational corporations. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of Greenwashing, quoted in *Boise Weekly*’s “The Name Game” as “disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image,” solidifies an abstract and previously esoteric concept. Here, the article educates uninformed readers prompting public support against Greenwashing or at the least, asks for consumers to become aware of Green issues.

Maybe, according to *The Green Guide*, an environmental activism publication, “We
can stop buying into it” (3). The Green Guide contends that environmental messages are “cheapened by the very perpetrators of the ecological crisis” (2). Often, these organizations seek to change only their public image while environmental degradation goes unnoticed by the average consumer and citizen. Coalitions of major corporations in similar markets, like The National Association of Manufacturers, sponsor Earth Day events and related activities to show they are “our country’s leading environmentalists” (Karliner 3). However, according to “The Name Game,” companies such as BP Oil “use advertising only to portray themselves as more environmentally friendly.” The author cites the Cascade Corporation, headquartered in Boise, as being responsible for such Greenwashing. In light of negative public connotation of the name “Cascade,” typically associated with heavy chemical use that damages the environment, the company seeks to reinvent its public image with a name change to “Boise Cascade Corporation.” These same commercial giants “pay millions of dollars in environmental fines and sponsor anti-environmental front groups” (Karliner 3), while they publicly pour support and money into “Astroturf” programs which laud their commitment to nature. For example, in 1999 Boise Cascade was fined an “undisclosed” sum for its illegal tree-cutting practices in Brazil (Draffan 1), while General Electric agreed to a $200 million settlement in September 1998 for pollution of the Housatonic River resulting from chemical releases from its plant in Pittsfield, Massachusetts (Corp Watch). “Astroturf” may be a sham, but, like its synthetic namesake, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between fake and real. Again, outward appearance supersedes environmental concern as these companies sneakily attempt to wash their image without actually cleaning up their actions.

The campaigns and programs of Greenwashing companies attempt to mirror those of ecological groups to garner public support and appeal to expanding Green-conscious audiences. Shell’s commitment to “sustainable development,” (Shell 2004) portrayed in aesthetically pleasing print ads, appeals to a wide audience. The accompanying text, detailing in poetic prose the beauty of America’s endangered wetlands, easily solicits sympathy from an unassuming public. Shell, “returning the favor” (Shell 2004) of protection to the land, is, according to The Green Guide, actually one of the major perpetrators of environmental degradation. However, for the employees pictured in the ad-environmental specialists affiliated with Shell, “it’s their responsibility” (Shell 2004) to help with conservation efforts. To the casual reader, both the Heritage Forests Campaign’s ad and Shell’s “Astroturf” seek support for environmental conservation. However, it would be difficult for the same reader to evaluate the advertisements’ deceptive messages. Certainly Shell hides its continued negative environmental impact in its “concerned” ads. Ironically, the ad, printed on the back cover of Stanford Magazine, reaches a well-educated readership.

These ads create “public confusion about which consumer products are or are not, environmentally sound” (Karliner 1). Another Shell campaign, “Cloud the Issue or Clear the Air?” focuses on Shell’s commitment to reducing global warming by limiting their Carbon Dioxide emissions and fossil fuel use. However, Shell continues to lobby congress for a lowering of standard emissions levels as decided in the Kyoto Protocol. In Shell’s own sustainable development booklet, entitled “Profits or Principles,” Shell clearly chooses the former by allowing that “a sustainable oil company is a contradiction in terms” (Shell). Here, their glossy print ads with clear blue skies run contrary to their stated goal of clearing the air: instead, Shell has “clouded the issue once again” (ARG Online). By imitating the motives and campaign strategy of nonprofit Green groups,
Greenwashers like Shell mask their actions with false concern, changing only their public image while they allow real environmental problems to worsen daily.

**Coming Clean: Combating Greenwash**

Today, some ethical environmental and corporate activists have taken the initiative to combat Greenwashing. CorpWatch, a five year old Bay-Area based organization, confers bimonthly “Greenwashing” awards to companies responsible for heavy public relations campaigns that blatantly ignore or misrepresent ecological issues (CorpWatch 2). According to CorpWatch, “With the Greenwash Awards, we research and document the reality behind the rhetoric, to reveal the true corporate role in various environmental issues” (CorpWatch 2). Companies that seek to be the “greenest of the green” (CorpWatch 2) today cannot escape the nonprofit group’s attention to such scams. Rachel Heller, coordinator for Earthday Resources, a group which publicizes Greenwashing scams, says, “These companies are trying to make fools of the public” (Heller). Watchdog groups are “delighted to recognize these companies for what they are: hypocrites” (CorpWatch). The group uses vibrant logos, such as the skull and crossbones image over Shell’s signature red and yellow namesake, to make its critique more effective.

Unfortunately, the average consumer is more likely to see an ad about Shell’s Sustainable Development efforts in an issue of *Reader’s Digest* than the in-depth articles and graphics posted on CorpWatch’s somewhat esoteric website. The accessibility to Americans of Greenwash ads makes disseminating the truth of these campaigns difficult. While lofty goals are laudable: “It is our mission to hold corporations accountable. The Greenwash Awards help expose the global corporate political agenda” (CorpWatch), few people actually encounter such anti-Greenwash efforts in their daily lives. Similarly, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has issued a series of “Green guidelines aimed at halting deceptive Greenwash ads” (Karliner 4). Again, the problem lies in the enforceability of such guidelines. The Guides for the Use of Environmental Marketing, issued in 1992 following FTC investigations, public opinion, and hearings, are neither legally enforceable nor do they preempt state or local laws and regulations (Karliner 4). For example, the FTC states “broad claims like ‘environmentally safe’ or ‘environmentally friendly’ should be qualified—or avoided—because they can convey a wide range of meanings to consumers that may be difficult to substantiate” (Federal Trade Commission). However, the FTC merely advises, rather than requires, that corporations comply. Finally, claims of false advertising can be used to sue companies responsible for Greenwashing. Many corporations, though, are cognizant of such exposure and skirt lawsuits with clever wording in advertisements, for example replacing “cleanest” with “cleaner.”

According to E. Bruce Harrison, the “father” of environmental marketing partnerships, a corporate-environmental partnership is a winning combination: “it avoids legal problems, and it widens your options” (Helvarg 3). By joining with mainstream environmental groups, polluting corporations put on a facade of cleaning up their acts—when in reality, they only clean their public image. Frequently, companies seek to misinform the public, as evidenced by a 1991 study in which 58% of environmental ads reviewed had at least one misleading claim (Journal of Public Policy and Marketing). Soon, it becomes all too difficult to incriminate these companies for ad campaigns that may appear misleading even to a highly informed segment of the population. All the better, according to major Public Relations firms like Burson-Marstellar, the industry’s leader in corporate Greenwashing. The advertising giant receives millions of dollars every
year to market dirty companies as environmentally friendly. As long as the American public shows concern about companies’ environmental actions, corporations that want to stay competitive must make environmentalism their main public relations focus (Karliner 2). And companies like Burson-Marstellar will continue to benefit, as they generate millions in annual revenue-on their “environmental” accounts alone.

Nonetheless, the rise of environmental concern in America today, evidenced by movements to restore, recycle, and conserve America’s natural resources, provides an impetus for Green campaigns. Amidst a sea of Greenwashers, nonprofit Green groups still seek to inform the public and to address environmental issues. Unfortunately, groups like the Heritage Forests Foundation adopt aggressive aesthetic tactics to counter Astroturf ads and end up confusing readers with their visuals. Also, their motives, contaminated by the possibility of lucrative partnerships with global corporations and the individual campaigns of Greenwashing companies, are increasingly questionable. Even apparently Green groups, like Environmental Defense, have questionable partisan political motives, while “dirty” multinational corporations like Shell and BP blatantly pitch their misleading “environmental concern” to readers around the globe. If Green groups truly want to remain “Green,” they must rely on informed readers to separate fact from fiction. Greenwashers such as Shell, however, hope for ignorance on the part of their audience. Their ads improve their public image by professing true concern and support for the environment. However, their actions are too often at odds with the environmental-friendly theme of their public relations campaigns.

Conclusion

Both nonprofit environmental groups and large multinational corporations appeal to similar audiences. While dirty corporations hope viewers lack the foresight to investigate seemingly innocuous claims, nonprofit organizations struggle to match the ostentation and high profile budgets of these campaigns. Hence, the nonprofits form partisan political and corporate partnerships and soon adopt much the same advertising strategies as the very companies whose practices they seek to change. Both corporations and nonprofits benefit from our tendency to accept media presentations at face value and not question the possibility of hidden motives. Today, many Green groups must find a way to circumvent Astroturf or risk losing public awareness and interest for pressing ecological problems. Consequently, political and monetary motives appear behind previously Green agendas in hopes of increasing audience attention.

The future, then, is not promising for the advancement, or even maintenance, of genuine environmental efforts in the media. David Helvarg’s declaration that Greenwashers “threaten our basic democratic institutions” is increasingly true, for the disinformation campaigns of these companies, disguising membership in industry front groups and support of “Wise Use” coalitions, undermines the facts and the ability of Americans to make informed decisions about environmental issues. Without drastic improvements and restrictions, Greenwashing will soon dominate environmental advertising and render worthless the campaigns of remaining real Green movements.
In this essay, I will use the term “dirty corporation” to reference companies that, according to The Environmental Magazine writer David Helvarg, present themselves as environmentally concerned but are actually degraders of the natural environment.

2 The group C.A.R.E. was established in 1996 with $175,000 in seed money from the timber industry, to advocate for the extension of clear-cut logging permits in the Tongass National Forest of Southeast Alaska. Its acronym stands for Concerned Alaskans for Resources and the Environment (Inter Press Service).

3 In using the term “political,” I refer to environmental campaigns funded or created in major part to emphasize certain opinions and aspects of a politician seeking election in office.

4 “Greenwash” is defined in the 10th edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary as the “disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image.”

5 The Environmental Defense Foundation counts Federal Express, McDonalds and CitiGroup among its major supporters, corporations identified with high smog production, excessive use of Styrofoam, and wasteful paper practices, respectively.

6 The term “ecopornography,” coined by Advertising Executive Jerry Mander, refers to the wave of Greenwashing ads in the media today (Ecopornography).

7 According to Corp-Focus, Shell began its campaign to preserve the Louisiana Wetlands in November 2002, titling the project “Returning the Favor.” Similarly, the “Clear the Air” campaign began in late 2001 and is an example of the oil corporations “giving millions to environmental groups and activists to buy silence and good will” (Corp-Focus).

8 CorpWatch, a 5-year old group dedicated to revealing the identities of major polluting corporations, defines Greenwashing as follows: “the phenomenon of socially and environmentally destructive corporations attempting to preserve and expand their markets by posing as friends of the environment” (CorpWatch).

9 A UN Conference on Climate Change, held in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997, produced an international agreement to combat global warming by sharply reducing emissions of industrial gases. Although the Unite States abandoned the treaty in 2001, saying it was counter to U.S. interests, most other nations agreed that year on the details necessary to make the protocol a binding international treaty (Encyclopedia.com).


“Solutions to Air Pollution.” Encyclopedia.com Online. 2004. 16 May 2004


Weissman, Robert. “Shell Oil and the Politics of Hype.” *Corp-Focus*. 2 December 2002. 2 May 2004
In “Writing About Technology: Rhetorics of Technophilia/Technophobia,” we study the invisibility of technology—including, prominently, the pervasive personal digital technologies of personal computing and entertainment—and ask ourselves questions about the nature of what was being taken for granted in the process. Guided by cultural critics like Sven Birkerts, Kirkpatrick Sale and Neil Postman, we try to train ourselves to look, to notice, and to think about the changes that we’re exposed to as denizens of what Postman calls the “Technopoly.” Cultivating the critical eye challenges us, because we are immersed in cultural systems that encourage us to see the superficial commercial message (smaller! lighter! faster! cool!) rather than the intrinsic narrative of cultural change (does this technology lead us to spend more time in the core pursuits that lead to a fulfilling life?).

Shivaram Lingamneni wanted to contribute to the explorations of our class community by disassembling the emerging mechanisms of web-based advertising and making visible in a compelling way the shallowness and duplicity of the form. Because advertising on the web is relatively new, he argued, it might show its hand and deliver up its manipulations for visible study more readily. This proved to be a fruitful approach. Shivaram tested his theories about the cynically shallow nature of online advertising by pulling back the covers of the advertisements’ screen presentations to reveal the underlying software logic that drove them. The markup of advertisements in Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and JavaScript provided fascinating and disturbing data that spoke directly to the motives and methods of the advertisers. Shivaram then met head on the rhetorical challenge of making meaningful to a non-technical audience the story told by the software code driving the ads. That story painted a picture of an industry engaging in bald misrepresentations bordering on malfeasance, an industry clawing unscrupulously for the mindshare of the growing community of internet users, an industry operating against no real code of propriety. Shivaram went on to set this story of today in the context of how it will likely play out tomorrow—and in so doing, he turned to the past to read the lessons of early television advertising and apply them to the current paradigm.

What makes this piece remarkable is its range and complexity—the willingness of the author to perform such diverse analytic work ranging from close readings of software code as well as broad readings of electronic advertising’s many decades of history. It takes a special writer and much diligent labor to bring those disparate pieces together into a coherent and important argument about the future. However, in the end Shivaram is most convincing in his conclusion that internet advertising is likely to attract specific governmental oversight in response to its current manipulative practices and that such oversight will lead to some specific and predictable outcomes. Shivaram’s essay represents what’s best about research in PWR1 because it is insightful in the questions it asks, fearless and smart in its approach to answering them, and articulate in its rendering of its answers.

Eric Miraglia
Advertising is so pervasive that some of its most bizarre and extreme examples have become invisible. We see nothing odd in race cars doubling as mobile billboards or our athletes accepting huge sums of money to become modern-day sandwich men. We are increasingly tolerant of the most grotesque examples of commercialization. But this same acceptance has been coupled with a remarkable degree of awareness and understanding. Children understand how the massive personal wealth of their favorite athletes is supported by a network of endorsements and promotions; adults have learned to regard advertisements with discernment and suspicion.

Advertising’s entrenchment in modern popular culture has had both profound positive and negative consequences. The celebrated media scholar Marshall McLuhan famously opined that advertising had become the “greatest art form of the 20th century” (“Advertising”); the Clio Awards, founded 1959, recognize excellence in all media of advertising with a ceremony that mimics the Academy Awards. Certain examples of advertisement are commonly accepted as entertainment in their own right; the most famous commercials, such as the Budweiser frog spots, have attained recognition as important cultural artifacts, even as actual works of art. Yet the ubiquity of advertising has raised considerable debate over whether the industry’s aims are truly in accord with the public interest. There is a widespread belief that advertisers and the public are at war: the advertisers seeking to breach the private citizen’s resistance to the sales pitch, the citizen himself doing his utmost to retain his skepticism. As early as 1927 (Fox 122), when the first wave of outcry against advertising began, the public has perceived a kind of cultural war between itself and the advertiser.

The World Wide Web, scarcely 15 years old, has arguably caused the massive increase in popularity of the Internet. The advertising industry certainly has not neglected to colonize this promising new territory; the Web now has the equivalents of print advertisements and television commercials, as well as new forms and techniques of advertising unique to the medium. But, in contrast to the established and entrenched conventions of its non-digital counterparts, Internet advertising is still in an embryonic, primitive state subject to dramatic changes in the immediate future. Based on examinations of advertising history, legal precedent, economic factors, and the technical issues of advertising display, we can make a variety of predictions about the future of interactive marketing on the Internet. A legal crackdown, a radical shift in business models, and a renewed focus on audience attitudes will all come to alter the state of Internet advertising in the near future.

An Introduction to Internet Advertising

The question of what, in fact, constitutes Internet advertising is more complicated than it might seem. Before we begin to discuss the future of Internet advertising, we must first define it, and distinguish it from related commercial content on the Internet.
The least invasive (and thus the first to be acclaimed) Internet advertising technique was the creation of entire websites to promote a product. The advertising establishment was quick to recognize these as supports for television and print campaigns. When the Clio Awards were first given to Internet campaigns in 1999, they went exclusively to such websites (Clio). It took two years for banner campaigns to gain similar recognition. The question is whether such websites actually qualify as Internet advertisements, or are instead the Internet presence of their corporation, analogous to physical premises rather than to a print ad or billboard. For the purposes of this paper, Internet advertisements are commercial messages displayed in the context of independent content, in the same way print and broadcast advertisements appear within another body of work; non-invasive promotional websites do not qualify.

The other major branch of Internet advertising that this paper will not discuss is unsolicited commercial e-mail, popularly known as spam. In a sense, spam is simply beyond the scope of this paper; spam has attracted so much public debate and academic research that a proper treatment of its evolution and current status would be impossible. Second, spam, unlike the other kinds of Internet advertising, is almost universally acknowledged to be a public nuisance. The CAN-SPAM Act of 2003, an aggressive piece of Federal legislation imposing strict limits and requirements on spammers, includes a list of official Congressional findings on the subject of spam. The Act estimates that spam constitutes “over half of all electronic mail traffic, up from an estimated 7 percent in 2001”; furthermore, it states that “the convenience and efficiency of electronic mail are threatened by the extremely rapid growth” of spam, which “imposes significant monetary costs on providers of Internet access services … that carry and receive such mail.” The CAN-SPAM Act effectively constitutes government acknowledgement that spam is not advertising in the usual sense, but rather a public burden. The conventional advertising issues of credibility and ethos become almost meaningless when applied to spam; the mere association with such a despised marketing tool destroys the advertiser’s standing in the recipient’s eyes.

This paper will focus on Internet advertising that displays along with published content and which financially supports the production of the content. To understand the dynamic between content and advertising on the Internet, it is necessary to understand the underlying framework of the World Wide Web.

The Web displays many similarities to previously existing media. It operates on the basis of client-server interactions. The server delivers static content to the client and executes programs that create dynamic pages; the user’s client software displays the pages, stores some information, and even executes some small scripts. Like a television or radio program, a given Web page can be distributed to any viewer with the equipment and the inclination to receive it; this interaction parallels the relationship of broadcast antenna and receiver. At the same time, the Web-based distribution model involves the client requesting a page, and the server delivering it at the cost of a small amount of resources; this situation is reminiscent of the print media. Where the Web radically differs from any previous media technology is in the interactivity it offers.

The Internet is currently the only mass medium to offer interactive advertising; it is also the only mass medium in which all advertising is, by definition, interactive. Interactive functionality is so easy to achieve on the Internet that there is no reason not to include it. Simple banners can be linked directly back to the parent site, adding a unique dimension of instant response to advertising; more complex advertisements can incorporate advanced...
levels of interactivity. By allowing instant, effortless response to an advertising appeal, the Internet adds a completely new dimension to advertising psychology and technique.

It is important to distinguish between interactive and adaptive advertising, another unique aspect of the Internet advertising experience. Interactive advertising responds to user actions and decisions directly. Adaptive advertising operates, to some extent, outside user control; it changes its mode of presentation and content depending on information gathered about the viewer. The distinction may seem blurred and ambiguous, since both interactive and adaptive advertisements involve responses to attributes of the user, but a key point of the distinction is transparency. Interactive advertisements reveal their complexities of their functionality directly to the reader. Adaptive advertisements fail this test; central to their tactics is the concealment of their methods, which are frequently illegal and unethical, and often violations of privacy. For example, the archetypal “punch the monkey” advertisement, which enticed the viewer to click on it by incorporating the characteristic features of a game, is an interactive advertisement; Amazon’s user tracking features, which suggest books and music to the viewer by analyzing his or her past purchases, is one of the more benign examples of adaptive advertising.

Finally, many of the techniques of these new genres of advertising are inseparable from the technologies used in their presentation. The Web’s primary language is HTML, a “markup language” used to format and integrate text with images and other content. HTML’s interactive features include clickable links and form elements, which the user can use to submit information. Javascript, a client-side programming language that runs in the browser, is a primary tool of both interactive and adaptive presentation. Cookies, which store information about the user on his or her own computer, are frequently tools of adaptive advertising.

Among formats for the advertisements themselves, the most primitive is the banner advertisement, an image which links directly back to the advertiser’s site; the effectiveness of banner advertising is measured in clickthroughs, or clicks on the banner. The animated GIF format allows banner ads to contain simple, frame-based animation. HTML provides the iframe tag, which allows the insertion of distinct HTML content into a page. Javascript can be used to create pop-up ads, which are distinct HTML pages loaded into new windows that display over the content-bearing page. Macromedia’s Flash plugin, the only widely accepted advanced animation format, offers more complicated animation features and a wider range of interactivity. Equipped with such an overview of Internet advertisements, we are ready to consider current and future states of marketing on the Internet.
**The Legal Situation**

In its brief existence, the Internet has acquired a reputation as a cultural and social frontier, a place without an entrenched corporate establishment or pervasive law enforcement. As the Internet became a medium of commerce, it acquired its own corporate culture; as it became a haven for mainstream copyright violators, a mechanism of subpoenas and civil lawsuits evolved to police it. At present, Internet advertising is in an analogous state: it is poorly regulated and controlled, and the regulations that do exist are poorly enforced. From a variety of historical and current precedents, we can predict a legal crackdown on the unethical and illegal tactics that are currently prevalent in online advertising.

Internet advertising is open to many kinds of analyses at the technical level; many of the advertisers’ tactics can be easily exposed through technical knowledge of their procedures. From the advertisers’ perspective, this is unquestionably a weakness; whether it will be corrected by further advances in advertising technology is an open question. The fact is that a close examination of present-day adaptive advertising reveals remarkable ethical and legal issues, including many that open the distributors and their clients to charges of false and fraudulent advertising.

![Figure 2. This advertisement poses as an opinion poll; an examination of its HTML and Javascript source code reveals that it in fact provides no such functionality. Furthermore, the expiration date of November 5, 2004 is dynamically calculated. Source: (Fastclick, “Is Bush a Good Leader?”)](image)

One example is Figure 2, a pop-up advertisement for AnyFreeGift.com, a multilevel marketing campaign offering free gift certificates to people who sign themselves up for a sampling of free trial offers, then recruit friends to do the same. The advertisement is distributed through the FastClick advertising agency. It is interactive; it contains the Yes and No buttons (HTML form elements) and a direct link to the AnyFreeGift.com site. The advertisement poses as an opinion poll; the realistic-looking buttons are intended to deceive the viewer into using the advertisement to report his or her political views.

Pop-up ads are displayed by Javascript code, and typically contain additional scripting themselves. An examination of the scripts in the advertisement itself (relevant material is highlighted in the left pane of Figure 3) reveals, in fact, that the two buttons perform the same function: taking the viewer directly to the advertiser’s page. Information about the user’s preference is not even recorded. In itself, this is hardly a legal issue; however, coupled with another scripted feature, it raises questions about the use of technology in deceptive advertising.
Figure 3. Snippets from the code of the advertisement in Figure 2. […] indicates an omission for clarity. (Fastclick, “Is Bush a Good Leader?”)

In the right pane of Figure 3, we can see that the expiration date displayed on the advertisement is calculated dynamically to be two days later than the current date. The non-highlighted code ensures that the date is properly formatted and does not contain an absurdity such as “December 33, 2004”. Whereas the opinion poll was an example of interactive advertising, the calculated date is a basic example of adaptive advertising; it adjusts itself to the local date in an attempt to pressure viewers into immediate action. Still, the issue remains more of an ethical problem than an actual violation of the law.

Figure 4. Two frames of an advertisement for Great Expectations. (Advertising.com, “Great Expectations”)

A far more serious example is Figure 4, which contains two frames of a Flash advertisement for Great Expectations, a dating service. The advertisement attempts to discover the viewer’s location; then it displays the message “Searching for singles in your area,” finishing by displaying the calculated location in the advertisement underneath the photographs of women supposedly available for dating.
Tracing the technology used to display this advertisement is more difficult than in the previous example. To begin with, Flash is a compiled format, so the code of the advertisement itself is not available. As seen in Figure 5, a piece of Javascript inserted in the publisher’s web page calls in remotely hosted Javascript code on the agency’s server (in this case, Advertising.com). The remote code, generated by a program running on the server, immune to examination, adds the necessary location information to the advertisement by calling it with the city and state in the flash advertisement’s query string (the part of the URL following the question mark). There is no way to definitively identify how the viewer’s location is obtained, but a reverse DNS lookup is the most likely answer (in particular, Stanford University IP addresses like the one used to view this advertisement translate to subdomain.stanford.edu). To confirm the falsity of the advertisement, we need only supply a different query string; the result is an image like Figure 6, a version of the advertisement which states that the same women are from a different (in this case, a fictional) place.

This advertisement, unlike the first, is a clear violation of FTC guidelines; it is “materially misleading,” an offense the FTC considers actionable (Wilson 26). It contains a material representation about an important characteristic of the service: one that is likely to affect a consumer’s purchasing decision. Both the advertised company and the agency are well-established corporations. The question arises: why do they expose themselves to legal action and government scrutiny? The answer is lack of precedent; since Internet advertisers are rarely prosecuted for deceptive advertising, both the agency and the dating service feel they can act with impunity.

We can predict a reaction against deceptive advertisement on the Internet both from historical precedents and from the recent precedent of action against “cybersquatters,” or

In 1993, the National Science Foundation allowed Network Solutions, Inc. to register domain names. By law, they were not required to verify the legality of names they registered; for this reason, they made no provision for abuses of their system until 1995 (Feinberg and Craycroft 5). In the meantime, a new phenomenon called cybersquatting had sprung up among a small group of enterprising Internet users who were claiming domain names associated with famous corporations and holding them, intending to sell them. Perhaps the most celebrated of these cybersquatters, Dennis Toeppen, managed to claim panavision.com, deltaairlines.com, and neiman-marcus.com.

Both Network Solutions and the government were quick to react. Network Solutions created a Domain Name Dispute Policy, amending it again in 1996 and 1997 (Feinberg and Craycroft 5). Congress passed the Trademark Dilution Act of 1995, which allowed the owners of a “famous” trademark to prevent its use for any purposes, even ones with no “likelihood of confusion” between the uses of the trademark. Senator Patrick Leahy (D., Vermont) hailed the act as a primary tool in “[stemming] the use of deceptive Internet addresses” (Congressional Record 19312), and Hasbro Inc. famously used it to reclaim candyland.com from a pornographic website. *Intermatic Inc. v. Toeppen* and *American Standard v. Toeppen*, both of which resulted in victories for the prior trademark owners, provided further precedents for the use of the Trademark Dilution Act in domain name litigation (Feinberg and Craycroft 9).

However, the Trademark Dilution Act proved too limited in scope to eliminate cybersquatting altogether. In 1999, Senator Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) sponsored the Cybersquatting Consumer Protection Act (according to Wilson, he had shortly before been offered senatororrinhatch.com for $45,000). The Act made offering a “pirated” domain name for sale and registering domain names with false information proofs of the bad faith of an accused cybersquatter (Wilson 137); it further allows a civil suit to be brought against the domain name itself, in cases when the domain has been registered with false information. Going even further, the Truth in Domain Names Act of 2003 made it a criminal offense, punishable by two years imprisonment, to “knowingly [use] a misleading domain name with the intent to attract a minor into viewing a visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct on the Internet.” On September 3, 2003, the arrest of John Zuccarini, then owner of disneyland.com, under this Act marked the end of an era in domain name exploitation (Kawamoto 1).

There are similar strong historical precedents of abuses and reforms within the advertising industry itself. In his book *The Mirror Makers*, a history of the American advertising industry, Stephen Fox details the reaction against the paid testimonials in the 1920s. Between 1926 and 1930, paid endorsements of products came to dominate advertisements for consumer goods. Women ranging from the Queen of Romania to movie star Joan Crawford were paid to endorse beauty products (Fox 89); at the height of the craze, Lucky Strike paid opera singers to claim that cigarettes improved their singing voices (115). After Lucky Strike enlisted a ship captain to claim that smoking had helped his crew perform a heroic rescue at sea, the leading advertising journal *Printer’s Ink* launched a campaign against the abuse of testimonials (116). *Printer’s Ink* ran a survey, asking their readers if purchased endorsements had a positive effect on the industry; overwhelmingly, survey respondents asserted that they did not. In 1930, the FTC responded to the public
outcry by ruling against Lucky Strike, restricting the use of testimonials and ordering that paid testimonials be labeled as such. The ruling put a permanent damper on the use of extravagant endorsements; ever since, testimonial advertising has been on a tighter, more ethical rein. This pattern of excess and reform, if repeated, will ensure a reaction against abusive practices in today’s online advertising.

The Business Models

Historically, advertising has been governed by its business models. The commercial transactions that enable an advertisement to be displayed determine its format and its content. Just as existing trademark laws and advertising regulations required modification after they were first applied to the Internet, the first business model of Internet advertising to emerge has profound weaknesses; the faults in the commercial framework have resulted in tensions between advertising agencies and publishers and the underemployment of many advertising opportunities. Change is inevitable; in the near future, we will see movement away from the traditional business model and towards alternatives, such as the sponsored links system and direct negotiation.

Advertising represents such a massive source of revenue for content publishers that it has historically transformed their business practices, and even their content. Advertising first appeared in print periodicals in 17th century England. However, those first examples of advertising were only roughly equivalent to the state of the industry today. Fox identifies the beginning of advertising-focused journalism with the 1869 debut of The People’s Literary Companion, a magazine that charged an unprecedentedly low price of fifty cents per annual subscription. The Companion provided a thin layer of “stories, fashions, and household hints,” sandwiched between the massive amounts of advertisements that supported the subscription price (Fox 28). The paper attracted a circulation of 500,000 before it was interrupted by its creator’s death (29). But the business model survived in periodicals like the Ladies’ Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post, the most notable magazines in the first wave of advertising-supported journalism. Instead of relying on the sale of copies for revenue, these new periodicals depended on the sale of advertising space.

The primary business model of online advertising is at once a response to the conditions of the Internet and an extension of the previous business models of print and radio advertising. The process is dominated by online advertising agencies, such as DoubleClick and FastClick. The advertising agency acts as intermediary between the content publisher and advertising client; the agency designs the advertisement and arranges for its display on the publishers’ sites. This paradigm of design and distribution is hardly an innovation; it has been well established in print advertising since the beginning of the 20th century (Fox 40). But the Internet advertising business model involves the separation of content from advertisement in a novel and completely unique fashion. The advertising agency hosts the advertisements on their own server; advertisements are transferred directly from agency to viewer. The publisher is responsible only for the HTML and Javascript that position the advertisement on the page; the agency monitors both display and audience response to the advertisements through programs running on their servers.

There are remarkable flaws in this business model, easily seen through a comparison to the paradigm of print advertising. In the print world, a given advertisement drawn up by an advertising agency must be approved separately by client and publisher; without the permission of the publisher, the ad cannot appear. With the Internet model of
advertisement distribution, the publisher’s control over advertising content is severely limited; the publisher can only accurately appraise the kind of advertising being displayed by closely observing the messages delivered from the agency’s server. Furthermore, the publisher cannot simply reject an objectionable message; he or she must either appeal to the agency to halt central distribution of the advertisement or sever ties with the agency altogether.

In fact, this business model is so unsatisfactory that major websites avoid it altogether, hosting their own advertising and eliminating the middleman. A simple test exists to determine whether a website is managing its own advertising: simply read the HTML source code of the page to establish the server on which the advertising is stored, then look up the ownership of the server’s domain name. This test establishes that MSN, Yahoo, CNN, Lycos, and Excite all host their own advertising, retaining control of their pages. However, outside this circle of high-traffic websites (Yahoo’s FAQ page claims 2.4 billion page views per day), most publishers have no alternative but to contract with an advertising agency. Albino Blacksheep, a humor website that hosts a variety of content, has announced its intention to contract directly with advertisers; claiming to be one of the world’s 10,000 most active sites, with upwards of 250,000 page views daily (“Albino” 1), it has not succeeded in finding customers. There is a considerable gap in the present-day advertising business model; while extremely active and low-traffic sites have good advertising solutions, the options for the middle range of sites are much weaker.

The major alternative business model in Internet advertising is paid search, or sponsored links. First developed in 1997 by Overture, then known as GoTo.com, sponsored links create revenue for a search engine by allowing websites to pay to have their links displayed alongside the results of a related search. In 2003, Overture became a wholly owned subsidiary of Yahoo, and its sponsored links are now displayed on CNN.com and MSN.com, but the sponsored links concept became famous when Google adopted it as its only advertising technology. Interestingly, Google’s IPO statement lists an ongoing lawsuit with Overture as a risk; further developments in the situation have not been made available to the public at the time of writing.

Google’s AdWords program effectively sells associations; by becoming a subscriber to the program, a company can link itself with a particular keyword, appearing in a sort of parallel search. Because the sponsorship does not impact Google’s actual search engine, and because sponsored links are clearly marked as such, it does not damage Google’s ethos as a purveyor of unbiased, accurate search results.

Ironically, even as Adwords allows Google to avoid the traditional model of advertising distribution, its sister program Adsense has made Google a distributor in its own right. Google now offers web publishers the opportunity to display

![Figure 7. In the left pane, we see Google’s sponsored links feature responding to a search for “broadband wireless” (Google.com, “Sponsored links”); in the right, we see Google Adsense displaying on a page about wireless broadband technologies (Bbwexchange.com).]
Google-sponsored links on their own pages via the Adsense program, which identifies the most relevant links to display. The relatively unobtrusive appearance of the advertisements, coupled with the association with Google’s brand image, makes Adsense one of the most attractive opportunities for publishers today.

In both this context and the original, sponsored links can be considered a form of adaptive advertising; however, unlike many other Internet marketing techniques, sponsored links pass the transparency test. As seen in Figure 7, Google clearly distinguishes commercial messages on their own site; Google Adsense bars carry the label “Ads by Google,” which links to an explanation of the workings of the Adsense service. Adsense even has the potential to solve the problem of underemployed advertising opportunities; Google’s published case studies for the Adsense program feature a variety of middle-traffic websites, the kind of publishers traditionally reluctant to offend their audience with obnoxious, obtrusive advertising. The elegant, low-key Adsense bars have huge potential in this market niche.

In a 2004 paper, Sharon Shavitt, Patrick Vargas, and Pamela Lowrey demonstrated that audience attitude towards an advertising medium responded directly to how intrusive the medium’s characteristic advertisements are, and to “the degree to which the medium offers self-selected ad experiences” (1028). Their major result was that media which involve audience self-selection of advertising content are not only better liked, but also enjoy better retention in viewer memory; they found that catalog and classified ads, which allow viewers the freedom to choose their own area of focus, can in fact surpass invasive TV and radio ads in terms of response and memory. Google’s Adsense model is in accordance with both these central principles. The simple, text-focused presentation of the Google ads is far less intrusive than graphics-based advertising, greatly improving viewer attitude and response to the message. Furthermore, since the Google Adsense model effectively creates self-selection by bringing advertising into close correspondence with user-selected content, the research of Shavitt, Vargas, and Lowrey supports the idea that the Google model of Internet advertising will prevail over previous paradigms.

Google has economics on its side as well. The Internet Advertising Bureau reported industry revenue of $2.4 billion for the third quarter of 2004 (Kutner 1); Google alone reported earnings of $890 million for the same quarter (“Google Announces” 1). It is clear that the sponsored links model of Internet advertising holds considerable promise; it represents a considerable threat to the traditional model of distribution, which it is likely to eclipse altogether.

**Format and Audience Response**

Audience reactions to Internet advertising have undergone radical shifts in the few years that the technology has been a mainstream phenomenon; this is because of changes in the format of Internet advertising. From an examination of media scholarship related to Internet advertising, we can predict a change towards renewed sensitivity to audience feelings.

The degree to which the public opinion of advertising has changed is exemplified by the 1999 article, “A Survey of Internet Users’ Attitudes towards Internet Advertising.” In this study of the public view of advertising, Ann Schlosser, Sharon Shavitt, and Alaina Kanfer draw conclusions about the public view of Internet advertising that seem remarkable, even shocking, today.
Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer conducted a survey of Internet users between 18 and 64 years of age, and conclude that in many respects, attitudes of Internet users towards Internet advertising are significantly better than their attitudes towards advertising in other media (referred to in their study as “general” advertising). 48% of the survey population said they could trust Internet advertising, versus 38% for general advertising; 33% of the population felt that they had “sometimes” or “often” been misled by Internet advertising, versus 67% for general advertising (44). Most surprisingly of all, the survey reveals no significant leanings either for or against Internet advertising in general: 38% represented themselves as liking it, with 35% against it and 28% neutral.

However, this figure did trail significantly behind the comparable statistic for Internet advertising; 46% of those surveyed liked general advertising. Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer explain this gap by claiming that the “entertainment value” rather than the “informativeness” of Internet advertising is at fault. With remarkable insight, the authors conclude that to improve their public perception, Internet advertisers should not attempt to duplicate “features that have been found to be entertaining in the mass media (e.g., attractive visuals, humor), but rather features that have been found to be entertaining on the Internet” (50).

In the five years that have elapsed since this survey, attitudes to Internet advertising have undergone a dramatic reversal. A new survey conducted by the author revealed a profound downturn in attitudes toward Internet advertising. This survey has weaknesses when compared to the one conducted by Schlosser, Shavitt and Kanfer. For one, it represents a convenience sample; the survey respondents were all undergraduate students of Stanford University, whereas Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer used a random sample of telephone households (39). Furthermore, the sample size of 41 is much smaller than the 397 in the 1999 survey. But the change in attitude towards Internet advertising cannot be denied.

An overwhelming 98% of those surveyed stated that they disliked Internet advertising as a whole, with 2% remaining neutral, and no respondents claiming to like it. Attitudes towards general advertising were down as well, with 58% reporting a negative attitude, 34% neutral, and 7% positive, but an unmistakable contrast with the 1999 figures is evident. Similarly, 91% of respondents felt that they could not trust Internet advertising, with 7% neutral, and 2% saying that they could. The percentage of respondents who felt they were sometimes or often misled by Internet advertising was 91%, up by 58 percentage points; the parallel percentage for general advertising was up as well, to 78%, but by the much narrower margin of 11 percentage points. Clearly, there has been a radical change in the public opinion of Internet advertising. The reasons that Internet marketing has fallen so dramatically out of favor are fundamentally technological; new, intrusive, techniques and formats of advertising have undermined the credibility of the industry in general, just as the abuse of testimonials once threatened the reputation of advertising as a whole.

The crucial technological factor in the downturn in attitudes has been the emergence of two specific advertising techniques. The easiest to pinpoint is the rise of Macromedia Flash in advertising; we can confidently date the beginning of Flash’s climb to prominence with Netscape’s 1998 decision to bundle it with their Navigator browser (Oakes 1). Microsoft responded by including the Flash plugin with their own Internet Explorer; once Flash had become established on both of the major browsers, it became the standard format for complex animation and interactive content throughout the Web. Flash
allowed advertisers much greater freedom in animation than they had previously enjoyed; furthermore, it offered unprecedented possibilities for interactivity. Flash was used to create visually disruptive miniature games, such as the iPod-shooting advertisement previously displayed; increasingly complex advertisements were a drain on the system resources of the audience, and Flash’s ability to make sounds was the most obviously invasive of its characteristics. One reason why Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer found such a positive attitude to Internet advertising was the simple fact that Flash had not yet been established as an advertising technology; Flash, which partially replaced traditional banner advertisements, is far more intrusive than its predecessors.

The second technology important in Internet advertising’s loss of public respect was the Javascript-enabled pop-up advertisement. Pop-up advertisements, being inherently disruptive, have created widespread public frustration. Abusive pop-up tactics such as mousetrapping, where clicking anywhere on a pop-up or even attempting to close it cause a stream of additional pop-ups to be displayed, have become closely associated with Internet pornography (the FTC’s 2001 restraining order against John Zuccarini provides a legal definition of this technique); these connotations have not helped the public image of pop-up advertising. Reactions against pop-ups have been so intense that the two current leading browsers, Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox, now offer some degree of pop-up blocking. A historical perspective on pop-ups is more difficult because the standardization process of Javascript has been far more confused; in his article for the O’Reilly Web Devcenter, Steve Champeon attempts to outline its development. Javascript began in late 1995 as LiveScript, a Netscape proprietary language that ran only on Navigator. By mid-1996, Javascript had attracted enough attention to cause Microsoft to implement it, under the name Jscript, in Internet Explorer (Champeon 1). It was only in 1999 that the European Computer Manufacturer’s Association created a standardized Javascript; for these reasons of compatibility, pop-up advertising had not become prevalent at the time of the Schlosser, Shavitt, and Kanfer survey.

In 2002, Hairong Li, Steven M. Edwards, and Joo-Hyun Lee co-authored the definitive paper on pop-ups as intrusive advertising; their work was a major influence on the Shavitt, Vargas, and Lowrey theory of the tension between intrusion and self-selection. Li, Edwards, and Lee sought to create a quantitative scale with which to measure the levels of irritation caused by intrusive advertising; the team isolated seven distinct characteristics of advertising annoyance, then used them to compare pop-up ads to television commercials. For example, Li, Edwards, and Lee found that people considered pop-ups to be less “distracting” than commercials, but more “disturbing,” “forced,” “intrusive,” and “invasive”; much of their research dealt with experimental design and statistical work on their quantitative model (42). However, the underlying theme of the research of Li, Edwards, and Lee, which found an echo in the work of Shavitt, Vargas, and Lowrey, was that marketing tactics that provoked “feelings of irritation” were “unlikely to elicit positive attitudes in consumers” (Li, Edwards and Lee 45). Instead, they resulted in advertising avoidance. Taken together, the Li and Shavitt papers represent a growing body of academic work claiming that pop-up advertising is an industry misstep and that advertisers alienate their audience at their own peril.

Finally, Xavier Drèze and François-Xavier Hussherr identify both a symptom and a solution of the problem of user discontent with Internet advertising. Their 2003 paper begins by observing a drop in advertising click-through rates from 7% in 1996 to .7% in 2002, and then attempts to determine the cause of the decline (9). Using eye-tracking
equipment, they discovered that experienced Internet users had come to adopt more
and more advanced advertising avoidance techniques and that fully half the Internet
advertisements displayed received no user real attention (15). However, the surprising
conclusion of their argument is not that advertisers should attempt to combat user apathy
with increasingly obtrusive, attention-grabbing pop-ups and animations. Instead, the
authors suggest that the advertisements were not failing at all, but that the metric of
clickthroughs was inappropriate. Drèze and Hushsherr call for a return to “traditional
memory-based effectiveness measures,” rather than single-minded focus on clickthroughs
(21). Effectively, they reinterpret the banner advertisement as a tool of branding. They
support their claims with some startling statistics; out of 100 people exposed to a banner
advertisement, 11 would remember the brand name without any prompting 24 hours
after exposure. Another 30 would recognize a version of the banner with the brand name
removed; 18 of the 30 would be able to remember the name upon viewing the banner
(21). These figures dwarf the miniscule click-through rate of .7%; Drèze and Hushsherr
accordingly conclude that the advertisement’s message (in their interpretation, the strength
of the brand image it projected) is more important than its form (eye-catching animation,
which proved to have little to do with either clickthroughs or brand retention).

At the heart of the three studies is a common theme: a rejection of pop-ups and
rich media advertisements coupled with an emphasis on positive user attitude. But Drèze
and Hushsherr provide the clearest link to the historical context of the theme; the idea
behind these studies is the concept of the “soft sell,” a brand-focused appeal focused on
the creation of public goodwill. Historically, Fox identified the greatest examples of the
soft sell with the “Creative Revolution” of the 1960s and early 1970s; a reaction against
the loud, aggressive, and direct “hard sell” work of the 1950s, the Creative Revolution
produced advertisements that focused on brand image, rather than on the product. Popular
classics like the humorous Alka-Seltzer spots originated in this period (Fox 269); the
1971 Coca-Cola “Hilltop” spot caused viewers to call their broadcast television stations
to request more showings of the advertisement (“Advertising”). Historically considered,
the researchers’ recommendations against pop-up ads are an example of a transition from
hard to soft sells; the consensus of media scholars on the issue strongly suggests that the
next generation of Internet advertisements will be far more sensitive to viewer attitude.

Conclusion

Predicting the future trends of any technology is difficult; the complex, multifaceted
technologies that support Internet-age advertising pose particular difficulties. All
advertising responds to a host of economic and social stimuli, continually evolving to
meet the demands of the product and the marketplace. On the Internet, the complexity
of the situation is multiplied by the ever-changing technological environment. It might
seem that any attempt to foretell the future of Internet advertising is doomed to failure.
How can we predict the evolution of such a wildly protean medium?

The answer is that we can only extrapolate from past and current trends. From solid
background knowledge of Internet advertising, firsthand observations of the current
situation, an understanding of historical patterns, and an acquaintance with current
rigorous research in the social sciences, we can make an educated, supported guess. This
process is certainly open to error, but it is the best method. These predictions are fallible
like all predictions; however, they have a real, substantial justification behind them.
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Autumn 2005 Honorable Mention

Emily Dalton

Instructor’s Foreword

Emily Dalton wrote “William Tyndale’s Biblical ‘Translation’” for my course “Rhetorics of the Journey” in Autumn 2004. In considering this expansive rhetoric, the question of what is lost or gained in linguistic and cultural translation in the experience of the journey gave Emily the general idea to work on a particular translation whose effects on our modern English language can still be seen today. William Tyndale, preacher and biblical scholar, began his momentous task to translate the bible into English amidst great political and religious debates over the relationship between the individual and church and what constituted sacred language in sixteenth-century England. For Emily, Tyndale’s goals went beyond an exercise in language; “Tyndale’s biblical ‘translation’ stemmed in reality from a complex interplay of theological, political and social considerations that allowed it to act as a vehicle for profound ideological and linguistic change.”

Context played an essential role in Emily’s assessment of the ultimate value of Tyndale’s translation; she organized her argument according to sub-sections that consider the “theological climate” and dimensions of Tyndale’s translation, the “traces of anticlericalism” that may be seen in his writing to the final “linguistic and cultural repercussions” of his work. Her own ethos in the final, revised version of her essay emerges as a scholarly voice that guides us through the twists and turns of Tyndale’s considerations in making his translation. Emily’s research is a fine example of a scholarly inquiry and assessment of a text in translation. The final persuasive power of her essay lies in her own credibility in creating a voice that illuminates not only the intricacies of language but also the journey of the translation as a rhetorical act.

Laura Roman
William Tyndale’s Biblical “Translation”

Emily Dalton

“No other book has so penetrated and permeated the hearts and speech of the English race than has the Bible—what Homer was to the Greeks, and the Koran to the Arabs, that—or something not unlike it—the Bible has become to the English.”

-Albert Cook, professor of English Language and Literature at Yale, 1920 (McGrath 253)

Secluded in a musty attic in the maritime city of Antwerp, dodging any encounter with the religious authorities who had condemned him as a heretic and a traitor, William Tyndale, preacher and biblical scholar, worked away at one of the most momentous tasks undertaken in the history of the Christian tradition. Tyndale, one of the first to translate the Bible into English, has always appealed to the popular imagination as a heroic figure whose intentions in translating consisted of providing the laity with a more pure and widely available version of the Scriptures. Tyndale himself catered to this widely-held and largely idealized image of his translation through his own enumeration of his goals, which he named as linguistic clarity and accuracy and the desire to make more accessible the Scriptures that he saw as the only complete, simple source of Christian truth. Yet, Tyndale worked on his translation during the 1520’s and 1530’s, a time of extraordinary political and cultural turmoil characterized by a drastic reevaluation of the place of the individual in relation to the Christian Church. Far from being a purely linguistic exercise, Tyndale’s biblical “translation” stemmed in reality from a complex interplay of theological, political, and social considerations that allowed it to act as a vehicle for profound ideological and linguistic change.

William Tyndale, theologian and translator

William Tyndale was born around 1494 in Gloucestershire and educated at Magdalen College in Oxford, where he received his B.A. in 1512 and his M.A. in 1515, and at Cambridge University, where he studied divinity and may have been ordained into the priesthood (Daniell, William Tyndale 51). Even his enemy Thomas More acknowledged him as “well known before he went over the seas, for a man of right good living, studious and well versed in Scripture, and in divers places in England was very well liked, and did great good with preaching” (Tyndale viii). Tyndale completed his first translation of the Bible into English in 1526, with the aim of rendering the New Testament into ‘proper English.’ The violent diatribes of Catholic authorities such as Thomas More and the attempt to suppress translation on the part of the Catholic Church eventually led Tyndale to flee England and to settle in the port city of Antwerp, which had begun to gain a reputation for its Protestant sympathies. Also the center of an extensive publishing trade with strong links to English booksellers, Antwerp offered an ideal location for the completion of Tyndale’s 1534 revision of his translation. Tyndale was eventually betrayed, however, and was arrested in May of 1535. Despite protests from the English government, he was executed in 1536 for what Catholic authorities viewed as an unsanctioned, heretical and
ultimately threatening mistranslation of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

The Theological Climate surrounding Tyndale’s translation

Tyndale himself often claimed the goals of this translation consisted of linguistic clarity and accuracy. In the preface to his 1534 edition, for example, he describes his endeavors to “look over [his] New Testament again and to compare it with the Greek, and to mend whatsoever I could find amiss” (Tyndale 13), and even entreats his readers, “wherever they find faults, [to] show me, or to write to me” (Tyndale 16). Upon closer examination, however, it is clear that Tyndale infused his translation of the Bible into the vernacular with a specific agenda shaped by the political, theological, and social climate in which he worked. The early sixteenth century saw the rise of the Humanist movement, which promoted the view of humans as rational individuals capable of challenging received doctrine, particularly doctrine that labeled the body as tempter of the soul. The growing anticlericalism of the era, which climaxed in Martin Luther’s nailing of the famous “95 Theses” to a church door, led to the rejection of a great deal of superstition surrounding the Bible and revolutionized biblical scholarship (Daniell, *The Bible in English*).

Both opponents and supporters of Tyndale’s undertaking recognized the profound theological implications of his translation. Tyndale himself saw Scripture not as the “passive recipient of a translator’s actions” (O’Sullivan 20), but as an agent through which a translator could advance particular theological views. Although his fellow Reformer Martin Luther, who had completed a German translation of the Bible a few years earlier, stressed the paramount importance of a biblical translator’s obligation to seek first and foremost the literal sense intended by the author, it was widely recognized that conformity to Lutheranism, Calvinism, or Roman Catholicism could be ensured through guiding readers toward a specific interpretation of the Bible (O’Sullivan 2). Most Bibles of the Reformation era, in fact, regardless of the sect of Christianity for which they were intended, encouraged specific readings through their use of marginal notes, glosses, prefaces, reading aids, summaries, maps, tables, and dictionaries which sought to restrain the free interpretation of the Bible and which were often viewed as far more suspect than biblical texts themselves.

Similarly, Catholic opposition to Tyndale’s biblical translation arose from deeply-held concerns regarding the ideological impact of the Bible, which was viewed as an essential tool in the cultivation of Christian “spiritual growth, personal integrity, and doctrinal correctness” (McGrath 191). Catholics generally perceived the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible as “the bedrock of Western Christian life and thought” (McGrath 191), having more authority than any other document placed in Church custody. Because God entrusted the Holy Scripture exclusively to the Catholic Church, it became the Church’s duty to defend it and to discourage its members from succumbing to the temptation of reading a translation that lacked Church approval, and that might contain marginal notes hostile to the Catholic Church. Indeed, as Rev. Henry Graham elucidated in his 1911 essay on the then-formal position of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to its exclusive authority to translate the Bible into English, the Church had always guarded the Bible from error and degradation, had grounded its doctrines upon it, and possessed, therefore, the unique right to claim the Bible as its book (J. Long 142-146). Many of More’s positions were thus taken to “buttress the authority of a Church on the defensive” (Partridge 43-45): he condemned what he viewed as Tyndale’s promotion of the principal doctrines of the Reformation movement, which included the belief that faith
provided sufficient grounds for salvation (rather than faith and good works, as Catholic authorities claimed), the idea that faith alone rather than the absolution of a priest could ensure salvation, the rejection of the concept of free will, the view that the sacraments were needless constructs of the priesthood, the belief that Christians were bound not by human laws but by the laws of Christ, the interpretation of prayers to saints or relics as forms of idolatry, and the conviction that Purgatory did not exist (Partridge 46). More and other Catholic authorities pointed to the inherent flaws of English translations that “refused to be tried by the ancient Latin translation, which is the text of the fathers and of the whole Church” (O’Sullivan 12). In insisting that the Scriptures provided sufficient grounds in themselves for the resolution of theological matters, Protestant reformers were, in effect, dismissing fifteen hundred years worth of theological analysis based on the Latin translation and were subordinating their concern with linguistic accuracy to the more important issues of “convention, community and legitimation by the authority of the institution” (O’Sullivan 12). More himself voiced this perspective with particular aggression in writing that of all “wretches the foulest is he who pretends to use scripture to convince unsuspecting innocent readers why the Church’s teachings are wrong” (Daniell, The Bible in English 107). Tyndale, conversely, drew his support from such figures as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who laid the foundation for a far more liberal theory of translation in stating that as long as the sense of their words remained intact, biblical texts would not be damaged or degraded by translation, for “the meaning of Scripture is strictly autonomous from the temporal, verbal signs by which it is expressed” (L. Long 3). Ultimately, the conflict over Tyndale’s work grew out of irreconcilable differences in the Catholic and Protestant perspectives on translation firmly rooted in differing views on the Scriptures.

**Traces of Anticlericalism**

Tyndale’s stance on political power also shaped his translation strategies. Just a few years before the publication of Tyndale’s New Testament, Luther’s presentation of the Bible as an alternative to Church authority had transformed the Scriptures into a kind of political symbol of the search for a new order in society, one that would redefine the relationship between the state and the individual (J. Long 137-138). In fact, many Humanists believed that restoring the text of the Vulgate, St. Jerome’s Latin translation from the Greek, would inspire the automatic reform of religious practices; more than a linguistic exercise, translation into the vernacular represented the quest for a more pure Christianity untainted by the excesses of ecclesiastical tradition. Furthermore, Scripture that had once asserted the authority of the Catholic Church came to be used under Tyndale to inspire loyalties to Henry VIII. The Coverdale Bible and the Great Bible, for example, contained title-pages designed to depict Henry’s newly-established role as head of both Church and State (O’Sullivan 141). Many biblical translations from the Reformation era even sought to promote English colonial exploits. The European power struggle between England and Spain took on religious connotations as the English began to view the conversion of Native Americans to the Protestant faith as an essential step in the expansion of Christ’s empire. English colonial ventures were thus often cast as Protestant undertakings inspired specifically by the recent Protestant focus on the Book of Revelation. The Geneva translation of the Bible, for example, prepared in the 1550’s, included a detailed commentary on the Book of Revelation based largely on John Bale’s *The Image of Both Churches* (1545), which argued that a vigorous effort was required on
the part of Protestants to convert as many Catholics as possible before the imminent arrival of Christ. In light of the intertwining of the national identity with a Protestant identity, colonial exploits took on new proportions inspired by the religious arguments of Reformation translators (O’Sullivan 145-146).

Tyndale himself wove anti-clericalism into his translations. A political as well as a theological revolutionary, he argued for the establishment of England as a Christian state under a Christian prince free from the influence of what he saw as a completely alien system centered in Rome (Daniell, *The Bible in English* 157). He maintained that Catholic priests asserted that “The Scripture requireth a pure mind and a quiet mind, because [man] is altogether cumbered with worldly business . . . if that be the cause, then it is a plain case that our prelates understand not the Scriptures themselves, for no layman is so tangled with worldly business as they are” (Brown 45). Furthermore, he proposed that when “we call men our heads, that we do, not because . . . of their names, parson, vicar, bishop, pope, but only because of the Word which they preach. If they err from the Word, then may whosoever God moveth his heart, play Paul and correct him” (Brown 62). Convinced that the Pope and the clergy persecuted the laity and manipulated princes for the benefit of Rome, Tyndale expressed his anticlericalism through both his linguistic shifts and his choice of illustrations accompanying his Bible: the identification of the Pope with Antichrist promoted by such German artists as Hans Holbein and Lucas Cranach, from whose collection Tyndale selected apocalyptic images, facilitated the communication to a largely illiterate laity of the image of the Pope “as a usurper, as deceitful and secretive, and in all possible ways antithetical to God” (O’Sullivan 138-141). Furthermore, Tyndale’s use of such words as “lay people,” whose prayers he viewed as no less effectual than those of priests, explicitly drew attention to the clergy’s illegitimate separation from and domination of the body of Christians, thus designating them as victims of clerical conspiracy (Day 107).

**Birth of a “Rhetorical Nationalism”**

Even Tyndale’s choice of English as his language of translation had important political and theological implications. The rise in confidence in the English language that arose in the sixteenth century helped spark his decision to tackle the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. Historically, much doubt about the translation of the Bible into English had rested on concerns over the merits of the English language itself. English had suffered a loss of prestige following the Norman Conquest in 1066, which led to a suppression of English in public life. During this period, the French court had flourished as the most chivalrous, refined, and widely-imitated of European courts, and French itself had become a kind of *lingua franca* superior to the increasingly dismissed English language, which was seen as incapable of conveying the “subtle undertones necessary for diplomacy, the fine distinctions of philosophy, and the complexities of legal and financial negotiations” (McGrath 24). By the fourteenth century, then, French had joined Latin, whose prestige endured throughout the Middle Ages, as a language of the elite, while English had been labeled as the language of the peasantry, capable of expressing only crude and ordinary thoughts and, most importantly, lacking the sophistication and grammatical structure essential for the communication of nuanced biblical truths.

The sixteenth century, however, brought with it an extraordinary increase in the expressiveness of the English language (O’Sullivan 49) that allowed it to surpass even Latin in its importance to the new cosmopolitan culture that blossomed in England during the
Renaissance. As England’s poets, translators, and playwrights propelled English into the foreground amid other European languages, national identity became tied to the growth of a literature in the vernacular (McGrath 27). By the early sixteenth century, English had already begun to displace French as the language of England’s public discourse, public elementary education, and even epic literary works such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. What can be termed a “rhetorical nationalism” (McGrath 25) began to sweep England as the act of writing in or translating into English came to be seen as a testament to the dignity of the English language and, indeed, of the English nation itself. The Hundred Years War (1336-1565) and other military victories against the French under Henry V further fueled the growing enthusiasm for English in consolidating the popular view of French as the language of the enemy, a language inappropriate for the discussion of the great philosophical, religious, and literary works of the English tradition.

The growing importance of English in relation to matters of religion emerged through such venues as the York “mystery plays” (McGrath 31), performed around 1350, that depicted the creation, fall and redemption of humanity in drawing extensively on biblical narratives. These plays, performed in English, infused English popular culture with one of the first presentations of Christian themes in the vernacular, in effect fueling the demand for an English translation of the Bible itself. This taste for a Bible in the vernacular sparked the adoption of English as the language of the religious underground—despite the conclusion of a series of Oxford debates in 1401 that English posed an acceptable candidate for biblical translation, writing in English came to be associated so strongly with the holding of heretical views that even as late as 1513 religious authorities such as John Colet, dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, were being suspended from their positions for having undertaken such translations as that of the Lord’s Prayer into English (McGrath 33). Increased antagonism toward a clergy charged with incompetence in Latin and separated by a widening gulf from the political and cultural life of the nation thus set the scene for a “powerful amalgamation of religion and nationalism” (McGrath 36) that invested Tyndale’s choice of English with a larger political and social significance.

As the communal consciousness of the Middle Ages gradually dissolved, Tyndale seized the opportunity to orient the radical new confidence in the individual that was characteristic of the Humanist movement toward theological matters, playing upon the growing dissatisfaction with external approaches to faith that depended upon priests for the interpretation of the Bible. His reevaluation of the laity as the center of the theological universe in need of access to public biblical texts (Day 114) reflected his argument that biblical narratives themselves were colored by accounts of Jesus being shunned by religious authorities; parables about lost sheep, lost coins, bread-making, and working in vineyards; stories of Christ associating with prostitutes and layabouts; and other such “low” experiences.

**William Tyndale, rhetorician**

From these diverse and complex influences sprung a translation carefully crafted to fulfill Tyndale’s own ideological aims. First, Tyndale drew on various linguistic appeals to elicit his readers’ sympathy and to establish his own authority as translator. His deep interest in matters of language, in its “grace and sweetness” and its “sense and pure understanding” (Davis 6), was reflected in his skillful distribution of stresses and in his extraordinary ability to capture the style of both the long Hebrew narratives in the Bible.
and the more colorful and emotionally elaborated language in the eight historical books after Deuteronomy (Daniell, *The Bible in English* 137). He mined the richness of the English language, with its plain Anglo-Saxon base and direct yet flexible syntax, to invest his words with aesthetic appeal. Tyndale clearly intended biblical passages such as the following, taken from his 1534 translation, to be read aloud: “And they came in haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe laid in a manger” (Daniell, *The Bible in English* 139). The rhythmic cadence of the sentence, which dances between the “a” sounds on either side of the central “Mary,” highlights Tyndale’s meticulous attention to aesthetics that transformed his text into a kind of counterexample to the widely-held view that English was far too base for biblical translation. Without abandoning the imaginative power of the biblical narratives he was translating (Day 86), Tyndale infused his work with the language of exhortation and persuasion, adding yet another dimension to the careful craftsmanship behind his work. His version of Romans VIII, for example, illustrates several figures characteristic of logical arguments in the sixteenth century. His use of *protrope*, a tone of language implying exhortation and argumentation, manifests itself in various schemes such as *traductio*, the repetition of a single word that displays its various meanings. In verses 26 and 27 of this chapter, the reiterated word is hope: “For we are saved by hope. But hope that is seen as no hope. For how can a man hope for that which he seeith?” (Tyndale Romans 8:26-27). Tyndale also employs *erotema*, a series of questions introduced to emphasize a point with rhetorical vehemence: “What shall we then say unto these things? If God be on our side: who can be against us? Which spared not his own son, but gave him for us all: how shall he not with him give us all things also?” (Tyndale Romans 8:31-32). The final lines of his version of Romans VIII are characterized by both *epiprochasmos*, a concise summary at the conclusion of an argument, and *polee*, a repeated use of a word interposed by other words for emphasis, as in the reiteration of the word “neither” (Partridge 51): “Yea and I am sure neither death, neither life, neither angels, …neither any other creature shall be able to depart us from the love of God, showed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Tyndale Romans 8:39).

Tyndale’s concern for linguistics and aesthetics, however, was not purely a literary one (Davis 23). In fact, Thomas More’s verbose renunciation of Tyndale’s work hinged on his adamant disapproval of certain key phrases in Tyndale’s text that he saw as having profound theological implications. One such point of contention was the substitution of the word “elder,” or “senior,” for the Greek word *presbuter*, which was translated in the Vulgate as “priest.” More proposed that this rhetorical choice was inappropriate because the office of “elder” had secular connotations, and, furthermore, not all priests were elderly. Moreover, the word “senior” as employed by Tyndale retained vestiges of mockery due to its association with the French “seigneur,” whose connotation at the time was derogatory. Not only had Tyndale denied the full religious significance of the priesthood by relegating it to the level of the secular, therefore, but he had also introduced a disparaging note that strengthened his challenge to the institution of the priesthood. Even Tyndale himself acknowledged his own agenda, though he cast it in a more positive light, arguing that the English “elder” mirrored more closely the meaning of the Greek *presbuter*, or for that matter the Latin *senior*, or *presbyter*, in that it connoted an officer whose role was purely didactic rather than one of mediation between God and humanity. He defended his choice in asserting that the New Testament meaning of “priest” was merely that of an elder whose role entailed bringing youth into a full understanding of Christ, “and by them that give all their study to quench the light of truth and to hold
the people in darkness, understand the disciples of Satan and messengers of Antichrist, whatsoever names they may have or whatsoever they may call themselves” (Brown 56). Tyndale even offered the radical assertion that all men are priests through Christ, that no official title could establish its bearer as a messenger between God and the body of the Church, and that priests were to be obeyed only as long as they preached truly. In subtly shifting his vocabulary, then, Tyndale allowed his anticlericalism to seep through the text and to implicitly reshape his readers’ vision of the Catholic clergy.

A second debate arose over the use of the word “congregation” rather than “church” for the Greek ekklisia and the Vulgate congregatio. Tyndale maintained that the Greek word for “church”, Kuriakon, meaning “pertaining to the Lord,” had not come into use until the third century and would therefore be an anachronism in a biblical narrative set during the lifetime of Christ. On a more subtle level, his choice of “congregation,” with its etymological undertones of “flock” or “herd,” rested on his belief that “church” more directly reinforced the complementary functions of the priests and the laity and the “unjust” authority of the former in establishing Christian doctrine (Partridge 42). In his Answere Unto Sir Thomas More’s Dialoge, Tyndale announces that “Church has diverse significations,” including that of a building or of the clergy, while a congregation implies, by contrast, “a multitude or a company gathered together in one, of all degrees of people” (Day 110). His rejection of what he saw as the less egalitarian “church” thus stemmed from a fear of misleading people into viewing the Church as a collection of priests, bishops, monks, and other religious authorities largely unrelated to the body of the laity that he saw as its core (Day 77).

The controversial use of the word “love” rather than “charity” for the Greek agape sparked yet another heated argument between Tyndale and More. The Latin amor signified physical love, while the Latin caritas denoted love from esteem. “Charity,” maintained More, adhered more closely to the definition of caritas than did love; furthermore, the medieval Church had expressly avoided the use of the term “love” because of its associations with amor, which was considered a distraction from holiness that undermined the celibacy of the priesthood (J. Long 143). Finally, Tyndale’s translation of the Greek New Testament metanoeite as “repent” rather than “do penance,” the phrase found in St. Jerome’s translation, and his substitution of “acknowledge” for “confess” from the Greek homologeo, were also seen as potentially subversive of ecclesiastical tradition (Partridge 42). In the eyes of More and other Catholic authorities, these rhetorical choices promoted a more individualized construction of faith that minimized the importance of Church sacraments such as confession and the role of the clergy in facilitating the laity’s quest for salvation.

**Conclusion: Linguistic and Cultural Repercussions**

Tyndale’s translation surfaced during a period of critical linguistic development that allowed it to play a pivotal role in the engineering and innovation of the English language. In the absence of an official body such as the Academie Française, charged with the task of rendering the French language “pure eloquent and capable of treating both arts and science” (McGrath 257) (James I had little interest in such matters), English was left to be molded chiefly by the influence of circulating printed material. Printed books, for example, became critically important in the establishment of standard lexical patterns and forms of spelling. Tyndale’s Bible, in addition to its more obvious impacts on the Reformation movement, also contributed to cultural literacy (much of the English population used his
Bible to learn to read), and thus was instrumental in the establishment of linguistic norms in both written and spoken English (Daniell, *The Bible in English* 158). In fact, Tyndale’s gift to the English language was immeasurable: his English inspired such great Elizabethan writers as Shakespeare, who modeled much of his syntax and diction after that of Tyndale, and whose theatrical portraits of villainous bishops and other religious authorities, which were highly influential in shaping the public perception of these figures, were drawn largely from the anticlerical writings of Tyndale and other early English Reformers (Day 287).

Furthermore, the constant reading of Tyndale’s Bible energized the English language through the naturalization of many Hebrew, Latin and Greek phrases used frequently in biblical contexts. Thanks to the immense cultural authority of “biblical English,” Tyndale was able to coin such phrases as “the powers that be” (Romans 13), “my brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4), “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5), and “a law unto themselves” (Romans 2) that continue to be used in modern English. Tyndale’s revival of such words as “Jehovah,” and even his invention of the words “Passover,” “scapegoat,” and “atonement,” whose Hebrew roots had previously had no English equivalent (McGrath 77-78), allowed his translation to function as a stimulus for linguistic enrichment as well as theological revolution. Ultimately, Tyndale’s technical skill and his profound knowledge of Hebrew, Latin, and Greek became tools through which he could clarify the English language, which changed rapidly “in compass and tone” (L. Long 3) after the introduction of his New Testament in 1534.

Tyndale’s translation thus surpassed even his own ambitious goals. Although he anticipated the shattering effects his translation would produce on the institution of the Catholic Church and, indeed, deliberately infused his work with subtle linguistic shifts loaded with theological, political, and nationalistic implications, Tyndale himself could not have predicted the legacy of cultural and linguistic innovation his translation would leave in its wake. The immensely divisive and contradictory suggestions inspired by Tyndale’s specific agenda in translating, and the effects that these suggestions produced, testify not only to the tremendous influence of the Bible in English society, but also to the extraordinary power of the translator.

**Footnotes**

1 Antwerp was, at the time, a center of both Christian Humanism and “heretical” publications. Home to many English expatriates during the 1520’s and 1530’s, it witnessed the printing not only of Tyndale’s Pentateuch and revised New Testament, but also of George Joye’s translations of the Psalms and portions of the Book of Prophets, Coverdale’s 1535 translation of the Bible, and “Matthew’s Bible” of 1537, the first English Bible to be licensed.

2 Incidentally, the King James Bible, one of the most widely read monuments of the English language, borrowed over four-fifths of its New Testament and large portions of its Old Testament directly from the language of Tyndale.
Works Cited


**Winter 2005 Winner**

**Eyal Ophir**

**Instructor’s Foreword**

I think Eyal would agree with me when I describe his research writing experience in my PWR 1 course on advertising as a labor of love. Eyal experienced the true labor of an archival researcher, spending hours in the basement of Green Library sifting through back issues of *Time* and *Rolling Stone* magazines. He also experienced the thrill of research discovery in finding that his questions were forming into answers. Those answers resulted in the essay “Kick Ass Culture: Ads Mirror an Anti-Dialogue American Discourse.” In this essay, Eyal maps the rise of anti-dialogue rhetoric in American national discourse through astute analyses of modern print advertisements. Ultimately, he argues that these ads manifest a recurrent and pervasive pattern in current American discourse that celebrates conflict as a means to its own end, ultimately encouraging a culture of one-way monologues of winners.

His type of enthusiasm directed into carefully gathering the resources for argument is what good research is about. But Eyal’s ideas were matched by the rhetorical character of his own writing. The final persuasive power of the essay that made his argument so exceptional rested in his active revision. After being notified that his essay would be nominated for the Boothe Prize, he worked on improving and re-thinking his presentation immediately. Two weeks later, he submitted a better and stronger piece, one that was not only clearer in argument but also more thoroughly engaged in a public dialogue. In the beginning of the term, I introduced the research essay as a mode of inquiry, where the writer enters with questions rather than answers; and where the writer considers how his argument responds to a public discussion on the matter. Eyal has not only fully immersed himself in this national conversation but has held his own through his original contribution to the discourse. While the essay may relate the end of this dialogue, it signals an emergence of a scholar and the start of many more dialogues to come.

*SoHui Lee*
Ads Mirror an Anti-Dialogue American Discourse

Eyal Ophir

“Demonstrate Your Contempt…”

This stark, aggressive phrase is an excerpt from the catchy slogan of a Chrysler advertisement found in a recent issue of *Time* magazine. It is one of a rising number of highly confrontational ads that entice their audiences by inviting them into a fantasy of ego-reinforcing aggression. On a larger scale, these ads point to an emerging confrontational rhetoric based on a new portrayal of conflict—within what is perhaps a new paradigm for American dialogue. What is this new paradigm? Why do advertisers believe that the opportunity to “demonstrate your contempt” makes the public want to buy a Chrysler? More importantly, what is it about the American public that has brought advertisers to this conclusion?

Dialogue is the key to conflict resolution; conflict, in turn, is an integral part of any social structure, and the way a society resolves conflict offers a fundamental insight into its values and success. And yet, as social analyst Richard A. Skinner points out, “No country in the world seeks redress through legal means as much as does America, and this holds true regardless of how one measures the phenomenon” (Skinner). Why does our dialogue not suffice to resolve our disputes?

In present American society, conflict and its resolution are shaped on a personal and inter-personal level by the inconstancy and fluidity of modern private life and the heterogeneous nature of our society. On both a national and international level, drastic differences in opinion and perspective throw us into heated debate and open confrontation. And yet it seems, perhaps because of the complexity of modern issues and the already saturated attention spans of modern Americans in the face of an information deluge, that our national discourse has been emaciated to little more than schoolyard verbal brawls. Even the 2004 election debates can be seen as a sad testament to this trend, summed up by the *New York Post* in the headlines, “Brawl Together Now” (Orin and Friedman 4), “Foes Pound Each Other” (Orin, Morris 2), and “Kerry Comes Out Swinging” (Bishop 5). Politics fused with popular culture and yielded an awkward exchange of one-liners, comebacks and put-downs.

Dialogue has been replaced by a new form of discourse: the anti-dialogue. In the anti-dialogue, conflict has lost its inherent hope for resolution and has instead become a venue that inspires aggressive, confrontational rhetoric aimed at nothing more than the self-glorification of the involved parties through domination of the opponent with little or no attempt at any meaningful exchange. Instead of fostering dialogue, this discourse inhibits it and, in effect, expels it. Within the context of the anti-dialogue, conflict has become an attraction. In a society where the individual has abandoned resolution and instead strives to be a “winner,” dialogue has been replaced by conflict for conflict’s sake—it is attractive, as a vehicle for the expression of our own intellectual, rhetorical, physical, and
sexual superiority.

Advertising, capitalism’s finger on the pulse of the masses, has been quick to discern this trend; recognizing the public’s fascination with the anti-dialogue, it has begun employing anti-dialogue motifs to tempt its audience. Gradually, advertisements displaying confrontational themes have left behind issue-based, commercial competition and have begun to attract consumers through the inherent appeal of conflict itself; the popularity of these new ads demonstrates, in turn, the popularity of the anti-dialogue itself. Eventually, from between the pages of *Time* magazine, a Chrysler becomes an opportunity to “display your contempt,” popular culture views “kick ass” and “in your face” as compliments, and a presidential address ends with the echoing phrase “Bring them on!” (Bush, qtd. in Frazza).

By using advertisements to trace the changes in the use of confrontational themes to appeal to the American public over the past forty years and analyzing the rhetoric of specific ads through case studies, this paper will attempt to illustrate how the conflict displayed in ads has gradually become devoid of relevant content while becoming more flagrantly aggressive, personal, and polarized. It will further endeavor to demonstrate the pervasiveness and appeal of the anti-dialogue within the American national discourse and define it as an approach to conflict resolution that effectively removes meaningful content from conflict, and glorifies conflict itself as a means of personal reaffirmation; ultimately, the goal of the anti-dialogue is not resolution, but victory.

**Modern Discourse and the Anti-Dialogue**

The anti-dialogue, as a new discourse paradigm, has for a foundation several phenomena in modern American communicative norms: the gradual removal of meaningful content from dialogue, the tendency to homogenize and polarize opposing groups, and the notion of aggression as a popular and effective means of conflict resolution.

The motion of modern discourse away from meaningful content is prevalent in the works of influential social theorist Jurgen Habermas and the political theorists Thomas E. Patterson and Kathleen H. Jamieson. Habermas defined the “public sphere” as the forum for public intellectual exchange, and wrote of its disintegration from “culture debate” to “culture consumption,” where “the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception …” (Habermas 161). Political analysis, specifically of the appeals made by politicians to the American public, supports this trend. In the landmark 1960 Kennedy/Nixon televised debate, the camera-friendly Kennedy was said to have “triumphed,” though “Nixon was deemed by those who only listened to the debate on the radio as the ‘winner’” (Coleman 7), pointing to what was perhaps the cornerstone in the gradual ascendance of image over content. Patterson’s analysis of the media coverage of American presidential elections provides further support: from 1960 to 1992, election stories went from a general focus on policy to a focus on the “game,” yielding a “horse-race” like perception of national politics (Patterson 74). Jamieson asserts that in the context of elections—where national politics enter the popular discourse—this form of coverage tends to “[focus] viewers’ attention on winning rather than governing” (Jamieson 31). As conflict gains in complexity, meaningful dialogue is almost impractical. Thus, the anti-dialogue emerges: in the age of the sound bite, the one-liner is king.

In contrast with resolution-oriented dialogue, which involves each side’s recognition of the other, the anti-dialogue relies on the creation of “straw-man” opponents. As research shows, the role of conflict in modern social structures provides precisely that. Individuals
tend to use conflict schemas to define their own opinions on either side of an issue (Price 219); it is easier to “pick sides” than to analyze any given issue and formulate a new opinion. The research of Vincent Price and Donald Roberts indicates that individuals tend to associate themselves with distinct social groups, and formulate views of “homogenized” opposing groups and “polarized or exaggerated perceptions of group opinion norms” (203). This tendency to “align and alienate” lends to the formation of an anti-dialogue by creating parties on either side of an issue with little true understanding of each other, and hence little reciprocal responsibility. Ultimately, it facilitates the transformation of conflict into a “game,” allowing for replacing resolution with a victory-oriented approach.

What defines the anti-dialogue is its glorified portrayal of aggression, and the result—domination, as a means of conflict resolution. Here too, it firmly rests on established American societal norms. In a comparative study of styles of conflict resolution in the US and Canada, social researcher Michael Adams wrote:

Out of step with social change in most industrialized nations… rather than moving toward greater autonomy, idealism, and inner direction, Americans are moving [toward] values of nihilism, aggression, fear of the other, and consumptive one-upmanship. (Qtd. in Skinner)

Popular culture points in a similar direction. A study of conflict resolution styles in prime time programs yielded the following conclusions:

Good guys were well over four times as likely to commit violence than bad guys. Given the choice between violence and the avoidance of violence, good guys were more than 3 times as likely to employ violence… bad guys, by comparison, were more likely to employ non-violence then good guys. (Niman and Dentan)

The popularity of violence over non-violent approaches in conflict resolution demonstrates the attractive view of aggression in the eyes of American audiences. This attraction has been often employed to appeal to the American public: George H.W. Bush’s famous line, “Read my lips (no new taxes!)” was originally made famous by action hero Dirty Harry, while the use of such quintessentially anti-dialogue catch-phrases as “bring it on” and “you are either with us or against us” by current US president George W. Bush shows how far the anti-dialogue has gone (Frazza; CNN.com).

As demonstrated by these social trends, conflict is easier than understanding; winning is less complex than resolution. Gradually, the oversimplifying tendencies required by the modern information influx and exacerbated by the flair of an entertainment based media vying for the public’s attention, as well as by the modern individual’s own need for self identification and reaffirmation within complex social structures, have defined the anti-dialogue: an argumentative style based on conflict for conflict’s sake, with self-reaffirmation as its drive, and winning as its goal—in as flagrant and unequivocal a manner as possible. Yet the anti dialogue is no longer a fault to be tolerated; completing a paradigm shift, it has become an ideal to be sought.

The Anti-Dialogue in Advertising

The importance and relevance of the emergence of the anti-dialogue as a social phenomenon can be shown through a review of modern advertisements and their depiction of confrontational themes. As John Berger wrote in his seminal book Ways of Seeing, advertisements provide us with a mirror of modern culture:
Publicity is always about the future buyer. It offers him an image of himself made glamorous by the product or opportunity it is trying to sell. The image then makes him envious of himself as he might be. (Berger 132)

By examining the images presented to the “future buyer” in advertisements, we discern the “glamorous […] image” of “himself as he might be,” and gain an understanding of what is deemed “enviable” by popular standards. By examining the prevalence and portrayal of confrontational themes in advertising, we begin to understand the anti-dialogue through the shift both in the importance of conflict in modern self-identification, and in the popular approach to conflict and styles of conflict resolution.

To define the anti-dialogue as mirrored by advertisements, I conducted a survey of ads in 39 issues of *Time* magazine from the years 1963, 1985, and 2003, as well as in 36 issues of *Rolling Stone* magazine from 1968, 1985, and 2003, focusing on the presence and nature of confrontational themes. These specific publications were chosen for their broad appeal: *Time* as an established periodical with a culturally central appeal, and *Rolling Stone* as representative of trend setting, pop-culture innovation.

The survey yielded dramatic results: the 1968 issues of *Rolling Stone* were virtually devoid of any confrontational themes; in all the 1963 issues of *Time* magazine examined, only one relevant advertisement was found. And although confrontational themes showed some presence in print advertisements from 1985, they still were far less prevalent than those encountered in 2003. These findings were reinforced by each publication on its own: both *Time* and *Rolling Stone* separately showed a proportionally similar rise in the prevalence of these ads.

**1963—1985: Emerging Motifs**

The portrayal of conflict in advertisements from 1963 and 1985 differed greatly from its parallel in modern ads. The ads found in publications from these periods were not openly aggressive, but rather employed more subtle techniques. In these ads, conflict was not presented as attractive in itself. Furthermore, the conflict suggested by these advertisements tended to be issue-based—addressing issues that were directly relevant to the product advertised.

Conflict itself is not the attraction in a 1963 Tareyton cigarettes ad (see figure 1). Although the ad speaks of the fight with a beckoning smile, the protagonist is not clearly displayed as an aggressor. He is smiling and at eye level with the reader—creating a sense of camaraderie, not intimidation. He is also not presented as an unequivocal winner (his black eye is prominent, and it is not even entirely clear that he won the fight), nor is he seen to dominate anyone or anything. Rather, he is presented as someone who might be *forced* into a defensive fight—he “would rather fight than switch.” The fight is a last resort; it is bad, but not as bad as giving up the taste of Tareyton. The product does not invite conflict, facilitate it, or allow the audience to be the victor; rather, it argues that the product is worthy of conflict. Tareyton smokers—“The Unswitchables”—are described...
not as “aggressive,” but “aggressively loyal;” the latter phrase places the emphasis from “aggression” to “loyalty.” The image of the man in the ad is not that of an intimidating winner, but rather of an “old boys club” style, rugged, happy-go-lucky all-American, his big smile shining past the black eye.

The ads I encountered in advertisements from 1985 show a gradual progression in the portrayal of conflict towards the anti-dialogue culture of today. Yet their portrayal of conflict was still restricted in its scope: the opponent was often limited to topics relevant to the product advertised. For example, a Goodyear tire ad (Figure 2) declares, “Enemy: potholes,” inviting the consumers to assert themselves against badly paved roads by using the Vector tire. The ad is actually presented from the perspective of the pothole; the reader looks through a gaping hole in the road at the tire above. The visually dominant black tire is seen sending rocks flying behind it as it surges forward; it is described in the text as “aggressive” in the face of “the punishment of torn up roads,” communicating the flair of domination (over potholes) and victory in conflict. Yet the conflict is not gratuitous—potholes are reasonable opponents of the car owner, and the conflict addresses practical matters within the realm of the product rather than directly targeting the consumer’s self image. The consumer may be tempted to buy the product to achieve the victorious air implied by the ad, but this victory can be logically and sensibly justified.

An ad calling for financial contributions to U.C. Berkeley provides an example of a portrayal of conflict that is more playful than truly threatening and ultimately rests on a message of collaboration rather than confrontation (see Figure 3). The ad harnesses cold war anti-Russian sentiment to attract attention with the line, “Berkeley threatens Russia.” Note the use of the word “threatens”: although the confrontational verb is definitely used to excite the reader, it is more a challenge than outright aggression. The call is more for pride on a national level, than the individualized gratification offered by the modern anti-dialogue. And though the headline uses a dominant, large, bold font, the text that follows is presented in a decidedly more gentle script. In addition, the achievements of the Berkeley professors are presented in a manner that is witty, without being flagrant: although the ad counts the institution’s achievements, it states, “But hey, who’s counting? Certainly not our professors … .” Furthermore, these achievements are attributed to the reader’s generosity:

“You deserve a medal.” And lastly, under the U.C. Berkeley name is the slogan, “It’s not the same without you.” The ad creates an image of the university as intellectually formidable, yet personable, approachable, and collaborative. Neither Berkeley, nor the
reader, are presented as infallible; rather, it is the collaboration that is glorified.

The Anti-Dialogue in Modern Ads

Print advertisements encountered in the 2003 issues of *Time* and *Rolling Stone* paint a dramatically different picture than their predecessors. As the anti-dialogue established itself within American dialogue norms, the ads that employ it to appeal to their audience changed as well. First, the conflict presented in the ads is no longer issue based. Departing from the rhetoric of commercial competition and leaving relevant issues behind, these ads present confrontation and conflict itself—no matter how gratuitous—as inherently attractive and employ its attraction to appeal to their readers. Secondly, having thus lost old constraints, the rhetoric of these ads has become more flagrantly aggressive, capitalizing on conflict’s newfound appeal. Thirdly, with relevant content giving way to flagrant rhetoric, meaningful dialogue disappears, and the ads are characterized by dramatic polarization of opposing sides: typically, “winners” and “losers.” Fourthly and finally, as conflict becomes no longer resolution-oriented but victory-oriented, the ads present it as a means of self-reaffirmation. The following case study analyses of modern ads employing confrontational themes will attempt to illustrate these trends, thereby extracting a definition of the anti-dialogue, and demonstrating its appeal across various social contexts.

This new brand of anti-dialogue ads shows how confrontation—and conflict itself, regardless of content, has become attractive—so much so that it is used to lure potential customers. An ad for Chrysler’s PT Turbo leads with the line, “Demonstrate your contempt for conformity 3.1 seconds faster” (see Figure 4). The use of such a phrase to lure readers implies that “demonstrating contempt” is an indulgence attractive to the ad’s target audience. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “contempt” as “The action of contemning or despising; the holding or treating as of little account, or as vile and worthless.” It is an openly negative act, and its demonstration is an act of aggression, or conflict. Yet this is precisely what the ad is inviting its audience to do—and suggestively, to enjoy; the ability to “demonstrate your contempt” is one of the luxuries afforded to the owner of the new Chrysler. The metallic blue car, punctuated by white highlights, blends into the black background, and mirrors the blue and white flames, echoing the “fiery” slogan. The text below describes how it “shaves” and “hacks off” at the statistics of previous models. The advertiser is tempting the reader with a rather loud subtext of aggression. Conformity constitutes an easy foe, the “straw man” opponent of the anti-dialogue—it is impersonal, ready and waiting to submit to the gratuitous, self-indulgent aggression of the consumer.

Another ad, this time for Dodge Trucks, reinforces the popular appeal of confrontation suggested by Chrysler advertisers (see Figure 5). It emphatically states of its trucks, “They have a starring role in other trucks’ nightmares.” The selling point is intimidation. The truck is portrayed using exaggerated perspective as not only powerful and dominating but also threatening. The advertisement suggests to the audience that by
associating themselves with a Dodge truck they too can be dominating and intimidating—the audience is being sold not only a truck, but the potential for inspiring fear. In a manner that could not be more direct, this ad demonstrates how intimidation, in American society, is being sought as a fantasy; it is indeed so attractive that Dodge advertisers believe it will sell their trucks.

The attractive nature of conflict and confrontation is made all the more apparent by the absence of any relevant content. It seems almost any conflict affording the buyer the chance for unequivocal domination of an opponent is attractive. A Mazda ad heralds the Mazda 6 with the following slogan (see Figure 6): “Insects call it the widowmaker.” The car is viewed from above, giving the reader an insect-like view, to better illustrate the threat. The conflict here is between the driver—and insects: the ability to massacre insects, and win the conflict, is the feature of this car used to enhance its appeal to the buyer. Again, the potential for aggressive domination is the attractive characteristic, but what is remarkable in this instance is the entirely inane character of the conflict. The domination over insects offered through the suggested conflict is entirely irrelevant to the actual driving experience (and actually, rather unappealing if truly considered). But in the eyes of the anti-dialogue culture, the substance of the conflict is immaterial; it is the very conflict itself, as a venue for unequivocal domination, which attracts.

A Wendy’s ad makes clear the extent of the departure from relevant, issue-based conflict: here, aggression is no longer commercial—it’s personal (see Figure 7). The ad’s aggression targets what is perhaps a friend or a roommate: “There is a cure for snoring: Jam one of these in his mouth.” Nor is this ad restricted to male aggression. The text of the ad implies a protagonist who is spending the night with a snoring man—which may very likely be suggesting an appeal to a female audience as much as to men. The burger’s enormous size, suggestively presented as dwarfing the earth, is communicated through violence. The “cure” is “jamming”—resolution is replaced by aggression and unmitigated victory. This innovative remedy to snoring says nothing of the taste (let alone the nutritional value) of the burger. The conflict, and its rather ugly resolution,
are entirely gratuitous—and directed at an acquaintance. The Wendy’s ad not only illustrates the transition from issue-based, commercial conflict (as in the case of the Goodyear Vector ad’s assault on potholes) to personal conflict, but also demonstrates the increasingly flagrant nature of the anti-dialogue.

This flamboyant, unapologetic confrontational rhetoric is further visible in the text of a Honda ad (see Figure 8): “Caution was not thrown to the wind. It was thrown to the wolves.” The difference between the two parallel sentences is nothing more than the flair of aggression. The layout of the text in relation to the speeding car moves the reader from a starting position in front of the vehicle to a finishing position behind it: perhaps the reader too will be thrown to the wolves, unless they buy a Honda Accord. Objectively, there is nothing to suggest that “throwing caution to the wind” is any less indicative of the reckless—or perhaps impetuous—image sought by Honda, than “throwing caution to the wolves.” But it is the latter that the company uses to seize the audience’s imagination. Perhaps other dialogue paradigms would throw caution to the wind. The anti-dialogue thrives on, and is defined by, flagrantly throwing its opponent to the wolves.

The enjoyment of such flagrant aggression relies on distancing oneself from the opponent. To this end, the creation of the “homogenized” and “polarized” factions described by the sociological research of Roberts and Price is evident in anti-dialogue rhetoric.

Reality in the eyes of the anti-dialogue paradigm is a matter of black and white—a field of winners and losers. This polarization is encapsulated in this Dodge slogan (see Figure 9): “You’re either with us. Or behind us.” When viewed by a public that espouses such a paradigm, the need to associate oneself with the “winners” and to be removed as emphatically as possible from the “losers” is pressing, almost threatening. This is precisely the reason why this ad is so effective. The visual relationship between the audience and the cars pictured in this ad suggest a third clause to the slogan: “You’re in our way.” In the world of the anti-dialogue, conflict is inevitable: “You’re either with us. Or behind us.” Any middle ground, or resolution, is pictured as mundane, and made irrelevant. The ad, and with it the anti-dialogue paradigm, both literally and figuratively, turns its back to dialogue.

At the core of the appeal of the flagrant, polarized anti-dialogue is its ability to impart
a sense of validity or reaffirmation to the winner, as seen in the following Nissan ad (see Figure 10). In this ad, which echoes the inter-personal aggression of the Wendy’s ad above, the driver’s opponents are the rest of the passengers in the car. The attraction of the ad lies in the reader’s desire to bolster his or her ego and reaffirm their social status in relation to those around them. The interior landscape of the new “265 HP [horsepower] Nissan Maxima” shown in the ad is divided in the following manner: “One seat for exhilaration. Three seats for petty jealousy, resentful mumbling, and wishful thinking.”

This is not only a mapping of the landscape of the car—it is a mapping of interpersonal social relations in the context of the anti-dialogue. It is a world of “exhilarated” winners defined in relation to the “petty,” “resentful,” “mumbling” losers. The ad relies for its effect on the reader’s need for reaffirmation; a reaffirmation established just as much by the losers’ loss as it is by the winner’s gain. In the eyes of the advertisement, to claim the throne of the anti-dialogue “winner,” all you have to do is drive a Maxima.

Advertisements also point to the prevalence of this dialogue across different social spheres—beyond the perhaps naturally competitive world of cars, or the depraved anonymity of late night fast-food. In a pre-Christmas issue of Us Magazine, an ad for Hormel ham presents the following protagonist narrative: “Today’s the day I cook the holiday meal. In addition to the ham, my mother-in-law will be eating her words” (see Figure 11). The demographic addressed is the homemaker, preparing for the holiday meal. Into this traditionally idyllic setting the advertisement introduces a dialogue of conflict—and invites the homemaker to put her (or his) mother-in-law in her place. The product, ham, is marketed as the means by which the homemaker can achieve unequivocal victory over the opponent. Contrast this ad with the 1963 Tareyton cigarette ad—whereas Tareyton presented aggression as a means to gain the prize of the “great taste” of “fine tobacco,” Hormel presents the “ideal flavor” of their ham as simply a means of silencing one’s mother-in-law. Thus, aggression has actually displaced the product as the focus of attention. Again, the mother-in-law is a convenient archetypal enemy, ready to reaffirm the dominance of the protagonist. The ad is summed up by the text, “Hormel Cure 81 Ham. Unarguably, the ideal flavor for holiday meals.” The use of the word “unarguably” is anything but coincidental. It is an argument that is the vehicle in this ad, the venue for the self-reaffirmation of the protagonist. Even within the context of the
Christmas meal, it is the conflict that is the attraction—with the product conveniently positioned as the key to victory. It would appear that American society has embraced the anti-dialogue to such an extent that this approach is not only appalling—it sells.

From pick up trucks to Christmas meals, the anti-dialogue appears to be clearly defined and firmly entrenched.

**The Anti-Dialogue in Perspective: Is it a Problem?**

The above ads do not constitute a majority of modern advertisements. Ads celebrating meaningful dialogue, understanding, and mutual respect are no less prevalent in the various media. But despite arguments to the contrary, the increasing employment of anti-dialogue rhetoric for the purpose of attracting and enticing modern audiences and the prevalence of this rhetoric across different contexts and media cannot be dismissed.

It may be argued that the aforementioned ads exhibit nothing more than meaningless rhetoric, attempting to appear “edgy” in a marketing world defined by competition. But the advertisements are not the source of this anti-dialogue paradigm; they only offer the public a reflection of itself. In the highly competitive sphere that is the advertising world, a method that does not attract the consumer does not last. The rising prevalence of ads glorifying conflict and anti-dialogue rhetoric would thus suggest that the appeal of this rhetoric to the public is indeed strong and very much relevant.

From a different perspective, it may be tempting to dismiss the argument for the historical emergence of this trend as nothing more than misled nostalgia. This, again, is not the case. The 1960s were a time of dire national division, whether over international policy or racial tensions. This paper thus does not suggest that American society has become gradually more violent or more aggressive. Rather, the focus here is the national discourse. Perhaps it is precisely because open violence is being tolerated less and less that American national discourse is becoming an outlet for the release of pent-up aggression and the need for pseudo-physical self-reaffirmation. Nevertheless, whereas the conflict in the past may perhaps have been swept under the institutionalized mainstream carpet of racial segregation and the Cold War to maintain a façade of national harmony, today that conflict is in the open—in the way Americans talk to each other, in the way they argue, in the way they are entertained, and in the way they are enticed as consumers. Advertisements show that this confrontational anti-dialogue is out in the open—and it is relished.

The inherently competitive and power-oriented context of the products advertised may also be used to excuse the attractive depiction of confrontational dialogue. At first glance, there is nothing unusual about highlighting the power and dominance of automobiles. Once again, it is the dialogue and its rhetoric that are under review. It seems that power in itself is no longer enough—dominance must be relative. Reaffirmation becomes based on the loser’s defeat as much as on the winner’s victory. The result is the category of ads presented in this paper, characterized by rhetoric that goes beyond statements of power, to statements of antagonism. Echoing the words of Honda, for the sake of reaffirmation of either the product or the consumer, the competition is not only “thrown to the wind … it [is also] thrown to the wolves.”

Is this anti-dialogue simply fad rhetoric, indulging the immature facets of the individual in moments of quirky experimentation, or is it truly a social phenomenon? Perhaps when a society is characterized by abandoning interpersonal dialogue in favor of
the court system more than any of its international counterparts, when foreign policy is defined in terms of an “axis of evil” and phrases such as “you’re either with us or against us” (eerily echoing, or perhaps inspiring, the text of the examined Dodge ad in Figure 9), and military opponents are confronted with the words “Bring them on,” indulging immaturity is more than a fad.

On a final note, this paper is not intended as an invective against the advertising world, nor is it political by nature. It points to a social phenomenon: both politicians and advertisers consistently employ anti-dialogue rhetoric to appeal to the public for a very simple reason—the public finds this rhetoric appealing.

Of Winners and Victory

The exposure to new, radically foreign perspectives afforded by global communication and inter-cultural integration underscores the cardinal importance of dialogue. However, through the filters of popular culture, the focus has shifted from issue-based dialogue to ego-inspired rhetoric. And in the individual-oriented American context, success in dialogue has been equated with “winning” the argument. The new goal is not resolution, but victory. In this manner, dialogue has come to serve not the resolution of conflict, but the glory of the orators—at each other’s expense. It has become the anti-dialogue. As such, it has created a standard for self-evaluation based on success in this rhetorical joust. In a final twist, to allow for self-reaffirmation in light of this new standard, conflict itself has become attractive.

So how does one proceed? Perhaps the realization that dialogue was never meant to reinforce the ego, but to help foster mutual understanding, will arouse greater self-awareness in discourse. We may hope that in time, and—more likely than not—on an individual basis, popular culture will surrender the pursuit of victory, and gain a chance at winning.
Works Cited


News Articles


Advertisements


Works Consulted


Winter 2005 Honorable Mention

Molly Cunningham

Instructor’s Foreword

Molly wrote “Colonial Echoes in Kenyan Education: A First Person Account,” for my course, “Breaking the Rules: Beyond the Rhetoric of Academic Writing.” Throughout the quarter, Molly, her classmates, and I explored the deceptively simple question of the use of the first person in student school-based writing. I say “deceptively” simple, because as we discovered throughout the quarter, when to use the first person is a multi-layered question, laced with rhetorical complexities involving tone, stance, perspective, argument, and perhaps most importantly, the writer’s relationship to her audience and to her material. Molly’s essay complicates these issues even further by suggesting that a writer’s use of the first person also involves ethical consideration.

“Colonial Echoes” begins with Molly’s experiences as a volunteer teacher at New Hope Children’s Centre near Nairobi, Kenya, and moves between memories of that experience and quiet reflections on colonialism and the history of Kenyan education. Molly argues that the “incestuous connections” that exist between the “legacy of colonialism and the psyche of a people” are perpetuated and sustained by the educational system in Kenya. Her own experiences at New Hope offer compelling evidence for this claim, as do her readings in Kenyan history and educational theory.

But the heart of Molly’s argument is the implicit and paradoxical claim that by telling her own story of education in Kenya, she can give voice to other stories. In so doing, Molly acknowledges that she risks setting up an echo of Kenya’s colonial past: as a “white Stanford student,” speaking for “the oppressed.” But by rooting her memories, descriptions and analysis in her own voice and memory, Molly transcends this trap and ultimately tells a multi-voiced story. As she writes, “My words can only show the collision of multiple voices …” Molly concludes that though the West continues to be implicated in the problems that Africa faces, the West alone cannot determine Africa’s fate.

Jennifer Trainor
Colonial Echoes in Kenyan Education: A First Person Account
Molly Cunningham

I arrived at New Hope Children’s Centre in the Uplands district outside of Nairobi, Kenya on March 13, 2004. The two-story orphanage is located off the Nairobi-Nakuru Highway, right on the Great Rift Valley. It houses 65 girls, most of whom are between the ages of 12 and 16. I was there to live and volunteer in the home and teach at the local school. Most of the girls were orphaned by the AIDS epidemic; many of them had suffered some combination of sexual and physical abuse, malnourishment, and homelessness. There are 1.7 million such children in Kenya, approximately 40% of who lost their parents to AIDS (Unicef). New Hope is a sanctuary for a lucky few of these kids and in many ways, rehabilitation. The home was founded in January 2000 by a woman named Anne Chege, who explains her dedication to the girls as “answering God’s call.” She brings up the kids in the Christian faith and gives them practical training for the real world. She also sends them all to school. Some of them even make it to secondary school, and “Mama” Chege prays she may even have the resources to send a couple of the girls to university.

The notes started to come in the second week of my visit. Throughout my day, between chores, games, or prayers, a little hand would slip a little piece of paper into mine. They were each decorated with unique flair and signed with a unique name. But they all read the same:

molly,
first of all receive a lot of greetings like a sand in the ocean. next is to thank you because of the love that you love us with. may God bless you. and in the last day, you shall be called. sons of God. and you will see the kingdom of God. bye bye.
from your lovely friend Elizabeth Wangui

More than half of the girls referred to “the sand in the ocean.” Many quoted the Bible or just jotted down “John 3:14.” All sent greetings to my family and called on me to praise God.

My students in my English composition class at the local school were no different. In their writing, every student was “as happy as a peasant marrying a king’s daughter,” or vowed to remember some event until “the worms ate [their] corpse.” Besides these identical idioms, most of their writing was incoherent, filled with muddled spelling and grammatical errors. This did not deter me; in all of my earnest ignorance, I only wanted my students to discover some joy in writing. I asked them to dream of something wild and exciting and then put it to words, in a story. I told them not to fret over the rules they had been taught, but just to have fun. Eight of my 37 students turned something in. Only three of those were stories; the other five had just copied what I had written on the board. I was excited about the stories that I had, especially one involving a girl who escaped rape by telling her tormenters that she was HIV/AIDS positive. When I boasted of this student’s story in the teacher’s lounge, the other teachers laughed and explained that the class had read that same story in a different class earlier in the week. They did not
I believed my students were missing something—some main point. But how could I understand what it was? Their world means slums, unemployment, developing—stagnantly, desperately. Their country’s history reveals insidious colonial takeover, strife and struggle, and a hard-earned, twisted version of independence. Their lives outside of the classroom mean everything to how my students will learn to think and what their education will represent. We must come to understand their present and their past and begin to ask ourselves: what will be their future?

I have sought to question and understand what I experienced in Kenya, exploring its history and economy, and examining the educational system in terms of its curriculum and language practices. These explorations have revealed incestuous connections between the legacy of colonialism and the psyche of a people, being perpetuated—despite its better intent—by the educational system. It is a dense and sensitive topic, and while I have tried to tease out some questions and nuances, I cannot boast of any definitive conclusions.

This is by no means my story. My insight cannot offer any candid portraits of the culture and the institution I wish to examine. My words can only show the collision of multiple voices and stories. Hopefully this polyphony can shed some light on the relationship between Africa and the West, focusing on the base of socialization and the vehicle that will lead us into the future: the education of our children.

As a guest, I accept the hot tea that is offered me although I am nearly sweating. It’s sunny and cool out in the bustling city streets, but in the apartment where I am taking tea, I can hardly breathe. The apartment is really a room, or maybe a closet built to store a person. The bed doubles as a closet, the only table doubles as a kitchen, and besides the small, ratty couch that I am sitting on, there is no more furniture. Our legs awkwardly mingle, hanging off the couch onto the single patch of floor space.

“I am lucky to have this place. It is quite expensive to live in the city, especially with no job.” My host is an unemployed, unmarried, middle-aged woman. She is personable, welcoming, and bright. But she constantly laments her status and prospects, concerned for her financial future. She showers me with questions about the United States, but eagerly cuts off my answers.

“I wish that is how it could be in Kenya! It must be so nice there. Many single men! And with jobs! Our country is such a mess, so many without jobs and poor. The government takes all of the money. It is so corrupt. Sometimes I wish the white people, you know, that Britain would come back and rule for us!”

The Context: History and the Economy

Some Kenyan history textbooks gloss the country’s colonial history positively. They characterize the British as a savior of some sort, “out to eradicate the slave trade and spread a ‘civilizing mission’ designed to make [Africans] all full human beings, on earth and in heaven” (Independent Kenya 3). In this light, British colonization appears as a benevolent, Christianizing force, implemented with the Africans’ best interest in mind.

However conciliatory this view is, it is flagrantly incorrect. Kenya was snatched up in
the Scramble for Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century as a means of protecting Britain’s naval ‘sphere of influence’ (Ochieng’ 12). “Direct territorial take-over was a way of forestalling competition and controlling areas of strategic economic value” (Independent Kenya 3). British settlers came in by the masses, snatching the best agricultural land. They began laying the groundwork for dependence, installing a colonial government to replace the former, less formal systems of the peaceful, indigenous Kenyans. Christian missionaries provided a mechanism for replacing indigenous value systems (Ntarangwi 221).

Here begins the legacy of the colonial education of Africa: the first school in Kenya was created by a church missionary society. Its purpose after evangelism was to develop labor and staff for the new colonial administration (Ntarangwi 213). The colonial government’s mandate for development amounted to establishing native customs, health, and food as bad and establishing itself as the authority of change in education and Kenya (220).

The colonial powers needed to start capitalizing on their investment. They began injecting their own ideas of capitalist ideas of production, exchange, industrialization, and agriculture into Kenyan culture. It was in this “waxen pot of colonial urbanization [that] ethnic particularism and African nationalism developed simultaneously” (Ochieng’ 66). However, the new modes of economics introduced by the British clashed with the traditional, indigenous methods, and by the 1920s, production as dictated by the settlers began to fail (Ochieng’ 104).

Tension began mounting as the effects of the Great Depression began to reverberate around the world in the 1930s. Conflict and consciousness were rising as Africans suffered the friction and failure of colonial misrule (Ochieng’ 140). The British settlers reacted by attempting to exacerbate differences between ethnic groups. Despite these efforts, the resistance, especially of the powerful union movements, was powerfully multi-ethnic and tended to organize around class lines (Independent Kenya 9). Tensions peaked in the early 1950s when anti-colonial militants broke out into violence against colonial powers and loyalists. A state of Emergency was declared, and the “Mau Mau Rebellion” was eventually quelled. In the ensuing retaliation undertaken by the British, 11,503 Africans were killed, though some experts estimate the numbers actually spand far beyond these official statistics into a massacre comparable to genocide (Bergner). But the unrest could not be stifled; the stage was set for independence. The British settlers began identifying indigenous loyalists, whom they exempted from taxes and fees, creating a sympathetic middle class with earning power (Independent Kenya 11).

As these deep social changes were taking place, the economy that would be inherited by the winners of independence was being shaped and concretized. After World War II, the United States began to emerge as an international superpower, spreading its influence throughout the world. Nairobi was dramatically transformed by the resulting radical jerk towards capitalism. It became, in the hands of foreign capital, a “regional financial, marketing and manufacturing center for East Africa” (Independent Kenya 7). The influx of international capital transformed the economy of Kenya, giving settlers and foreign investors “monopoly control of marketing, prices, and inputs” (7). By the 1950s, 4,000 white settlers held over 7 million acres of the best land in the country. Meanwhile, the average, indigenous Kenyan was earning an annual income of 3 pounds, despite the fact that the price of the staple crop, maize, had increased by 800%. The people were performing all the labor, and were not only robbed of the proceeds, but also starved out of their own economy (4, 6).
With the economic losses of WWII and US pressure bearing down (whether the US applied this pressure for ethical or financial purposes is debatable), Britain finally began the process of decolonization in Kenya, ultimately granting the people independence in 1963 (Ochieng’ 196). All parties seemed to call for a continuity of lifestyles—at least all parties involved by the settlers arranging the transition. In his speech at Independence, the new president, Jomo Kenyatta, promised there would be no loss of land or security for the British settlers. The Kenyan people had to buy their own land back at inflated prices, affordable only with loans from Britain and the World Bank (Independent Kenya 12). Kenya embarked on its first year as a free nation already in obligation to the West. In effect, Britain managed to relieve itself of its nominal authority and all obligations of law and order, without disturbing its economic interests or the self-interested systems it had embedded into Kenyan culture long ago, accomplishing “exploitation without responsibility” (Ochieng’ 197).

Consistent with this smooth political and economic transition, the educational structure following independence was hardly touched. There were minor shifts in structure, but none in content. The teachers, trainers, movers, and shakers were now Kenyan, but the system remained British. All ensuing tweaks and reforms would be working from the foundation of Kenya’s colonial heritage.

“Good morning, guys.”

“Good morning, Teacher Molly!”

“Thank you! Please, sit down! Today, guys, we’re going to study nutrition!” I’m doing my best here, grinning ear-to-ear, as I turn to the board and write down ‘nutrition’ in large block letters. That morning, I was handed the textbook for Class 4 Science and was told to prepare a lesson on nutrition. I protested—“I know nothing about the subject!” They laughed—“But it’s in the textbook! Just tell them what it says.” And here I find myself, smiling and copying the four food groups from the book onto the board.

“To have healthy bodies and to grow, you need 2-3 servings of protein a day!”

Some of my middle-class students have meat once a week. The girls from New Hope each get a few pieces on holidays.

“To keep your bones strong, you need plenty of calcium! That means lots of milk!”

To even have water to drink, my girls must haul 5-gallon jugs for a mile. The little milk produced by the home’s cow goes to the youngest and weakest.

“To grow strong muscles and keep your nervous system healthy, you need magnesium! Magnesium is found in green vegetables, legumes, fish, and whole bran!”

I’m reading to forty blank faces. Faces that need healthy bodies, strong bones and muscles. And all I can offer them are these words; these awful, empty words.
Curriculum

Since independence, Kenya has struggled to define a philosophy of education and apply it meaningfully in an articulate and feasible curriculum. Working within the brittle skeleton of the former colonial structure, critics and reformers have big ideas but face considerable challenges. For example, while the curriculum must be a means of conveying culture and a strong national identity, it must also accommodate high levels of cultural and linguistic diversity (Woolman 27). The curriculum must also be financially feasible, coping with the reality of too many students and too few resources. It must also incorporate the role of education in the critical issue of development. The evolution of curriculum in Kenya reflects a nation grappling with these issues and facing challenges with the best intentions.

At independence, the goals and expectations of curriculum development were fundamental: to produce manpower for economic development and to Africanize the civil service (Woolman 33). From 1965-1975, the Primary Curriculum Revision sought to infuse materials with Kenyan history and geography, starting by using locally produced teaching materials. This “Revision” outlined student-oriented teaching methods designed to develop cooperation, creativity, and discovery (36). There was a sustained call for continued change and evaluation of the educational system. Intellectuals called for a sort of African literacy, an education “rooted in Africa’s own cultural heritage and values [that has] relevance to African societies” (Busia qtd. in Woolman 31). This idea raised questions on how to integrate scientific and technological innovations of the West (Woolman 31).

There was a Beecher Committee, a Binns Report, an Ominde Commision, the Gachathi Committee, and a Mackay Report: intensive investigations and recommendations, considerations and changes (Omulando). But to what avail? How was the Kenyan curriculum really affected by these deliberations? The textbooks have changed: they have black faces and beautiful African names. There have even been significant structural changes. The 8-4-4 system was adopted in 1985, breaking Kenyan schooling into 8 years of primary school, 4 of secondary, and 4 of university. This system was adopted to address the lack of correlation between graduation and employment, providing vocational training so that each stage or cycle was self-containing for students who do not continue to the next (265).

A student’s chance at moving from one stage to the next depends entirely on his performance on a national examination, the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examinations (KCPE) or the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examinations (KCSE). The tradition of exam-oriented education is a clear relic of the colonial system and British educational philosophy. With the introduction of the 8-4-4 system, many pushed for a reduction of these inherited systems. However, these proposals failed, and course overload and student failure are persistent (Woolman 36). In fact, the importance of the exams has only increased, as they are the sole indicators of whether a student will proceed to the next cycle—51% are eliminated in the first exam, and about 20% in the second. Every pronouncement in the curriculum must be considered under the light that the exam takes precedent to everything; therefore, facts and drills come first, and more important material at the end of the curriculum is neglected for the “front-loaded” examinations.

The current curriculum resonates with high ideas of values and holistic development. It encompasses life skills, national development and identity, universal ideas with equal opportunity, cultural heritage, social justice, human dignity, and multiculturalism—a
strong laundry list of solid, foundational principles (Woolman 33). It reaches to help students “internalize the values that underlie the country’s constitution and laws” (Omulando 305). The subjects are integrative and comprehensive, with aims to teach critical thinking, excite curiosity and improve communication (Omulando 303).

This new curriculum looks great on paper. All problems seem to be addressed by these abstract conceptions of educational philosophy. We are given an answer to multiculturalism and an answer to development. But what about resources? How does the Kenyan government plan to actually implement this nobly stated curriculum? What do these subjects and principles really mean to the students who they are supposed to benefit? What is the reality for the faces from my class on nutrition who need to be nourished with answers and a promise for a future? The curriculum will be meaningless, empty, and awful to them if there is no implementation.

I asked Lucy to sit with me after class in the grass outside to review some things for English class. My tenure as a guest teacher at St. Joe’s overlapped for one day with a woman earning her Ph.D. in Education in Canada. She told me about Lucy. Lucy, she explained, was dyslexic, confusing the b’s and d’s, p’s and q’s. At sixteen years old, Lucy was illiterate. A challenge.

Lucy and I sat in the sunshine. I held a workbook prepared by the Canadian teacher just for Lucy, filled with dotted outlines of letters and fill-in-the-blank _ogs and pe_cils.

“Lucy,” I spoke slowly. “Can you tell me what this says?”

She did not look at the notebook. She continued to look at me, smiling timidly. I pointed.

“Th-th-the …” I began sounding out. She looked from the notebook to me, with confused urgency flashing in her eyes. The smile stayed, stuck yet quivering.

“The tah-tah-tab-tah-rah-rah-rah-eeeeeee… the tree,” Lucy was silently listening to me, the smile wavering with each awkward noise I made.

“Lucy, do you understand?” A hesitation. And a nod.

“Can you sound it out for me?” Pause. Nod.

Silence.

My insistence grew stronger as her smile grew weaker as we both desperately tried to communicate. Until I suddenly realized that was precisely the problem: communication. Lucy didn’t speak English. I was trying to teach, in English, a dyslexic child, who did not speak English, how to read, well, English.

I sent Lucy to lunch. I sat alone in my classroom and cried for the rest of the period.
Language

English is the official language of Kenya; Kiswahili, on the other hand is the national language. This subtle distinction means that government and education are in English, while everything else tends to be in Swahili. And, in actuality, most of government is in Swahili also (Kenya.com). But for Kenyans who live outside of urban centers, neither of these two languages is their first language. They are raised with their “mother tongue” (MT), a language associated with their ethnic group. For example, in the Uplands, where I was staying, the MT was Kikuyu. There are over 42 of these language groups in Kenya (Woolman 38). And when children skip nursery and preschool (as often happens in rural areas), they lose their most critical years of language development.

English became the language of instruction in 1965, one of the few significant changes to the colonial administration, which taught in MT (Muthwii 3). To the newly independent nation, English was seen as the language for “empowerment and advancement,” the route to autonomy, development, and success (Woolman 38). This approach has been slightly modified since the 1970s, when MT or Kiswahili (the former used only in monolingual schools) was implemented as the language of instruction for the first three years of primary school (Muthwii 4). This change acknowledged English as the ultimate objective for students, but also accounted for the students’ need to relate their education to their home environment.

But this is just policy; the question of language turns out to be a prime example of curriculum choices with sound intent and no means of practical implementation. In relatively affluent areas and urban centers—where often English is spoken at home or on television—the policy translates well, and the transition from MT or Kiswahili to English is smooth. But in most schools, the reality amounts to a faulty system of “code-switching,” in which teachers first instruct in English and then translate (Muthwii 16). Often in this system, when students do not understand, they are silent, imitating the rest of the class’ response: nodding, smiling, appeasing the teacher. Code-switching is a problematic band-aid for the language difficulties: students cannot respond, to the teacher or on tests, in the same code in which they were presented the material. Students who mix languages in class are often ridiculed by their teacher and heckled by their classmates, creating classrooms full of timid students who dread expressing themselves (45).

Many teachers from rural areas feel their students would have a better chance for success if taught and examined in MT or Kiswahili. As it is, most students think in MT or Kiswahili, and then must translate their thoughts into English (Muthwii 28). In essence, with every examination they take, they are tested twice: once on the subject matter and again on English. But there does not seem to be another possibility. Teaching resources and textbooks come in English; technical math and science vocabulary is often not translatable into MT; MT and Kiswahili can also compete with each other, leaving students juggling two or three languages at a time (19).

Besides, the students are by no means asking for a switch in language policy. Even while admitting they understand MT and Kiswahili much better, the majority of students prefers English. Already, at the primary level they understand English as the language of success—the language that will lead them to a “bright future” (Muthwii 21). English provides access to a larger body of knowledge, to employment, and to higher education. It opens pathways of communication across the country, the continent, and the globe (Muthwii 33). To the West, understanding words and meaning is more difficult, true;
some even worry about English alienating ethnic heritage. But this worry is mitigated by the belief that it is in the homes and communities that should propagate culture. Ignoring the American programming on television and rap music on the radio waves that students are exposed to in their homes and communities, this justification of English in the classroom is still problematic. In the previous discussion on curriculum, education was identified as precisely the opposite: it was a bastion of cultural ideals, Africanized images, and strong national identity. Are these thoughts somehow complementary, existing on different planes somehow? Or is the discord deeper than it seems?

As the situation currently stands, the examinations are English-oriented, and the curriculum is examination-oriented, so there is no clear alternative for classes being hindered by language problems. Some teachers resort to “code-switching;” others ridicule or even punish students for the casual use of MT. For the students who cannot grasp the language of instruction, the “spontaneous interactive response during learning activities” is obstructed (Muthwii 55). Students memorize facts that they do not comprehend and cannot apply to their lives or world. It is a difficult reality to address, and one that is not likely to change soon: even the most profoundly effective new policy from the government would—like most past policies—not be adhered to or fully be understood by teachers (55). Such policy changes require expensive tools of implementation: teacher training, resources, and an active process of analysis and evaluation. In the meantime, teachers keep pushing, while the students nod and smile, and everybody waits to go to lunch.

This memory burns. Trust its accuracy: I can still smell it, see it, hear it …

I’m in the teacher’s lounge. My shoes are muddy on the wet concrete floor, the rain is loud through broken window panes, the room smells of gloriously aged and mildewed textbooks—textbooks, only too few. I am, as usual, the only white person in the room. Usually, all the other teachers buzz around me, gossiping in Kikuyu, ignoring the eager, sycophantic young American preparing lessons in her corner.

But today, one of the teachers has become fascinated with me. He wants my opinion. He’s wearing a second or third hand suit, too big for him, but freshly cleaned and pressed. I remember him getting off the bus that morning, walking leisurely with his umbrella as the kids hurried to shelter from the rain.

He’s asking me about America. His questions are all loaded; he wants me to tell him that it’s better there, that I would only come to Africa out of pity. I protest, taking his words out of my mouths, walking on egg shells, begging him to understand. But my words fall on deaf ears.

And then he says it. He says it without sarcasm, without contempt. He takes for granted that I believe it, and he even believes it himself.

“You think that here in Africa, we are just like monkeys, swinging from the trees.”
When Kenya maintained the old, British structure of education, they attempted to Africanize it. But there was something inherently un-African about this structure. Traditional African education was organic, informal, and based in the community. Transitions between age groups were natural and inclusive, not based on any system of elimination. Learning was based on active discovery, not textbooks, no matter how Africanized (Woolman 31). The colonial structure was a complete “subordination of Africans,” that introduced Eurocentric morality models that were individualistic and contradictory to the traditional, communal values (Uchendu qtd. in Woolman 29). This imported culture of egocentric materialism caused “the decline of collective responsibility and contrib[ed] directly to unemployment” (Rwomire qtd. in Woolman 30).

The stated value of traditional, African culture within the curriculum is also questionable. Mwenda Ntarangwi recalls being taught about the Mississippi and Rhine rivers before the Athi and Tana rivers of his nation (216). He was singing “London Bridges” without having seen anything like them or understanding remotely why. He argues that alienating students from their heritage causes self-loathing (216). Alternatively, superficial “Africanization” of materials manifests as “indigenous knowledge … as a relic to be documented and saved,” rather than “a process that reaffirms different ways of living and interpreting the world, that ultimately leads to more appropriate models of change” (Moita qtd. in Ntarangwi 219). Indigenous culture is undermined, and education deteriorates into students memorizing meaningless facts to be parroted in a meaningless language.

This reality echoes the ideas of Paulo Freire in his treatise on education, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. In this system, he illustrates, education is boiled down to the “banking concept” in which the teacher is the depositor of knowledge, and the students are the depositories (Freire). There is no comprehension or digestion of the material, only memorization. This system leaves the students with a view that knowledge and the world is somehow static, that there is no interaction or critical discourse with the reality they learn. The authoritative teacher role, in which the teacher holds all knowledge, projects ignorance onto the pupils, stifles inquiry, and undermines academic self-esteem (which Freire notes is “characteristic of oppression”) (Freire). By making learning passive and unquestioning, the effect of the banking concept is to make students adapt this approach to their society and world. The education of the oppressed prepares them for their world, so they can fit their places. The reality of oppression is disguised to the students who learn numbness, subjugation, and apathy (Freire).

During colonial rule, the citizens became aware of the outright injustice of their situation and were able to actively resist. But in modern Kenya, the cultural and economic dependency has been insidiously ingrained into the next generation, creating citizens who don’t think, judge, or challenge their government and society (Independent Kenya 2). The rich and complex process of education, “through which values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all parts of a people’s unique cultural orientation are transmitted from generation to the next” has been reduced to schooling, a cheapened “process of perpetuating and mandating a society’s existing power relations and its institution” (Ntarangwi 222). It is a system of teaching certain people certain things, preparing and dividing the future leaders and future beggars, herding everyone to their proper place without explanation (Independent Kenya 70). In fact, ex-President Moi was first a schoolmaster and went on to treat “his country like his classroom,” where activity falls “along rigidly authoritarian
lines, designed to kill initiative and independent thought" (*Independent Kenya* 70). This is a “classroom” of the oppressed from which Kenyan citizens cannot emerge or escape.

Ironically, this oppression of thought often translates to thought on development. The popular belief—in both Kenya and the West—is that development is the natural answer for “underdeveloped” nations such as Kenya. But this belief and these terms may really be part of the problem. It reflects a conception of a spectrum of sorts; this spectrum ranges from “primitive,” “underdeveloped,” “third world” (i.e., Africa) to “modern,” “developed,” “first world” (i.e., the West) (*Ntarangwi* 220). Built into this spectrum are the assumptions that Africa is somehow inferior and that Africa must evolve along the same path towards the same success as the West. These assumptions are at the base of the Kenyan educational system; this spectrum implicates education as a sign of modernity and key to development. Kenya can never incorporate traditional material and systems in a meaningful way as long as the dominating belief is that prosperity means Westernized development means Westernized education (215). What results is a “system of education that is in itself a form of governmentality … where individuals absorb dominant ideologies that construct imaginary pictures of prosperity that are shaped by foreign lifestyles” (216).

The fact is that everyday, Kenyans are told education is the key to development, and education accounts for 30% of the government’s budgetary expenditures (*Ntarangwi* 219). The reality is that 40% of Kenyans are unemployed (*World Factbook*), and every year, highly trained students graduate from college and cannot find a job in the very fields that are supposed to be so “key to development.” Despite all the policies and spending and programs, there is a gap. Aid, loans, and well-meaning NGOs have been pouring into Africa for years, and still, there is a gap.

It is time we face the possibility that the “Western diagnosis” for development “does not reflect Africa’s realities” (*Ntarangwi* 222). We have imported our culture, our resources, our technology, and our institutions into the country with the best and worst intentions. But to what avail? The Western model of education and economy is not working. The “shadow of the West” is stunting Kenya’s growth; Kenyan citizens must be allowed to create their own cultural framework and their own terms of development (222). In education, this means gearing the curriculum to teach towards economic self-sufficiency of a country. It means teaching citizenship skills that liberate the student, engaging them with skills of questioning and critical thinking. It means teaching history as a collective, inclusive pool of human knowledge rather than as a demeaning spectrum of societal evolution (223). It must be relevant to students, fostering a sense of self-worth and national pride that defies any comparison to the West. Perhaps this alternative could not make it past the embryonic stages of hypothesis, but it is a possibility that calls for a new debate. But there must be a debate, there must be new possibilities. There must be change.

**Mgure’s Story (Conclusion)**

We are implicated. Kenya—Brazil, Tanzania, Laos, the “undeveloped world”—is thousands of miles away, out of sight, out of mind. But this globalized world is shrinking everyday, and despite the thousands of miles, our culture has flooded their line of sight, and our economy has skewed their frame of mind. The West has set an international standard of education, language, and development that is insidiously colonizing a people who were granted independence decades ago. As a result, students are blocked from their own education—disallowed the means of communicating, expressing, and advancing. And worst
of all, they hate themselves for it. It may be thousands of miles away, but we are implicated.

But IMF economists, the US government, or an Oxford think-tank cannot undertake solving this problem, outlining recommendations, and creating committees. Neither can a white American Stanford student. I have presented a first person account: my trip to Africa, my placement in the school, the treatment I received as a teacher and as a traveler all reflect the very problem I seek to present. This paper itself has traces of this mentality. I will not seek to recommend or answer all question or conclude because it is not my place to do so. We must finally trust Kenya to decide its fate.

But history cannot be retracted, and generations of oppression cannot be reversed. We cannot extract ourselves so easily, and the reality of the “global village” will never allow us to do so. While Kenya re-examines its own role, we must understand our own, working towards a mutual approach to mutual understanding, esteem, and benefits. So while I cannot offer answers, sweeping conclusions, or even a candid portrait of Kenyan culture, I can offer my first person account of the clash of cultures, the multiplicity of voices, and perhaps, a little hope. We can always start with understanding.

For a week, I have been conducting interviews with the girls at New Hope, collecting their stories to recruit potential donors. We talk one-on-one, in my bedroom. The interviews often last an hour; while the girls only speak for fifteen minutes, they spend the majority of the time crying. At first I thought I was doing irreparable damage, but Mama Chege assured me it was quite the opposite. The girls, she explained, have never been asked their story. They have never grieved, they have never explained, they have never been held and rocked and whispered to, “Everything will be just fine.”

Mgure has been in my room for an hour, but she has been speaking the whole time. She needs a translator, from whom I hear in fifteen second delay how Mgure was beaten and starved as a child, how when she ran away she was gang-raped by street boys, how she lived in dire poverty and only managed to survive selling her body for a few shillings. And how, at the age of thirteen, Mama Chege found her and brought her in.

She continues to speak, despite her tears, despite the translator, despite my sporadic whimpers and sobs. She speaks for an hour, hurriedly, including details of all sorts: the cost of the first meal she had in exile from her own home, the number of street boys who found her all alone, the shoes she wore when she was taken in as a house girl by an abusive employer. I scribble furiously on my pad, never quite exhausting my tears.

When she finishes her story, I tell her everything will be okay and that she is so beautiful and so strong and that I love her so much. I tell her that people in America care and will love her so much too. I ask her what she would say to them. If she could tell America one thing, one thing that I promise I will tell the whole country.

She turns to me and wipes her tears and says to me in clear English,

“I just want them to know.”
Works Cited


**Spring 2004 Winner**

**Wendy Hagenmaier**

**Instructor’s Foreword**

The original essay assignment asked our students to examine Denise Levertov’s “An English Field in the Nuclear Age” in light of her assertion that “Form is never more than the revelation of content.” Levertov fashions the spine of her poem from a single long sentence filled with pauses, parentheses, and dependent clauses. A series of perceptions follow, nestled one within the other, dizzying the reader as they extend further and further. Wendy Hagenmaier offers a lucid and nuanced explication of the poem’s structure, but that is not the measure of her achievement. Wendy’s analysis not only tunes our hearing to an embedded dialogue between the human observer and nature observed, an exchange that the poem’s emphasis on verbal artifice and its wariness of solipsism would seem to forbid, she also has caught something of Levertov’s own sensibility in the style of her piece. The critical skill and verve Wendy displays in the essay leaves us eager to read her future work.

**Andrew Dimock**

1. Editor's note: Integral to Wendy's essay is Levertov's poem, in particular, its reproduction as an illustrated broadside signed by the author in 1982 as a gift to Professor John Felstiner. We are able to reproduce a copy of an illustrated broadside of Levertov's poem on the following page thanks to, in particular, Kathy Walkup, who graciously provided us with an original and to funding support from the office of the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education. Broadside of Denise Levertov's "An English Field in the Nuclear Age." Designed by Kathy Walkup. Illustrated by Katy Festinger. Palo Alto: Matrix Press, 1981. Our thanks also go to Professor Felstiner, as well as to the Levertov estate and New Directions Books for permission to reproduce the poem.
To render it—this moment,
haze and haloes of
sunless’d particulars, knowing
no one,
not lost and dearest nor
the unfound,
could,
though summoned,
though present,
partake nor proffer vision unless
(taxed, spun, tempered, stain of it
sunk into steel of utterance) it
be wrought:

centuries furrowed in oakbole, this oak,
these dogrose pillors, that very company
of rooks plodding
from stile to stile of the sky):
to render that isolate knowledge, certain

(shadow of oakeaves, larks
urging the green wheat into spires)

there is no sharing save in the furnace,
the transubstantiace, acts
of passion: (the way
air, this minute, searches
warm bare shoulders, blind, a lover,

and how among
thistles, nettles, subtle silver
of long-dried cowpads,

gold mirrors of buttercup satin
assert eternity as they reflect
nothing, everything, absolute instant,
and dread

holds its breath, for
this minute at least was
not the last),

An
English Field
in the
Nuclear Age
“To render it:” Acts of Structural Passion
In Levertov’s “An English Field in The Nuclear Age”

Wendy Hagenmaier

there is no sharing save in the furnace,
the transubstantiate, acts
of passion

Denise Levertov

“To render it!”
Levertov begins
her poem

“An English Field in The Nuclear Age.”
And so the reader watches her
unwind
her rendering
her naming
her creating
(in falling
phrases, these words of
wildness
so that the poem
nearly obscures its own meaning;
nearly destroys itself in
a terse
botanical tangle
and, instead, creates itself beautiful) through
structural innovation, imagery, and allusion
a dialogue
between
man nature
form function
a transubstantiation
down
the page
from the first plain word into
an act of passion
This may seem a curious way to begin an analytic exploration of Denise Levertov’s “An English Field in The Nuclear Age.” The curious brilliance of Levertov’s own lines, however, invites and embraces the unpredictable. One need only read through her first few stanzas to discover that Levertov exists in a literary landscape all her own: her lines sprawl across the page with the abandon of a wild English garden; her enjambment and punctuation and white space tangle the reader in a stream of consciousness and interruption; her metaphors and references mystify readers into answering Levertov’s lines with poetical experimentation of their own. However, hers is not poetical originality without forethought: each enigma of punctuation or pacing informs the poem’s content in a pivotal way. Indeed, Levertov creates, through her unique, irregular structure of spacing and pacing, her biting imagery, and her intricate allusions, a dialogue between man and nature in which each voice is defined by punctuation and arrangement. These two voices sound together alternately in dissonance and harmony until the distinction between the two blurs into ambiguity, and Levertov’s lines become both a passionate product and a visual map of the artist’s creative process.

Perhaps most striking of all of Levertov’s creative decisions in the poem are her structural choices: phrases wind around each other; syllables stand alone on lines to themselves; italicization and enjambment invigorate each turn. Upon close inspection, however, the poem aligns itself into seven structural sections, which intermingle on the page to form a thematic conversation. As part of the first of these components, the title establishes the identity of the poem’s juxtaposed speakers—nature, as symbolized by “an English field,” and man, as epitomized by “the Nuclear Age.” The remainder of the first section belongs to man: the phrasing of the first line, “To render it!” implies the presence or thought-process of a human speaker, and each successive line until “be wrought” discusses this observing, “rendering,” naming, spinning, creating of the natural world on the part of man. Indeed, line eleven serves as a map of the dialogue to come: man will “name” or observe and describe nature, “spin” or “render” his vision of nature, “temper” or refine it, and finally find that rendering permanently complicated—he will witness the “stain of it” (11). The second section, beginning with “centuries” and ending with “sky,” explores man from the perspective of nature: the idea of nature rendering, naming and identifying man through a natural metaphor. On the one hand, “that very company / of rooks plodding” seems to describe a flock of large, black birds soaring through the sky (15-16). On the other hand, one comes to see the rooks as a metaphor for man. A “rook” implies a second meaning—a swindler—and birds are not often described as “plodding” from step to step of the sky. It is man who walks with a laborious and heavy tread, who steps to climb over a wall.

As the poem unfolds, the third section, comprising only line eighteen, shows a return to the voice of man, a re-emphasis by the human speaker of man’s ability to name and render nature, of man’s “vision” of nature (10). The next portion again visits man from the point of view of nature: another bird metaphor serves for man here. From the perspective of nature, man is a “lark,” shaping nature through speech and language, “urging” the products of the natural world (“green wheat”) into technology and institutions (“spires” as architectural elements and thus symbols of civilization or even of the church) (19-20). This second bird-man is more advanced, a man of a new “age,” who is able to conquer pale nature (“pallors”) and convert it to something dangerous, “shadow[y]” and “furrowed” (19; 14). Returning once again to man, the fifth section, from line 21 through line 26, explores the realm of the sensory and corporeal from a distinctly human point
of view—man with his “warm bare shoulders” and “lover[s]” (26). Lines 27 through 33 form the next portion, in which nature “mirrors” man (30), a pool of natural water within a buttercup reflecting the whole world and its zeitgeist of “dread” (33). And the final section, from line 34 to the poem’s conclusion, reveals a unity or commingling between man and nature: through pathetic fallacy, both nature and man hold their breath here, both dreading and fragile, reflected in and dependent upon one another.

Levertov then proceeds to break this structural map of seven exchanges—a thematic dialogue between man and nature—into two categories of punctuation and spatial orientation. What appears to be one poem instead becomes two: the lines not contained within parentheses form an overarching narrative, justified towards the left, with specifics increasing in detail as the lines move further to the right of the page. This poem embodies the rational voice of the speaker, the argument flowing throughout that man must name and shape and transform nature in acts of creative passion—and the simultaneous danger that this powerfully creative, innovative impulse poses to the fragile living world (living as it refers to both nature and mankind). The reader may find the second poem—within-a-poem that Levertov fashions in the parenthetical segments: the four passages in parentheses delineate the four concepts in line 11—the naming, spinning, tempering, and stain of nature by man. The first parenthetical passage defines what it is to “name” nature; the second describes the unfurling, spinning, naming, or rendering of nature by man; the third explores the further rendering or tempering of that rendering; and the fourth outlines the complication of that rendering, the mirroring or naming of oneself through one’s naming of nature—or, more generally, the definition of oneself through the definition or naming of one’s artistic creation—and the indelible “stain” of that complication (11). Thus, while the poem formed by the linking of the interrupted phrases outside the parentheses forms an overt, overarching rational narrative, the poem created from the grouped parenthetical segments becomes a sort of subtext: a passionate, irrational, sensory intermixing of man and nature.

Apart from punctuation and spatial innovation, yet another structural element informing this dialogue between humanity and the natural world is Levertov’s experimentation with pacing—with interruption, delay, and references to time. Parentheses are not the only punctuation marks to intervene and break the flow of the poem’s tangle. An assortment of dashes, commas, and colons, along with one exclamation point in the first line and one period in the last, ensure a disjointed current to the meter and rhythm of the poem. The pairing of the exclamation point with the dash and the italicization all in the first line forces the reader to jump, to visually and mentally gasp, and then to rush on with reading. And the placement of only one full end-stop, a period, at the end of the poem’s final line, underscores the fact that this is the end of interruption, of parentheses, of delay, of rendering. The period highlights a strange dichotomy between the emphasis, because of enjambment, on the word “not” in the last line (that this is not the end of all life for dangerously creative man and his fragile environment) and the fact that this is indeed the last moment—of the poem, at least. Breaks of naked white space and enjambment also serve to dictate the fluctuating pace of the poem: from lines 24 through 33, the poem’s momentum quickens through enjambed lines, and the striking white space break before line 34 compels the reader, quite literally, to “hold … [his or her] breath” (34). Considering the punctuation patterns present early in the poem, one might expect Levertov to have italicized the “this” of line 35 or to have added commas around “at least.” Indeed, it is as though in this, the climax of the poem, the writer, holding her
breath, forgot or subordinated all previously crucial punctuational matters to the thematic rush of the danger to nature of man’s exquisite and threatening creations. This incongruity parallels the contrast between references to time in the poem: so many of the italicized words refer to specificity, to particular moments and places in time—“this moment” (1), “this oak” (14), “this minute” (25)—and yet, Levertov simultaneously refers to broad scopes of time and place—“centuries furrowed” (14), “eternity” (31), “everything” (32). Just as nature and man exist as separate entities in the poem while also commingling and coexisting, just as the poem exists as multiple poems in one, time exists on the scale of the momentary and the entire “age,” and structure exists as simultaneously binding and intentional, abandoned and free-flowing. These juxtapositions and dichotomies create the many structural and thematic dialogues within the puzzle of the poem.

A fully realized understanding of Levertov’s poem would not be complete, however, without an exploration of the figurative language that fills the lines and comprises the poem’s structure—without careful attention to imagery and allusion. It is these poetical components, which take up the thematic space, that form the thematic structure of the poem. Central to the concepts of imagery and allusion is Levertov’s powerful word choice: puns or terms with multiple applicable definitions breathe complex life into the lines, metaphor abounds, and archaic or even invented botanical terms lend a tone of innovation and mystery. The second word of the first line, “render,” the first carefully chosen word to strike the reader as intricate and multi-faceted in meaning, most prominently denotes the portrayal of something or someone in art. Levertov begins a thread here that continues throughout the poem—the idea that “there is no sharing” (21), no finding or giving of poetical “vision” (10), in the real world, unless that world is “rendered” or portrayed by the artist in some “act of passion” (22). “To render” also might mean to define or to declare the identity or “certain[ty]” of something (18), to name something, almost in the biblical sense of God asking Adam to name the creatures of the earth. Indeed, the poem abounds with language of naming, defining, creating: “render” (used twice, in lines 1 and 18), “named” (11), “spun” (11), “tempered” (11), “utterance” (12), “wrought” (13), “urging” (20), “assert” (31). This diction underscores the role of the artist—of the poet—in the poem: words are the tools of the writer, just as they are the tools of nature in the poem—transformative, legitimizing, passionate. Furthermore, the scientific concept of rendering as purifying or extracting a substance by melting, of heating a solid slowly until as much liquid as possible has been extracted from it, almost could make “render” a synonym for lines 21 through 23: “render” is Levertov’s word to describe the power of all words—transubstantiating, metamorphosing. The reader must yield to the poet’s “rendering” of nature—must “[sur]render” to the overwhelming power of man as artist to control, to till, to civilize what is fragile in the natural world. Levertov complicates her portrayal of this fragile natural world with an obscure botanical vocabulary. Terms such as “sunbless’d” (3), “oakbole” (14), and “cowpads” (29) color the stanzas with an archaic feel of timelessness and universality of imagination: the rendering is occurring in a specific “age,” a specific “field” (an English one), but also in every age and every landscape.

And Levertov litters her lines with other hidden allusions that enhance this tone of universality: the idea of the rooks “plodding / from stile to stile of the sky” seems reminiscent of her poem “The Jacob’s Ladder” (16-17), at once a biblical reference and a botanical one. With the same phonetic pronunciation but the alternate spelling “style,” the word denotes a structural element of a plant stalk and also a writing instrument—as though nature, the flight of birds (or perhaps the fumbling of man, if the rooks are viewed
as a metaphor for man), could be divine and botanical and human and artistic at once. The image of “spires” in line 20 and the appropriation of the words “transubstantiate” (22) and “passion” (23) also combine to enhance this reference to the divine in nature, this synthesis of the sacred, the earthly, and the artistically human: “spires” could be seen as symbolizing the architecture not only of a church, but also of any grand manmade institution or innovation, even, indeed, one as dangerous as a nuclear weapon. The terms “transubstantiation” and “passion” allude to concepts that are at once holy and sublunar, transformative and natural. It is as though there exists some divinity in nature and in man, some capacity to change, through art, the botanical (which some religious philosophies, for example, might symbolize with the Eucharistic bread and wine) into the human (body and blood), the human (suffering, as a parallel example) into the godly.

Furthermore, from an historical perspective, the word “transubstantiation” connotes the great schism within Christianity of the Protestant Reformation—a violent and morally tumultuous age that could be viewed as an historical precursor to the nuclear age described in the poem. No doubt “dread” pervaded an era of religious strife in which it seemed all fragile factions, at any moment, might destroy each other (33). This allusion underscores the simultaneous timelessness and *timeliness* of the “dread” felt in the poem, of the artist’s act of “rendering,” and sheds light on the historical references embedded in the title: the idea of creation and of man’s innate ability to use the products of the natural world to create—to scrawl words or weapons on a page—is at once a thing of vision, beautiful and artistic, and wild and dangerous and deadly. This is an English field Levertov describes—perhaps unaware and innocent, “knowing / no one, / not lost and dearest nor / the unfound” (3-6)—and yet whole battles may have occurred in this field throughout British history. Like all landscapes or “particulars” of the natural world (3), the field has a past of its own, rendered by man’s destructive and constructive movements. The reference to the nuclear age in the title alludes to many more associations as well: to the nucleus, the basic core of an atom, the creation of nuclear energy through fission or fusion, the nuclear family of basic components—man, nature, one writer, *this* writer, one oak, “*this* oak” (14). The nuclear age is one of danger and yet also one of hopeful transubstantiation, as though a writer might begin “blind” (26), and with words and a crucible or a linear accelerator—adding heat (the “warm” body of the “lover” in line 26)—might find “vision” (10). For the writer, every page might be a nuclear age, just quaking to be altered by the pen. Such is this poem: lines like the windblown grasses of a field, made through heat and held breath into something orderly and beautiful and passionate by the writer’s creative process.

Through revolutions in spatial and thematic structure—through arrangement and pacing and imagery and allusion—Levertov creates in “An English Field in The Nuclear Age” a dialogue between mankind and the natural world, in the course of which emerges an embodiment of the artist’s act of creation. Along the right margin of one copy of the poem are tiny sketches of flowers and leaves, a shy field of haphazard and fragile renderings of the natural world, erasing themselves more completely with every reproduction in this photocopying age, transforming themselves through time and artistic evolution. I cannot help but think that if Levertov came across them there, next to her words, some faint act of passion, she would smile.

**Works Cited**

Spring 2004 Honorable Mention

Lia Hardin

Instructor’s Foreword

Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* are two literary classics that many readers find to be equally bleak visions of the fragmentation and alienation of European life in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In “Hear the Thunder: Isolation and Emotional Power in Kafka and Eliot,” Lia Hardin, ever attentive to subtlety and nuance, surprises us with her faith in Eliot’s optimism, which she deftly contrasts with Kafka’s unrelenting despair. She finds hope and catharsis in the very texture of Eliot’s poem, where the interweaving of disparate voices promises that community will arise from the ashes of industry and war. Whether willingly or no (the manuscript of *The Trial* was published posthumously), Kafka’s novel fails its readers because it offers no such “creative resolution” to the problems posed by the sterile and indifferent nature of modernity. Its fractious protagonist never manages to get outside his own head and is thus condemned to die. This essay implies that literature has a moral imperative to affirm life, forge bonds, and, if not to inspire, then at least to console. Hardin reminds us to read with our hearts.

Emily Cohen
Hear the Thunder: Isolation and Emotional Power in Kafka and Eliot

Lia Hardin

In a work of fiction or poetry, the relationship between the reader and the author shapes the thematic structure of the work. Kafka’s *The Trial* and Eliot’s *The Waste Land* both address the tension, isolation, fragmentation, and indifference associated with modern consciousness. Kafka’s principal character, Josef K, isolates himself by maintaining a constant sense of preemptive shame, and Eliot’s poem includes many voices that are isolated from each other. However, because Kafka writes prose that presents the continuous voice of a single, main character while Eliot presents a series of voices tied together only thematically and by their placement within the poem, the focuses of the two works diverge drastically. *The Trial*’s principal character’s failure to make sense of his society creates a tension that remains unresolved. The reader is left without resolution, and is made to feel discomfort and despair, especially as the novel reaches its conclusion. In *The Waste Land*, however, although the same tension dominates, the many fragmented, incoherent voices unite to create an emotional tableau that establishes a community that is absent in *The Trial*. Fear, awe, desire, need, and relief combine to create a catharsis. Eliot’s reader avoids the cycle of despair that characterizes a reading of Kafka’s work. Unlike *The Trial*, *The Waste Land* includes a mechanism for transmuting the fragmentation of the modern consciousness into a positive, creative resolution.

Although Josef K’s initial problems in *The Trial* originate with the upside-down justice system he is forced to encounter, and are therefore external, the tension in the novel results from his inability to cope with internal factors. K’s stress is caused by his indifference, his isolation, and his tendency to feel preemptive shame or paranoia about others’ potential critiques of his future actions, all consequences of his apparent emotional paralysis. Throughout the novel, K’s isolation is clear. He has no friends, only associates. He belittles the clerks from the bank provided by the inspector for his convenience, yet competes rather than socializes with the vice president, who is higher up in the administration. Kafka makes it clear that when K’s uncle Karl arrives it is only because K “was particularly indebted to” his uncle that he “had to assist him in every way and put him up for the night as well.” K feels nothing more emotional than familial obligations toward even a close relative (59). Similarly, K makes love to both Elsa and Leni without feeling particular affection for either (108). In short, he is isolated from and largely indifferent to the thoughts and actions of others. The only instances in which K truly considers the feelings of others seem to center around his perception of their opinions of himself. For example, in the bank, he feels shame about working on his petition and he likewise feels shame upon hearing the cries of the guards being flogged (126; 84). The shame, in both cases, is irrational. It has no direct external cause, but rather originates from within K himself, in the form of an ill-reasoned chain of causality. He justifies his shame with unfounded assumptions. In the case of the flogging, for instance, K assumes that the people in his building would presume the guards’ screams reflect directly upon him. Indeed, he goes out of his way to avoid talking to anyone about the noise by sticking his head out of the window, an illogical preventative measure. Furthermore, the shame
paralyzes him; he is unable either to stay there comfortably or to return home (84). K’s emotional paralysis, his isolation, and his bizarre misuse of logic are all factors in his radical misconception of the trial. The trial presents a problem he considers external when it is in fact entirely internal in origin. He does not reconsider his belief that a corrupt court upset the routine of an otherwise orderly society.

Because K is unable to escape the ramifications of his misconceptions, despair begins to characterize the reader’s experience of The Trial. The reader experiences Kafka’s thematic material through a lens: the artificial perspective of the narrative voice. There is always this degree of separation between the intention of the author and the perceptions of the reader. K’s experience of the trial is that of a crescendo; over time it consumes his life. His original thought is that the trial might be a “crude joke his colleagues at the bank were playing on him for some unknown reason” (6). Even after dismissing the possibility that the entire situation is a joke or farce, he initially does not take the trial seriously. He feels uncomfortable with his uncle’s insistence that he see a lawyer (96). Eventually, however, he comes to the conclusion that the trial is all-important and so spends all his time at work attempting to write his petition at the expense of other activities (132). Finally, unable to get through the metaphorical door presented in the prison chaplain’s parable (217), K dies “like a dog” (231). Gradually, the trial consumes Josef K’s existence, until he disappears entirely. K’s experience does little to provide the reader any understanding of the situation because he does not understand it himself.

The reader’s experience and the protagonist’s experience converge, then, because access to salvation in The Trial is severely limited. A dangling possibility of escape alluded to several times in the novel is never realized. This possibility of escape only serves to emphasize its absence. K’s frustration and the reader’s sense of the futility of the situation both increase as K discovers that such freedom is an impossibility. The presence of the metaphorical door, for instance, indicates that some people are presumably allowed through to stand before the higher Law, and the doorkeeper does suggest that the man from the country might at some point achieve admittance through his doorway. The prison chaplain suggests that “the doorkeeper exceeded his duty by holding out to the man the prospect of a possible future entry,” thus indicating that he was aware of the problems implicitly created by the knowledge (218). Likewise, the painter whom Josef K consults states the existence of actual acquittal, or freedom from the trial, but simultaneously declares it impossible to achieve (156). In both the instance with the doorway and in the discussion with the painter, Kafka makes it clear that it is impossible for K to reach the higher Law and salvation. Since the possibility exists abstractly, however, K’s inability to reach salvation evidently is due to some circumstance particular to his situation. It is not the concept of salvation that is impossible, but rather the immediate salvation of Josef K. It seems reasonable, therefore, that this restriction is a result of his fundamental character flaws, including his tendencies toward indifference and shame. Kafka eliminates the reader’s access to resolution by making his primary character imperfect. The reader, like the man from the country, is aware of a barrier, but has only a limited ability to overcome the trial and reach salvation.

Although Kafka’s The Trial incorporates the voice of only one protagonist and Eliot’s The Waste Land is broken into many different voices, fragmentation, indifference, and isolation cause tension in both works. However, Eliot additionally incorporates the discomforting imminence of death, which is responsible for both additional tension and its eventual release. The themes and symbolic vocabularies of the two works are nevertheless
remarkably similar. It is clear that the voices in the poem themselves divide the whole into several fragments. Marie and Tireseus, present in sections I and III, for example, speak with different voices and from different perspectives. The “indifference” of the typist to her lover’s advances is mentioned explicitly in part III, and clearly invokes negative connotations since it results in only “half-formed” thoughts (242-251). Isolation has a continuous presence in the poem, in the form of the disjointed conversation between the woman who speaks and the man who answers silently in part II, the presence of fog in part I, and a general invocation of unreality throughout the poem. Emotional withdrawal, disjointed conversation, and obscured, cloudy imagery fuse and work together to unsettle the reader. Death, however, also maintains an obvious presence throughout the poem. In Part I, death appears as a shadow, the Hanged Man, and a corpse. Part II refers to “rats’ alley where the men lost their bones” and alludes to the phenomenon of nothing. In Part III death appears in several instances as “bones”; part IV expands upon the overarching theme of “death by water.” Part V mentions death as “we … who are now dying with a little patience” (28-29; 55; 71; 115-116; 121; 312; 329-330). Despite the significant inclusion and discussion of death, the tension in The Waste Land does not diverge significantly from that in The Trial: Josef K ends his story by dying, and his death is, throughout, the implied consequence of condemnation at the end of his trial. However, death in The Waste Land is a multifaceted concept.

Eliot portrays death in both positive and negative contexts. It is negative primarily when it is directly associated with some form of isolation. The crowd that “flowed over London Bridge” in part I consists of living individuals, still breathing, who have been “undone” by death. Each of these men fixes “his eyes before his feet,” ceasing all intercourse with other members of the crowd (62-65). The woman of part II, sitting in her “enclosed” room with a “coffered ceiling,” is reminiscent of a corpse in a coffin (93, 107). Eliot finds these states implicitly worthy of fear:

And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust. (27-30)

His reference here is to the story of the Sibyl, whose years counted the same as the number of grains of sand she held in her hand, and who is referred to in the Latin and Greek quotation that appears on The Waste Land’s title page. Immortal un-death is equated here with fear, and is separated from both youth, when death is of little consequence, and old age, when death is a reality that needs to be confronted. Isolation and indifference are, in The Waste Land, precisely this sort of un-death because they cause the living to exist as ghosts. As in The Trial, isolation in The Waste Land must be overcome before a resolution of the tension it creates can be reached.

Unlike Josef K’s immutable isolation, however, the fragmentation of the voices in The Waste Land is only partially complete: although the various segments appear unrelated, there is occasionally continuity from stanza to stanza. In one case, a stanza ends with the line, “And puts a record on the gramophone”; the next stanza begins with, “This music crept by me upon the waters” (256-257). Although the second stanza is clearly a new fragment, not only does the direct reference to music in the second line reflect continuity between the two stanzas, but also, because the second line is a quotation, it can be interpreted as lyrics from the aforementioned record. There is further justification for
this idea of connection in the text since, in part III, Eliot writes “I can connect nothing
with nothing” (201-202). Fragments easily could be the nothings to which he refers. Seeming fragmentation and isolation are then only the outer appearance of a poem that actually consists of an intricate net of connections and references.

These communicative references in the poem are conveyed to the reader primarily
through the presence of an explicit emotional tableau that is linked symbolically in many
cases to imagery of water. Water occupies a cathartic role in the poem, both because it kills, an action that prevents eternal un-death, and because it revivifies, which alleviates living
isolation. It nearly always is associated with emotions. These associations include those
of spring rain with desire and snow with forgetfulness, and freedom in part I, while dry
dust in the parched desert, as explained above, is associated with fear (3-4; 6; 17; 30). Fog is accompanied by surprise at unreality, frost is abrupt and “sudden,” hot water and rain are accompanied by suspense (60-61; 73; 135-138). Lake Leman is described in relation
to weeping and sadness, the twilight sea is associated with throbbing and waiting, both of which invoke desire, and the frosty silence with agony (182; 217-225; 323-324). Like the rising British seashore that slowly destroys ancient coastal ruins, the symbolic invocation of universal emotions erodes and breaks down isolation. So, The Waste Land, unlike The
Tria
l, does not leave its readers without recourse to salvation. The salvation is creative
because it is comprised of invocations of connections formed by the interrelations of poetic imagery. It overcomes fragmentation, a form of isolation that is likewise presented
directly to the reader through the structure and language of the poem, by including in its discussion both death and emotion.

There is, therefore, a direct contrast between the creative, cathartic resolution in
Eliot’s poem and the sterile ending of Kafka’s novel. In The Waste Land, the continuous evocation of water throughout the poem becomes, in the final section, nearly tangible, in the form of “… a damp gust. Bringing rain” (394-395). Water and, in fact, the entire extended poetic metaphor become immediately accessible, largely because the lack of water in the “waste land” has been emphasized from the first section. Likewise, as connections form, isolation ends. Eliot writes:

… I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison. (412-415)

The prison here, within the context of the extended metaphor, is likely life, while the key
to escaping life, which turns “once only,” is death. By this point in the poem, however, death has become an important aspect of life, a means of escape from the sterility of the Sibyl’s un-death. The form of the lines is somewhat reminiscent of a cycle, given the repetition of the words “key,” “once,” “each,” and “prison.” The key word to note in these lines, however, is “We.” Community is in essence the transcendence of prison, or of isolation, and, like the poem, is necessarily composed of several voices. Death is necessary, Eliot insists, but its imminence nevertheless can be transcended. Poetry is responsible here
for the renewal of life.

Contrastingly, the metaphorical door to the Law that K encounters in The Trial does not open for him, and so he remains isolated through to the end of his life. Shame, K’s warped conception of community, is the subject of Kafka’s last line: “it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him” (231). There is also symbolic evidence of the proliferation
of sterility in *The Trial*, since the court painter whom K visits, incidentally the only artist in the book, paints according to rules that, although “numerous … varied, and … secret,” are nevertheless unchanging over generations (151). The vocabulary of cyclic renewal and resolution present in *The Waste Land*, then, is entirely absent from *The Trial*. Eliot presents an alternative to insurmountable isolation. For both his characters and his readers, Kafka provides no recourse, but rather only regret and a lingering sense of what might have happened, had something been done differently.

Emotion and overarching metaphors that weave poetical disjunction into thematic unity can be very powerful literary mechanisms. In *The Waste Land*, the unifying, communal nature of emotion ensures the restoration of creativity within the “waste land” itself, an artificially dry, noiseless, sterile environment. In *The Trial*, however, the lack of any communal emotion or attitude prevents Josef K from reaching any form of creative resolution. Rather, the end of the book leaves him within the context of misinterpretation, isolation, and illogical shame. More importantly, however, in *The Waste Land*, the resolution is palpable: the reader can hear the sound of the thunder in the words of the final stanzas of the poem, can envision the feeling of rain and the movement of a boat over a calm sea, can feel horror at the turning of a key to lock a prison door, but can escape it, escape the paralysis of horror, by envisioning something else. Poetry connects a series of images in a way that lends itself to both the acceptance of tension and the “peace that surpasses all reason.” *The Trial*, which suffers from the problematic inclusion of flawed reason and a static character, remains wanting a little peace.

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**Works Cited**


In her own words, getting Annie to do something means letting her do it. Hearing this comes as something of a relief: Annie is one of those remarkable students about whom a teacher pleasurably frets. What pedagogical strategies, say, could challenge this young thinker best? What commentary might enhance her writing talents? Determining which of my student authors to nominate for the Boothe Essay prize was immediately evident. Deciding which of this author’s projects would be most worthy, however, was more vexing. Whether she tackles her own Sixteen Sestinas, difficult philosophical arguments such as Hegel’s on Antigone, less commonly taught literary texts like Aeschylus’s Oresteia or Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman, or, as here, Shakespeare’s oft-read and written-upon Hamlet, Annie produces surprisingly original pieces of intellectual complexity enveloped in a finely wrought prose, indeed, poetry. As her casual comment with which I began already indicates, it is in her sensitive scrutiny of the workings of language, its metaphors and its music—or, rather, in her inhabitation of each particular author’s languages—that Annie discovers her most sophisticated insights and by which she conveys her own highly nuanced arguments. This is a kind of fretting in which I happily engage; I eagerly anticipate the pleasure of reading, and re-reading, Annie’s future publications. I’ll add only that to get Annie’s work means to let it work its charms.

Erin Ferris
Hamlet stalks the halls of Elsinore, twisted by the bloody urgings of his murdered father, contorted by internal conflicts he will prove ultimately unable to untangle. This Prince of Denmark, mangled and distorted by forces beyond his control, has been resurrected to relive his anguish on innumerable stages for innumerable audiences—Shakespeare’s Hamlet, as a text, a play, and an investigation of the human condition, as one of the most compelling and oft-pondered works yet penned, may never be laid to rest.

Martin Evans suggests Hamlet derives its power to fascinate from the sum effect of its enigmas. He begins with an Aristotelian postulate: Art imitates life. Applying a simple physical analogy, he asserts that, if the play is to function as a mirror, it must be fundamentally opaque. If the light of literary or psychological explication passed through the text, Hamlet would be nothing but a worthless sheet of glass. Instead, its impenetrable surface, shining with that inner mystery, offers up the reflection of the observer. If Evans is correct, we aim our gaze at Hamlet’s heart and instead find ourselves fascinated, like Narcissus, by the nuances of our own countenances.

However, Hamlet functions not through reflection but refraction. Certainly opaque, certainly mysterious, it is a carnival mirror, and Shakespeare has rippled its glass. We aim our gaze at Hamlet’s heart and instead find ourselves fascinated by a world of overblown curvature and frightening proportions. It is this distorted world, not a faithful reproduction of the logic or illogic of life, that chains the observer’s intellect and soul to Elsinore. Already entombed in its heavy walls, Hamlet finds himself surrounded by multifoliate distortions, both entranced and horrified by them. Shakespeare simultaneously guides Hamlet to bend himself and his world to fascinate and manipulate other characters on the stage—and the audience beyond it.

Refractions plague Hamlet, hypnotize him, and provoke him to obsession just as they raise the eyebrows of the rest of the court. Claudius describes his marriage to Gertrude as one undertaken “with a defeated joy, / With an auspicious and a dropping eye, / with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,” and the sorrow of Old Hamlet’s death refracted onto the joy of the marriage (1.2.10-12). This set of distortions, coupled with Hamlet’s new knowledge that Claudius, as “a murderer and a villain,” created those foul twists, sets Hamlet’s mind to “carnal, bloody and unnatural acts … accidental judgements, casual slaughters … [and] deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,” as Horatio will later describe to Fortinbras in the play’s final scene (3.4.97; 5.2.383-385). The “forced cause” in Hamlet is begotten by the twisting of characters, natures, and even the inanimate.

In the first Act, Shakespeare tears the thin seal between earth and the afterlife, allowing an inhabitant of the latter to seep through and discolor the former. He confronts Hamlet with the revelations of his father’s ghost, distorting his gray soul with the reddish tint of revenge. Hamlet “think[s] meet to put an antic disposition on” immediately after conversing with Old Hamlet’s shade (1.5.171-172). Perhaps he chooses at this moment to “cast [his] knighted color off” in an effort to evade Claudius’s suspicions until his own
can be confirmed, or perhaps he thinks that affecting a mind aflame with madness might help smoke out the vermin usurper-king (1.2.68). Perhaps this feigned madness then grows, feeds upon his extraordinary circumstance, and overcomes his reason. In any case, Shakespeare’s distortion of Hamlet is intended to deceive or provoke other characters, and his new, unnatural ravings do elicit intense attention. Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern specifically for the purpose of addressing Hamlet’s distortion, telling them:

Something you have heard
Of Hamlet’s transformation; so call it,
Sith nor th’exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. (2.2.5-8)

The underlying causes of Hamlet’s “transformation” are unclear both to Claudius and the reader, lending the text its opacity—but it is the transformation itself that concerns the King. Hamlet’s mother notices this change as well, ordering Rosencrantz to seek out Hamlet because his “behavior hath struck her into amazement and admiration” (3.2.332).

A change in “[Hamlet’s] exterior” accompanies his behavioral shift. Soon after he meets the ghost, Hamlet bursts in upon Ophelia with “no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled / Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle” (2.1.79-80). His figurative “inky cloak” and “customary suits of solemn black” have been exchanged for disarray (1.2.77-78). The scene is revealed only through Ophelia’s description, not performed—physical imagery depicting his transformation is necessary to draw the audience closer to the forces at work upon Hamlet. The language Shakespeare later provides Ophelia again focuses upon the prince’s appearance. She says his was an “unmatched form and feature of blown youth” but is now “blasted with ecstasy,” indicating the prominence of physical distortion in conjunction with behavioral transformation (3.1.162-163). The metaphysical framework of Hamlet’s world is knocked apart by the ghost, his character has become warped, and his physical fabric—his clothes—begin to reflect this disorder. His new distorted form attracts Ophelia’s attention, and her words bring it to the attention of the audience through detailed imagery.

Despite his obvious distaste for unnatural distortions, Hamlet knowingly employs them to his own ends. In Act 3, Scene 4, he is summoned to the queen’s bedchamber. He thrusts two portraits at Gertrude, one of his father and one of Claudius, and insists that the images portray the distilled nature of each. “See what a grace was seated on this brow: / Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself,” he exclaims of his father (56). Of Claudius, he tells her, “Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear / Blasting his wholesome brother” (65-66). He is attempting to convince Gertrude through incredibly overblown hyperbole that she should put aside Claudius’s affections—and he succeeds. “Thou turn’s my eyes into my very soul,” Gertrude tells him. Hamlet distorts physical imagery to fix the queen’s conscience upon the very distortion that has mesmerized him so: the corruption of her virtue—a move that directly parallels the metatheatrical effect of his own physical distortion upon the audience.

The appearance of the ghost in Gertrude’s chamber during the same exchange further ensnares both her and Hamlet in a net of writhing distortions. As before, this net is expanded to include the reader or audience as well. Commanded by a supernatural being, Hamlet “bend[s his] eye on vacancy” and “holds discourse” with “th ’incorporal air”
Gertrude’s unwitting irony—that the ghost, clearly visible from even the cheap seats, is “incorporal air”—compels the observer to mark the ghost more carefully, to invest more of his intellect in peeling back the shifting layers of the scene. Shakespeare’s choice of the word “bend” might indeed be the hinge upon which the play turns.

All in Elsinore is horrifically, tragically, and even comically bent out of shape. Most notably, Hamlet’s black wit transforms Polonius, making of him a comic buffoon before he is made a tragic corpse. The death of a clown is deeply affecting, as Hamlet himself demonstrates while musing upon Yorick’s skull (5.1.80). “Gambols,” “songs,” and “flashes of merriment” are a confirmation of life and the joy of living. When distorted to serve death, they call forth emotions powerful enough that Hamlet’s “gorge rims at it” (5.1.80).

If Elsinore’s court jester was Yorick, Polonius is the play’s, and his death pins the audience just as the gaze of Yorick’s empty skull pins Hamlet because he was once an endearing, clownish figure. When the Prince of Denmark unleashes his wit upon the elderly adviser, his attacks are composed of verbal distortions, absurdities, and exaggerations. “Do you know me, my lord?” Polonius asks Hamlet, crudely attempting to ascertain his mental state. “You are a fishmonger,” Hamlet tells him. Polonius is somewhat taken aback, unable to respond save with a scintillating, “Not I” (2.2.188; 175). During another exchange regarding the shape of a cloud on the horizon, Hamlet’s lines suggest Polonius is but clay in his hands (3.2.268-275). He insists the cloud is first a camel, then a weasel, and finally a whale. To each contradictory suggestion, Polonius emphatically agrees. The impossible cloud and Polonius’s shifting opinions exemplify a running technique. Hamlet bares a toothy Shakespearean grin, which is then reversed once more to reveal thin-lipped tragedy. “Very like a whale” is the second to last line Polonius will speak to Hamlet before the prince rams two feet of steel into his intestine (3.2.390).

Just as coincidence knocks Hamlet’s intentions awry, Shakespeare knocks temporal flow “out of joint” (1.5.88). At the beginning of the play within a play, Hamlet mutters, “How cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within’s two hours” (3.2.129-131). Ophelia is quick to correct him: “Nay, ’tis twice two months, my lord” (132). Hamlet’s contraction of time emphasizes his horror at his mother’s behavior and his preoccupation with her “over-hasty marriage” as a perversion of moral, familial, and social order. Hamlet’s place in time—his apparent age—is similarly distorted. As implied by his encounter with the gravediggers he is ostensibly near thirty years old (5.1). By the standards of Victorian England or medieval Denmark, he is a man, almost middle aged. At eighteen, Shakespeare was married; at thirty, Hamlet writes burning love letters to Ophelia and engages in passion suited to “flaming youth” (3.4.85). He is referred to as “young Hamlet” by Horatio, who is supposedly his peer and a fellow student at the University of Wittenberg. Hamlet swings back and forth through time, a mesmerizing pendulum suspended from some ominous Shakespearean clock.

But Hamlet himself warns that a play should not “o’erstep the modesty of nature.” He admonishes the actors who visit Elsinore that “anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold … the mirror up to nature.” If forced to align with Evans’s opinions, Hamlet’s musings are at best fundamentally incomplete. The setting of Hamlet’s play is not Elsinore but Italy, the villain not an uncle but a nephew, and—most compellingly—any character who could parallel Hamlet is mysteriously absent. Hamlet’s conceptual staging of his world is so distorted that he has removed himself from its mirror altogether. The play-within-a-play provides him an opportunity precisely because it is thus twisted; Hamlet would have lost
his audience and perhaps his chance to observe Claudius’s reactions were he not able to say, “This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna,” to divert the king’s questions as the dumb show unfolds (3.2.243). When The Mousetrap actually springs, it proves itself a trick mirror. Those who are innocent will be unaffected by the players, Hamlet reassures Claudius, his words tinged with sarcasm: “Our withers are unwrung” (3.2.248). Here Shakespeare’s very wording suggests that guilty parties will be metaphorically twisted by the mirror of the play; therefore it must be a metaphorically rippled glass. Hamlet suggests plays should be realistic because he is infinitely distressed by distortions, even those put on by actors:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit … ? (2.2.560-564)

But he does not hesitate to utilize the play’s distortions to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.617). It is this same power of distortion that catches at the conscience of the audience and the reader.

If Hamlet and its role as a driving component of Western literary culture are to be satisfactorily addressed, Aristotle’s postulate must be amended to read thus: *art transforms life*. Art intensifies life, distorts it, bends it backward. A rippled mirror or a skewed pane of glass refracts focused light into a fascinating spray of unmasked color. The mesmerism of Hamlet is the light of inquiry transformed into a rainbow through the prism of Shakespeare’s text. Regardless of the nature of the literal world—be it logical, illogical, fundamentally knowable or unknowable—the literary world of Elsinore is a trap, a labyrinthine castle of its refractions. Attracted by their mysterious gleam, readers and audiences step within—and upon that first step, the conscience is caught, the withers wrung, the time set out of joint, and the projections of the “sullied flesh melt[ed], thaw[ed], and resolv[ed] into a dew” (1.2.130).

**Works Cited**


Instructor’s Foreword

Salvatore Bonaccorso’s essay, “Self-Discovery through Language in Omeros and Walden,” is an intricate, insightful study of the dialectic strategies two modern authors employ in probing their writing as a method of self-creation. Throughout his accurately sensitive and original reading, Salvatore compares how Henry David Thoreau in Walden and Derek Walcott in his modern epic Omeros embark on inner voyages of identity construction, motionless odysseys “that all writers take as they wield words into prose and poetry” seeking to clarify who they are and how they ought to live as both authors and humans. He demonstrates that, in essence, Thoreau and Walcott write to construct their own identities, and do so by obtaining spiritual truths from the natural world through their use of language. Specifically, he argues that Thoreau utilizes symbolic language in the form of natural correspondences to bridge the gap between language and spiritual facts, and thus realizes that the divinity he finds in nature mirrors the divinity of the self—a realization that precipitates the author’s experience of transcending time following the discovery of the divinity of the present moment. Salvatore then demonstrates that, to Walcott, language is an insurmountable burden that entraps one in a self-constructed, fictitious history, but, when assuming the form of poetic writing, language heals the very affliction of self-forgetfulness and self-alienation inherent in it, for it enables the poet to live vicariously through his characters, and hence to see the experiential world as it really is: a world stripped of language, a world without metaphor. This essay testifies to Salvatore’s talent, critical voice, curiosity, and fascination with the written word.

Noa Ronkin
Both *Walden* and *Omeros* often are described by scholars as self-reflective works. Through their writing, Henry David Thoreau and Derek Walcott seek answers to their own questions by incorporating themselves as main characters in their respective books. In his quest to define American life on his own terms, Thoreau journeys into the woods one mile outside of Concord, Massachusetts, “so that he can discover the liberating divinity within himself and his world” (Meyer 7). Walcott, a descendant of slaves who was born and raised on the island of St. Lucia, writes an epic poem in which many of the characters, including himself, are also slave descendants living on St. Lucia in search of their history. In essence, Thoreau and Walcott write to construct their own identities by obtaining spiritual truths from the natural world through the use of language. In *Walden*, Thoreau utilizes symbolic language in the form of natural correspondences to bridge the gap between language and spiritual facts; in doing so he unveils the truth that divinity exists within nature and thus within himself. On the other hand, Walcott views language simultaneously as an insurmountable burden that binds us to a fictitious history and as an alleviation from this burden that can be gained through writing.

With regard to their ideas about the connections among language, nature, and spiritual truths, both Thoreau and Walcott subscribe to the beliefs of the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his essay “Nature,” Emerson argues that words are symbols of natural facts and that “every word which is used to express a moral or intellectual fact, if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some physical appearance” (Emerson). For example, the word “wrong” has its origins in the physical, natural appearance of something twisted (such as a warped tree branch). Emerson continues, saying that natural facts are emblematic of spiritual facts because appearances in nature correspond to states of mind and soul. For example, a picture of a lion represents rage while the image of flowers represents affection. Through the logic of transitivity, one can conclude from Emerson’s theories that words themselves are symbolic of spiritual truths, so that language holds the key to obtaining spiritual truth.

Thoreau shows his readers that he supports Emerson’s ideas about language when he describes a conglomerate of sand and clay thawing: “When the flowing mass reaches the drain at the foot of the bank it spreads out flatter into strands … till they form an almost flat sand, still variously and beautifully shaded, but in which you can trace the original forms of vegetation” (353-354; original emphasis). Thoreau metaphorically compares tracing the melting sand back to its original form with tracing words back to their original forms in natural appearances. This comparison introduces the idea that, through observing natural phenomena, one can find the original meaning of words. The passage continues:

> Internally, whether in the globe or animal body, it is a moist thick lobe, a word especially applicable to the liver and lungs and the leaves of fat, (ληφθό, labor, lapsus, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing; λόβος, globus, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words,) externally a dry thin leaf, even as the f and v are a pressed and dried b. (354; original emphasis)
Thoreau shifts the discussion from thawing sand to words, letters, and their Greek origins. Clearly he views a connection between the two, one that is identical to that of Emerson. The similarity is further emphasized by Thoreau’s italicizing of words that have roots linked to natural facts; for example, *strands* is derived from the shore, while *lobe* comes from vegetable pod (Harper). At the end of his description of the melting sand, Thoreau takes the final step of linking everything he has discussed to humans and their nature: “What is a man but a mass of thawing clay? … Is not the hand a spreading palm leaf with its lobes and veins? … The lip—*labium* from *labor* (?)—lap or lapses from the sides of the cavernous mouth. … Thus it seemed that this one hillside illustrated the principle of all operations of Nature” (355-356). This is the spiritual truth that Thoreau derives from observing the melting clay and tracing words back to their origins. The melting of the clay-sand is one example of the many natural correspondences that appear throughout *Walden*, which demonstrate how language, nature, and spirit all relate to one another.

Natural correspondences are a product of Thoreau’s physical interaction with nature; by being in direct contact with his earthly surroundings and by understanding the relationship between words and the natural world, Thoreau believes he can overcome the barrier that language creates. His success in comprehending this connection is most evident in the well-known line, “It was no longer beans that I hoed nor I that hoed beans” (204). Through the physical process of planting and hoeing these beans, Thoreau manages to collapse the superficial distinction that words create between himself and the beans, and extracts the biocentric, spiritual truth that the two are spiritually no different.

Writing natural correspondences allows Thoreau to define his identity. One of the main issues that Thoreau grapples with throughout his life is where to place God in relation to nature. Does God transcend nature as a separate and superior entity, or is God immanent in nature, making nature itself a divine entity? Thoreau addresses this critical question through natural correspondences; they allow him to break down the language barrier in the same fashion as with the beans. At the beginning of the chapter, “Higher Laws,” which is purposely placed in the middle of *Walden*, Thoreau writes, “I caught a glimpse of a woodchuck stealing across my path, and felt a strange thrill of delight, and was strongly tempted to seize and devour him raw; not that I was hungry then, except for the wildness that he represented” (257). Thoreau is using the image of the woodchuck to discover the savage, instinctual state of humans. He then goes on throughout the chapter to promote vegetarianism and reject this wild, impure part of humans: “The wonder is how they, how you and I, can live this slimy and beastly life, eating and drinking” (265). He, in essence, is rejecting our natural component, our physical body, an entity that requires food and hydration. By the end of “Higher Laws,” he solidifies this stance by boldly stating, “Nature is hard to overcome, but she must be overcome” (268). Thoreau emphasizes here that the human’s non-physical component (the “soul”) must overcome its natural component—this idea would suggest that God transcends nature for we must transcend our own nature in order to reach the state of purity that Thoreau describes.

This, however, is not Thoreau’s final statement. In the very last pages of *Walden*, he writes of another natural correspondence:

Everyone has heard the story of a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table. … Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried … in the dead, dry life of society … may unexpectedly come forth amidst society’s most trivial and handselled furniture to enjoy its perfect summer life at last. (381-382)
Just as he compares humans to thawing clay in the earlier example (which comes shortly before the end of Walden as well), he now compares humankind to insects. He is no longer rejecting nature, but rather emphasizing that humans belong in the natural world. The image of a bug hatching from the dried wood of a man-made table is used to achieve the spiritual truth that humans must “hatch” out of society and into nature, just like the bug, which, like the bean, is our spiritual equal. This advice to his fellow humans stems from his final belief that nature is divine. Thoreau gestures towards this in various correspondences in Walden. For example, he describes Walden Pond as being “blue at one time and green at another, even from the same point of view. Lying between the earth and heavens it partakes of the color of both” (223). At this point, he hints that divinity exists within nature by describing how the pond contains a portion of heaven; later on, Thoreau more concretely states that “Heaven is under our feet as well as over our head” (331). Obtaining this spiritual fact through language, he is able to figure out that he must live his life like the bug—in harmony with nature.

While language also plays a significant role to the characters of Omeros, Walcott intellectualizes language differently than Thoreau. In his Nobel Lecture, “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,” Walcott distinguishes between two different kinds of languages:

There is the buried language and there is the individual vocabulary. … [T]he individual voice is a dialect; it shapes its own accent, its own vocabulary and melody in defiance of an imperial concept of language, the language of libraries and dictionaries, law courts and critics, and churches, universities, political dogma, the diction of institutions.

The “imperial concept of language” is what acts as a burden to Walcott’s characters. He demonstrates this through the example of Achille, a slave descendant who travels across space and time from the island of St. Lucia to the tribe of his ancestors in Africa. There, Achille encounters his forefather, Afolabe, who says, “Achille. What does the name mean?” “A name means something. … [E]very name is a blessing, … . Unless the sound means nothing. Then you would be nothing” (Omeros 137). Achille, who responds that he does not know what his name means, is essentially left without an identity or a history. Achille’s name has no meaning to him because it is not his original name, but rather a name forced on his enslaved ancestors by imperialists. Walcott describes this change earlier in the text: “It was then that the small admiral with a cloud / on his head renamed Afolabe ‘Achilles,’ / which, to keep things simple, he let himself be called” (83). This imperial enforcement of language is responsible for Achille’s loss of heritage.

For Walcott, language is what connects us to our past and to our history. History, literature, and culture are all bound by language—they cannot exist without it. Walcott expresses his belief that language and history are intertwined when he states in his Nobel Lecture that art “is the restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary” (“Antilles”). However, for his character, Achille, history is fictitious because his name is not his own. Language again acts as a barrier by distancing Achille from his roots and identity as an African. This barrier is so strong that, with regard to his heritage, Achille states, “Everything was forgotten” (Omeros 137).

Once Achille returns to Africa, he overcomes language and regains his memory by interacting with his home and by creating his own version of history. Walcott writes, “the echoes were prediction and memory, the crossing X’s / of the sidewise strokes, but here
in their element / the trees and the spirits that they uttered were / rooted” (144). Walcott shows that, by returning to his home, Achille is able to regain his memory of his real history through interacting with nature and spirit. Walcott continues, “Then war / came,” and Achille witnesses a European raid on his ancestors and is left walking “in the dusty street / of the barren village. The doors were like open graves” (144-145). The fact that Achille observes this atrocity firsthand is crucial to his comprehension of his past. Walcott states earlier that “[t]he factual fiction / of textbooks, pamphlets, brochures … had the affliction / of impartiality; skirting emotion / as a ship avoids a reef” (95). Reading history from a textbook does not allow one to understand it because the language will be tainted by the writer’s own point of view. Such is the case with any written or spoken language; it cannot escape metaphor and opinion. This is why it is necessary for Achille to journey back to Africa to experience the raid for himself. It will not be skewed by language or interpretation, but will exist solely as Achille himself views and remembers it.

It is important to note that, on his journey of self-exploration to Africa, nature guides Achille to overcome the language barrier and discover his identity. As a fisherman, Achille directly interacts with nature every day, similar to Thoreau. Right before Achille leaves St. Lucia to travel to Africa, God tells him, “Look, I giving you permission / to come home. Is I send the sea-swift as a pilot” (134). Just as Thoreau was guided by nature on his journey of self-discovery, Achille, very literally, is guided by a bird back to his homeland in order to find his spiritual truths to escape from the fictitious history that language had imposed upon him.

And, just as Achille undergoes this struggle for his origins, so does Walcott seek to overcome metaphorical language and the fictional history that it generates. He criticizes himself for doing the same thing that textbooks and imperial languages do: for trying to create a history for his characters that is purely fictional and only seen through his eyes. For example, he compares himself to Major Plunkett, a European expatriate who works to write a history for his housemaid Helen and for St. Lucia: “the Major’s zeal / … was an ideal / no different from mine. Plunkett, in his innocence, / had tried to change History to a metaphor, / in the name of a housemaid; I, in self-defence, / altered her opposite. Yet it was all for her” (270). Walcott then expresses his frustration with the fact that he cannot view Helen objectively and cannot escape the use of metaphorical language: “Why not see Helen / as the sun saw her, with no Homeric shadow, … ? When would it stop, / the echo in the throat, insisting, ‘Omeros’; / when would I enter the light beyond metaphor?” (271). The Homeric shadow in this passage refers to the influence of the Classics on Walcott and how their language and history influence his own.

Like Thoreau, Walcott desires to go beyond metaphors because language is only superficial and does not express spirit. He cannot truly love anyone or any place if his use of language corrupts it. The passage on Helen contradicts the scene that occurs later in Omeros, where Walcott visits hell and shows that he is not merely a poet who only expresses history in superficial language:

In one pit were the poets. Selfish phantoms with eyes
who wrote with them only, saw only surfaces
in nature and men, and smiled at their similes,
condemned in their pit to weep at their own pages.
And that was where I had come from. Pride in my craft.
Elevating myself. I slid, and kept falling
towards the shit they stewed in; … . (293)
He falls toward the pit because he uses “similes,” metaphorical language, to see only the “surfaces in nature and men,” not beyond the words into the spiritual meaning. However, before he falls in he is saved by the blind poet Omeros: “Omeros gripped / my hand in enclosing marble and / … [his] blind feet guided me higher” (293). This oxymoronic idea of blind feet guiding Walcott out of the pit of condemned poets suggests that blindness is an asset, for if a poet is blind, he cannot see the world through his own eyes, but is forced to see it through the eyes of others. Since these blind feet are what save Walcott from doom, he suggests that using others’ eyes has allowed him to see beyond the surface of nature and men. This becomes even more apparent when Walcott talks of his home and writes, “I was seeing / the light of St. Lucia at last through her own eyes, / her blindness, her inward vision as revealing / as [Omeros’s]” (282). Walcott claims here that he truly can see his homeland for what it is, and that he can appreciate it just as well as Omeros.

In the midst of all these contradictory passages, where does Walcott end up? Is he unable to go to “the light beyond metaphor,” or has he done exactly that and, as a result, found spiritual truth? And, if so, why is Omeros a book comprised of multi-leveled metaphors buried in language? There is no definite answer to these questions. Ultimately, it appears that Walcott is unable to escape from language. He expresses this through the ideal of the ocean: “The ocean had / no memory of the wanderings of Gilgamesh / or whose sword severed whose head in the Iliad. … It never altered its metre / to suit the age, a wide page without metaphors. / Our last resort as much as yours, Omeros” (295-296). According to this passage, only nature itself can reach this ideal because nature has no memory. Most writers, including Walcott, have read the Classics and so are influenced by their language and interpretation of history. Therefore Walcott cannot fully escape language since he has memory. However, he does appear to believe that, through his writing, he can ease the discomfort created by this inability to reach pure spiritual truth. Walcott writes that, “When one grief afflicts us we choose a sharper grief / in hope that enormity will ease affliction, / so Catherine Weldon rose in high relief / through the thin page of a cloud, making a fiction / of my own loss” (181). This is precisely what Walcott is doing in Omeros; he uses metaphorical language to create characters who experience the same pains that he does. Achille’s struggle as a slave descendant, Plunkett’s struggle as a historian, Catherine Weldon’s struggle with the destructions of history, and Omeros’s struggle as a poet are all essentially Walcott’s struggles. By creating histories, he can live vicariously through his characters and strive to understand the transformations that they go through. Through this logic, language simultaneously creates pain and heals it; Walcott admits to this when he writes, “Like Philoctete’s wound, this language carries its cure, / its radiant affliction” (323). Therefore, for Walcott, overcoming language would allow him to gain spiritual truths about his identity. But, he cannot reach this ideal. Instead, Walcott creates poetry so that he can see the spiritual truths through his characters’ eyes and “fall in love with the world in spite of History” (“Antilles”).

Through the use of language, Thoreau and Walcott are able to refine and construct their identities. Thoreau goes out to Walden Pond to create natural correspondences that reveal nature as divine and show him that he must go to nature to reach his heaven. Walcott struggles with his use of language to ultimately conclude that he cannot overcome the language barrier; instead, he uses poetic language to ease his afflictions by finding the answers he seeks through his characters and their struggles. The common ground is that both Thoreau and Walcott are writing as a method of self-discovery. Walcott describes in Omeros an odyssey in which “the ‘I’ is a mast; a desk is a raft / … , foaming with paper,
and dipping the beak / of a pen in its foam” (291). This is the motionless odyssey that all writers take as they wield words into poetry and prose. They embark on an internal voyage, seeking to clarify who they are, what their purpose is, and how they should live their lives as both authors and humans.

Works Cited


Works Consulted


In her own words, getting Annie to do something means letting her do it. Hearing this comes as something of a relief: Annie is one of those remarkable students about whom a teacher pleasurably frets. What pedagogical strategies, say, could challenge this young thinker best? What commentary might enhance her writing talents? Determining which of my student authors to nominate for the Boothe Essay prize was immediately evident. Deciding which of this author’s projects would be most worthy, however, was more vexing. Whether she tackles her own Sixteen Sestinas, difficult philosophical arguments such as Hegel’s on Antigone, less commonly taught literary texts like Aeschylus’s Oresteia or Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman, or, as here, Shakespeare’s oft-read and written-upon Hamlet, Annie produces surprisingly original pieces of intellectual complexity enveloped in a finely wrought prose, indeed, poetry. As her casual comment with which I began already indicates, it is in her sensitive scrutiny of the workings of language, its metaphors and its music—or, rather, in her inhabitation of each particular author’s languages—that Annie discovers her most sophisticated insights and by which she conveys her own highly nuanced arguments. This is a kind of fretting in which I happily engage; I eagerly anticipate the pleasure of reading, and re-reading, Annie’s future publications. I’ll add only that to get Annie’s work means to let it work its charms.

Erin Ferris
Hamlet stalks the halls of Elsinore, twisted by the bloody urgings of his murdered father, contorted by internal conflicts he will prove ultimately unable to untangle. This Prince of Denmark, mangled and distorted by forces beyond his control, has been resurrected to relive his anguish on innumerable stages for innumerable audiences—Shakespeare’s Hamlet, as a text, a play, and an investigation of the human condition, as one of the most compelling and oft-pondered works yet penned, may never be laid to rest.

Martin Evans suggests Hamlet derives its power to fascinate from the sum effect of its enigmas. He begins with an Aristotelian postulate: Art imitates life. Applying a simple physical analogy, he asserts that, if the play is to function as a mirror, it must be fundamentally opaque. If the light of literary or psychological explication passed through the text, Hamlet would be nothing but a worthless sheet of glass. Instead, its impenetrable surface, shining with that inner mystery, offers up the reflection of the observer. If Evans is correct, we aim our gaze at Hamlet’s heart and instead find ourselves fascinated, like Narcissus, by the nuances of our own countenances.

However, Hamlet functions not through reflection but refraction. Certainly opaque, certainly mysterious, it is a carnival mirror, and Shakespeare has rippled its glass. We aim our gaze at Hamlet’s heart and instead find ourselves fascinated by a world of overblown curvature and frightening proportions. It is this distorted world, not a faithful reproduction of the logic or illogic of life, that chains the observer’s intellect and soul to Elsinore. Already entombed in its heavy walls, Hamlet finds himself surrounded by multifoliate distortions, both entranced and horrified by them. Shakespeare simultaneously guides Hamlet to bend himself and his world to fascinate and manipulate other characters on the stage—and the audience beyond it.

Refractions plague Hamlet, hypnotize him, and provoke him to obsession just as they raise the eyebrows of the rest of the court. Claudius describes his marriage to Gertrude as one undertaken “with a defeated joy, / With an auspicious and a dropping eye, / with mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,” and the sorrow of Old Hamlet’s death refracted onto the joy of the marriage (1.2.10-12). This set of distortions, coupled with Hamlet’s new knowledge that Claudius, as “a murderer and a villain,” created those foul twists, sets Hamlet’s mind to “carnal, bloody and unnatural acts … accidental judgements, casual slaughters … [and] deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,” as Horatio will later describe to Fortinbras in the play’s final scene (3.4.97; 5.2.383-385). The “forced cause” in Hamlet is begotten by the twisting of characters, natures, and even the inanimate.

In the first Act, Shakespeare tears the thin seal between earth and the afterlife, allowing an inhabitant of the latter to seep through and discolor the former. He confronts Hamlet with the revelations of his father’s ghost, distorting his gray soul with the reddish tint of revenge. Hamlet “think[s] meet to put an antic disposition on” immediately after conversing with Old Hamlet’s shade (1.5.171-172). Perhaps he chooses at this moment to “cast [his] knighted color off” in an effort to evade Claudius’s suspicions until his own
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can be confirmed, or perhaps he thinks that affecting a mind aflame with madness might help smoke out the vermin usurper-king (1.2.68). Perhaps this feigned madness then grows, feeds upon his extraordinary circumstance, and overcomes his reason. In any case, Shakespeare’s distortion of Hamlet is intended to deceive or provoke other characters, and his new, unnatural ravings do elicit intense attention. Claudius summons Rosencrantz and Guildenstern specifically for the purpose of addressing Hamlet’s distortion, telling them:

Something you have heard
Of Hamlet’s transformation; so call it,
Sith nor th’exterior nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. (2.2.5-8)

The underlying causes of Hamlet’s “transformation” are unclear both to Claudius and the reader, lending the text its opacity—but it is the transformation itself that concerns the King. Hamlet’s mother notices this change as well, ordering Rosencrantz to seek out Hamlet because his “behavior hath struck her into amazement and admiration” (3.2.332).

A change in “[Hamlet’s] exterior” accompanies his behavioral shift. Soon after he meets the ghost, Hamlet bursts in upon Ophelia with “no hat upon his head, his stockings fouled / Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle” (2.1.79-80). His figurative “inky cloak” and “customary suits of solemn black” have been exchanged for disarray (1.2.77-78). The scene is revealed only through Ophelia’s description, not performed—physical imagery depicting his transformation is necessary to draw the audience closer to the forces at work upon Hamlet. The language Shakespeare later provides Ophelia again focuses upon the prince’s appearance. She says his was an “unmatched form and feature of blown youth” but is now “blasted with ecstasy,” indicating the prominence of physical distortion in conjunction with behavioral transformation (3.1.162-163). The metaphysical framework of Hamlet’s world is knocked apart by the ghost, his character has become warped, and his physical fabric—his clothes—begin to reflect this disorder. His new distorted form attracts Ophelia’s attention, and her words bring it to the attention of the audience through detailed imagery.

Despite his obvious distaste for unnatural distortions, Hamlet knowingly employs them to his own ends. In Act 3, Scene 4, he is summoned to the queen’s bedchamber. He thrusts two portraits at Gertrude, one of his father and one of Claudius, and insists that the images portray the distilled nature of each. “See what a grace was seated on this brow: / Hyperion’s curls, the front of Jove himself,” he exclaims of his father (56). Of Claudius, he tells her, “Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear / Blasting his wholesome brother” (65-66). He is attempting to convince Gertrude through incredibly overblown hyperbole that she should put aside Claudius’s affections—and he succeeds. “Thou turn’s my eyes into my very soul,” Gertrude tells him. Hamlet distorts physical imagery to fix the queen’s conscience upon the very distortion that has mesmerized him so: the corruption of her virtue—a move that directly parallels the metatheatrical effect of his own physical distortion upon the audience.

The appearance of the ghost in Gertrude’s chamber during the same exchange further ensnares both her and Hamlet in a net of writhing distortions. As before, this net is expanded to include the reader or audience as well. Commanded by a supernatural being, Hamlet “bend[s his] eye on vacancy” and “holds discourse” with “th’incorporeal air”
Gertrude’s unwitting irony—that the ghost, clearly visible from even the cheap seats, is “incorporeal air”—compels the observer to mark the ghost more carefully, to invest more of his intellect in peeling back the shifting layers of the scene. Shakespeare’s choice of the word “bend” might indeed be the hinge upon which the play turns.

All in Elsinore is horrifically, tragically, and even comically bent out of shape. Most notably, Hamlet’s black wit transforms Polonius, making of him a comic buffoon before he is made a tragic corpse. The death of a clown is deeply affecting, as Hamlet himself demonstrates while musing upon Yorick’s skull (5.1.80). “Gambols,” “songs,” and “flashes of merriment” are a confirmation of life and the joy of living. When distorted to serve death, they call forth emotions powerful enough that Hamlet’s “gorge rims at it” (5.1.80). If Elsinore’s court jester was Yorick, Polonius is the play’s, and his death pins the audience just as the gaze of Yorick’s empty skull pins Hamlet because he was once an endearing, clownish figure. When the Prince of Denmark unleashes his wit upon the elderly adviser, his attacks are composed of verbal distortions, absurdities, and exaggerations. “Do you know me, my lord?” Polonius asks Hamlet, crudely attempting to ascertain his mental state. “You are a fishmonger,” Hamlet tells him. Polonius is somewhat taken aback, unable to respond save with a scintillating, “Not I” (2.2.188; 175). During another exchange regarding the shape of a cloud on the horizon, Hamlet’s lines suggest Polonius is but clay in his hands (3.2.268-275). He insists the cloud is first a camel, then a weasel, and finally a whale. To each contradictory suggestion, Polonius emphatically agrees. The impossible cloud and Polonius’s shifting opinions exemplify a running technique. Hamlet bares a toothy Shakespearean grin, which is then reversed once more to reveal thin-lipped tragedy. “Very like a whale” is the second to last line Polonius will speak to Hamlet before the prince rams two feet of steel into his intestine (3.2.390).

Just as coincidence knocks Hamlet’s intentions awry, Shakespeare knocks temporal flow “out of joint” (1.5.88). At the beginning of the play within a play, Hamlet mutters, “How cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within’s two hours” (3.2.129-131). Ophelia is quick to correct him: “Nay, ’tis twice two months, my lord” (132). Hamlet’s contraction of time emphasizes his horror at his mother’s behavior and his preoccupation with her “over-hasty marriage” as a perversion of moral, familial, and social order. Hamlet’s place in time—his apparent age—is similarly distorted. As implied by his encounter with the gravediggers he is ostensibly near thirty years old (5.1). By the standards of Victorian England or medieval Denmark, he is a man, almost middle aged. At eighteen, Shakespeare was married; at thirty, Hamlet writes burning love letters to Ophelia and engages in passion suited to “flaming youth” (3.4.85). He is referred to as “young Hamlet” by Horatio, who is supposedly his peer and a fellow student at the University of Wittenberg. Hamlet swings back and forth through time, a mesmerizing pendulum suspended from some ominous Shakespearean clock.

But Hamlet himself warns that a play should not “o’erstep the modesty of nature.” He admonishes the actors who visit Elsinore that “anything so o’erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold … the mirror up to nature.” If forced to align with Evans’s opinions, Hamlet’s musings are at best fundamentally incomplete. The setting of Hamlet’s play is not Elsinore but Italy, the villain not an uncle but a nephew, and—most compellingly—any character who could parallel Hamlet is mysteriously absent. Hamlet’s conceptual staging of his world is so distorted that he has removed himself from its mirror altogether. The play-within-a-play provides him an opportunity precisely because it is thus twisted; Hamlet would have lost
his audience and perhaps his chance to observe Claudius’s reactions were he not able to say, “This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna,” to divert the king’s questions as the dumb show unfolds (3.2.243). When The Mousetrap actually springs, it proves itself a trick mirror. Those who are innocent will be unaffected by the players, Hamlet reassures Claudius, his words tinged with sarcasm: “Our withers are unwrung” (3.2.248). Here Shakespeare’s very wording suggests that guilty parties will be metaphorically twisted by the mirror of the play; therefore it must be a metaphorically rippled glass. Hamlet suggests plays should be realistic because he is infinitely distressed by distortions, even those put on by actors:

Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit … ? (2.2.560-564)

But he does not hesitate to utilize the play’s distortions to “catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.617). It is this same power of distortion that catches at the conscience of the audience and the reader.

If Hamlet and its role as a driving component of Western literary culture are to be satisfactorily addressed, Aristotle’s postulate must be amended to read thus: art transforms life. Art intensifies life, distorts it, bends it backward. A rippled mirror or a skewed pane of glass refracts focused light into a fascinating spray of unmasked color. The mesmerism of Hamlet is the light of inquiry transformed into a rainbow through the prism of Shakespeare’s text. Regardless of the nature of the literal world—be it logical, illogical, fundamentally knowable or unknowable—the literary world of Elsinore is a trap, a labyrinthine castle of its refractions. Attracted by their mysterious gleam, readers and audiences step within—and upon that first step, the conscience is caught, the withers wrung, the time set out of joint, and the projections of the “sullied flesh melt[ed], thaw[ed], and resolv[ed] into a dew” (1.2.130).

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**Winter 2005 Winner**

**Yun Chu**

**Instructor’s Foreword**

Written for Myth and Modernity: Culture in Germany, Yun’s essay considers the status of violence in two canonical German texts: Johann Sebastian Bach’s musical oratorio *St. Matthew Passion* and Johann Wolfgang Goethe’s play *Faust*. Yun does not address violence as an expressly physical act, but instead, in the bold and highly original arguments developed in her essay, offers the notion of “rationalized violence,” which she defines as violence in the Enlightenment that serves to achieve a higher state of reason. In exploring her transformed understanding of violence, Yun analyzes the “violence of interpretation,” “violence of composition,” and “violence of translation” in *St. Matthew Passion* and *Faust*, offering creative, convincing, and highly sophisticated analyses of important textual and musical passages in the two works. The essay, concluding with a thoughtful consideration of an etching by Goya, demonstrates a remarkable fluidity in analyzing three genres. Yun’s stimulating arguments and sophisticated literary, musical, and visual interpretative skills together create a remarkable essay.

*Francesca Draughon*
Germany’s turbulent history often leaves modern readers with an ambiguous question: can violence ever be justified? In 1648, Germany’s Thirty Years War left more than seven million individuals dead, but the death toll was largely overshadowed by the “triumphant” Treaty of Westphalia. History books call the Peace of Westphalia “the initiator of modern diplomacy” because the treaty violently shattered the tradition of religious governments in order to create secular principalities (“Treaty”). But while the physical violence of the Thirty Years War may be perceived as completely irrational, the philosophical violence of Westphalia is actually logical because the truce attempted to bring Germany into the Enlightenment’s world of reason. Enlightenment authors promoted a society built on reason as the ideal “end,” yet they never took the violent “means” to fulfill that vision—perhaps because they viewed violence, or radical revolution, as the ultimate state of irrationality. However, in St. Matthew Passion and Faust, German writers Johann Sebastian Bach and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe propose that, if a “society of reason” is the prioritized goal, then violence may be a rational process if it can result in such a reasoned community. During the Enlightenment, violence may be defined as rational any time it serves to achieve a higher state of reason. Radical changes in this context are not necessarily physical, but are rather implemented through violence of interpretation, of composition, and of translation in eighteenth-century literature. Unfortunately, Enlightenment thinkers continued to condemn violence as chaotic without fully confronting and realizing the rational qualities of force. Hence, the period’s intolerance of forcible action, or the use of rational violence, arguably caused the movement to be destabilized by its own ideals and to be absorbed by a more tolerant Romantic era.

In St. Matthew Passion, Bach presents violence as a logical method of action when it leads to a “rational” religious end that can benefit the common good. When Jesus sits down at the table with the twelve apostles, he calmly tells Judas that “He who his hand in the dish now dippeth, this one will betray [him]” (Bach Part 1; Bach track 11). Judas’s “betrayal” is shunned as a violent, deceptive act, one that no knowledgeable man should do. Bach’s diction depicts Judas as a man who is literally willing to “dip” into treachery and abandon his rational mind just to gain money. However, the brutality behind Judas’s disloyalty towards Jesus can be interpreted as an extremely rational act because the violent deception in St. Matthew actually fulfills God’s will. Jesus himself reminds the listener that “it hath been written of him” to die, meaning that God planned all along for Jesus to be sacrificed as his mortal son. If God resolved that Jesus be crucified in order to liberate “our sins,” then his son’s predestined death is a desired end for the progress of humanity. Judas’s disloyalty eventually causes Jesus’s demise, yet his death actually justifies Judas’s violent betrayal because it results in “our justification” and “our everlasting life.” Before his departure, Jesus laments that “it would be better for him if this very man [Judas] had never been born.” At first glance, Jesus’s statement seems reasonable since if Judas “had
never been born” Jesus would not have been betrayed and killed. But the logic behind this comment is really irrational because if Judas had not caused Jesus’s death then God’s wish would have been left unfulfilled and religious followers would not have had a martyr to idolize in Christianity.

Bach mirrors the textual violence in *St. Matthew Passion* with the musical violence of his orchestral arrangements. The *Passion* score is dominated by an even, solid Baroque-style tempo, and the tempo is kept consistent by the continuous beat of the cello section. But when Jesus declares that he will be betrayed, the bass voice sings, “The Son of Man indeed goeth hence …” (“*Des Menschen Sohn gebet zwar dahin …*”) in a very slow melody (*langsam*), which is immediately followed by the same voice singing, “through whom the Son of man hath been betrayed!” (“*durch welchen des Menschen Sohn verraten wird!*”) in a fast paced rhythm (*schneller*). The sudden shift in singing tempo, called *tempo rubato*, violently contrasts with the steady *basso continuo* of Bach’s background, disrupting the score’s continuity and adding a musical element of surprise and unease. While the violent change in singing pulse seems irrational and perhaps erratic, Bach actually uses this variation to seize the listener’s attention and engage him or her in the story of the Passion. The contrasting melodious themes between the voice and the orchestra allow the listener to tune into the musical narrative, to think about what happens to Jesus, and to eventually gain a rational understanding of the context surrounding Jesus’s betrayal. Hence, Bach’s use of violent musical changes can be seen as a rational way to engage the listener and to teach him about the story of the Passion.

On the other hand, if violence can promote a rational result, then the inverse of this hypothesis also must be true: non-violence or idleness leads to a static, irrational state. For example, when Jesus is about to be executed, his followers fall into a state of chaos because they do not commit any sort of “deed” to save him. Instead, they simply “put back [their] sword into its place and in persecution kept [their] silence” (*Bach* part 1; Bach tr. 28). Not only do the people remain passive and retract their “swords”—suggesting that they are thwarting violent action—but they also “keep their silence,” meaning that they are not even holding up the “word” of the Enlightenment! As a result, they feel, “O pain! Here tremleth the tormented heart; How it doth sink” (*Bach* part 1; Bach tr. 19). While Jesus, the symbol of the ideal man, accepts the violence towards him with serenity, the common people “tremble with tormented heart” just to see him suffer. They feel this suffering, an irrational emotion, because they do not take any kind of immediate violent action, such as taking up their “swords” to save Jesus. Therefore, their “tormented hearts” are destined to “sink” even further into irrationality. Their state of chaos is also reflected in Bach’s musical composition: whenever the chorus begins to wail, the background string sections play in violently dissonant chords, causing the notes to grate against the listener’s ear. Bach uses the violent clash of chords to musically “wake-up” the listeners and make them realize the disordered, irrational state of Jesus’s followers resulting from their inaction. Accordingly, Bach’s violent, cacophonous music teaches the audience a rational lesson about the consequences of passivity.

The non-violent irrationality of Jesus’s followers is criticized by Voltaire’s comment that “those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities”—that if people believe in the unreasonable, they will do what is unreasonable (“Voltaire”). Jesus tells the people to “put away their swords,” and the people immediately obey. Because the crowd only listens to his “word,” but they never rise to forcefully challenge his wrongful death sentence, they “commit the [unreasonable] atrocity” of sending Jesus
to the cross. The people do not violently challenge the unlawful death of Jesus; they possess no opinion, skepticism, or objection to being passive, so they are not progressive, rational thinkers. When the citizens refuse to turn their love for Jesus into an inspiration to ferociously defend him, they witness the death of the very man they admire. Their anxiety of rationality arguably could reflect Enlightenment philosophers’ fear of active reason, even though the period promoted theoretical reason. Here, they do not take a violent risk to turn its “word” into reality because they were so convinced that violence exists only as an irrational affair.

Similar to Bach’s inquiry of rational violence in St. Matthew Passion, Goethe demonstrates in Faust that reason can remain only an abstract concept without the violent move to convert it into a practical experience. Goethe introduces Faust as a “restless man in a high-vaulted, narrow, gothic chamber”; he has “digested Philosophy, wrested the whole of Law and Medicine, and, alas, [thrown] in Theology”(42). Interestingly, Goethe places Faust in a “gothic” room, alluding to a period that preceded the Enlightenment. Because Gothic culture remained “overwhelmingly rural [and] rudimentary at best,” Goethe’s juxtaposition of Faust (foreground) and the Gothic chamber (background) emphasizes the superiority of the Enlightenment’s intellectual stance. But Faust gains his knowledge through a very unnatural, violent way. The violent verbs, such as “digesting” philosophy, “wresting” law and medicine, and “throwing” theology imply that Faust has no appreciation for what he has learned. Despite this violent educational process, the final achievement is a rational Faust, a man who is “highly-vaulted” above Gothic irrationality. The figure of Faust as someone who overcomes the narrow-mindedness of the Gothic era is the archetype of the Enlightenment. The violence behind “wresting” and “throwing” no longer matters as long as Faust simply learns. Therefore, his violent, uncomely style of learning is justified because his mind is able to “digest” all the rational texts.

Upon coming back from a walk, Faust sits down to translate sections of the New Testament. Immediately, he stumbles over the phrase: “In the beginning was the Word” (71). Rather than translating the sentence word-for-word into German, he declares that he “will try a new translation [and] writes, ’In the beginning was the Deed’” (71). Faust rephrases the New Testament by writing “deed” instead of “word,” an action that would have been considered violent, almost blasphemous, in Martin Luther’s time. But Faust is placing religion in a new light during the Enlightenment—the “light” of reason. He merges contemporary philosophy and Enlightenment perspectives toward religion with his fresh translation, thereby elevating the Bible to an “enlightened” position. His violent treatment of the Bible now seems justified because he is bringing the “rational” influence of the Enlightenment into the religious text. But Faust goes one step further than other Enlightenment authors would by applying this rationality to life. His thoughtful meditation “in the beginning” over the “Word” eventually results in an action of radically changing the words of the New Testament. By taking the risk of violent translation, Faust is actually performing the deed of re-writing “Deed,” and so goes beyond merely pondering the “word.”

Although Faust is only a fictional character, his treatment of religious texts is not far off Bach’s use of New Testament materials in the Passion. Both men take original biblical excerpts and edit their content—not to profane or degrade religion, but to reformulate the Testament so that it may be integrated into contemporary music and literature. However, most Enlightenment thinkers developed such an anti-religious mindset that it did not bring religion up-to-date with its philosophies; thinkers of the period such as Voltaire merely pushed religion aside, suppressing the Bible as an irrational text. So, many
Enlightenment authors never took Faust’s violent step to re-interpret the Bible; instead, they never interpreted it at all. Texts like Voltaire’s *Candide* only parodied religion as an “unreasonable,” ancient way of thought.

Although Faust symbolizes the ideal rational man, he is actually quite melancholic about his position since he experiences no love. In his desperation, he calls to the Devil for help, and Mephistopheles immediately appears. Mephistopheles then assuages Faust’s anxiety by telling the Spirits to “sink him in dreams, bemuse him with your pranks / Submerged in seas where fancies sway and swell” (81). The Devil plays a violent trick on Faust by luring him into an exhaustive sleep so that he may toss up Faust’s spirits before getting him to make the wager. But Mephistopheles justifies his cruel prank by what he tells the Spirits to do to Faust during his “dream”: he urges them to “bemuse him with fancies” so that Faust finally can see a world outside of his academic prison. While Faust represents the ideal “enlightened” man, he remains unsatisfied throughout Goethe’s play since he cannot let go of his rational existence to embrace religion, love, and emotion. Goethe shows how Enlightenment thinkers were afraid of gaining complete rationality because they each feared becoming a real-life Faust and following in his tragic footsteps. If the Enlightenment promoted rational ideology and at the same time feared it, then it left no room for those ideals to be put into effect. Writers and thinkers of the period made the innovative move to install the “word,” but made no radical move to turn that word into a “deed.” Without this next violent step, Enlightenment authors could not physically defend their ideal principles.

Similar to the way Mephistopheles places Faust in a world of emotion, Goethe violently transports the reader into an illogical literary realm of devils, witches, and magic. Upon seeing his future lover Gretchen, Faust tells Mephistopheles to “spare [him being] Professor Plausible,” and to “give [him] the girl” to fulfill the “hunger of [his] heart” (122). In contrast to his initial scholarly nature, Faust now forsakes logic and “plausibility” in an attempt to satisfy his emotional “hunger,” revealing a radical transformation in character. Although Mephistopheles triggered Faust’s violent conversion by bringing him into Gretchen’s world, the devil’s actions seem reasonable because he introduces Faust to a whole new experience—an encounter filled with emotion that Faust has never felt through reading books. However, Faust’s logical mind seems to go astray as he experiences love for the first time. When Gretchen asks Faust to “please tell her what religion means to him,” he avoids her question by telling her to “let be, dear child,” for his “love is sure!” (152). Unlike his initial violent move to rationalize a Bible translation at the outset of the play, Faust does not try to combine reason and religion when answering the *Gretchenfrage*. His evasive answer that “love is the only sure thing!” hints at his reluctance to embrace religion head on, meaning that he never actually implements his own translation of the “word” into a “deed.” By circumventing Gretchen’s seemingly irrational question, Faust may stand as a symbol of the Enlightenment’s hesitance to integrate religion into its ideal rational society.

Interestingly, Goethe creates Faust as a “split” character: Faust either appears as the superior, knowledgeable man of the beginning, or he is overwhelmed with emotion during his love affair with Gretchen. Goethe brings the reader into Faust’s violent world of devilish pacts and tragic deaths, but then justifies his engrossment of the audience by teaching them how a “split” man like Faust may not flourish when he cannot integrate both reason and emotion into a single experience. Because Faust is unable to feel and *reason* at the same time, he is carried away, “hither, to [the devil],” by the end of the story (197). Like Bach’s use of musical violence, Goethe uses literary violence as a vehicle to engage,
educate, and enlighten his reader to show that irrationality must not be suppressed, but rather be integrated into practicality in order to promote reason to a higher status.

The tension between theoretical reason and active reason discussed in Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* and Goethe’s *Faust* is artistically reproduced in Goya’s etching, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, made during the late Enlightenment period (see fig. 1). The artist depicts himself as the man with his head in his arms, completely in despair from academic learning. The figure in Goya’s work is similarly symbolic of Faust: although Faust reads, he does not act on what he learns, and so he is violently haunted by “monsters.” The monsters are drawn as “owls,” representing wisdom, yet they are eternally trapped in Faust’s unconscious and cannot “fly free” because he never turns his ideas into physical actions. In Bach’s work, Judas sets his “owls” free and fulfills God’s will by making the choice to betray Jesus. The aggressive dream points out the vulnerability of Enlightenment morals—that it promoted and feared the complete achievement of reason. Through the frustration of the man in the etching, Goya shows how Enlightenment thinkers were afraid of gaining complete rationality because they each feared becoming a real-life Faust or Judas and following in their tragic footsteps. If authors of this period advocated rational ideology, but at the same time feared it, then they left little room for those ideals to be put into effect.

The Enlightenment’s friction between promotion of and fear of reason may be better understood by examining the works of Bach and Goethe. Because Enlightenment authors never used rational violence to reach their theoretical goals, they were not able to transform its philosophies into reality. The overly rational tradition of this period was eventually displaced by the more emotionally open-minded Romantic period in the later eighteenth century, and the bottled-up tension of the Enlightenment was uncorked. The innovators of Romanticism finally were able to embrace the shortcomings of the Enlightenment by rejecting rationality, order, and harmony to make room for violent and radical reactions, slowly allowing the Enlightenment “owls” to fly free.

![Fig. 1: Goya's The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, 1799. Courtesy of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum, Cornell University, Membership Purchase Fund.](image)
Notes

1 Citations to Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, 1727, here refer to multiple sources: lyrics are taken from *Bach: St. Matthew Passion*, Part 1, while analyses of musical performances refer to clips, denoted by track number, provided on Myth and Modernity’s restricted access course website (Bach).

2 God’s predetermined death of Jesus is found in two separate sections of the Bible: “He [Jesus] was *delivered over to death* for our sins and was raised to life *for our justification*” (Holy Bible, Romans 4:25; emphasis added) and “For God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have *everlasting life*” (John 3:16; emphasis added).

3 *Tempo rubato* is defined as “slight deviations from strict tempo made at the performer’s discretion, shortening one note or lengthening another” (Sadie 488).

4 *Basso continuo* is a characteristic of Baroque music consisting of a “bass part that runs continuously throughout a work” (Sadie 78).

5 The term “Gothic” was coined “in the sixteenth century by the Italian artist and historian Giorgio Vasari. He disparagingly attributed the style to the Goths, Germanic northerners who had destroyed the classical civilization of the Roman Empire” (Stokstad 1:547). Three hundred years later, Goethe attempts to dispel this irrational “Gothic” image of Germans by creating Faust as the epitome of the “learned man.”

Works Cited


Instructor’s Foreword

Emily Dalton focuses her essay, “Memory as Moral Force,” on a discussion of the complex and crucial role of memory in *The Brothers Karamazov*. Emily shows the ways in which forgetting in the novel is an expression of a horrific sort of lovelessness that leads one away from God. At the same time, she claims, while memory is often connected with pain, the recollection of painful events can have redemptive power. She argues that memory is ultimately an anti-rational force, working in opposition to the pernicious rationalism that infects so many characters in the novel. Memory, in short, transcends intellect, bringing people into closer community with each other and with God. Emily’s argument is highly insightful, showing evidence not just of an excellent knowledge of the text of *The Brothers Karamazov*, but also of a profound understanding of the spiritual implications of memory in Dostoevsky’s work.

*Anne Hruska*
Memory As A Moral Force

Emily Dalton

The act of personal recollection is woven throughout Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, coloring both the interactions among Fyodor, Dmitri, Ivan, and Alyosha and the spiritual discourses of Father Zosima. Through repeated references to the memories of the novel’s characters, Dostoevsky constructs a dichotomy between forgetfulness, with its associations of abandonment and neglect, and memory, with its associations of family, love, and redemptive beauty amid suffering. Through this contrast, Dostoevsky situates forgetfulness within a context of spiritual depravity and establishes memory as a moral force that recalls characters to their true identities as part of a community, advancing a vision of collective responsibility in direct opposition to the isolating individualism and rationalism of such characters as Ivan.

Through his references to fathers forgetting children, God forgetting His people, and characters forgetting their own identities or direction, Dostoevsky places forgetfulness in a context of neglect, immorality, and abuse. Dmitri’s devastating loneliness during his childhood, for example, arises from an act of careless forgetfulness on the part of his father, who “totally and utterly abandoned his child by Adelieda Ivanovna, not out of malice towards him and not from any wounded matrimonial feelings, but simply because he totally forgot about him” (10). The failure to remember is again tied to the extraordinary suffering of the neglected child in Ivan’s conversation with Alyosha: it is the locking up and so, in a sense, deliberate forgetting of the little girl he reads about that ultimately inspires Ivan’s declaration that he cannot accept God’s world. It is furthermore the abandonment of Richard in his childhood that, at least in Ivan’s eyes, proves so detrimental that it partially alleviates his responsibility for the murders he commits later in life. Later on, as Ivan describes his vision of the Grand Inquisitor, he highlights the moral horror and spiritual shock engendered by the forgetfulness of God, the ultimate paternal figure: “among them, by the way, there is the most amusing class of sinners in a burning lake: some of them sink so far down that they can never come up again, and ‘these God forgets’—an expression of extraordinary depth and force” (247). The extraordinary darkness of this vision stems from Ivan’s suggestion that the sinful forgetfulness of a father mirrors God’s own forgetfulness: if God can allow an innocent child to be forgotten, neglected, and abandoned, then God Himself has forgotten His children. Even Alyosha is so spiritually shaken by Ivan’s vision of a world in which everything is permitted and in which there are no laws to remember because God Himself has forgotten that he “completely forget[s] about his brother Dmitri, although he had resolved that morning, only a few hours earlier, that he must find him” (264). In fact, the narrator mentions that later in life Alyosha recalls several times that, after being confronted with this haunting vision, he failed to remember his own brother and the task he had set out to accomplish—an act of forgetfulness that he recognizes as constituting a moral lapse.

If forgetfulness connotes sin and neglect of children, however, the act of remembering, particularly in the context of Alyosha’s childhood memories, is associated
with love, family, and transcendent beauty in the face of suffering. While Fyodor Pavlovich forgets entirely about his three sons, Alyosha, who possesses the “gift of awakening special love for himself” and who is proclaimed by the narrator himself the moral hero of the novel (19), draws from the memory of his mother the love and attention so absent in the broken relationships between other members of his family:

[H]e remembered a quiet summer evening, an open window, the slanting rays of the setting sun (these slanting rays he remembered most of all), an icon in the corner of the room, … [his mother] hugging him so tightly that it hurt, … Alyosha remembered his mother’s face, too, at that moment: he used to say that it was frenzied, but beautiful, as far as he could remember. (18-19)

Despite the extraordinary grief of this scene in which his mother’s sexual and emotional repression at the hands of Fyodor Pavlovich translates into fits of “sobbing as if in hysterics, with shrieks and cries” (19), Alyosha is able to find a redemptive beauty in his mother’s suffering, specifically through the act of remembering. Similarly, Dmitri’s final exchange with Katya also speaks to the redemptive power of remembering what is painful or bitter: “Remember how I used to squeeze [your hand] in Moscow?—to say you are my God, my joy, to tell you that I love you madly,” she nearly groaned with suffering, and suddenly, greedily pressed her lips to his hand. Tears streamed from her eyes” (766). Just as with Ilyusha’s plea to his father, “Don’t forget me papa” (561), it is through the sharing of this painful act of remembering that Dmitri, so often conflicted and emotionally isolated, experiences a moment both of profound human connection and of certainty of his own convictions, for it is during this brief exchange that “everything was truth, and they both utterly believed what they were saying” (766).

Dostoevsky draws on this dichotomy between remembering and forgetting in order to depict memory as a moral force that undermines or at least opposes the rationalism exemplified by such characters as Ivan. In his exchange with the Devil, it is Ivan’s memory of his youth that ultimately allows him to gain some self-awareness: “Caught you!” Ivan cried out with almost childlike glee, as if he had now finally remembered something. “That anecdote about the quadrillion years—I made it up myself!” (644). It is Ivan’s recollection of his past that awakens him to the fact that the Devil is merely a projection of his own consciousness and that the emptiness of the Devil’s vision stems from the limitations of his own desire to rationalize spirituality. Furthermore, memory emerges in the context of Ivan’s discourses and internal struggles as a force in conflict with reason. While reason is repeatedly depicted as incapable of responding in a meaningful way to profound questions, memory, by contrast, allows characters to access a higher spiritual truth. When Ivan excitedly tells Alyosha in the tavern, “I want to live, and do live, even if it be against logic” (230), his momentary departure from rationalism is connected directly with both spiritual fulfillment and with memory. Ivan fervently voices his intentions to visit Europe, saying, “The precious dead lie there, each stone over them speaks of such ardent past life, of such passionate faith in their deeds, their truth, their struggle, that I … will fall to the ground and kiss those stones and weep over them” (230). Though in the guise of an intellectual admiration, Ivan’s assurance to Alyosha that he will kiss the stones, almost as if they were the relics of saints, is infused with a rare vitality and passion that stem from an almost religious reverence at the idea of belonging to a community of thinkers. The memory of the deeds of the members of this community invests these thinkers with a kind of immortality in the minds of their disciples, offering to Ivan a
momentary escape from his spiritual isolation through the submerging of his individual identity.

Ultimately, the association of memory with morality is at the foundation of the spiritual vision of Father Zosima and Alyosha. Memory, for example, serves as a vehicle through which the actions of such characters as Markel, Ilyusha, and Zosima, like those of Christ himself, may be preserved as models for the rest of humanity. It is the recollection of his brother Markel’s spiritual awakening before his death, for example, that sparks Zosima’s own moral transformation—“And then I remembered my brother Markel, and his words to the servants before his death … ‘Yes, am I worthy?’ suddenly leaped into my mind” (298)—just as the voice of the deceased Father Zosima, in a similarly irrational context, reappears to guide Alyosha. This spiritual fulfillment brought about by remembering Christ and those who emulate Him seems to echo Father Zosima’s philosophy that good deeds are never completely lost, that “salvation always comes after the death of the savior” (294). In fact, the importance of remembering relationships ultimately testifies to a radically anti-individualist philosophy, for it is through memory that the deaths of such characters as Ilyusha and Zosima adopt a more meaningful and even Christ-like aspect: upon Ilyushenka’s death, Alyosha asks of Kolya and his companions,

Who has united us in this good, kind feeling, which we will remember and intend to remember always, all our lives, if not Ilyushenka, that good boy, that kind boy, that boy dear to us unto ages of ages! Let us never forget him, and may his memory be eternal and good in our hearts now and unto ages of ages! (775)

As Father Zosima suggests in proclaiming, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (1; John 12:24), unless one experiences a kind of death to the individual, isolated self and to the conviction that each person is responsible only for himself, one’s life, like the life of an individual grain, remains fruitless and meaningless. Ultimately, it is only through the collective responsibility of remembering others and sacrificing oneself for the memory of others that one can begin to embrace the vision of Father Zosima that “each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and everything” (289).

Works Cited: