Welcome, future AP students! We are all very excited to meet you and to begin our exploration of language and literature. We’re sure that you are JUST as excited to begin your journey! All AP Language teachers request that you complete the following assignment over the summer and be prepared to discuss the texts at the start of the semester.

Assignment

In the Summer Reading Packet, we encourage you to read all of the selections, but we require that you pick TEN to annotate for craft and understanding (see annotation directions below). In addition to your first read annotations*, use the Talk Back prompts below to respond to the ten texts you have chosen. These annotations and responses will help guide discussions upon your return in the fall.

Annotation is simply noting words on the page that strike you, phrases that confuse or thrill you, or places where you want to talk back to the speaker or [author]. Your goal is to record ideas and impressions for future analysis. Why bother to do this? Here’s what well-known scholar and avid reader Mortimer Adler says in *How to Read a Book*:

> Why is marking up a [text] indispensable to reading? First, it keeps you awake. (And I don’t mean merely conscious; I mean awake.) In the second place, reading, if it is active, is thinking, and thinking tends to express itself in words, spoken or written. The marked [text] is usually the thought-through book. Finally, writing helps you remember the thought you had, or the thoughts the author expressed.

So whether you use sticky notes, highlight passages, or write comments directly in the margins, annotation helps you become a better reader. There are no hard-and-fast rules for annotating properly, but the following approach is a good way to get started.

*Through your first reading, circle or highlight words or phrases that are interesting or unfamiliar, as well as any language choices that stand out to you. Note in the margins or on a sticky note why you are circling or highlighting these words. If you just circle, or just highlight, you will soon forget why you did so. Note words that stand out for their beauty or oddity as well as words you need to look up. Don’t hesitate to make an educated guess at their meaning.—*Language of Literature*  Shea, Scanlon, Aufses

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<td>For each essay, “Talk back” to the sources in the summer reading packet by responding to prompts 1, 2, &amp; 3. In addition, use three additional prompts in your annotations as you read. Note: we do not expect a developed essay or paragraph on each prompt; rather, we want to see you engage in a conversation with the text. Therefore, the majority of these annotations should appear handwritten directly on the essay.</td>
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<th>2. The most interesting language choice the speaker/author made was...</th>
<th>3. The speaker/author seems to be writing for an audience of...</th>
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<td>4. I wonder if...</td>
<td>5. I agreed with...</td>
<td>6. I can see how this position makes sense, however...</td>
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<td>7. I had a question about...</td>
<td>8. I hadn’t thought about...</td>
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## Nonfiction Required Summer Reading

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Read each text below. Perform a first read annotation and Talk Back.* Once you have completed each reading, identify how the writer attempts to connect with his/her audience.

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Happy Reading!
Barbara Bush

Commencement Address at Wellesley College

Delivered 1 June 1990

Thank you very, very much, President Keohane. Mrs. Gorbachev, Trustees, faculty, parents, and I should say, Julia Porter, class president, and certainly my new best friend, Christine Bicknell; and, of course, the Class of 1990. I am really thrilled to be here today, and very excited, as I know all of you must be, that Mrs. Gorbachev could join us.

These are exciting times. They’re exciting in Washington, and I have really looked forward to coming to Wellesley. I thought it was going to be fun. I never dreamt it would be this much fun. So, thank you for that.

More than ten years ago, when I was invited here to talk about our experiences in the People’s Republic of China, I was struck by both the natural beauty of your campus and the spirit of this place.

Wellesley, you see, is not just a place but an idea -- an experiment in excellence in which diversity is not just tolerated, but is embraced. The essence of this spirit was captured in a moving speech about tolerance given last year by a student body president of one of your sister colleges. She related the story by Robert Fulghum about a young pastor, finding himself in charge of some very energetic children, hits upon the game called “Giants, Wizards, and Dwarfs.” "You have to decide now," the pastor instructed the children, "which you are -- a giant, a wizard, or a dwarf?" At that, a small girl tugging at his pants leg, asked, "But where do the mermaids stand?" And the pastor tells her there are no mermaids. And she says, "Oh yes there are. I am a mermaid."
Now this little girl knew what she was, and she was not about to give up on either her identity, or the game. She intended to take her place wherever mermaids fit into the scheme of things. "Where do the mermaids stand? All of those who are different, those who do not fit the boxes and the pigeonholes?" "Answer that question," wrote Fulghum, "And you can build a school, a nation, or a whole world." As that very wise young woman said, "Diversity, like anything worth having, requires effort -- effort to learn about and respect difference, to be compassionate with one another, to cherish our own identity, and to accept unconditionally the same in others.

You should all be very proud that this is the Wellesley spirit. Now I know your first choice today was Alice Walker -- guess how I know! -- known for The Color Purple. Instead you got me -- known for the color of my hair. Alice Walker's book has a special resonance here. At Wellesley, each class is known by a special color. For four years the Class of '90 has worn the color purple. Today you meet on Severance Green to say goodbye to all of that, to begin a new and a very personal journey, to search for your own true colors.

In the world that awaits you, beyond the shores of Lake Waban, no one can say what your true colors will be. But this I do know: You have a first class education from a first class school. And so you need not, probably cannot, live a "paint-by-numbers" life. Decisions are not irrevocable. Choices do come back. And as you set off from Wellesley, I hope that many of you will consider making three very special choices.

The first is to believe in something larger than yourself, to get involved in some of the big ideas of our time. I chose literacy because I honestly believe that if more people could read, write, and comprehend, we would be much closer to solving so many of the problems that plague our nation and our society.

And early on I made another choice, which I hope you'll make as well. Whether you are talking about education, career, or service, you're talking about life -- and life really must have joy. It's supposed to be fun.

One of the reasons I made the most important decision of my life, to marry George Bush, is because he made me laugh. It's true, sometimes we've laughed through our tears, but that shared laughter has been one of our strongest bonds. Find the joy in life, because as Ferris Bueller said on his day off, "Life moves pretty fast; and ya don't stop and look around once in a while, ya gonna miss it."

(I'm not going to tell George you clapped more for Ferris than you clapped for George.)

The third choice that must not be missed is to cherish your human connections: your relationships with family and friends. For several years, you've had impressed upon you the importance to your career of dedication and hard work. And, of course, that's true. But as important as your obligations as a doctor, a lawyer, a business leader will be, you are a human being first. And those human connections -- with spouses, with children, with friends -- are the most important investments you will ever make.
At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a child, a friend, or a parent.

We are in a transitional period right now, fascinating and exhilarating times, learning to adjust to changes and the choices we, men and women, are facing. As an example, I remember what a friend said, on hearing her husband complain to his buddies that he had to baby-sit. Quickly setting him straight, my friend told her husband that when it's your own kids, it's not called babysitting.

Now maybe we should adjust faster; maybe we should adjust slower. But whatever the era twenty -- whatever the era, whatever the times, one thing will never change: fathers and mothers, if you have children, they must come first. You must read to your children, and you must hug your children, and you must love your children. Your success as a family, our success as a society, depends not on what happens in the White House, but on what happens inside your house.

For over fifty years, it was said that the winner of Wellesley's annual hoop race would be the first to get married. Now they say, the winner will be the first to become a C.E.O. Both of those stereotypes show too little tolerance for those who want to know where the mermaids stand. So I want to offer a new legend: the winner of the hoop race will be the first to realize her dream -- not society's dreams -- her own personal dream.

And who knows? Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps, and preside over the White House as the President's spouse -- and I wish him well.

Well, the controversy ends here. But our conversation is only beginning. And a worthwhile conversation it has been. So as you leave Wellesley today, take with you deep thanks for the courtesy and the honor you have shared with Mrs. Gorbachev and with me.

Thank you. God bless you. And may your future be worthy of your dreams.
Finding the Hammam

in favor of haraam auntie poetics.

BY FATIMAH ASGHAR

The Salon was where I went to feel safe. Like the Planned Parenthoods across America, The Salon’s exterior was unwelcoming, every inch of glass crowded in newspaper cutouts. The newspapers across glass were there to block out the outside world, to create a space where the women inside could not be seen by the men who owned the streets. Inside, behind two doors, The Salon was immaculate. It was more of a mini-mall than a salon: there was a sugar-waxing studio, a nail salon, a gym, and then a locker room with a Turkish bath (Hammam) and showers, where the woman would gather, naked, in the water and talk for hours.

In 2010 I was living in Jordan, studying abroad in Amman for a semester of college to improve my Arabic. It was the first time my Pakistani-American ass was for real for real outside of the Western world, which despises Islam and Muslims. In my first few weeks in Jordan I’d been followed home twice from the bus by strange men hoping to marry me. My host brothers had to chase them out of our backyard. It became quite clear to me that I couldn’t just walk outside freely without a man to help “protect” me. Places that were inside, with mostly women, became my only realm of real safety while I lived there.
It was not all that different from America. I was in middle school when the towers fell; my formative years were defined by the vitriolic racism and Islamophobia that plagued America in its wake. While most kids were worried about the sudden new stench of B.O. coming from their armpits, I was hiding in my school’s bathrooms, afraid of being followed home or called a terrorist. I became used to harassment, not just in terms of race and religion, but also as a woman walking about the world. In my high school hallways I was constantly groped by the hands of young men when I was trying to get to class. Once, a classmate followed me out of class on my way to the bathroom and pinned me against a locker while he felt me up until I had to literally shout for him to get off me. He wasn’t even reprimanded—the teacher who heard my scream just told us to stop goofing around and get back to class. The next day when I walked to the train station from school, he laughed with his friends and shouted, “You see those sideburns, dude? She has to be a fucking man, as hairy as she is.”

Boys will be boys, as they say, and reap the benefits of a patriarchal world. A world that is built on “boys will be boys” violence; a world where women, femme, gender nonconforming, trans, and queer people, by design, can never fit safely inside.

The street harassment in Jordan was only surprising to me because my naïve self expected more from Muslim men. I was so excited to be living in a Muslim-majority place for the first time in my life, I hadn’t even considered that would happen. I expected it to be more like a family reunion, where we would all dance and sing together and practice Islam in whatever way we saw fit. Aunties and uncles would greet me at the bus stop with sweets. We would all roll out our prayer mats in the streets and pray together, delighting in how our relationship with God was our own and free from judgment.
That was far from the case. On sight, many people judged me as a haraami, a Muslim woman brimming with sin, going straight to hell. My uncovered hair, my sandals showcasing my exposed feet, and my Western clothes were all sites of scorn.

This all changed in The Salon. In here, women took off their hijabs and the covered and uncovered blended in together without worry. Women talked openly about sex, showing each other lacy lingerie they had bought for a special night with their husbands. Bodies soaked in the warm water for hours as recipes were exchanged, hair and nail tips passed through the pools. I didn't feel judged; I felt like I could come as I was, lose track of time, and spend hours just being. Here, for a few brief moments every day, we were free.

One day the receptionist at The Salon ran down the halls flinging her hijab around her and screaming, “A man is here! A man is here! A man!” A maintenance man had come to fix a pipe that was broken in the building and was being sequestered between the two doors by non-hijabi women. The air shifted, the tension so thick it hung like a spoiled wedding cake throughout the complex. From corners I had never before noticed, women began pulling out shawls and draping themselves in them. A few women locked themselves in the waxing room, turning the light off and pressing themselves against the wall to avoid being seen, like the lockdown drills we practiced in middle school. Water splashed as wet bodies left the Hammam, rolls jiggling with the force of running, emergency hijabs flying through the air. Within a minute, women who had previously been fully naked were completely covered, not a wisp of hair in sight.
I can't remember how long the maintenance man took. Ten minutes? An hour? We were all absolutely still, unmoving, not even the whir of a treadmill going.

When he left, we all breathed freely again. And that is when I knew that this place was nothing short of magic. That I could live in The Salon, forever.

At a reading a few weeks ago, an audience member asked me how I would describe my poetries in a few words. I said I wanted them to be haram auntie poetries—the auntie who you can talk to about sex and sexuality, who you can go to when you can't go to your parents. Another audience member asked what I hoped my poems would do in the world. I told them that if one of my poems could make someone else feel seen, feel safe for a brief moment, feel a little less alone, I would have accomplished my goal. The two answers are really the same. Far too many times I put myself in violent situations, particularly sexual ones, because I felt an aloneness, an otherness that I could not talk about with anyone. Because I could not name my desire. Because I could not reconcile the many things I was into an identity that was accepted. Muslim. Pakistani. Kashmiri. American. Queer. Femme. Orphan. Sometimes woman. Sometimes man. Sometimes neither. Disposable.

What's the cost of a Muslim girl writing poems the way I do? I have already lost so much. What more can I stand to lose? It's the twenty-first century and we still live in a world of honor killings. A world where rape is rationalized. A world where trans women, particularly Black and brown trans women, are being murdered without justice. A world where police murder Black civilians and go unpunished. A world where the murders of Muslim people are not considered hate crimes. A world where queer people
are thrown out of their homes. A world where girls are married off, before they can even name their own desire.

What's the cost, of writing poems the ways we do?

Let us create a poetics that recreates the Hammam, where we can come in our real, naked skin, sit in the water, and talk openly. Where all of us—the hijabis, the haraamis, the uncovered, the gender nonconforming, the queer, the married, the never-married, the virgins, the non-virgins, brown, Black, all races—can just be. Can be seen. Can be heard. Can be celebrated. Can live, exist, and make our own freedoms.

Originally Published: April 1st, 2019

Poet, screenwriter, educator, and performer Fatimah Asghar is a Pakistani, Kashmiri, Muslim American writer. Fatimah Asghar is the author of the poetry collection If They Come for Us (One World/Random House, 2018) and the chapbook After (Yes Yes Books, 2015). She is also the writer and co-creator of the Emmy-nominated Brown Girls,...
How evil happens

Why some people choose to do evil remains a puzzle, but are we starting to understand how this behaviour is triggered?

Noga Arikha

In 1941, *en route* from a ghetto to a concentration camp in Ukraine, a Nazi soldier beat my grandfather to death. My father witnessed this murder. His is just one of millions of similar stories, of course, and I grew up aware of how death hovered on the other side of life, and brutality on the underside of humanity. The ‘sapiens’ in *Homo sapiens* does not fully describe our species: we are as violent as we are smart. This
might be why we are the only Homo genus left over in the first place, and why we have been so destructively successful at dominating our planet. But still the question nags away: how are ordinary people capable of such obscene acts of violence?

This duality is also a puzzle to ourselves, at the heart of cosmologies, theologies and tragedies, the motor of moral codes and the tension at the heart of socio-political systems. We know light and we know dark. We are capable of doing terrible things, but also of asking ourselves contemplatively and creatively how that is. The self-consciousness that characterises the human mind is nowhere more baffling than in this problem of evil, which philosophers have been discussing since Plato. An obvious place to look for explanations of evil is in the patterns of behaviour that those who commit atrocities display.

This is what the neurosurgeon Itzhak Fried at the University of California, Los Angeles did with his article <http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(97)09385-9/fulltext> ‘Syndrome E’ (1997) in The Lancet. A syndrome is a group of biological symptoms that together constitute a clinical picture. And E stands for evil. With Syndrome E, Fried identified a cluster of 10 neuropsychological symptoms that are often present when evil acts are committed – when, as he puts it, ‘groups of previously nonviolent individuals’ turn ‘into repetitive killers of defenceless members of society’. The 10 neuropsychological symptoms are:

1. Repetition: the aggression is repeated compulsively.
2. Obsessive ideation: the perpetrators are obsessed with ideas that justify their aggression and underlie missions of ethnic cleansing, for instance that all Westerners, or all Muslims, or all Jews, or all Tutsis are evil.
3. Perseveration: circumstances have no impact on the perpetrator’s behaviour, who perseveres even if the action is self-destructive.
4. Diminished affective reactivity: the perpetrator has no emotional affect.
5. Hyperarousal: the elation experienced by the perpetrator is a high induced by repetition, and a function of the number of victims.
6. Intact language, memory and problem-solving skills: the syndrome has no impact on higher cognitive abilities.
7. Rapid habituation: the perpetrator becomes desensitised to the violence.
8. Compartmentalisation: the violence can take place in parallel to an ordinary, affectionate family life.
9. Environmental dependency: the context, especially identification with a group and obedience to an authority, determines what actions are possible.
10. Group contagion: belonging to the group enables the action, each
member mapping his behaviour on the other. Fried's assumption was that all these ways of behaving had underlying neurophysiological causes that were worth investigating.

Note that the syndrome applies to those previously normal individuals who become able to kill. It excludes the wartime, sanctioned killing by and of military recruits that leads many soldiers to return home (if they ever do) with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); recognised psychopathologies such as sociopathic personality disorder that can lead someone to shoot schoolchildren; and crimes of passion or the sadistic pleasure in inflicting pain. When Hannah Arendt coined her expression 'the banality of evil' in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963), she meant that the people responsible for actions that led to mass murder can be ordinary, obeying orders for banal reasons, such as not losing their jobs. The very notion of ordinariness was tested by social psychologists. In 1971, the prison experiment by the psychologist Philip Zimbardo at Stanford University played with this notion that 'ordinary students' could turn into abusive mock 'prison guards' — though it was largely unfounded, given evidence <https://aeon.co/essays/is-it-ok-for-psychologists-to-deceive-their-test-subjects> of flaws in the never-replicated experiment. Still, those afflicted with Syndrome E are indeed ordinary insofar as they are not affected by any evident psychopathology. The historian Christopher Browning wrote of equally 'ordinary men' in the 1992 book of that name (referenced by Fried) who became Nazi soldiers. The soldier who killed my grandfather was very probably an ordinary man too.

Today, biology is a powerful explanatory force for much human behaviour, though it alone cannot account for horror. Much as the neurosciences are an exciting new tool for human self-understanding, they will not explain away our brutishness. Causal accounts of the destruction that humans inflict on each other are best provided by political history — not science, nor metaphysics. The past century alone is heavy with atrocities of unfathomable scale, albeit fathomable political genesis. But it was the advent of ISIS and the surge in youthful, enthusiastic recruits to it that gave Fried's hypothesis a new urgency, and prompted him to organise, with the neurophysiologist Alain Berthoz at the Collège de France in Paris, three conferences <https://www.paris-iae.fr/fr/liste-des-videos/the-brains-that-pull-the-triggers-3rd-paris-conference-on-syndrome-e-10707> around Syndrome E that between 2015 and 2017 gathered cognitive neuroscientists, social psychologists, neurophysiologists, psychiatrists, terrorism specialists and jurists, some of whose theories and insights I share here. Syndrome E is a useful provocation to an innovative, interdisciplinary discussion of this old problem — and a powerful example of how to frame neuroscientific output in human terms. Already this approach is giving rise to interesting hypotheses and explanations.
As the brain’s functional anatomy reveals itself in increasingly precise ways, neuroscience is growing in its ability to address the complexities underlying our behaviour, violence included. But since we are evolved animals, to investigate the biological bases for behaviour is to look both at the embodied results of evolutionary time and at historical time – at how the evolved circuits of the brain are recruited by cultures, as well as producing cultures. Given that we evolved as inherently social, interactive creatures, neuroscience requires dialogue with other disciplines – the brain has not evolved in isolation, and action always takes place at a moment in time in a particular place with particular meaning. The psychological and cultural environment is central in determining whether and how given biological processes will play out. The traits enumerated by Fried thus encompass a combination of neurological and environmental conditions.

Central to Syndrome E is the symptom of ‘diminished affect’. Most people – except, precisely, psychopaths – shy away from or are extremely reluctant to inflict pain, let alone kill. As the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton has shown, it takes brainwashing and coercion to dull our emotional response and to overcome our reticence to cross the line beyond which ‘habituation’ sets in – the Syndrome E symptom whereby the repetition of the act makes it easier to perform. Perpetrators of mass murder and torturers can also love and want the best for their children, while feeling nothing for their victims – an instance of the ‘compartmentalisation’ symptom of Syndrome E. This was probably the case for the anonymous Nazi soldier who killed my grandfather. Family belonging and social belonging are separate. When they meet, as happened in Bosnia and Rwanda when families turned on each other, the group identity prevails. Empathy is rarely universal.

The social neuroscientist Tania Singer at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig in Germany defines empathy as the ability to ‘resonate’ with the feelings of the other. It develops from babyhood on – as imitation at first, then joint attention – into the ability to adopt the point of view of another, along with a shift in spatial perception from self to other, as if one were literally stepping into another’s shoes. This requires an ability to distinguish between self and other in the first place, an aspect of the so-called ‘theory of mind’ that one acquires over the first five years of life. The developmental psychologist Philippe Rochat at Emory University in Atlanta has shown how children develop
an ethical stance by that time as well, and become aware of how their actions can be perceived by others.

But while empathy ensures the cohesion of a group or a society, it is also biased and parochial. Revenge thrives on it. The social psychologist Emile Bruneau at the University of Pennsylvania has demonstrated how it is easily directed at an ‘in-group’ at the expense of an ‘out-group’ that can then be targeted as an enemy, and dehumanised. Its selectivity also explains how we can walk by a homeless person without feeling the need to offer help, or rejoice in nasty gossip about a disliked absentee. Inevitably, we all practise selective empathy, its absence manifest in everyday, non-lethal instances of violence that occur in social and family life, in business and politics. What the psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen at the University of Cambridge calls ‘empathy erosion’ in *The Science of Evil: On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty* (2011) is therefore not a sufficient ingredient in the outbreak of extreme violence. But it is a necessary one, opening the way to discrimination and ultimately genocide. As the social neuroscientist Jean Decety at the University of Chicago put it, ‘our hypersociality has a dark side’.

This developmental account can dispel, in part, the mystery of our two faces—of our ability at once to help each other and to kill each other, or to argue ourselves into ‘just wars’. In common with other hominins such as chimpanzees, we have evolved the capacity to cement relationships, communicate and cooperate with those in our immediate environment—and also to attack outsiders and members of other tribes. But our evolved self-consciousness is what defines our humanity even apart from other hominins. What remains puzzling is our continued ability to destroy even as we are able to understand ourselves and to create sophisticated scientific models of our own minds.

Under given circumstances, 70 per cent of a population can take part in crimes as part of a group

Neuroscience gives an interesting physiological model of the emotion of empathy as a complex, dynamic process that unites executive, premotor and sensorimotor functions. It recruits, in particular, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) and the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), with which the vmPFC overlaps in part, and which is crucial for the processing of emotions generated in the amygdala—an evolutionary ancient structure within the limbic system. Lesion to the OFC impairs emotional feeling—and with it, decision-making. With his 'somatic marker hypothesis' <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/neuroscience/somatic-marker-hypothesis>,
the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles has shown how bodily feelings that participate in signalling emotions, processed in the OFC and vmPFC, enable appropriate, socially situated decision-making, thereby informing our evaluations of the world, including our moral sense.

In the phenomenon of diminished affect, hyperactivity in these same areas of the frontal lobe inhibits activation of the amygdala. Studies <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3079445/> have shown dysfunctional activity of the OFC in people with obsessive-compulsive disorder. It thus might also be involved in the obsessive nature of ideas about one group that justify murderous intent against its members. And the sense of elated hyperarousal—such as that induced by cocaine—that entrains action upon these ideas involves processing in the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC). In short, in cases of Syndrome E emotional pathways in the brain no longer regulate judgment and action. A breakdown occurs in the feedback between the amygdala and higher, cognitive cortical structures. The acting self splits away from the feeling self, a phenomenon that Fried calls ‘cognitive fracture’. He believes that, under given circumstances, about 70 per cent of the population can be subject to it and be able to take part in crimes as part of a group—as might have happened in the Stanford prison experiment, despite caveats regarding its results.

The acting self of the individual with cognitive fracture feels no empathy. But empathy is not always a reliable guide to appropriate behaviour—we don’t feel empathy for the insects dying because of climate change, for instance, but we can decide rationally to act against the disaster. It can even lead to bad decisions with regard to those at whom it is directed—a surgeon who feels empathy for the patient under drapes should really not operate. There is such a thing as a surfeit of feeling. The psychologist Paul Bloom at Yale University has argued ‘against empathy’, in a 2016 book of that title and elsewhere, suggesting that ‘rational compassion’ is a better barometer with which to evaluate our environment and how we should act upon it. That is to say, members of a group whose mission is to kill its perceived enemies might have the ability for emotional empathy for their group, and no rational compassion for their perceived enemy.

A n account of the inability to feel any emotion for such perceived enemies can take us closer to understanding what it is like to have crossed the line beyond which one can maim and kill in cold blood. Observers at the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the Hague note frequently the absence of remorse displayed by perpetrators. The clinical psychologist Françoise Sironi, who assesses perpetrators for the ICC and treats them and their victims, has directly seen what Lifton called the
‘murder of the self’ at work – notably with Kang Kek Iew, the man known as ‘Duch’, who proudly created and directed the Khmer Rouge S-21 centre for torture and extermination in Cambodia. Duch was one of those who felt absolutely no remorse. His sole identity was his role, dutifully kept up for fear of losing himself and falling into impotence. He did not comprehend what Sironi meant when she asked him: ‘What happened to your conscience?’ The very question was gibberish to him.

Along with what Fried calls this ‘catastrophic’ desensitisation to emotional cues, cognitive functions remain intact – another Syndrome E symptom. A torturer knows exactly how to hurt, in full recognition of the victim’s pain. He – usually he – has the cognitive capacity, necessary but not sufficient for empathy, to understand the victim’s experience. He just does not care about the other’s pain except instrumentally. Further, he does not care that he does not care. Finally, he does not care that caring does, in fact, matter. The emotionally inflected judgment that underlies the moral sense is gone.

Such a state involves the fusion of identity with a larger system within which occurs the splitting of the feeling self and the cognitive self, and the concomitant replacement of individual moral values with that system’s norms and rules. Chemistry is operative throughout, as it is in all cerebral and somatic functions – and tweakable by pharmaceuticals. The neuroscientist Trevor Robbins at the University of Cambridge has studied ‘pharmacoterrorism’, and how, for instance, the amphetamine Captagon – used, inter alia, by ISIS members – affects dopamine function, depletes serotonin in the OFC, and leads to rigid, psychopathic-like behaviour, increasing aggression and leading to the perseverance that Fried lists among the Syndrome E symptoms. It shuts off social attachment, and disables all emotional feeling (empathy included), a condition called alexithymia.

This is one simplified neurological account of how murderous action becomes possible. The neuroscience of value and action can help to further explain what might be going on. The OFC is exceptionally developed in humans and primates. As Edmund Rolls at the Oxford Centre for Computational Neuroscience has shown, it plays a crucial role in representing reward value in response to a stimulus: we make choices based on the assignation of value – to an object, an idea, an action, a norm, a person. Our emotions are value-rich, and our actions vary and can be updated according to how they are met in the world, in turn motivating us to seek or avoid a stimulus. Our behaviour can continue in the search of an absent reward – this would be one account of compulsive action, a Syndrome E symptom. The neuroscientist Mathias Pessiglione and his team
in Paris have also shown [https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352154615001126] a central role for vmPFC in value-attribution to a stimulus or an idea, whereby we choose to undertake an action based on its attractive reward or its aversive outcome. But when this function is overstimulated, new inputs — such as cries for mercy — have no impact on the attribution of value to the idea, for instance that ‘all you people deserve to die’, and action cannot change. It becomes automatic, controllable by an external agent or leader, independently of any sense of value.

**Coercion switches off the sense of responsibility — a chilling finding**

But these neurological events signify criminal action only under particular environmental circumstances. The psychiatrist David Cohen and his team at the Pitié-Salpêtrière hospital in Paris evaluated teenage candidates for radicalisation. They found that certain socio-psychological conditions in childhood — such as an absent father or an unstable mother, and a history of foster care — affected the development of identity, in some cases eventually leading to the need to subsume it into a wider group with a transcendental message. Again, group trumps family. As the anthropologist Scott Atran has shown [https://aeon.co/essays/why-isis-has-the-potential-to-be-a-world-altering-revolution], conflicts are often intractable and non-negotiable because they are conducted in the name of absolute, spiritual values — secular or religious — and not for any utilitarian outcome. These values can seem highly attractive — stronger than family ties.

In her novel *Home Fire* (2017), the British Pakistani writer Kamila Shamsie showed how a loving, innocent but maladjusted and lost young man of Pakistani origin could fall prey to an ISIS recruiter’s siren call to rejoin a lost father and find fulfilment and belonging in a community depicted as devoted to a greater good. Our narratives, inner and outer, inform and justify the choices we make, conferring on them a coherence that is reassuring and can seem good and right. Coherence rides on the moral sense and masquerades as it, bringing on a cognitive dissonance ‘between what we think and what we do’, as Zimbardo once put it — between what we convince ourselves was an appropriate action, and our deeply held, prior beliefs. Shamsie’s character soon regrets his choice and tries to get away from a violence he cannot stomach, unable to withstand the cognitive dissonance. Not so Nazi doctors, say, who convinced themselves that they were acting for a greater good — in a perverse twist to the equivalence of morality with a concern for the good of others. Heinrich Himmler’s speech in Poznan in 1943 is a chilling instance of this high-minded justification of
criminal behaviour: ‘We have the moral right, we had the duty to our people to do it, to kill this people who wanted to kill us.’ Once moral justification is divorced from an emotionally calibrated response to the other, violence can be deployed on rationalised grounds. This has happened time and again throughout history.

But ‘ordinary men’ must cross a line into that zone where the Syndrome E symptoms operate – pushed by circumstance. A noteworthy insight into what happens during the crossing is provided by the neuroscientist Patrick Haggard at University College London. He has shown how powerful is the initial coercion that allows us to step beyond the line. In the wake of the 1961 trial in Jerusalem of Adolf Eichmann, who invoked the ‘Nuremberg Defence’ that he was ‘just obeying orders’ – so-called because it was first used by the Nazi defendants in the Nuremberg Trials of 1945-46 – the psychologist Stanley Milgram at Yale University showed, or rather exaggeratedly claimed, that most people will obey orders from an authority even if the order is to harm another person. Milgram was interested in obedience. Haggard, who has been studying <http://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(16)00052-X> the sense of agency – the sense that we initiate and own our actions, which is central to our lives, and also to legal arguments about criminal accountability – asked instead what it feels like to be coerced and have one’s autonomy removed to some degree. Through an experiment <https://www.nature.com/articles/nm827> that partly takes its cue from Milgram’s (but addresses some of its ethical and methodological issues) and uses the intentional binding effect, Haggard found that people do feel a notable reduction in their sense of agency when they are coerced into an action. Coercion switches off the sense of responsibility – a chilling finding.

The neurological correlates of what can lead to our worst actions do not indicate a clinical condition. Syndrome E is not a disease, nor quite a disorder eligible for integration into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Problems. If it were officialised as such, it would have intricate juridical ramifications: the use of neurological evidence in court is problematic, as the jurist Jean-Paul Costa, a former president of the European Court of Human Rights, has pointed out, because it requires the expert reading of imprecise and opaque data. It is hard to establish exactly which brain events – including those underlying the sense of agency – could or should constitute legally mitigating factors.

But introducing, as Fried has done, a set of features that characterise our most beastly nature, and kickstarting a wide-ranging discussion across the fields relevant to their study, particularly in the area of neuroscience, can only help to enrich programmes of
prevention and remediation at a time when these are sorely needed. The devil might be dead, but evil actions will always exist. The 'Why?' remains a metaphysical puzzle, and I am one of the millions whose life is lived under this question mark, passed on by my survivor father. But at least some answers to the 'How?' are now within our reach.

Noga Arikha is a historian of ideas, particularly interested in the relation between mind and body, and in tracing the genealogy of the concepts that pertain to it. She has taught at Bard College, was on the advisory board for Prospect Magazine, and was chair of liberal studies at the Paris College of Art. Her essays have been published in Lapham's Quarterly and Architectural Digest, and she is the author of Passions and Tempers: A History of the Humours (2007). She lives in Paris.

aeon.co 30 July, 2018
Gawker published the essay, "How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America" last year, three weeks after George Zimmerman told Sean Hannity that the shooting of Trayvon Martin "was all God's plan." As the jury deliberates in the State vs. George Zimmerman case, we are rerunning it.
I've had guns pulled on me by four people under Central Mississippi skies — once by a white undercover cop, once by a young brother trying to rob me for the leftovers of a weak work-study check, once by my mother and twice by myself. Not sure how or if I've helped many folks say yes to life but I've definitely aided in few folks dying slowly in America, all without the aid of a gun.

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I'm 17, five years younger than Rekia Boyd will be when she is shot in the head by an off duty police officer in Chicago. It's the summer after I graduated high school and my teammate, Troy, is back in Jackson, Mississippi. Troy, who plays college ball in Florida, asks me if I want to go to McDonald's on I-55.

As Troy, Cleta, Leighton and I walk out of McDonald's, that Filet-o-Fish grease straight cradling my lips, I hold the door open for a tiny, scruffy-faced white man with a green John Deere hat on.

"Thanks, partner," he says.

A few minutes later, we're driving down I-55 when John Deere drives up and rolls his window down. I figure that he wants to say something funny since we'd had a cordial moment at McDonald's. As soon as I roll my window down, the man screams, "Nigger lovers!" and speeds off.

On I-55, we pull up beside John Deere and I'm throwing finger-signs, calling John Deere all kinds of clever "motherfuckers." The dude slows down and gets behind us. I turn around, hoping he pulls over.
Nope.

John Deere pulls out a police siren and places it on top of his car. Troy is cussing my ass out and frantically trying to drive his Mama's Lincoln away from John Deere. My heart is pounding out of my chest, not out of fear, but because I want a chance to choke the shit out of John Deere. I can't think of any other way of making him feel what we felt.

Troy drives into his apartment complex and parks his Mama's long Lincoln under some kind of shed. Everyone in the car is slumped down at this point. Around 20 seconds after we park, here comes the red, white and blue of the siren.

We hear a car door slam, then a loud knock on the back window. John Deere has a gun in one hand and a badge in the other. He's telling me to get out of the car. My lips still smell like Filet-o-Fish.

"Only you," he says to me. "You going to jail tonight." He's got the gun to my chest.

"Fuck you," I tell him and suck my teeth. "I ain't going nowhere." I don't know what's wrong with me.

Cleta is up front trying to reason with the man through her window when all of a sudden, in a scene straight out of Boyz n the Hood, a black cop approaches the car and accuses us of doing something wrong. Minutes later, a white cop tells us that John Deere has been drinking too much and he lets us go.
16 months later, I’m 18, three years older than Edward Evans will be when he is shot in the head behind an abandoned home in Jackson.

Shonda and I are walking from Subway back to Millsaps College with two of her white friends. It’s nighttime. We turn off of North State Street and walk halfway past the cemetery when a red Corolla filled with brothers stops in front of us. All of the brothers have blue rags covering their noses and mouths. One of the brothers, a kid at least two years younger than me with the birdest of bird chests, gets out of the car clutching a shiny silver gun.

He comes towards Shonda and me.

"Me," I say to him. "Me. Me." I hold my hands up encouraging him to do whatever he needs to do. If he shoots me, well, I guess bullets enter and hopefully exit my chest, but if the young Nigga thinks I’m getting pistol whapped in front of a cemetery and my girlfriend off of State Street, I’m convinced I’m going to take the gun and beat him into a burnt cinnamon roll.

The boy places his gun on my chest and keeps looking back and forth to the car.

I feel a strange calm, an uncanny resolve. I don’t know what’s wrong with me. He’s patting me down for money that I don’t have since we hadn’t gotten our work-study checks yet and I just spent my last little money on two veggie subs from Subway and two of those large Chocolate Chip cookies.
The young brother keeps looking back to the car, unsure what he's supposed to do. Shonda and her friends are screaming when he takes the gun off my chest and trots goofily back to the car.

I don't know what's wrong with him but a few months later, I have a gun.

A partner of mine hooks me up with a partner of his who lets me hold something. I get the gun not only to defend myself from goofy brothers in red Corollas trying to rob folks for work-study money. I guess I'm working on becoming a black writer in Mississippi and some folks around Millsaps College don't like the essays I'm writing in the school newspaper.

A few weeks earlier, George Harmon, the President of Millsaps, shuts down the campus paper in response to a satirical essay I wrote on communal masturbation and sends a letter to over 12,000 overwhelmingly white Millsaps students, friends and alumnae. The letter states that the "Key Essay in question was written by Kiese Laymon, a controversial writer who consistently editorializes on race issues."

After the President's letter goes out, my life kinda hurts.

I receive a sweet letter in the mail with the burnt up ashes of my essays. The letter says that if I don't stop writing and give myself "over to right," my life would end up like the ashes of my writing.

The tires of my Mama's car are slashed when her car was left on campus. I'm given a single room after the Dean of Students thinks it's too dangerous for me to have a roommate. Finally, Greg Miller, an English Professor, writes an essay about how and why a student in his Liberal
Studies class says, "Kiese should be killed for what he's writing." I feel a lot when I read those words, but mainly I wonder what's wrong with me.

It's bid day at Millsaps.

Shonda and I are headed to our jobs at Ton-o-Fun, a fake ass Chuck E. Cheese behind Northpark Mall. We're wearing royal blue shirts with a strange smiling animal and Ton-o-Fun on the left titty. The shirts of the other boy workers at Ton-o-Fun fit them better than mine. My shirt is tight in the wrong places and slightly less royal blue. I like to add a taste of bleach so I don't stank.

As we walk out to the parking lot of my dorm, the Kappa Alpha and Kappa Sigma fraternities are in front of our dorm receiving their new members. They've been up drinking all night. Some of them have on black face and others have on Afro wigs and Confederate capes.

We get close to Shonda's Saturn and one of the men says, "Kiese, write about this!" Then another voice calls me a "Nigger" and Shonda, a "Nigger bitch." I think and feel a lot but mostly I feel that I can't do anything to make the boys feel like they've made us feel right there, so I go back to my dorm room to get something.

On the way there, Shonda picks up a glass bottle out of the trash. I tell her to wait outside the room. I open the bottom drawer and look at the hoodies balled up on the top of my gun. I pick up my gun and think about my Grandma. I think not only about what she'd feel if I went back out there with a gun. I think about how if Grandma walked out of that room with a gun in hand, she'd use it. No question.
I am her grandson.

I throw the gun back on top of the clothes, close the drawer, go in my closet and pick up a wooden T-ball bat.

Some of the KA's and Sigs keep calling us names as we approach them. I step, throw down the bat and tell them I don't need a bat to fuck them up. I don't know what's wrong with me. My fists are balled up and the only thing I want in the world is to swing back over and over again. Shonda feels the same, I think. She's right in the mix, yelling, crying, fighting as best she can. After security and a Dean break up the mess, the frats go back to receiving their new pledges and Shonda and I go to work at Tono-Fun in our dirty blue shirts.

I stank.

On our first break at work, we decide that we should call a local news station so the rest of Jackson can see what's happening at Millsaps on a Saturday morning. We meet the camera crew at school. Some of boys go after the reporter and cameraman. The camera gets a few students in Afros, black face and Confederate capes. They also get footage of "another altercation."

I don't know what's wrong with me. My fists are balled up and the only thing I want in the world is to swing back over and over again.

A few weeks pass and George Harmon, the President of the college, doesn't like that footage of his college is now on television and in newspapers all across the country. The college decides that two individual fraternity members, Shonda and I will be put on disciplinary probation.
for using "racially insensitive language" and the two fraternities involved get their party privileges taken away for a semester. If there was racially insensitive language Shonda and I could have used to make those boys feel like we felt, we would have never stepped to them in the first place. Millsaps is trying to prove to the nation that it is post-race(ist) institution and to its alums that all the Bid Day stuff is the work of an "adroit entrepreneur of racial conflict."

A few months later, Mama and I sit in President George Harmon's office. The table is an oblong mix of mahogany and ice water. All the men at the table are smiling, flipping through papers and twirling pens in their hands except for me. I am still 19, two years older than Trayvon Martin will be when he swings back.

President Harmon and his lawyers don't look me in the eye. They zero in on the eyes of Mama, as Harmon tells her that I am being suspended from Millsaps for at least a year for taking and returning Red Badge of Courage from the library without formally checking it out.

He ain't lying.

I took the book out of the library for Shonda's brother without checking it out and returned the book the next day. I looked right at the camera when I did it, too. I did all of this knowing I was on parole, but not believing any college in America, even one in Mississippi, would kick a student out for a year, for taking and returning a library book without properly checking it out.

I should have believed.
George Harmon tells me, while looking at my mother, that I will be allowed to come back to Millsaps College in a year only after having attended therapy sessions for racial insensitivity. We are told he has given my writing to a local psychologist and the shrink believes I need help. Even if I am admitted back as a student, I will remain formally on parole for the rest of my undergrad career, which means that I will be expelled from Millsaps College unless I'm perfect.

19-year-old black boys can not be perfect in America. Neither can 61-year-old white boys named George.

Before going on the ride home with Mama, I go to my room, put the gun in my backpack and get in her car.

On the way home, Mama stops by the zoo to talk about what just happened in George Harmon's office. She's crying and asking me over and over again why I took and returned the gotdamn book knowing they were watching me. Like a black mother of black boy, Mama starts blaming Shonda for asking me to check the book out in the first place. I don't know what to say other than I know it wasn't Shonda's fault and I left my ID and I wanted to swing back, so I keep walking and say nothing. She says that Grandma is going to be so disappointed in me. "Heartbroken," is the word she uses.

There.

I feel this toxic miasma unlike anything I've ever felt not just in my body but in my blood. I remember the wobbly way my Grandma twitches her eyes at my Uncle Jimmy and I imagine being at the end of that twitch for
the rest of my life. For the first time in almost two years, I hide my face, grit my crooked teeth and sob.

I don't stop for weeks.

The NAACP and lawyers get involved in filing a lawsuit against Millsaps on my behalf. Whenever the NAACP folks talk to me or the paper, they talk about how ironic it is that a black boy who is trying to read a book gets kicked out of college. I appreciate their work but I don't think the irony lies where they think it does. If I'd never read a book in my life, I shouldn't have been punished for taking and bringing back a library book, not when kids are smoking that good stuff, drinking themselves unconscious and doing some of everything imaginable to nonconsenting bodies.

That's what I tell all the newspapers and television reporters who ask. To my friends, I say that after stealing all those Lucky Charms, Funyons, loaves of light bread and over a hundred cold dranks out of the cafeteria in two years, how in the fuck do I get suspended for taking and returning the gotdamn Red Badge of Courage.

The day that I'm awarded the Benjamin Brown award, named after a 21-year-old truck driver shot in the back by police officers during a student protest near Jackson State in 1967, I take the bullets out of my gun, throw it in the Ross Barnett Reservoir and avoid my Grandma for a long, long time.

I enroll at Jackson State University in the Spring semester, where my mother teaches Political Science. Even though, I'm not really living at
home, everyday Mama and I fight over my job at Cutco and her staying with her boyfriend and her not letting me use the car to get to my second job at an HIV hospice since my license is suspended. Really, we're fighting because she raised me to never ever forget I was on parole, which means no black hoodies in wrong neighborhoods, no jogging at night, hands in plain sight at all times in public, no intimate relationships with white women, never driving over the speed limit or doing those rolling stops at stop signs, always speaking the king's English in the presence of white folks, never being outperformed in school or in public by white students and most importantly, always remembering that no matter what, white folks will do anything to get you.

Mama's antidote to being born a black boy on parole in Central Mississippi is not for us to seek freedom; it's to insist on excellence at all times. Mama takes it personal when she realizes that I realize she is wrong. There ain't no antidote to life, I tell her. How free can you be if you really accept that white folks are the traffic cops of your life? Mama tells me that she is not talking about freedom. She says that she is talking about survival.

One blue night my mother tells me that I need to type the rest of my application to Oberlin College after I've already hand-written the personal essay. I tell her that it doesn't matter whether I type it or not since Millsaps is sending a Dean's report attached to my transcript. I say some other truthful things I should never say to my mother. Mama goes into her room, lifts up her pillow and comes out with her gun.

It's raggedy, small, heavy and black. I always imagine the gun as an old dead crow. I'd held it a few times before with Mama hiding behind me.
Mama points the gun at me and tells me to get the fuck out of her house. I look right at the muzzle pointed at my face and smile the same way I did at the library camera at Millsaps. I don't know what's wrong with me.

"You gonna pull a gun on me over some college application?" I ask her.

"You don't listen until it's too late," she tells me. "Get out of my house and don't ever come back."

I leave the house, chuckling, shaking my head, cussing under my breath. I go sit in a shallow ditch. Outside, I wander in the topsy turvy understanding that Mama's life does not revolve around me and I'm not doing anything to make her life more joyful, spacious or happy. I'm an ungrateful burden, an obese weight on her already terrifying life. I sit there in the ditch, knowing that other things are happening in my mother's life but I also know that Mama never imagined needing to pull a gun on the child she carried on her back as a sophomore at Jackson State University. I'm playing with pine needles, wishing I had headphones—but I'm mostly regretting throwing my gun into the reservoir.

When Mama leaves for work in the morning, I break back in her house, go under her pillow and get her gun. Mama and I haven't paid the phone or the light bill so it's dark, hot and lonely in that house, even in the morning. I lie in a bathtub of cold water, still sweating and singing love songs to myself. I put the gun to my head and cock it.

I think of my Grandma and remember that old feeling of being so in love that nothing matters except seeing and being seen by her. I drop the gun to my chest. I'm so sad and I can't really see a way out of what I'm feeling.
but I'm leaning on memory for help. Faster. Slower. I think I want to hurt myself more than I'm already hurting. I'm not the smartest boy in the world by a long shot, but even in my funk I know that easy remedies like eating your way out of sad, or fucking your way out of sad, or lying your way out of sad, or slanging your way out of sad, or robbing your way out of sad, or gambling your way out of sad, or shooting your way out of sad, are just slower, more acceptable ways for desperate folks, and especially paroled black boys in our country, to kill ourselves and others close to us in America.

I start to spend more time at home over the next few weeks since Mama is out of town with her boyfriend. Mama and I still haven't paid the phone bill so I'm running down to the pay phone everyday, calling one of the admissions counselors at Oberlin College. He won't tell me whether they'll accept me or not, but he does say that Oberlin might want me because of, not in spite of, what happened at Millsaps.

I drop the gun to my chest. I'm so sad and I can't really see a way out of what I'm feeling but I'm leaning on memory for help.

A month passes and I haven't heard from Oberlin. I'm eating too much and dry humping a woman just as desperate as me and lying like its my first job and daring people to fuck with me more than I have in a long time. I'm writing lots of words, too, but I'm not reckoning. I'm wasting ink on bullshit political analysis and short stories and vacant poems that I never imagine being read or felt by anyone like me. I'm a waste of writing's time.
The only really joyful times in life come from playing basketball and talking shit with O.G. Raymond "Gunn" Murph, my best friend. Gunn is trying to stop himself from slowly killing himself and others, after a smoldering break up with V., his girlfriend of eight years. Some days, Gunn and I save each other's lives just by telling and listening to each other's odd-shaped truth.

One black night, Ray is destroying me in Madden and talking all that shit when we hear a woman moaning for help outside of his apartment on Capitol Street. We go downstairs and find a naked woman with open wounds, blood and bruises all over her black body. She can barely walk or talk through shivering teeth but we ask her if she wants to come upstairs while we call the ambulance. Gunn and I have taken no Sexual Assault classes and we listen to way too much The Diary and Ready to Die, but right there, we know not to get too close to the woman and just let her know we're there to do whatever she needs.

She slowly makes her way into the apartment because she's afraid the men might come back. Blood is gushing down the back of her thighs and her scalp. She tells us the three men had one gun. When she makes it up to the apartment, we give the woman a towel to sit on and something to wrap herself in. Blood seeps through both and even though she looks so scared and hurt, she also looks so embarrassed. Gunn keeps saying things like, "It's gonna be okay, sweetheart," and I just sit there weakly nodding my head, running from her eyes and getting her more glasses of water. When Gunn goes in his room to take his gun in his waistband, I look at her and know that no one man could have done this much damage to another human being. That's what I need to tell myself.
Eventually, the ambulance and police arrive. They ask her a lot of questions and keep looking at us. She tells them that we helped her after she was beaten and raped by a three black men in a Monte Carlo. One of the men, she tells the police, was her boyfriend. She refuses to say his name to the police. Gunn looks at me and drops his head. Without saying anything, we know that whatever is in the boys in that car, has to also be in us. We know that whatever is encouraging them to kill themselves slowly by knowingly mangling the body and spirit of this shivering black girl, is probably the most powerful thing in our lives. We also know that whatever is in us that has been slowly encouraging us to kill ourselves and those around us slowly, is also in the heart and mind of this black girl on the couch.

A few weeks later, I get a letter saying I've been accepted to Oberlin College and they're giving me a boatload of financial aid. Gunn agrees to drive me up to Oberlin and I feel like the luckiest boy on earth, not because I got into Oberlin, but because I survived long enough to remember saying yes to life and "no" or at least "slow down" to a slow death.

My saying yes to life meant accepting the beauty of growing up black, on parole, in Mississippi. It also meant accepting that George Harmon, parts of Millsaps College, parts of my state, much of my country, my heart and mostly my own reflection, had beaten the dog shit out of me. I still don't know what all this means but I know it's true.

This isn't an essay or simply a woe-is-we narrative about how hard it is to be a black boy in America. This is a lame attempt at remembering the contours of slow death and life in America for one black American
teenager under Central Mississippi skies. I wish I could get my Yoda on right now and surmise all this shit into a clean sociopolitical pull-quote that shows supreme knowledge and absolute emotional transformation, but I don’t want to lie.

I want to say and mean that remembering starts not with predictable punditry, or bullshit blogs, or slick art that really ask nothing of us; I want to say that it starts with all of us willing ourselves to remember, tell and accept those complicated, muffled truths of our lives and deaths and the lives and deaths of folks all around us over and over again.

Then I want to say and mean that I am who my Grandma thinks I am.

I am not.

I’m a walking regret, a truth-teller, a liar, a survivor, a frowning ellipsis, a witness, a dreamer, a teacher, a student, a joker, a writer whose eyes stay red, and I’m a child of this nation.

I know that as I’ve gotten deeper into my late twenties and thirties, I have managed to continue killing myself and other folks who loved me in spite of me. I know that I’ve been slowly killed by folks who were as feverishly in need of life and death as I am. The really confusing part is that a few of those folk who have nudged me closer to slow death have also helped me say yes to life when I most needed it. Usually, I didn’t accept it. Lots of times, we’ve taken turns killing ourselves slowly, before trying to bring each other back to life. Maybe that’s the necessary stank of love, or maybe — like Frank Ocean says — it’s all just bad religion, just tasty watered down cyanide in a styrofoam cup.
Here's Frank Ocean's Gorgeous First TV Performance

Frank Ocean performed his song "Bad Religion" on tonight's Late Night with Jimmy...

I don't even know.

I know that by the time I left Mississippi, I was 20 years old, three years older than Trayvon Martin will be when he is murdered for wearing a hoodie and swinging back in the wrong American neighborhood. Four months after I leave Mississippi, San Berry, a 20-year-old partner of mine who went to Millsaps College with Gunn and me, would be convicted for taking Pam McGill, a social worker, in the woods and shooting her in the head.

San confessed to kidnapping Ms. McGill, driving her to some woods, making her fall to her knees and pulling the trigger while a 17-year-old black boy named Azikiwe waited for him in the car. San says Azikiwe encouraged him to do it. Even today, journalists, activists and folks in Mississippi wonder what really happen with San, Azikiwe and Pam McGill that day. Was San trying to swing back? Were there mental health issues left unattended? Had Ms. McGill, San and Azikiwe talked to each other before the day? Why was Azikiwe left in the car when the murder took place?

I can't front, though. I don't wonder about any of that shit, not today.

I wonder what all three of those children of our nation really remember about how to slowly kill themselves and other folks in America the day before parts of them definitely died under the blue-black sky in Central Mississippi.
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How to Slowly Kill Yourself and Others in America

Illustration by Jim Cooke.

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How to Think Like Shakespeare

By Scott L. Newstok AUGUST 29, 2016

Illustration by Mathew McFarren

Class of 2020, welcome to college. Right about now, your future professors are probably sitting in a faculty meeting, rolling their eyes at their dean’s recitation of the annual Beloit College Mindset List, which catalogs the cultural touchstones of your lives.

But to me, the most momentous event in your intellectual formation was the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which ushered in our disastrous fixation on testing. Your generation is the first to have gone through primary and secondary school knowing no alternative to a national regimen of assessment. And your professors are only now beginning to realize how this unrelenting assessment has stunted your imaginations.

In response to the well-intentioned yet myopic focus on literacy and numeracy, your course offerings in art, drama, music, history, world languages, and the sciences were all too often set aside "to create more time for reading and math instruction." Even worse, one of the unintended consequences of high-stakes testing is that it narrowed not only what you were taught but how you were taught. The joy of reading was too often reduced to extracting content without context, the joy of mathematics to arbitrary exercises, without the love of pattern-making that generates conjecture in the first place.

You’ve been cheated of your birthright: a complete education. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr. (at your age of 18), a "complete education" gives "not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate."

But now your education is in your own hands. And my advice is: Don’t let yourself be cheated anymore, and do not cheat yourself. Take advantage of the autonomy and opportunities that college permits by approaching it in the spirit of the 16th century. You’ll become capable of a level of precision, inventiveness, and empathy worthy to be called Shakespearean.

Building a bridge to the 16th century must seem like a perverse prescription for today’s ills. I’m the first to admit that English Renaissance pedagogy was rigid and rightly mocked for its domineering pedants. Few of you would be eager to wake up before 6 a.m. to say mandatory prayers, or to be lashed for tardiness, much less translate Latin for hours on end every day of the week. Could there be a system more antithetical to our own contemporary ideals of student-centered, present-focused, and career-oriented education?

Yet this system somehow managed to nurture world-shifting thinkers, including those who launched the Scientific Revolution. This education fostered some of the very habits of mind endorsed by both the National Education Association and the Partnership for 21st Century Learning: critical thinking; clear communication; collaboration; and creativity. (To these “4Cs,” I would add “curiosity.”) Given that your own education has fallen far short of those laudable goals, I urge you to reconsider Shakespeare’s intellectual formation: that is, not what he purportedly thought — about law or love or leadership — but how he thought. An apparently rigid educational system could, paradoxically, induce liberated thinking.
“Take advantage of the autonomy and opportunities that college permits by approaching it in the spirit of the 16th century. You’ll become capable of a level of precision, inventiveness, and empathy worthy to be called Shakespearean.”

So how can you think like Shakespeare?

His mind was shaped by rhetoric, a term that you probably associate with empty promises — things politicians say but don’t really mean. But in the Renaissance, rhetoric was nothing less than the fabric of thought itself. Because thinking and speaking well form the basis of existence in a community, rhetoric prepares you for every occasion that requires words. That’s why Tudor students devoted countless hours to examining vivid models, figuring out ways to turn a phrase, exercising elaborate verbal patterning.

Antonio Gramsci described education in this way: "One has to inculcate certain habits of diligence, precision, poise (even physical poise), ability to concentrate on specific subjects, which cannot be acquired without the mechanical repetition of disciplined and methodical acts." You take it for granted that Olympic athletes and professional musicians must practice relentlessly to perfect their craft. Why should you expect the craft of thought to require anything less disciplined? Fierce attention to clear and precise writing is the essential tool for you to foster independent judgment. That is rhetoric.

Renaissance rhetoric achieved precision through a practice that might surprise you: imitation. Like "rhetoric," "imitation" sounds pejorative today: a fake, a knockoff, a mere copy. But Renaissance thinkers — aptly, looking back to the Roman Seneca, who himself looked back to the Greeks — compared the process of imitation to a bee’s gathering nectar from many flowers and then transforming it into honey. As Michel de Montaigne put it:

"The bees steal from this flower and that, but afterward their pilferings into honey, which is their own. ... So the pupil will transform and fuse together the passages that he borrows from others, to make of them something entirely his own; that is to say, his own judgment. His education, his labor, and his study have no other aim but to form this."

The honey metaphor corrects our naïve notion that being creative entails making something from nothing. Instead, you become a creator by wrestling with the legacy of your authoritative predecessors, standing on the shoulders of giants. In the words of the saxophone genius John Coltrane: "You’ve got to look back at the old things and see them in a new light." Listen to Coltrane fuse experimental jazz, South Asian melodic modes, and the Elizabethan ballad "Greensleeves," and you’ll hear how engaging with the past generates rather than limits.

The most fascinating concept that Shakespeare’s period revived from classical rhetoric was invention, which gives us both the word "invention" and the word "inventory." Cartoon images of inventors usually involve a light bulb flashing above the head of a solitary genius. But nothing can come of nothing. And when rhetoricians spoke of invention, they meant the first step in constructing an argument: an inventory of your mind’s treasury of knowledge — your database of reading, which you can accumulate only through slow, deliberate study.

People on today’s left and right are misguided on this point, making them strange bedfellows. Progressive educators have long been hostile to what they scorn as a "banking concept" of education, in which teachers deposit knowledge in passive students. Neoliberal reformers — the ones who have been assessing you for the past dozen years — act as if cognitive "skills" can somehow be taught in the abstract, independent of content. And some politicians seem eager to get rid of teachers altogether and just have you watch a video. You, having been born when Google was founded, probably take it for granted that you can always look something up online.

But knowledge matters. Cumulatively, it provides the scaffolding for your further inquiry. In the most extreme example, if you knew no words in a language, having a dictionary wouldn’t help you in the least, since every definition would simply list more words you didn’t know. Likewise, without an inventory of knowledge, it’s frustratingly difficult for you to accumulate, much less create, more knowledge. As the Italian novelist Elena Ferrante said, "There is no work ... that is not the fruit of tradition."
Tradition derives from the Latin *traditio* — that which is handed down to you for safekeeping. I think part of our innate skepticism of tradition derives from our good democratic impulses: We don’t want someone else telling us what to do; we want to decide for ourselves. In other words, you rightly reject a thoughtless adherence to tradition, just as you rightly reject (I hope) the thoughtlessness that accompanies authoritarianism. However, as the political philosopher Hannah Arendt insisted, education "by its very nature ... cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition." Educational authority is not the same thing as political authoritarianism.

You simply cannot transform tradition (a creative ideal) without first knowing it (a conserving ideal). Making an inventory must precede making an invention. Just imagine how startling it must have been for Shakespeare, the child of a small-town glove maker, the first time he encountered Seneca’s blood-drenched tragedies, or Lucretius’ treatise on the nature of the material world, or Ovid’s exquisite tales of shape-shifting. Shakespeare’s education furnished him with an inventory of words, concepts, names, and plots that he would reinvent throughout his career. Immersion in distant, difficult texts enlarges your mind and your world, providing for a lifetime of further inquiry. Devote the time in college to develop your growing inventory.

You’ve repeatedly heard the buzz phrase "critical thinking" during your orientation; who could be against such an obvious good? Yet we might do better to revive instead the phrase "negative capability," what the poet John Keats called Shakespeare’s disposition to be “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts.” In the Renaissance, the rhetorical tradition encouraged such “play of the mind” through the practice of disputation. Students had to argue from multiple perspectives rather than dogmatically insist upon one biased position.

Once you are familiar with Shakespeare’s training in disputation, you can easily see how it would lead to the verbal give-and-take that constitutes the heart of drama. As Zadie Smith says, "Shakespeare sees always both sides of a thing. ... In his plays he is woman, man, black, white, believer, heretic, Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim. ... He understood what fierce, singular certainty creates — and what it destroys. In response, he made himself ... speak truth principally." Now that’s the kind of critical thinking you should aspire to: speaking truth principally.

All well and good, you say, but my parents are worried about what I’m going to do after I graduate. There, too, Shakespeare can be a model.

When he was born, there wasn’t yet a professional theater in London. In other words, his education had prepared him for a job that didn’t even exist. You should be encouraged to learn that this has been true for every generation: Four of today’s largest companies did not exist when I was born, 43 years ago. One of them, Apple, was co-founded by someone who said that the most important topic he ever studied was not engineering but calligraphy.

In short, the best way for you to prepare for the unforeseen future is to learn how to think intensively and imaginatively. Abraham Flexner, a legendary reformer of American medical education, was adamant about the "usefulness of useless knowledge." According to Flexner, "the really great discoveries" have "been made by men and women who were driven not by the desire to be useful but merely the desire to satisfy their curiosity." To cultivate such curiosity, you should think of yourself as apprenticing to the craft of thought. As the intellectual historian Mary Carruthers puts it: "people do not ‘have’ ideas, they ‘make’ them."

As with rhetoric, imitation, and invention, you might not think very highly of apprenticeship these days. But it was crucial for skilled labor in Renaissance Europe. It required an exacting collaborative environment, with guidance from people who knew more than you did. When Shakespeare arrived on the London theater scene, he entered a kind of artistic studio, or workshop, or laboratory, in which he was apprenticing himself to experienced playwrights. Note that playwright is not spelled w-r-i-t-e-r; it’s spelled w-r-i-g-h-t-a maker — like a wheelwright, who crafts wheels, or a shipwright, who crafts ships. A playwright crafts plays.

After collaborating with other dramatists, Shakespeare soon graduated to crafting his own plays, yet still collaborating with the members of his company, in which he owned a share. That is, he received revenue from every ticket purchased. As Bart Van Es has shown, Shakespeare wrote with specific actors in mind, making the most of the talents of his team, with an eye toward long-term continuity. And profit! At the age of 33, he could already afford to buy the second-biggest house in prosperous Stratford. He soon acquired
another home, purchased more than 100 acres of land, and retired before the age of 50. Who says rhyme doesn’t pay?

Part of what made Shakespeare collaborate so well with others was his radical sense of empathy; he probably would have called it *fellowship*. Researchers *have found evidence* that literary fiction improves a reader’s capacity to understand what others are thinking and feeling. *Shakespeare developed his empathy through his schoolboy exercises of "double translation," when he was impersonating the voices of others, as explored in Lynn Enterline’s work on character making (ethopeia).

A letter I recently received from a former student renewed my appreciation for the indirect ways in which empathy can be developed. Christopher Grubb, who double-majored in chemistry and music at Rhodes College, is now enrolled in Columbia University’s College of Physicians and Surgeons. He recalled the opening quatrain of Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 73*, which he had memorized for my seminar. An aging speaker compares his declining life to a tree shedding its leaves:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold,
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.

It would be hard to think of something more irrelevant to a medical student interviewing a patient than some ambiguous 400-year old poem. Talk about useless knowledge! Or is it? Remarkably, Shakespeare enacts a double empathy here—that is to say, the speaker imagines the addressee imagining the speaker: "That time of year thou mayst in me behold." Reading this poem as an undergraduate, for an elective course, contributed in some small but genuine way to Chris’s capacity for empathy.

As Chris observed, medical schools are introducing liberal-arts approaches into their curricula, but he wonders whether this is "too little, too late. If a person has spent an entire academic life striving for scientific advancement, how can we expect that person to become, suddenly, expert at conversations about end-of-life care or existential pain?"

He’s far from the first to lament the creeping preprofessionalism in our schools—in fact, Shakespeare’s contemporary Francis Bacon complained that among the many "colleges in Europe, I find strange that they are all dedicated to professions, and none left free to arts and sciences at large." Our word "college" derives from the Latin legal term *collegium*. It means a group of people with a common purpose, a body of colleagues, a fellowship, a guild.

Class of 2020: welcome to college, your workshop for thought. You have the "gift of the interval": an enviable chance to undertake a serious, sustained intellectual apprenticeship. You will prove your craft every time you choose to open a book; every time you choose to settle down to write without distraction; every time you choose to listen, to consider, and to contribute to a difficult yet open conversation. Do not cheat yourselves.

While the Latin curriculum has long since vanished, you can still bring precision to your words, invention to your work, and empathy to your world.

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Imagination and Reality

The reality of art is the reality of the imagination.

What do I mean by reality of art?

What do I mean by reality of imagination?

My statement, and the questions it suggests, are worth considering now that the fashionable approach to the arts is once again through the narrow gate of subjective experience. The charge laid on the artist, and in particular on the writer, is not to bring back visions but to play the Court photographer.

Is this anathema to art? Is it anti-art? I think so. What art presents is much more than the daily life of you and me, and the original role of the artist as visionary is the correct one.
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'Real' is an old word, is an odd word. It used to mean a Spanish sixpence; a small silver coin, money of account in the days when the value of a coin was the value of its metal. We are used to notional money but 'real' is an honest currency.

The honest currency of art is the honest currency of the imagination.

The small silver coin of art cannot be spent; that is, it cannot be exchanged or exhausted. What is lost, what is destroyed, what is tarnished, what is misappropriated, is ceaselessly renewed by the mining, shaping, forging imagination that exists beyond the conjectures of the everyday. Imagination's coin, the infinitely flexible metal of the Muse, metal of the moon, in rounded structure offers new universes, primary worlds, that substantially confront the pretences of notional life.

Notional life is the life encouraged by governments, mass education and the mass media. Each of those powerful agencies couples an assumption of its own importance with a disregard for individuality. Freedom of choice is the catch phrase but streamlined homogeneity is the objective. A people who think for themselves are hard to control and what is worse, in a money culture, they may be sceptical of product advertising. Since our economy is now a consumer economy, we must be credulous and passive. We must believe that we want to earn money to buy things we don't need. The education system is not designed to turn out thoughtful individualists, it is there to get us to work. When we come home exhausted from the inanities of our jobs we can relax in front of the inanities of the TV screen. This pattern, punctuated by birth, death and marriage and a new car, is offered to us as real life.

Children who are born into a tired world as batteries of new energy are plugged into the system as soon as possible and gradually drained away. At the time when they become adult and conscious they are already depleted and prepared to accept a world of shadows. Those who have kept their spirit find it hard to nourish it and between the ages of twenty and thirty, many are successfully emptied of all resistance. I do not think it an exaggeration to say that most of the energy of most of the people is being diverted into a system which destroys them. Money is no antidote. If the imaginative life is to be renewed it needs its own coin.

We have to admit that the arts stimulate and satisfy a part of our nature that would otherwise be left untouched and that the emotions art arouses in us are of a different order to those aroused by experience of any other kind.

We think we live in a world of sense-experience and what we can touch and feel, see and hear, is the sum of our reality. Although neither physics nor philosophy accepts this, neither physics nor philosophy has been as successful as religion used to be at persuading us of the doubtfulness of the seeming-solid world. This is a pity if only because while religion was a matter of course, the awareness of other
realities was also a matter of course. To accept God was to accept Otherness, and while this did not make the life of the artist any easier (the life of the artist is never easy), a general agreement that there is more around us than the mundane allows the artist a greater licence and a greater authority than he or she can expect in a society that recognises nothing but itself.

An example of this is the development of the visual arts under Church patronage during the late medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe. This was much more than a patronage of money, it was a warrant to bring back visions. Far from being restricted by Church rhetoric, the artist knew that he and his audience were in tacit agreement; each went in search of the Sublime.

Art is visionary; it sees beyond the view from the window, even though the window is its frame. This is why the arts fare much better alongside religion than alongside either capitalism or communism. The god-instinct and the art-instinct both apprehend more than the physical biological material world. The artist need not believe in God, but the artist does consider reality as multiple and complex. If the audience accepts this premise it is then possible to think about the work itself. As things stand now, too much criticism of the arts concerns itself with attacking any suggestion of art as Other, as a bringer of realities beyond the commonplace. Dimly, we know we need those other realities and we think we can get them by ransacking different cultures and rhapsodising work by foreign writers simply because they are foreign writers. We are still back with art as the mirror of life, only it is a more exotic or less

democratic life than our own. No doubt this has its interests but if we are honest, they are documentary. Art is not documentary. It may incidentally serve that function in its own way but its true effort is to open to us dimensions of the spirit and of the self that normally lie smothered under the weight of living.

It is in Victorian England that the artist first becomes a rather suspect type who does not bring visions but narcotics and whose relationship to different levels of reality is not authoritative but hallucinatory. In Britain, the nineteenth century recovered from the shock of Romanticism by adopting either a manly Hellenism, with an interest in all things virile and Greek, or a manly philistinism, which had done with sweet Jonney Keats and his band and demanded of the poet, if he must be a poet, that he be either declamatory or decorative. Art could be rousing or it could be entertaining. If it hinted at deeper mysteries it was effeminate and absurd. The shift in sensibility from early to late Wordsworth is the shift of the age. For Tennyson, who published his first collection in 1830, the shift was a painful one and the compromises he made to his own work are clear to anyone who flicks through the collected poems and finds a visionary poet trying to hide himself in legend in order to hint at sublimities not allowed to his own time. Like Wordsworth before him, Tennyson fails whenever he collapses into the single obsessive reality of the world about him. As a laureate we know he is lying. As a visionary we read him now and find him true.

And what are we but our fathers' sons and daughters? We are the Victorian legacy. Our materialism, our lack of
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spirituality, our grossness, our mockery of art, our utilitarian attitude to education, even the dull grey suits wrapped around the dull grey lives of our eminent City men, are Victorian hand-me-downs. Many of our ideas of history and society go back no further than Victorian England. We live in a money culture because they did. Control by plutocracy is a nineteenth-century phenomenon that has been sold to us as a blueprint for reality. But what is real about the values of a money culture?

Money culture recognises no currency but its own. Whatever is not money, whatever is not making money, is useless to it. The entire efforts of our government as directed through our society are efforts towards making more and more money. This favours the survival of the dullest. This favours those who prefer to live in a notional reality where goods are worth more than time and where things are more important than ideas.

For the artist, any artist, poet, painter, musician, time in plenty and an abundance of ideas are the necessary basics of creativity. By dreaming and idleness and then by intense self-discipline does the artist live. The artist cannot perform between 9 and 6, five days a week, or if she sometimes does, she cannot guarantee to do so. Money culture hates that. It must know what it is getting, when it is getting it, and how much it will cost. The most tyrannical of patrons never demanded from their protégées what the market now demands of artists; if you can't sell your work regularly and quickly, you can either starve or do something else. The time that art needs, which may not be a long time, but which

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has to be its own time, is anathema to a money culture. Money confuses time with itself. That is part of its unreality.

Against this golden calf in the wilderness where all come to buy and sell, the honest currency of art offers quite a different rate of exchange. The artist does not turn time into money, the artist turns time into energy, time into intensity, time into vision. The exchange that art offers is an exchange in kind; energy for energy, intensity for intensity, vision for vision. This is seductive and threatening. Can we make the return? Do we want to? Our increasingly passive diversions do not equip us, mentally, emotionally, for the demands that art makes. We know we are dissatisfied, but the satisfactions that we seek come at a price beyond the resources of a money culture. Can we afford to live imaginatively, contemplatively? Why have we submitted to a society that tries to make imagination a privilege when to each of us it comes as a birthright?

It is not a question of the money in your pocket. Money can buy you the painting or the book or the opera seat but it cannot expose you to the vast energies you will find there. Often it will shield you from them, just as a rich man can buy himself a woman but not her love. Love is reciprocity and so is art. Either you abandon yourself to another world that you say you seek or you find ways to resist it. Most of us are art-resisters because art is a challenge to the notional life. In a money culture, art, by its nature, objects. It fields its own realities, lives by its own currency, aloof to riches and want. Art is dangerous.
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FOR SALE: MY LIFE. HIGHEST BIDDER COLLECTS.

The honest currency of art is the honest currency of the imagination.

In Middle English, 'real' was a variant of 'royal'.

Can we set aside images of our own dishonoured monarchy and think instead about the ancientness and complexity of the word 'royal'?

To be royal was to be distinguished in the proper sense; to be singled out, by one's fellows and by God or the gods. In both the Greek and the Hebraic traditions, the one who is royal is the one who has special access to the invisible world. Ulysses can talk to Hera, King David can talk to God. Royalty on earth is expected to take its duties on earth seriously but the King should also be a bridge between the terrestrial and the supernatural.

Perhaps it seems strange to us that in the ancient world the King was more accessible to his people than were the priests. Although King and priest worked together, priesthood, still allied to magic, even by the Hebrews, was fully mysterious. The set-apartness of the priest is one surrounded by ritual and taboo. The priest did not fight in battle, take concubines, hoard treasure, feast and riot, sin out of humanness, or if he did, there were severe penalties. The morality of the priesthood was not the morality of Kingship and whether you read The Odyssey or The Bible, the difference is striking.

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The King is not better behaved than his subjects, essentially he was (or should have been) the nobler man.

In Britain, royalty was not allied to morality until the reign of Queen Victoria. Historically, the role of the King or Queen had been to lead and inspire, this is an imaginative role, and it was most perfectly fulfilled by Elizabeth the First, Gloriana, the approachable face of Godhead. Gloriana is the Queen whose otherness is for the sake of her people, and it is important to remember that the disciplines she laid upon her own life, in particular her chastity, were not for the sake of example but for the sake of expediency. The Divine Right of Kings was not a good conduct award it was a mark of favour. God's regent upon earth was expected to behave like God and anyone who studies Greek or Hebrew literature will find that God does not behave like a Christian schoolmistress. God is glorious, terrifying, inscrutable, often capricious to human eyes, extravagant, victorious, legislative but not law-abiding, and, the supreme imagination. 'In the beginning was the Word.'

At its simplest and at its best, royalty is an imaginative function; it must embody in its own person, subtle and difficult concepts of Otherness. The priest does not embody these concepts, the priest serves them. The priest is a functionary, the King is a function.

Shakespeare is preoccupied with Kingship as a metaphor for the imaginative life. Leontes and Lear, Macbeth and Richard II, are studies in the failure of the imagination. In The Winter's Tale, the redemption of Leontes is made possible
through a new capacity in him; the capacity to see outside of his own dead vision into a chance as vibrant as it is unlikely. When Paulina says to him, 'It is required you do awake your faith' she does not mean religious faith. If the statue of Hermione is to come to life, Leontes must believe it can come to life. This is not common sense. It is imagination.

In the earliest Hebrew creation stories Yahweh makes himself a clay model of a man and breathes on it to give it life. It is this supreme confidence, this translation of forms, the capacity to recognise in one thing the potential of another, and the willingness to let that potential realise itself, that is the stamp of creativity and the birthright that Yahweh gives to humans. Leontes' failure to acknowledge any reality other than his own is a repudiation of that birthright, a neglect of humanness that outworks itself into the fixed immobility of his queen. When Hermione steps down and embraces Leontes it is an imaginative reconciliation.

I hope it is clear that as I talk about King and priest I am dealing in abstractions and not actualities. I do not wish to upset republicans anywhere. What I do want to do is to move the pieces across the chessboard to see if that gives us a different view.

By unravelling the word 'real' I hope to show that it contains in itself, and without any wishful thinking on my part, those densities of imaginative experience that belong to us all and that are best communicated through art. I see no conflict between reality and imagination. They are not in fact separate. Our real lives hold within them our royal lives; the inspiration to be more than we are, to find new solutions, to live beyond the moment. Art helps us to do this because it fuses together temporal and perpetual realities.

To see outside of a dead vision is not an optical illusion.

The realist (from the Latin *re* = thing) who thinks he deals in things and not images and who is suspicious of the abstract and of art, is not the practical man but a man caught in a fantasy of his own unmaking.

The realist unmakes the coherent multiple world into a collection of random objects. He thinks of reality as that which has an objective existence, but understands no more about objective existence than that which he can touch and feel, sell and buy. A lover of objects and of objectivity, he is in fact caught in a world of symbols and symbolism, where he is unable to see the thing in itself, as it really is, he sees it only in relation to his own story of the world.

The habit of human beings is to see things subjectively or not to see them at all. The more familiar a thing becomes the less it is seen. In the home, nobody looks at the furniture, they sit on it, eat off it, sleep on it and forget it until they buy something new. When we do look at other people's things, we are usually thinking about their cachet, their value, what they say about their owner. Our minds work to continually label and absorb what we see and to fit it neatly into our own pattern. That done, we turn away. This is a sound survival skill but it makes it very difficult to let anything have an existence independent of ourselves, whether furniture or
people. It makes it easier to buy symbols, things that have a particular value to us, than it does to buy objects.

My mother, who was poor, never bought objects, she bought symbols. She used to save up to buy something hideous to put in the best parlour. What she bought was factory made and beyond her purse. If she had ever been able to see it in its own right, she could never have spent money on it. She couldn’t see it, and nor could any of the neighbours dragged in to admire it. They admired the effort it had taken to save for it. They admired how much it cost. Above all, they admired my mother; the purchase was a success.

I know that when my mother sat in her kitchen that had only a few pieces of handmade furniture, she felt depressed and conscious of her lowly social status. When she sat in her dreadful parlour with a china cup and a bought biscuit, she felt like a lady. The parlour, full of objects unseen but hard won, was a fantasy chamber, a reflecting mirror. Like Mrs Joe, in Great Expectations, she finally took her apron off.

Money culture depends on symbolic reality. It depends on a confusion between the object and what the object represents. To keep you and me buying and upgrading an overstock of meaningless things depends on those things having an acquisitional value. It is the act of buying that is important. In our society, people who cannot buy things are the underclass.

Symbolic man surrounds himself with objects as tyrants surround themselves with subjects: “These will obey me. Through them I am worshipped. Through them I exercise control.” These fraudulent kingdoms, hard-headed and practical, are really the soft-centre of fantasy. They are wishfulfillment nightmares where more is piled on more to manufacture the illusion of abundance. They are lands of emptiness and want. Things do not satisfy. In part they fail to satisfy because their symbolic value changes so regularly and what brought whistles of admiration one year is next year’s car boot sale bargain. In part they fail to satisfy because much of what we buy is gadgetry and fashion, which makes objects temporary and the need to be able to purchase them, permanent. In part they fail to satisfy because we do not actually want the things we buy. They are illusion, narcotic, hallucination.

To suggest that the writer, the painter, the musician, is the one out of touch with the real world is a doubtful proposition. It is the artist who must apprehend things fully, in their own right, communicating them not as symbols but as living realities with the power to move.

To see outside of a dead vision is not an optical illusion.

According to the science of optics, if an image consists of points through which light actually passes, it is called real. Otherwise it is called virtual.

The work of the artist is to see into the life of things; to discriminate between superficialities and realities; to know what is genuine and what is a make-believe. The artist through the disciplines of her work, is one of the few people
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who does see things as they really are, stripped of associative value. I do not mean that artists of whatever sort have perfect taste or perfect private lives, I mean that when the imaginative capacity is highly developed, it is made up of invention and discernment. Invention is the shaping spirit that re-forms fragments into new wholes, so that even what has been familiar can be seen fresh. Discernment is to know how to test the true and the false and to reveal objects, emotions, ideas in their own coherence. The artist is a translator; one who has learned how to pass into her own language the languages gathered from stones, from birds, from dreams, from the body, from the material world, from the invisible world, from sex, from death, from love. A different language is a different reality; what is the language, the world, of stones? What is the language, the world, of birds? Of atoms? Of microbes? Of colours? Of air? The material world is closed to those who think of it only as a commodity market.

How do you know but every bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight closed by your senses five?

William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (c.1790)

To those people every object is inanimate. In fact they are the ones who remain unmoved, fixed rigidly within their own reality.

The artist is moved.

IMAGINATION AND REALITY

The artist is moved through multiple realities. The artist is moved by empty space and points of light. The artist tests the image. Does light pass through it? Is it illuminated? Is it sharp, clear, its own edges, its own form?

The artist is looking for real presences. I suppose what the scientist Rupert Sheldrake would call ‘morphic resonance’; the inner life of the thing that cannot be explained away biologically, chemically, physically. In the Catholic Church ‘real presence’ is the bread and wine that through transubstantiation becomes the living eucharist; the body and blood of Christ. In the Protestant Church the bread and wine are symbols only, one of the few places where we recognise that we are asking one thing to substitute for another. For the average person, this substitution is happening all the time.

The real presence, the image transformed by light, is not rare but it is easily lost or mistaken under clouds of subjectivity. People who claim to like pictures and books will often only respond to those pictures and books in which they can clearly find themselves. This is ego masquerading as taste. To recognise the worth of a thing is more than recognising its worth to you. Our responses to art are conditioned by our insistence that it present to us realities we can readily accept, however virtual those realities might be. Nevertheless art has a stubborn way of cutting through the subjective world of symbols and money and offering itself as a steady alternative to the quick change act of daily life.

We are naturally suspicious of faculties that we do not ourselves possess and we do not quite believe that the poet can read the sermons in stones or the painter know the purple that bees love. Still we are drawn to books and
picturites and music, finding in ourselves an echo of their song, finding in ourselves an echo of their sensibility, an answering voice through the racket of the day.

Art is for us a reality beyond now. An imaginative reality that we need. The reality of art is the reality of the imagination.

The reality of art is not the reality of experience.

The charge laid on the artist is to bring back visions.

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, we find that the Moor wins Desdemona's heart by first winning her imagination. He tells her tales of cannibals and of the Anthropophagi whose heads grow beneath their shoulders. What he calls his 'round unvarnished tale' is a subtle mixture of art and artfulness. When a Shakespearean hero apologises for his lack of wit we should be on our guard. Shakespeare always gives his heroes the best lines, even when the hero is Richard II.

*Othello*'s untutored language is in fact powerful and wrought. He is more than a master of arts, he is a master of art. It is his words that win Desdemona. She says 'I saw *Othello*'s visage in his mind.' His face, like his deeds, belongs to the world of sense-experience, but it is his wit that makes both dear to her. For Desdemona, the reality of *Othello* is his imaginative reality.

*Othello*

  she thank'd me,  
  And bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd
  
  her,

  I should but teach him how to tell my story,  
  And that would woo her.

The clue here is not the story but the telling of it. It is not *Othello* the action man who has taught Desdemona to love him, it is *Othello* the poet.

We know that Shakespeare never bothered to think of a plot. As a good dramatist and one who earned his whole living by his work, he had to take care to make his historical ransackings stage-satisfactory. The engineering of the plays gives pleasure even to those who are not interested in the words. But the words are the thing. The words are what interested Shakespeare and what should closely interest us. Shakespeare is a dramatic poet. He is not a chronicler of experience.

I have to say something so obvious because of the multitude of so-called realists, many making money out of print, who want art to be as small as they are. For them, art is a copying machine busily copying themselves. They like the documentary version, the 'life as it is lived'. To support their opinions they will either point to Dickens or Shakespeare. I have never understood why anyone calls Dickens a realist, but I have dealt with that myth elsewhere in these essays. As for Shakespeare, they will happily disregard the pervading spirit behind the later plays, and quote *Hamlet* Act III, Scene II 'the purpose of playing . . . is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature.'

But what is nature?
ECSTASY AND ENERGY

From the Latin Natura, it is my birth, my characteristics, my condition.
It is my nativity, my astrology, my biology, my physiognomy,
my geography, my cartography, my spirituality, my sexuality,
my mentality, my corporeal, intellectual, emotional, imaginative self. And not just my self, every self and the Self
of the world. There is no mirror I know that can show me all
of these singularities, unless it is the strange distorting
looking-glass of art where I will not find my reflection nor
my representation but a nearer truth than I prefer. Natura is
the whole that I am. The multiple reality of my existence.

The reality of the imagination leaves out nothing. It is the
most complete reality that we can know. Imagination takes
in the world of sense experience, and rather than trading it
for a world of symbols, delights in it for what it is. The artist
is physical and it is in the work of true artists in any medium,
that we find the most moving and the most poignant studies
of the world that we can touch and feel. It is the writer, the
painter, and not the realist, who is intimate with the material
world, who knows its smells and tastes because they are fresh
in her nostrils, full in her mouth. What her hand touches,
she feels. R. A. Collingwood said that Cézanne painted like
a blind man (critics at the time agreed though for different
reasons). He meant that the two-dimensional flimsy world
of what is overlooked by most of us, suddenly reared out of
the canvas, massy and tough. Cézanne seems to have hands
in his eyes and eyes in his hands. When Cézanne paints a tree
or an apple, he does not paint a copy of a tree or an apple, he

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paints its nature. He paints the whole that it is, the whole that
is lost to us as we pass it, eat it, chop it down. It is through the
painter, writer, composer, who lives more intensely than the
rest of us, that we can rediscover the intensity of the physical
world.

And not only the physical world. There is no limit to
new territory. The gate is open. Whether or not we go
through is up to us, but to stand mockingly on the threshold,
claiming that nothing lies beyond, is something of a flat earth
theory.

The earth is not flat and neither is reality. Reality is
continuous, multiple, simultaneous, complex, abundant and
partly invisible. The imagination alone can fathom this and it
reveals its fathomings through art.

The reality of art is the reality of the imagination.
Thomas Jefferson's Letter to Roger Chew Weightman

Context provided by *The Washington Post*: Roger Chew Weightman, the mayor of Washington, had big plans for a Fourth of July celebration. He sent invitations to the three surviving signers of the Declaration — Jefferson; John Adams, who was 90; and Charles Carroll of Maryland, 88 — along with former presidents James Madison and James Monroe. Monroe and Carroll both declined for health reasons. Adams sent a short note of thanks, also pleading poor health. Madison wrote a lengthy and polite letter citing his age (he was 75), but saluted the occasion with a nice line: “Ever honored will be the day which gave birth to a nation, and to a System of self-government, making it a new Epoch in the History of Man.” And then there was Jefferson. He was, apparently, the last to respond. He had been riding horses and getting around just the year before, but his bouts of illness — not to mention all the other problems — were finally overwhelming him. Now, with this latest invitation, Jefferson paused. There was no way he could attend, of course. But this was a moment. And as old, sick, distraught and broke as he was, Jefferson couldn’t let it pass. Amid all these burdens, Jefferson was aware of the approaching anniversary. Nostalgia was in the air. The era of the Founders was almost over, and the United States had been mired in a period of partisan disunity. Reverence for the Revolution was one thing everyone could agree on.

Monticello June 24. 1826

Respected Sir

The kind invitation I receive from you on the part of the citizens of the city of Washington, to be present with them at their celebration of the 50th. anniversary of American independance; as one of the surviving signers of an instrument pregnant with our own, and the fate of the world, is most flattering to myself, and heightened by the honorable accompaniment proposed for the comfort of such a journey. it adds sensibly to the sufferings of sickness, to be deprived by it of a personal participation in the rejoicings of that day. but acquiescence is a duty, under circumstances not placed among those we are permitted to control. I should, indeed, with peculiar delight, have met and exchanged there congratulations personally with the small band, the remnant of that host of worthies, who joined with us on that day, in the bold and doubtful election we were to make for our country, between submission or the sword; and to have enjoyed with them the consolatory fact, that our fellow citizens, after half a century of experience and prosperity, continue to approve the choice we made. may it be to the world, what I believe it will be, (to some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all,) the Signal of arousing men to burst the chains, under which monkish ignorance and superstition had persuaded them to bind themselves, and to assume the blessings & security of self-government. that form which we have substituted, restores the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion. all eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. the general spread of the light of science has already laid open to every view. the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready
to ride them legitimately, by the grace of god. these are grounds of hope for others. for ourselves, let the annual return of this day forever refresh our recollections of these rights, and an undiminished devotion to them.

I will ask permission here to express the pleasure with which I should have met my ancient neighbors of the City of Washington and of it's vicinities, with whom I passed so many years of a pleasing social intercourse; an intercourse which so much relieved the anxieties of the public cares, and left impressions so deeply engraved in my affections, as never to be forgotten. with my regret that ill health forbids me the gratification of an acceptance, be pleased to receive for yourself, and those for whom you write, the assurance of my highest respect and friendly attachments.

Th. Jefferson
A Nose for Words

The day John Lennon was shot, just across the park from where I attended high school, was also the day my P.S.A.T. scores came in. The news wasn't good. The problem was my vocabulary; I didn't know enough words. And so, while the rest of the world was laying flowers at the Dakota, I found myself at the Stanley H. Kaplan Educational Center, where, for 10 Sundays, I was enrolled in reform school.

Most writers will tell you that as children, while their friends were busy chopping off toads' legs, they were seated under a tree reading Austen and Melville. I, however, was one of the leg choppers. I spent all my free time playing basketball, and even though I dutifully lugged my Barron's test prep book to summer camp before my junior year, I did so talismanically. I seemed to think that as long as the book made the trip, my vocabulary would improve.

Now, as an adult, I share my friends' suspicions of standardized tests. They're misguided and culturally biased and get in the way of real learning. But my own dirty little secret is that I fell in love with language because of the SAT. The person most responsible for my becoming a writer was Stanley H. Kaplan.

And my father in tandem with him. Born in Belarus, my father loved language the way only an immigrant could, a boy whose own father lived on the Lower East Side for 50 years and never learned English. My father used to help my brothers and me pass the time on airplane trips by giving us word jumbles. And when I began to study for the SAT, he would come home from Columbia Law School, where he was a professor, with a list of vocabulary words he had run across that day. Some of these words were long and hard to pronounce, and others were short and easy to pronounce, but they had one thing in common: They had never appeared in the history of the SAT, I was fully convinced, and they would never appear in the history of the SAT and what in the world kind of books was my father reading that he came across these words? "Quondam," for instance, which meant "erstwhile," which meant "former," and which, in the 30 years since I took the SAT, I have never run across again.

But it didn't matter. I loved "quondam" — I loved the sound of the word, the way it reminded me of "quantum," the simple slant rhyme of it. I loved "contumely," and how wonderful and unexpected that it was a noun. I loved
“perspicacious” and “recondite” and “hortatory” and “cleave,” the last of which meant the opposite of itself, both to join and to tear apart. “Impregnable” was an autoantonym, too. It was like a snake that ate its own tail.

I loved the sound of these words, loved the sight of them, the feel of them, the smell of them, the taste of them. Without having yet read her, I was absorbing Flannery O’Connor, who said: “The beginning of human knowledge is through the senses, and the fiction writer begins where human perception begins.” I was channeling Vladimir Nabokov, who, as a synesthetic, could “hear” color. Apparently, Victor Hugo could, too. All writers try to cultivate their own synesthesia, and when, many years later, the word “hortatory” appeared in one of my novels, I saw so vividly the color of my Kaplan instructor’s vest, it was as if the word “hortatory” were itself green. And now, as I type the word “quondam” into my computer, it’s the smell of Mennen — my father’s deodorant — that comes to me.

In the dining room of my parents’ apartment, so many books lined the shelves one could have been forgiven for thinking it wasn’t a dining room but simply a library with some food in the middle. The two-volume O.E.D., with its accompanying magnifying glass, was shelved within arm’s reach of where I sat. But it was a heavy thing, and when I was 16 I didn’t believe in looking things up. I believed in shortcuts: I wanted my father to give me the answer.

“Look it up,” he said.

But I resisted.

One night, he asked me to define the word “adhere.” I knew “adhere.” “Adhere,” I thought, was easy. But when I tried to define it, all I could say was, “You know, adhere.”

My father said, “You don’t know a word if you can’t define it,” and he took me down the hall to the bathroom, where he opened the medicine chest and removed a package of Band-Aids. The word “adhesive” was printed across the front. “They stick to you,” he said.

And the meanings of the words stuck to me, in turn. They adhered to me on Sunday mornings as I took the subway to my SAT class, as I walked across 57th Street, all those Kaplan manuals weighing me down.
One day, Stanley Kaplan himself visited our class. I recall him as a kind of impresario, a Jackie Gleason-type figure who warmed the class up with a few jokes. And then he was gone, leaving me to my vocabulary words, which I kept on flash cards and which I would hum as I memorized them. It was the words themselves I was humming. It's the same thing I do now when I write, a drone so reflexive I don't even realize I'm doing it until my wife, who shares an office with me, says, “You're humming again,” and I try to quiet down.

I did better on the SAT than on the P.S.A.T. More important, I became a reader. And, eventually, I started to write. After college, I moved out to the Bay Area, where, to sustain my writing habit, I became a Kaplan instructor myself.

Now, instead of Kaplan manuals, I keep J. I. Rodale's book “The Synonym Finder” at my side. More than one million synonyms, the jacket copy boasts. Enough words to smell and taste to last a lifetime.

Stanley Kaplan died in 2009, a year before my father. Kaplan, too, was the son of a Jewish immigrant from Belarus, and he attended City College, where my father was offered a scholarship. I suspect the similarities ended there. But to this day, I still hear Kaplan's voice when I encounter a new word, just as I hear my father's — my father, who, on the night before my SAT, said, “Isn't it interesting that 'impertinent' isn't the opposite of 'pertinent'?” My father, who, long before John Lennon died, said apropos of “A Hard Day's Night,” “Don't you think those young men could have come up with a better rhyme for 'dog' than 'log'?” My father probably cared more than he should have how I did on the SAT, but he cared for the right reasons — because he loved learning, because he loved words — my father, whom I remember best for coming home every evening with his vocabulary lists, and who, in cahoots with Stanley Kaplan, unknowingly but persistently set me on my path.

Joshua Henkin is the author, most recently, of the novel “The World Without You.”
2. Develop an essay in which you refute Thomas's argument that separatism, individuality, and selfishness are not viable human conditions.

3. Transport yourself to the twenty-second century, and discuss the effect of the future scientific discovery that reveals the presence of DNA strands or chromosomal codes for "usefulness" and "helpfulness" projected by Thomas in paragraph 8.

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**Notes on Punctuation**

There are no precise rules about punctuation (Fowler lays out some general advice as best he can under the complex circumstances of English prose (he points out, for example, that we possess only four stops (the comma, the semicolon, the colon and the period (the question mark and exclamation point are not, strictly speaking, stops; they are indicators of tone (oddly enough, the Greeks employed the semicolon for their question mark (it produces a strange sensation to read a Greek sentence which is a straightforward question: Why weighest thou? (instead of Why weakest thou?) (and, of course, there are parentheses (which are surely a kind of punctuation making this whole matter much more complicated by having to count up the left-handed parentheses in order to be sure of closing with the right number (but if the parentheses were left out, with nothing to work with but the stops, we would have considerably more flexibility in the deploying of layers of meaning than if we tried to separate all the clauses by physical barriers (and in the latter case, while we might have more precision and exactitude for our meaning, we would lose the essential flavor of language, which is its wonderful ambiguity )))))

The commas are the most useful and usable of all the stops. It is highly important to put them in place as you go along. If you try to come back after doing a paragraph and stick them in the various spots that tempt you you will discover that they tend to swarm like minnows into all sorts of crevices whose existence you hadn't realized and before you know it the whole long sentence becomes immobilized and lashed up squirming in commas. Better to use them sparingly, and with affection, precisely when the need for each one arises, nicely, by itself.

I have grown fond of semicolons in recent years. The semicolon tells you that there is still some question about the preceding full sentence; something needs to be added; it reminds you sometimes of the Greek usage. It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a period. The period tells you that that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, anyway you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.

Colons are a lot less attractive, for several reasons: firstly, they give you the feeling of being rather ordered around, or at least having your nose pointed in a direction you might not be inclined to take if left to yourself, and, secondly, you suspect you're in for one of those sentences that will be labeling the points to be made: firstly, secondly and so forth, with the implication that you haven't sense enough to keep track of a sequence of notions without having them numbered. Also, many writers use this system loosely and incompletely, starting out with number one and number two as though counting off on their fingers but then going on and on without the succession of labels you've been led to expect, leaving you floundering about searching for the ninethly or seventeenthly that ought to be there but isn't.

Exclamation points are the most irritating of all. Look! they say, look at what I just said! How amazing is my thought! It is like being forced to watch someone else's small child jumping up and down crazily in the center of the living room shouting to attract attention. If a sentence really has something of importance to say, something quite remarkable, it doesn't need a mark to point it out. And if it is really, after all, a banal sentence needing more zing, the exclamation point simply emphasizes its banality.

Quotation marks should be used honestly and sparingly, when there is a genuine quotation at hand, and it is necessary to be very rigorous about the words enclosed by the marks. If something is to be quoted, the exact words must be used. If part of it must be left out because of space limitations, it is good manners to insert three dots to indicate the omission, but it is unethical to do this if it means connecting two thoughts which the original author did not intend to have tied together. Above all, quotation marks should not be used for ideas that you'd like to disown, things in the air so to speak. Nor should they be put in place around clichés; if you want to use a cliché you must take full responsibility for it yourself and not try to fob it off on an or on society. The most objectionable misuse of quotation marks, but one which illustrates the dangers of misuse in ordinary prose, is seen in advertising, especially in advertisements for small restaurants, for example "just around the corner," or "a good place to eat." No single, identifiable, citable person ever really said, for the record, "just around the corner," much less "a good place to eat," least likely of all for restaurants of the type that use this type of prose.
The dash is a handy device, informal and essentially playful, telling you that you're about to take off on a different tack but still in some way connected with the present course—only you have to remember that the dash is there, and either put a second dash at the end of the notion to let the reader know that he's back on course, or else end the sentence, as here, with a period.

The greatest danger in punctuation is for poetry. Here it is necessary to be as economical and parsimonious with commas and periods as with the words themselves, and any marks that seem to carry their own subtle meanings, like dashes and little rows of periods, even semicolons and question marks, should be left out altogether rather than inserted to clog up the thing with ambiguity. A single exclamation point in a poem, no matter what else the poem has to say, is enough to destroy the whole work.

The things I like best in T. S. Eliot's poetry, especially in the Four Quartets, are the semicolons. You cannot hear them, but they are there, laying out the connections between the images and the ideas. Sometimes you get a glimpse of a semicolon coming, a few lines farther on, and it is like climbing a steep path through woods and seeing a wooden bench just at a bend in the road ahead, a place where you can expect to sit for a moment, catching your breath.

Commas can't do this sort of thing; they can only tell you how the different parts of a complicated thought are to be fitted together, but you can't sit, not even take a breath, just because of a comma.

3. In paragraph 2, Thomas states that without proper usage, commas "tend to swarm like minnows into all sorts of crevices." Where else does Thomas endow punctuation marks with animate qualities? What is there about prose writing that lends itself to depicting punctuation marks in this way?

Strategy and Structure

1. Study the first paragraph. Does Thomas's use of parentheses make sense? Are they used appropriately “in the deploying of layers of meaning”?
2. Thomas is using the same humorous approach in paragraphs 1 and 7. What is this strategy? What makes it funny?
3. While Thomas is being clever in his use of examples to illustrate his major points on punctuation, the essay's basic organization is quite conventional. How does Thomas create a coherent essay? What does each paragraph fit into the scheme? How do the topic sentences help give coherence to the paragraphs?

Thinking and Writing

1. Rewrite paragraph 1 without using any parentheses. Compare both versions. How do they differ in meaning and effect? Does the version without parentheses have the "wonderful ambiguity" Thomas suggests? Similarly, add commas in the long sentence in paragraph 2 that is devoid of them, and compare both versions.
2. Select one of Thomas's other essays in this book, and analyze his use of punctuation in several of its paragraphs. Does this essay reflect Thomas's advice on punctuation? Write an essay demonstrating that Thomas's use of punctuation conforms, or does not conform, to his personal views on it.
3. Argue for or against the proposition that English teachers are too strict and conventional in the way they teach punctuation. Use examples, illustrations, and personal experience.

Purpose and Meaning

1. How is Thomas's approach to the subject of punctuation different from the standard textbook method? What level of competence does he assume on the part of the reader for him or her to appreciate the tone and content of the essay?
2. Is Thomas's purpose to instruct, entertain, show off, or a combination of these? How does his approach demonstrate that he is an expert in the subject matter?
3. What does punctuation mean to Thomas? What does he value in punctuation?

Language and Style

1. What is the first indication that Thomas is approaching the subject in a humorous way? When did you first realize that nature of his approach?
2. Does Thomas give us a clue to his attitude about punctuation in the tone of the essay? Does his style imply that proper punctuation is something immutable? something subject to change? something to be feared? to be respected? to be experimented with?

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Becoming a Doctor

Doctors, dressed up in one professional costume or another, have been in busy practice since the earliest records of every culture on earth. It is hard to think of a more dependable or enduring occupation, harder still to imagine any future events leading to its extinction. Other trades—goldsmithing, embalming, cathedral architecture, hexing, even
William Lyon Phelps
“The Pleasure of Books”

William Lyon Phelps (1865-1943) was an American educator, literary critic and author. He served as a professor of English at Yale University from 1901 to 1933. His works include *Advance of the English Novel* and *Essays on Modern Dramatists*. On April 6, 1933, he delivered this speech during a radio broadcast. His reverence for books was not shared by everyone, especially those in Nazi Germany. On May 10, 1933, the Nazis had staged an event unseen since the Middle Ages as young German students from universities, formerly regarded as among the finest in the world, had gathered in Berlin and other German cities to burn books with “un-German” ideas.

The habit of reading is one of the greatest resources of mankind; and we enjoy reading books that belong to us much more than if they are borrowed. A borrowed book is like a guest in the house; it must be treated with punctiliousness, with a certain considerate formality. You must see that it sustains no damage; it must not suffer while under your roof. You cannot leave it carelessly, you cannot mark it, you cannot turn down the pages, you cannot use it familiarly. And then, some day, although this is seldom done, you really ought to return it.

But your own books belong to you; you treat them with that affectionate intimacy that annihilates formality. Books are for use, not for show; you should own no book that you are afraid to mark up, or afraid to place on the table, wide open and face down. A good reason for marking favorite passages in books is that this practice enables you to remember more easily the significant sayings, to refer to them quickly, and then in later years, it is like visiting a forest where you once blazed a trail. You have the pleasure of going over the old ground, and recalling both the intellectual scenery and your own earlier self.

Everyone should begin collecting a private library in youth; the instinct of private property, which is fundamental in human beings, can here be cultivated with every advantage and no evils. One should have one's own bookshelves, which should not have doors, glass windows, or keys; they should be free and accessible to the hand as well as to the eye. The best of mural decorations is books; they are more varied in color and appearance than any wallpaper, they are more attractive in design, and they have the prime advantage of being separate personalities, so that if you sit alone in the room in the firelight, you are surrounded with intimate friends. The knowledge that they are there in plain view is both stimulating and refreshing. You do not have to read them all. Most of my indoor life is spent in a room containing six thousand books; and I have a stock answer to the invariable question that comes from strangers. "Have you read all of these books?"

"Some of them twice." This reply is both true and unexpected.
There are of course no friends like living, breathing, corporeal men and women; my devotion to reading has never made me a recluse. How could it? Books are of the people, by the people, for the people. Literature is the immortal part of history; it is the best and most enduring part of personality. But book-friends have this advantage over living friends; you can enjoy the most truly aristocratic society in the world whenever you want it. The great dead are beyond our physical reach, and the great living are usually almost as inaccessible; as for our personal friends and acquaintances, we cannot always see them. Perchance they are asleep, or away on a journey. But in a private library, you can at any moment converse with Socrates or Shakespeare or Carlyle or Dumas or Dickens or Shaw or Barrie or Galsworthy. And there is no doubt that in these books you see these men at their best. They wrote for you. They "laid themselves out;" they did their ultimate best to entertain you, to make a favorable impression. You are necessary to them as an audience is to an actor; only instead of seeing them masked, you look into their innermost heart of heart.

William Lyon Phelps - 1933
Privileged

BY KYLE FORVER
APR 9 2019

When the police break your teammate’s leg, you’d think it would wake you up a little.

When they arrest him on a New York street, throw him in jail for the night, and leave him with a season-ending injury, you’d think it would sink in. You’d think you’d know there was more to the story.

You’d think.

But nope.
late after a game in Atlanta. When I woke up the next morning, our team group text was going nuts. Details were still hazy, but guys were saying, Thabo hurt his leg? During an arrest? Wait – he spent the night in jail?! Everyone was pretty upset and confused.

Well, almost everyone. My response was..... different. I’m embarrassed to admit it.

Which is why I want to share it today.

Before I tell the rest of this story, let me just say real quick – Thabo wasn’t some random teammate of mine, or some guy in the league who I knew a little bit. We’d become legitimate friends that year in our downtime. He was my go-to teammate to talk with about stuff beyond the basketball world. Politics, religion, culture, you name it – Thabo brought a perspective that wasn’t typical of an NBA player. And it’s easy to see why: Before we were teammates in Atlanta, the guy had played professional ball in France, Turkey and Italy. He spoke three languages! Thabo’s mother was from Switzerland, and his father was from South Africa. They lived together in South Africa before Thabo was born, then left because of apartheid.

It didn’t take long for me to figure out that Thabo was one of the most interesting people I’d ever been around. We respected each other. We were cool, you know? We had each other’s backs.

Anyway – on the morning I found out that Thabo had been arrested, want to know what my first thought was? About my friend and teammate? My first thought was: What was Thabo doing out at a club on a back-to-back??

Yeah. Not, How’s he doing? Not, What happened during the arrest?? Not, Something seems off with this story. Nothing like that. Before I knew the full story, and before I’d even had the chance to talk to Thabo..... I sort of blamed Thabo.
Cringe.

It’s not like it was a conscious thought. It was pure reflex – the first thing to pop into my head.

And I was worried about him, *no doubt*.

But still. Cringe.

A few months later, a jury found Thabo not guilty on all charges. He settled with the city over the NYPD’s use of force against him. And then the story just sort of..... disappeared. It fell away from the news. Thabo had surgery and went through rehab. Pretty soon, another NBA season began -- and we were back on the court again.

Life went on.

But I still couldn’t shake my discomfort.

I mean, I hadn’t been involved in the incident. I hadn’t even *been there*. So why did I feel like I’d let my friend down?

Why did I feel like I’d let myself down?

A few weeks ago, something happened at a Jazz home game that brought back many of those old questions.
happened, and if you were following on TV or on Twitter, maybe you had a similar initial viewing of it. Then, after the game, one of our reporters asked me for my response to what had gone down between Russ and the fan. I told him I hadn't seen it – and added something like, *But you know Russ. He gets into it with the crowd a lot.*

Of course, the full story came out later that night. What actually happened was that a fan had said some really ugly things at close range to Russ. Russ had then responded. After the game, he'd said he felt the comments were racially charged.

The incident struck a nerve with our team.

In a closed-door meeting with the president of the Jazz the next day, my teammates shared stories of similar experiences they'd had – of feeling degraded in ways that went beyond acceptable heckling. One teammate talked about how his mom had called him right after the game, concerned for his safety in SLC. One teammate said the night felt like being “in a zoo.” One of the guys in the meeting was Thabo – he's my teammate in Utah now. I looked over at him, and remembered his night in NYC.

Everyone was upset. I was upset – and embarrassed, too. But there was another emotion in the room that day, one that was harder to put a finger on. It was almost like..... disappointment, mixed with exhaustion. Guys were just *sick and tired* of it all.

This wasn’t the first time they’d taken part in conversations about race in their NBA careers, and it wasn’t the first time they’d had to address the hateful actions of others. And one big thing that got brought up a lot in the meeting was how incidents like this – they weren’t only about the people directly involved. This wasn’t only about Russ and some heckler. It was about more than that.

It was about what it means just to *exist* right now – as a person of color in a mostly white space.
Before the meeting ended, I joined the team’s demand for a swift response and a promise from the Jazz organization that it would address the concerns we had. I think my teammates and I all felt it was a step in the right direction.

But I don’t think anyone felt satisfied.

There’s an elephant in the room that I’ve been thinking about a lot over these last few weeks. It’s the fact that, demographically, if we’re being honest: I have more in common with the fans in the crowd at your average NBA game than I have with the players on the court.

And after the events in Salt Lake City last month, and as we’ve been discussing them since, I’ve really started to recognize the role those demographics play in my privilege. It’s like – I may be Thabo’s friend, or Ekpe’s teammate, or Russ’s colleague; I may work with those guys. And I absolutely 100% stand with them.

But I look like the other guy.

And whether I like it or not? I’m beginning to understand how that means something.

What I’m realizing is, no matter how passionately I commit to being an ally, and no matter how unwavering my support is for NBA and WNBA players of color..... I’m still in this conversation from the privileged perspective of opting in to it. Which of course means that on the flip side, I could just as easily opt out of it. Every day, I’m given that choice – I’m granted that privilege – based on the color of my skin.

In other words, I can say every right thing in the world: I can voice my solidarity with Russ after what happened in Utah. I can evolve my position on what happened to Thabo in New
But I can also fade into the crowd, and my face can blend in with the faces of those hecklers, any time I want.

I realize that now. And maybe in years past, just realizing something would’ve felt like progress. But it’s NOT years past – it’s today. And I know I have to do better. So I’m trying to push myself further.

I’m trying to ask myself what I should actually do.

How can I – as a white man, part of this systemic problem – become part of the solution when it comes to racism in my workplace? In my community? In this country?

These are the questions that I’ve been asking myself lately.

And I don’t think I have all the answers yet – but here are the ones that are starting to ring the most true:

I have to continue to educate myself on the history of racism in America.

I have to listen. I’ll say it again, because it’s that important. I have to listen.

I have to support leaders who see racial justice as fundamental – as something that’s at the heart of nearly every major issue in our country today. And I have to support policies that do the same.

I have to do my best to recognize when to get out of the way – in order to amplify the voices of marginalized groups that so often get lost.

But maybe more than anything?
We all have to hold each other accountable.

And we all have to be accountable – period. Not just for our own actions, but also for the ways that our inaction can create a “safe” space for toxic behavior.

And I think the standard that we have to hold ourselves to, in this crucial moment..... it's higher than it's ever been. We have to be active. We have to be actively supporting the causes of those who've been marginalized – precisely because they’ve been marginalized.

Two concepts that I’ve been thinking about a lot lately are guilt and responsibility.

When it comes to racism in America, I think that guilt and responsibility tend to be seen as more or less the same thing. But I'm beginning to understand how there's a real difference.

As white people, are we guilty of the sins of our forefathers? No, I don’t think so.

But are we responsible for them? Yes, I believe we are.

And I guess I’ve come to realize that when we talk about solutions to systemic racism – police reform, workplace diversity, affirmative action, better access to healthcare, even reparations? It’s not about guilt. It’s not about pointing fingers, or passing blame.

It’s about responsibility. It’s about understanding that when we’ve said the word “equality,” for generations, what we’ve really meant is equality for a certain group of people. It's about understanding that when we’ve said the word “inequality,” for generations, what we’ve really meant is slavery, and its aftermath – which is still being felt to this day. It’s about understanding on a fundamental level that black people and white people, they still have it
And it’s about understanding that Black Lives Matter, and movements like it, matter, because – well, let’s face it: I probably would’ve been safe on the street that one night in New York. And Thabo wasn’t. And I was safe on the court that one night in Utah. And Russell wasn’t.

But as disgraceful as it is that we have to deal with racist hecklers in NBA arenas in 2019? The truth is, you could argue that that kind of racism is “easier” to deal with.

Because at least in those cases, the racism is loud and clear. There’s no ambiguity – not in the act itself, and thankfully not in the response: we throw the guy out of the building, and then we ban him for life.

But in many ways the more dangerous form of racism isn’t that loud and stupid kind. It isn’t the kind that announces itself when it walks into the arena. It’s the quiet and subtle kind. The kind that almost hides itself in plain view. It’s the person who does and says all the “right” things in public: They’re perfectly friendly when they meet a person of color. They’re very polite. But in private? Well..... they sort of wish that everyone would stop making everything “about race” all the time.

It’s the kind of racism that can seem almost invisible – which is one of the main reasons why it’s allowed to persist.

And so, again, banning a guy like Russ’s heckler? To me, that’s the “easy” part. But if we’re really going to make a difference as a league, as a community, and as a country on this issue..... it’s like I said – I just think we need to push ourselves another step further.

First, by identifying that less visible, less obvious behavior as what it is: racism.
That’s the bare minimum of where we have to get to, I think, if we’re going to consider the NBA – or any workplace – as anything close to part of the solution in 2019.

I’ll wrap this up in a minute – but first I have one last thought.

The NBA is over 75% players of color.

_Seventy-five percent._

People of color, they built this league. They’ve grown this league. People of color have made this league into what it is today. And I guess I just wanted to say that if you can’t find it in your heart to support them – _now_? And I mean actively support them?

If the best that you can do for their cause is to passively “tolerate” it? If that’s the standard we’re going to hold ourselves to – to blend in, and opt out?

Well, that’s not good enough. It’s not even close.

I know I’m in a strange position, as one of the more recognized white players in the NBA. It’s a position that comes with a lot of….. interesting undertones. And it’s a position that makes me a symbol for a lot of things, for a lot of people – often people who don’t know anything about me. Usually, I just ignore them. But this doesn’t feel like a “usually” moment.

This feels like a moment to draw a line in the sand.

I believe that what’s happening to people of color in this country – right now, in 2019 – is wrong.
poverty as white Americans is wrong. The fact that black unemployment rates nationally are double that of overall unemployment rates is wrong. The fact that black imprisonment rates for drug charges are almost six times higher nationally than white imprisonment rates for drug charges is wrong. The fact that black Americans own approximately one-tenth of the wealth that white Americans own is wrong.

The fact that inequality is built so deeply into so many of our most trusted institutions is wrong.

And I believe it's the responsibility of anyone on the privileged end of those inequalities to help make things right.

So if you don’t want to know anything about me, outside of basketball, then listen – I get it. But if you do want to know something? Know I believe that.

Know that about me.

If you’re wearing my jersey at a game? Know that about me. If you’re planning to buy my jersey for someone else...... know that about me. If you’re following me on social media..... know that about me. If you’re coming to Jazz games and rooting for me..... know that about me.

And if you’re claiming my name, or likeness, for your own cause, in any way..... know that about me. Know that I believe this matters.

Thanks for reading.

Time for me to shut up and listen.
THE NEW YORKER

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INEQUALITY

Researchers find that much of the damage done by being poor comes from feeling poor.

By Elizabeth Kolbert  January 8, 2018

In 2016, the highest-paid employee of the State of California was Jim Mora, the head coach of U.C.L.A.’s football team. (He has since been fired.) That year, Mora pulled in $3.58 million. Coming in second, with a salary of $2.93 million, was Cuonzo Martin, at the time the head coach of the men’s basketball team at the University of California, Berkeley. Victor Khalil, the chief dentist at the Department of State Hospitals, made six hundred and eighty-six thousand dollars; Anne Neville, the director of the California Research Bureau, earned a hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars; and John Smith, a seasonal clerk at the Franchise Tax Board, earned twelve thousand nine hundred dollars.

I learned all this from a database maintained by the Sacramento Bee. The database, which is open to the public, is searchable by name and by department, and contains precise salary information for the more than three hundred thousand people who work for California. Today, most state employees probably know about the database. But that wasn’t the case when it was first created, in 2008. This made possible an experiment.

The experiment, conducted by four economists, was designed to test rival theories of inequity. According to one theory, the so-called rational-
updating model, people assess their salaries in terms of opportunities. If they discover that they are being paid less than their co-workers, they will “update” their projections about future earnings and conclude that their prospects of a raise are good. Conversely, people who learn that they earn more than their co-workers will be discouraged by that news. They’ll update their expectations in the opposite direction.

According to a rival theory, people respond to inequity not rationally but emotionally. If they discover that they’re being paid less than their colleagues, they won’t see this as a signal to expect a raise but as evidence that they are underappreciated. (The researchers refer to this as the “relative income” model.) By this theory, people who learn that their salaries are at the low end will be pissed. Those who discover that they’re at the high end will be gratified.

The economists conducting the study sent an e-mail to thousands of employees at three University of California schools—Santa Cruz, San Diego, and Los Angeles—alerting them to the existence of the *Bee’s* database. This nudge produced a spike in visits to the Web site as workers, in effect, peeked at one another’s paychecks.

A few days later, the researchers sent a follow-up e-mail, this one with questions. “How satisfied are you with your job?” it asked. “How satisfied are you with your wage/salary on this job?” They also sent the survey to workers who hadn’t been nudged toward the database. Then they compared the results. What they found didn’t conform to either theory, exactly.

As the relative-income model predicted, those who’d learned that they were earning less than their peers were ticked off. Compared with the control group, they reported being less satisfied with their jobs and more interested in finding new ones. But the relative-income model broke
down when it came to those at the top. Workers who discovered that they were doing better than their colleagues evinced no pleasure. They were merely indifferent. As the economists put it in a paper that they eventually wrote about the study, access to the database had a “negative effect on workers paid below the median for their unit and occupation” but “no effect on workers paid above median.”

The message the economists took from their research was that employers “have a strong incentive” to keep salaries secret. Assuming that California workers are representative of the broader population, the experiment also suggests a larger, more disturbing conclusion. In a society where economic gains are concentrated at the top—a society, in other words, like our own—there are no real winners and a multitude of losers.

**VIDEO FROM THE NEW YORKER**
The Challenge of Going Off Psychiatric Drugs
Keith Payne, a psychologist, remembers the exact moment when he learned he was poor. He was in fourth grade, standing in line in the cafeteria of his elementary school, in western Kentucky. Payne didn’t pay for meals—his family’s income was low enough that he qualified for free school lunch—and normally the cashier just waved him through. But on this particular day there was someone new at the register, and she asked Payne for a dollar twenty-five, which he didn’t have. He was mortified. Suddenly, he realized that he was different from the other kids, who were walking around with cash in their pockets.

“That moment changed everything for me,” Payne writes, in “The Broken Ladder: How Inequality Affects the Way We Think, Live, and Die.” Although in strictly economic terms nothing had happened—Payne’s family had just as much (or as little) money as it had the day before—that afternoon in the cafeteria he became aware of which rung on the ladder he occupied. He grew embarrassed about his clothes, his way of talking, even his hair, which was cut at home with a bowl. “Always a shy kid, I became almost completely silent at school,” he recalls.

Payne is now a professor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He has come to believe that what’s really damaging about being poor, at least in a country like the United States—where, as he notes, even most people living below the poverty line possess TVs, microwaves, and cell phones—is the subjective experience of feeling poor. This feeling is not limited to those in the bottom quintile; in a world where people measure themselves against their neighbors, it’s possible to earn good money and still feel deprived. “Unlike the rigid columns of numbers that make up a bank ledger, status is always a moving target, because it is defined by ongoing comparisons to others,” Payne writes.
Feeling poor, meanwhile, has consequences that go well beyond feeling. People who see themselves as poor make different decisions, and, generally, worse ones. Consider gambling. Spending two bucks on a Powerball ticket, which has roughly a one-in-three-hundred-million chance of paying out, is never a good bet. It’s especially ill-advised for those struggling to make ends meet. Yet low-income Americans buy a disproportionate share of lottery tickets, so much so that the whole enterprise is sometimes referred to as a “tax on the poor.”

One explanation for this is that poor people engage in riskier behavior, which is why they are poor in the first place. By Payne’s account, this way of thinking gets things backward. He cites a study on gambling performed by Canadian psychologists. After asking participants a series of probing questions about their finances, the researchers asked them to rank themselves along something called the Normative Discretionary Income Index. In fact, the scale was fictitious and the scores were manipulated. It didn’t matter what their finances actually looked like: some of the participants were led to believe that they had more discretionary income than their peers and some were led to believe the opposite. Finally, participants were given twenty dollars and the choice to either pocket it or gamble it on a computer card game. Those who believed they ranked low on the scale were much more likely to risk the money on the card game. Or, as Payne puts it, “feeling poor made people more willing to roll the dice.”

In another study, this one conducted by Payne and some colleagues, participants were divided into two groups and asked to make a series of bets. For each bet, they were offered a low-risk / low-reward option (say, a hundred-per-cent chance of winning fifteen cents) and a high-risk / high-reward option (a ten-per-cent chance of winning a dollar-fifty). Before the exercise began, the two groups were told different
stories (once again, fictitious) about how previous participants had fared. The first group was informed that the spread in winnings between the most and the least successful players was only a few cents, the second that the gap was a lot wider. Those in the second group went on to place much chancier bets than those in the first. The experiment, Payne contends, “provided the first evidence that inequality itself can cause risky behavior.”

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE

JANUARY 15, 2018

A CRITIC AT LARGE
Improving Ourselves to Death
By Alexandra Schwartz

PARIS POSTCARD
Dining as Nature Intended at O’Naturel
By Henry Alford

SHOUTS & MURMURS
The Mysteries of Humor
By Jack Handey

People’s attitude toward race, too, he argues, is linked to the experience of deprivation. Here Payne cites work done by psychologists at N.Y.U., who offered subjects ten dollars with which to play an online game. Some of the subjects were told that, had they been more fortunate, they would have received a hundred dollars. The subjects, all white, were then shown pairs of faces and asked which looked “most black.” All the images were composites that had been manipulated in various ways. Subjects in the “unfortunate” group, on average, chose images that were darker than those the control group picked. “Feeling disadvantaged magnified their perception of racial differences,” Payne writes.
“The Broken Ladder” is full of studies like this. Some are more convincing than others, and, not infrequently, Payne’s inferences seem to run ahead of the data. But the wealth of evidence that he amasses is compelling. People who are made to feel deprived see themselves as less competent. They are more susceptible to conspiracy theories. And they are more likely to have medical problems. A study of British civil servants showed that where people ranked themselves in terms of status was a better predictor of their health than their education level or their actual income was.

All of which leads Payne to worry about where we’re headed. In terms of per-capita income, the U.S. ranks near the top among nations. But, thanks to the growing gap between the one per cent and everyone else, the subjective effect is of widespread impoverishment. “Inequality so mimics poverty in our minds that the United States of America . . . has a lot of features that better resemble a developing nation than a superpower,” he writes.

Rachel Sherman is a professor of sociology at the New School, and, like Payne, she studies inequality. But Sherman’s focus is much narrower. “Although images of the wealthy proliferate in the media, we know very little about what it is like to be wealthy in the current historical moment,” she writes in the introduction to “Uneasy Street: The Anxieties of Affluence.”

Sherman’s first discovery about the wealthy is that they don’t want to talk to her. Subjects who agree to be interviewed suddenly stop responding to her e-mails. One woman begs off, saying she’s “swamped” with her children; Sherman subsequently learns that the kids are at camp. After a lot of legwork, she manages to sit down with fifty members of the haut monde in and around Manhattan. Most have family incomes of more
than five hundred thousand dollars a year, and about half have incomes of more than a million dollars a year or assets of more than eight million dollars, or both. (At least, this is what they tell Sherman; after a while, she comes to believe that they are underreporting their earnings.) Her subjects are so concerned about confidentiality that Sherman omits any details that might make them identifiable to those who have visited their brownstones or their summer places.

“I poked into bathrooms with soaking tubs or steam showers” is as far as she goes. “I conducted interviews in open kitchens, often outfitted with white Carrara marble or handmade tiles.”

A second finding Sherman makes, which perhaps follows from the first, is that the privileged prefer not to think of themselves that way. One woman, who has an apartment overlooking the Hudson, a second home in the Hamptons, and a household income of at least two million dollars a year, tells Sherman that she considers herself middle class. “I feel like, no matter what you have, somebody has about a hundred times that,” she explains. Another woman with a similar household income, mostly earned by her corporate-lawyer husband, describes her family’s situation as “fine.”

“I mean, there are all the bankers that are heads and heels, you know, way above us,” she says. A third woman, with an even higher household income—two and a half million dollars a year—objects to Sherman’s use of the word “affluent.”

“‘Affluent’ is relative,” the woman observes. Some friends of hers have recently flown off on vacation on a private plane. “That’s affluence,” she says.
This sort of talk dovetails neatly with Payne’s work. If affluence is in the eye of the beholder, then even the super-rich, when they compare their situation with that of the ultra-rich, can feel sorry for themselves. The woman who takes exception to the word “affluent” makes a point of placing herself at the “very, very bottom” of the one per cent. “The disparity between the bottom of the 1 percent and the top of the 1 percent is huge,” she observes.

Sherman construes things differently. Her subjects, she believes, are reluctant to categorize themselves as affluent because of what the label implies. “These New Yorkers are trying to see themselves as ‘good people,’” she writes. “Good people work hard. They live prudently, within their means. . . . They don’t brag or show off.” At another point, she observes that she was “surprised” at how often her subjects expressed conflicted emotions about spending. “Over time, I came to see that these were often moral conflicts about having privilege in general.”

Whatever its source—envy or ethics—the discomfort that Sherman documents matches the results of the University of California study. Inequality is, apparently, asymmetrical. For all the distress it causes those on the bottom, it brings relatively little joy to those at the top.

As any parent knows, children watch carefully when goodies are divvied up. A few years ago, a team of psychologists set out to study how kids too young to wield the word “unfair” would respond to unfairness. They recruited a bunch of preschoolers and grouped them in pairs. The children were offered some blocks to play with and then, after a while, were asked to put them away. As a reward for tidying up, the kids were given stickers. No matter how much each child had contributed to the cleanup effort, one received four stickers and the other two. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
children shouldn’t be expected to grasp the idea of counting before the age of four. But even three-year-olds seemed to understand when they’d been screwed. Most of the two-sticker recipients looked enviously at the holdings of their partners. Some said they wanted more. A number of the four-sticker recipients also seemed dismayed by the distribution, or perhaps by their partners’ protests, and handed over some of their winnings. “We can . . . be confident that these actions were guided by an understanding of equality, because in all cases they offered one and only one sticker, which made the outcomes equal,” the researchers reported. The results, they concluded, show that “the emotional response to unfairness emerges very early.”

If this emotional response is experienced by toddlers, it suggests that it may be hardwired—a product of evolution rather than of culture. Scientists at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, outside Atlanta, work with brown capuchin monkeys, which are native to South America. The scientists trained the monkeys to exchange a token for a slice of cucumber. Then they paired the monkeys up, and offered one a better reward—a grape. The monkeys that continued to get cucumbers, which earlier they’d munched on cheerfully, were incensed. Some stopped handing over their tokens. Others refused to take the cucumbers or, in a few cases, threw the slices back at the researchers. Like humans, capuchin monkeys, the researchers wrote, “seem to measure reward in relative terms.”

Preschoolers, brown capuchin monkeys, California state workers, college students recruited for psychological experiments—everyone, it seems, resents inequity. This is true even though what counts as being disadvantaged varies from place to place and from year to year. As Payne points out, Thomas Jefferson, living at Monticello without hot water or overhead lighting, would, by the standards of contemporary America, be
considered “poorer than the poor.” No doubt inequity, which, by many accounts, is a precondition for civilization, has been a driving force behind the kinds of innovations that have made indoor plumbing and electricity, not to mention refrigeration, central heating, and Wi-Fi, come, in the intervening centuries, to seem necessities in the U.S.

Still, there are choices to be made. The tax bill recently approved by Congress directs, in ways both big and small, even more gains to the country’s plutocrats. Supporters insist that the measure will generate so much prosperity that the poor and the middle class will also end up benefitting. But even if this proves true—and all evidence suggests that it will not—the measure doesn’t address the real problem. It’s not greater wealth but greater equity that will make us all feel richer. ♦

This article appears in the print edition of the January 15, 2018, issue, with the headline “Feeling Low.”

Elizabeth Kolbert has been a staff writer at The New Yorker since 1999. She won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction for “The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History.” Read more »

Video
Annie Dillard was born April 30, 1945, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She received a B.A. from Hollins College in 1967 and an M.A. the following year. In 1974, she published a collection of poetry, Tickets for a Prayer Wheel, and her highly acclaimed Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, for which she received a Pulitzer Prize for nonfiction. Since then, Dillard has published several other books, including the essay collection Teaching a Stone to Talk (1982); a personal memoir, An American Childhood (1987); and a Writing Life (1993). Dillard's philosophically based nature writing, which stems from her fascination with the natural world and its mysteries, has been compared by many to that of Henry David Thoreau's masterpiece, Walden.

Echoes of Thoreau's vow to "live life to the bone" and to "suck out all its marrow" can be heard in Dillard's "Living Like Weasels" when she says, "I would like to live as I should, as the weasel lives as he should. And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will." And in her nature writing, she does notice and examine everything intensely, whether her topic is an old snakeskin, a total eclipse, or a weasel. Intertwined with these observations is a fascination with mystery as a manifestation of God. Typically, in essays like "Singing with the Fundamentalists," Dillard finds that all of life is holy. One critic has written that "Dillard brings to her work an artist's eye, a scientist's curiosity, a metaphysician's mind, all woven together in what might be called, essentially, a theologian's quest." Dillard herself admits, "I am a wanderer with a background in theology and a penchant for quirky facts."

Not only does Dillard work as a writer and teach writing, but she also writes about the writing process. In an interview, she lamented the mistaken impression some readers have that "you just sit on a tree stump and take dictation from some little chipmunk!" Instead, she cautions, writing is "hard, conscious, terribly frustrating work!" The rich, poetic journey into nature, its mystery and wonder, that Dillard takes in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, was written over an eight-month period at a pace of fifteen to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week—in a library, not in the wilderness. A voracious reader and researcher, Dillard has collected some fifty volumes of notes from her readings. She lives six months of each year near Bellingham, Washington, the locale of her Northwest frontier novel, The Living (1992).

"Writing is work" is one message that is clear from Dillard's mounting list of publications. She is a painstaking researcher, writer, and reviser. But there is also present in her writing the unmistakable mark of inspiration.

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Push It

People love pretty much the same things best. A writer looking for subjects inquires not after what he loves best, but after what he alone loves at all. Strange seizures beset us. Frank Conroy loves his yo-yo tricks, Emily Dickinson her slant of light; Richard Selzer loves the glistening peritoneum, Faulkner the muddy bottom of a little girl's drawers visible when she's up a pear tree. "Each student of the ferns," I once read, "will have his own list of plants that for some reason or another stir his emotions."

Why do you never find anything written about that idiosyncratic thought you advert to, about your fascination with something no one else understands? Because it is up to you. There is something you find interesting, for a reason hard to explain. It is hard to explain because you have never read it on any page; there you begin. You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment.

Write as if you were dying. At the same time, assume you write for an audience consisting solely of terminal patients. That is, after all, the case. What would you begin writing if you knew you would die soon? What could you say to a dying person that would not enrage by its triviality?

Write about winter in the summer. Describe Norway as lensen did, from a desk in Italy; describe Dublin as James Joyce did, from a desk in Paris. Willa Cather wrote her prairie novels in New York City; Mark Twain wrote "Huckleberry Finn" in Hartford. Recently scholars learned that Walt Whitman rarely left his room.

The writer studies literature, not the world. She lives in the world; she cannot miss it. If she has ever bought a hamburger, or taken a commercial airplane flight, she spares her readers a report of her experience. She is careful of what she reads, for that is what she will write. She is careful of what she learns, because that is what she will know.

The writer knows her field—what has been done, what could be done, the limits—the way a tennis player knows the court. And like that expert, she, too, plays the edges. That is where the exhilaration is. She hits up the line. In writing, she can push the edges. Beyond this limit,
Here, the reader must recoil. Reason balks, poetry snaps; some madness enters, or strain. Now gingerly, can she enlarge it, can she nudge the bounds? And enclose what wild power?

A well-known writer got collared by a university student who asked, “Do you think I could be a writer?”

“Well,” the writer said, “I don’t know. . . . Do you like sentences?”

The writer could see the student’s amazement. Sentences? Do I like sentences? I am 20 years old and do I like sentences? If he had liked sentences, of course, he could begin, like a joyful painter I knew. I asked him how he came to be a painter. He said, “I liked the smell of the paint.”

Hemingway studied, as models, the novels of Knut Hamsun and Ivan Turgenev. Isaac Bashevis Singer, as it happened, also chose Hamsun and Turgenev as models. Ralph Ellison studied Hemingway and Gertrude Stein. Thoreau loved Homer; Eudora Welty loved Chekhov. Faulkner described his debt to Sherwood Anderson and Joyce; E. M. Forster, his debt to Jane Austen and Proust. By contrast, if you ask a 21-year-old poet whose poetry he likes, he might say, unblushing, “Nobody’s.” He has not yet understood that poets like poetry, and novelists like novels; he himself likes only the role, the thought of himself in a hat. Rembrandt and Shakespeare, Bohr and Gauguin, possessed powerful hearts, not powerful wills. They loved the range of materials they used. The work’s possibilities excited them; the field’s complexities fired their imaginations. The caring suggested the tasks; the tasks suggested the schedules. They learned their fields and then loved them. They worked, respectfully, out of their love and knowledge, and they produced complex bodies of work that endure. Then, and only then, the world harassed them with some sort of wratched hat, which, if they were still living, they knocked away as well as they could, to keep at their tasks.

It makes more sense to write one big book—a novel or nonfiction narrative—than to write many stories or essays. Into a long, ambitious project you can fit or pour all you possess and learn. A project that takes five years will accumulate those years’ inventions and richesses. Much of those years’ reading will feed the work. Further, writing sentences is difficult whatever their subject. It is no less difficult to write sentences in a recipe than sentences in “Moby Dick.” So you might as well write “Moby Dick.” Similarly, since every original work requires a unique form, it is more prudent to struggle with the outcome of only one form—that of a long work—than to struggle with the many forms of a collection.

Every book has an intrinsic impossibility, which its writer discovers as soon as his first excitement dwindles. The problem is structural; it is insoluble; it is why no one can ever write this book. Complex stories, essays and poems have this problem, too—the prohibitive structural defect the writer wishes he had never noticed. He writes it in spite of that. He finds ways to minimize the difficulty; he strengthens other virtues; he cantilevers the whole narrative out into thin air and it holds.

Why are we reading, if not in hope of beauty laid bare, life heightened and its deepest mystery probed? Can the writer isolate and vivify all in experience that most deeply engages our intellects and our hearts? Can the writer renew our hope for literary forms? Why are we reading, if not in hope that the writer will magnify and dramatize our days, will illuminate and inspire us with wisdom, courage and the hope of meaningfulness, and press upon our minds the deepest mysteries, so we may feel again their majesty and power? What do we ever know that is higher than that power which, from time to time, seizes our lives, and which reveals us startlingly to ourselves as creatures set down here bewildered? Why does death so catch us by surprise, and why love? We still and always want wakening. If we are reading for these things, why would anyone read books with advertising slogans and brand names in them? Why would anyone write such books? We should mass half-dressed in long lines like tribesmen and shake gourds at each other, to wake up; instead we watch television and miss the show.

No manipulation is possible in a work of art, but every miracle is. Those artists who dabble in eternities, or who aim never to manipulate but only to lay out hard truths, grow accustomed to miracles. Their sureness is hard won. “Given a large canvas,” said Veronese, “I enriched it as I saw fit.”

The sensation of writing a book is the sensation of spinning, blinded by love and daring. It is the sensation of a stunt pilot’s turning barrel rolls, or an inchworm’s blind rearing from a stem in search of a route. At its worst, it feels like alligator wrestling, at the level of the sentence.

At its best, the sensation of writing is that of any unmerited grace. It is handed to you, but only if you look for it. You search, you break your fists, your back, your brain, and then—and only then—it is handed to you. From the corner of your eye you see motion. Something is moving through the air and headed your way. It is a parcel bound in ribbons and bows; it has two white wings. It flies directly at you; you can read your name on it. If it were a baseball, you would hit it out of the park. It is that one pitch in a thousand you see in slow motion; its wings beat slowly as a hawk’s.

One line of a poem, the poet said—only one line, but thank God for that one line—drops from the ceiling. Thornton Wilder cited this unnamed writer of sonnets: one line of a sonnet falls from the ceiling, and you tap in the others around it with a jeweler’s hammer. Nobody whispers it in your ear. It is like something you memorized once and forgot.
Now it comes back and rips away your breath. You find and finger a phrase at a time, you lay it down as if with tongs, restraining your strength, and wait suspended and fierce until the next one finds you: yes, this; and yes, praise be, then this.

Einstein likened the generation of a new idea to a chicken’s laying an egg: “Klicks—auf einmal ist es da.” Cheep—and all at once there it is. Of course, Einstein was not above playing to the crowd.

Push it. Examine all things intensely and relentlessly. Probe and search each object in a piece of art; do not leave it, do not course over it, as if it were understood, but instead follow it down until you see it in the mystery of its own specificity and strength. Giacometti’s drawings and paintings show his bewilderment and persistence. If he had not acknowledged his bewilderment, he would not have persisted. A master of drawing, Rico Lebrun, discovered that “the draftsman must aggress; only by persistent assault will the live image capitulate and give up its secret to an unrelenting line.” Who but an artist fierce to know—not fierce to seem to know—would suppose that a live image possessed a secret? The artist is willing to give all his or her strength and life to probing with blunt instruments those same secrets no one can describe any way but with the instruments’ faint tracks.

Admire the world for never ending on you as you would admire an opponent, without taking your eyes off him, or walking away.

One of the few things I know about writing is this: spend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away, every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place in the book, or for another book; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something for a better place later is the signal to spend it now. Something more will arise for later, something better. These things fill from behind, from beneath, like well water. Similarly, the impulse to keep to yourself what you have learned is not only shameful, it is destructive. Anything you do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to you. You open your safe and find ashes.

After Michelangelo died, someone found in his studio a piece of paper on which he had written a note to his apprentice, in the handwriting of his old age: “Draw, Antonio, draw, Antonio, draw and do not waste time.”

3. Dillard seems to be writing to her audience in several voices. Identify these multiple voices, and explain their effect.

Language and Style

1. Dillard begins using the pronoun he to refer to the writer. The next time she refers to the writer, in paragraph 5, she uses she. Why does she alternate her usage and why does she continue with the altered usage? What reasons could she have—both ideological and stylistic—for this usage?

2. Commands appear frequently in this essay: “Write as if you were dying” (paragraph 3); “Write about winter in the summer” (paragraph 4); “Examine all things intensely and relentlessly” (paragraph 19); “Probe and search each object” (paragraph 19); “Admire the world for never ending on you” (paragraph 20). What tone is generated by these commands?

3. Some of Dillard’s sentences are exceedingly compact, reminiscent of an Emily Dickinson poem: “Strange seizes best us” (paragraph 1); “Reason balks, poetry snaps; some madness enters, or strain” (paragraph 6). What is poetic about such language?

4. Many of the metaphors Dillard has chosen liken writing to a physical experience—for instance, “The writer knows her field . . . the way a tennis player knows the court” (paragraph 5). Cite additional examples of this technique. What effect do these metaphors produce? In what way are they more effective than a nonfigurative explanation of writing? Why does she choose such physical imagery?

Strategy and Structure

1. For the first twelve paragraphs, Dillard’s approach is direct. In paragraph 13, she becomes questioning. Why does she shift her tone at this point?

2. Beginning in paragraph 15, Dillard shifts her approach again and becomes rather lyrical. Why is a lyric tone appropriate now? What shift has occurred in the discussion?

3. For most of the essay, Dillard has been writing as an authority. She is a widely read, Pulitzer-Prize winning author who knows her subject well. However, at the end of the essay, she begins paragraph 21 by saying, “One of the few things I know about writing is this.” Why does she affect modesty at this point? Is it effective, or does it sound false?

Thinking and Writing

1. In paragraph 16, Dillard writes: “You search, you break your fists, your back, your brain, and then—and only then—it is handed to you. From the corner of your eye you see motion. Something is moving through the air...”
Revenge Is Sour

Tribune, 9 November 1945

Whenever I read phrases like “war guilt trials,” “punishment of war criminals,” and so forth, there comes back into my mind the memory of something I saw in a prisoner-of-war camp in South Germany, earlier this year.

Another correspondent and myself were being shown round the camp by a little Viennese Jew who had been enlisted in the branch of the American army which deals with the interrogation of prisoners. He was an alert, fair-haired, rather good-looking youth of about twenty-five, and politically so much more knowledgeable than the average American officer that it was a pleasure to be with him. The camp was on an airfield, and, after we had been round the cages, our guide led us to a hangar where various prisoners who were in a different category from the others were being “screened.”

Up at one end of the hangar about a dozen men were lying in a row on the concrete floor. These, it was explained, were S.S. officers who had been segregated from the other prisoners. Among them was a man in dingy civilian clothes who was lying with his arm across his face and apparently asleep. He had strangely and horribly deformed feet. The two of them were quite symmetrical, but they were clubbed out into an extraordinary globular shape which made them more like a horse’s hoof than anything human. As we approached the group the little Jew seemed to be working himself up into a state of excitement.

“That’s the real swine!” he said, and suddenly he lashed out with his heavy army boot and caught the prostrate man a fearful kick right on the bulge of one of his deformed feet.

“Get up, you swine!” he shouted as the man started out of sleep, and then repeated something of the kind in German. The prisoner scrambled to his feet and stood humbly to attention. With the same air of working himself up into a fury—indeed he was almost dancing up and down as he spoke—the Jew told us the prisoner’s history. He was a “real” Nazi: his party number indicated that he had been a member since the very early days, and he had held a post corresponding to a general in the political branch of the S.S. It could be taken as quite certain that he had had charge of concentration camps and had presided over tortures and hangings. In short, he represented everything that we had been fighting against during the past five years.

Meanwhile, I was studying his appearance. Quite apart from the scrubby, unfed, unshaven look that a newly captured man generally has, he was a disgusting specimen. But he did not look brutal or in any way frightening; merely moronic and, in a low way, intellectual. His pale, shifty eyes were deformed by powerful spectacles. He could have been an unfrocked clergyman, an actor ruined by drink, or a spiritualist medium. I have seen very similar people in London common lodging-houses, and also in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Quite obviously he was mentally unbalanced—indeed, only doubtfully sane, though at this moment sufficiently in his right mind to be frightened of
old, and for four years he had been doing war propaganda over the radio. For several days after this, his attitude was quite different from what it had been earlier. He looked with disgust at the bomb-wrecked town and the humiliations the Germans were undergoing, and even on one occasion intervened to prevent a particularly bad bit of looting. When we left, he gave the residue of the coffee we had brought with us to the Germans on whom we were billeted. A week earlier he would probably have been scandalised at the idea of giving coffee to a "Boche." But his feelings, he told me, had undergone a change at the sight of "_ce pauvre mort" beside the bridge; it had suddenly brought home to him the meaning of war. And yet, if we had happened to enter the town by another route, he might have been spared the experience of seeing even one corpse out of the—perhaps—twenty million that the war has produced.

getting another kick. And yet everything that the Jew was telling me of his history could have been true, and probably was true! So the Nazi torturer of one's imagination, the monstrous figure against whom one had struggled for so many years, dwindled to this pitiful wretch, whose obvious need was not for punishment, but for some kind of psychological treatment.

Later, there were further humiliations. Another S.S. officer, a large brawny man, was ordered to strip to the waist and show the blood-group number tattooed on his under-arm; another was forced to explain to us how he had lied about being a member of the S.S. and attempted to pass himself off as an ordinary soldier of the Wehrmacht. I wondered whether the Jew was getting any real kick out of this new-found power that he was exercising. I concluded that he wasn't really enjoying it, and that he was merely—like a man in a brothel, or a boy smoking his first cigar, or a tourist traipsing round a picture gallery—_telling_ himself that he was enjoying it, and behaving as he had planned to behave in the days when he was helpless.

It is absurd to blame any German or Austrian Jew for getting his own back on the Nazis. Heaven knows what scores this particular man may have had to wipe out: very likely his whole family had been murdered; and, after all, even a wanton kick to a prisoner is a very tiny thing compared with the outrages committed by the Hitler regime. But what this scene, and much else that I saw in Germany, brought home to me was that the whole idea of revenge and punishment is a childish daydream. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as revenge. Revenge is an act which you want to commit when you are powerless and because you are powerless: as soon as the sense of impotence is removed, the desire evaporates also.

Who would not have jumped for joy, in 1940, at the thought of seeing S.S. officers kicked and humiliated? But when the thing becomes possible, it is merely pathetic and disgusting. It is said that when Mussolini's corpse was exhibited in public, an old woman drew a revolver and fired five shots into it, exclaiming, "Those are for my five sons!" It is the kind of story that the newspapers make up, but it might be true. I wonder how much satisfaction she got out of those five shots, which, doubtless, she had dreamed years earlier of firing. The
condition of her being able to get near enough to Mussolini to shoot at him was that he should be a corpse.

In so far as the big public in this country is responsible for the monstrous peace settlement now being forced on Germany, it is because of a failure to see in advance that punishing an enemy brings no satisfaction. We acquiesced in crimes like the expulsion of all Germans from East Prussia – crimes which in some cases we could not prevent but might at least have protested against – because the Germans had angered and frightened us, and therefore we were certain that when they were down we should feel no pity for them. We persist in these policies, or let others persist in them on our behalf, because of a vague feeling that, having set out to punish Germany, we ought to go ahead and do it. Actually there is little acute hatred of Germany left in this country, and even less, I should expect to find, in the army of occupation. Only the minority of sadists, who must have their “atrocities” from one source or another, take a keen interest in the hunting-down of war criminals and quislings. If you ask the average man what crime Goering, Ribbentrop and the rest are to be charged with at their trial, he cannot tell you. Somehow the punishment of these monsters ceases to seem attractive when it becomes possible: indeed, once under lock and key, they almost cease to be monsters.

Unfortunately, there is often need of some concrete incident before one can discover the real state of one’s feelings. Here is another memory from Germany. A few hours after Stuttgart was captured by the French army, a Belgian journalist and myself entered the town, which was still in some disorder. The Belgian had been broadcasting throughout the war for the European Service of the B.B.C., and, like nearly all Frenchmen or Belgians, he had a very much tougher attitude towards “the Boche” than an Englishman or an American would have. All the main bridges into the town had been blown up, and we had to enter by a small footbridge which the Germans had evidently made efforts to defend. A dead German soldier was lying supine at the foot of the steps. His face was a waxy yellow. On his breast someone had laid a bunch of the lilac which was blossoming everywhere.

The Belgian averted his face as we went past. When we were well over the bridge he confided to me that this was the first time he had seen a dead man. I suppose he was thirty-five years
The text of President Obama's eulogy in Tucson

9:55 PM, Jan. 13, 2011 |

To the families of those we've lost; to all who called them friends; to the students of this university, the public servants gathered tonight, and the people of Tucson and Arizona: I have come here tonight as an American who, like all Americans, kneels to pray with you today, and will stand by you tomorrow.

There is nothing I can say that will fill the sudden hole torn in your hearts. But know this: the hopes of a nation are here tonight. We mourn with you for the fallen. We join you in your grief. And we add our faith to yours that Representative Gabrielle Giffords and the other living victims of this tragedy pull through.

As Scripture tells us:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy place where the Most High dwells.

God is within her, she will not fall;

God will help her at break of day.

On Saturday morning, Gabby, her staff, and many of her constituents gathered outside a supermarket to exercise their right to peaceful assembly and free speech. They were fulfilling a central tenet of the democracy envisioned by our founders - representatives of the people answering to their constituents, so as to carry their concerns to our nation's capital. Gabby called it "Congress on Your Corner" - just an updated version of government of and by and for the people.

Shattered by bullets

That is the quintessentially American scene that was shattered by a gunman's bullets. And the six people who lost their lives on Saturday - they too represented what is best in America.

Judge John Roll served our legal system for nearly 40 years. A graduate of this university and its law school, Judge Roll was recommended for the federal bench by John McCain 20 years ago, appointed by President George H.W. Bush, and rose to become Arizona's chief federal judge. His colleagues described him as the hardest-working judge within the Ninth Circuit. He was on his way back from attending Mass, as he did every day, when he decided to stop by and say hi to his representative. John is survived by his loving wife, Maureen, his three sons, and his five grandchildren.

George and Dorothy Morris - "Dot" to her friends - were high school sweethearts who got married and had two daughters. They did everything together, traveling the open road in their RV, enjoying what their friends called a 50-year honeymoon. Saturday morning, they went by the Safeway to hear what their congresswoman had to say. When gunfire rang out, George, a former Marine, instinctively tried to shield his wife. Both were shot. Dot passed away.
A New Jersey native, Phyllis Schneck retired to Tucson to beat the snow. But in the summer, she would return East, where her world revolved around her three children, seven grandchildren, and 2-year-old great-granddaughter. A gifted quilter, she'd often work under her favorite tree, or sometimes sew aprons with the logos of the Jets and the Giants to give out at the church where she volunteered. A Republican, she took a liking to Gabby, and wanted to get to know her better.

Dorwan and Mavy Stoddard grew up in Tucson together - about 70 years ago. They moved apart and started their own respective families, but after both were widowed they found their way back here, to, as one of Mavy's daughters put it, "be boyfriend and girlfriend again." When they weren't out on the road in their motor home, you could find them just up the road, helping folks in need at the Mountain Avenue Church of Christ. A retired construction worker, Dorwan spent his spare time fixing up the church along with their dog, Tux. His final act of selflessness was to dive on top of his wife, sacrificing his life for hers.

**Passion for people**

Everything Gabe Zimmerman did, he did with passion - but his true passion was people. As Gabby's outreach director, he made the cares of thousands of her constituents his own, seeing to it that seniors got the Medicare benefits they had earned, that veterans got the medals and care they deserved, that government was working for ordinary folks. He died doing what he loved - talking with people and seeing how he could help. Gabe is survived by his parents, Ross and Emily, his brother, Ben, and his fiancée, Kelly, who he planned to marry next year.

And then there is 9-year-old Christina Taylor Green. Christina was an A student, a dancer, a gymnast, and a swimmer. She often proclaimed that she wanted to be the first woman to play in the major leagues, and as the only girl on her Little League team, no one put it past her. She showed an appreciation for life uncommon for a girl her age, and would remind her mother, "We are so blessed. We have the best life." And she'd pay those blessings back by participating in a charity that helped children who were less fortunate.

Our hearts are broken by their sudden passing. Our hearts are broken - and yet, our hearts also have reason for fullness.

Our hearts are full of hope and thanks for the 13 Americans who survived the shooting, including the congresswoman many of them went to see on Saturday. I have just come from the University Medical Center, just a mile from here, where our friend Gabby courageously fights to recover even as we speak. And I can tell you this - she knows we're here and she knows we love her and she knows that we will be rooting for her throughout what will be a difficult journey.

And our hearts are full of gratitude for those who saved others. We are grateful for Daniel Hernandez, a volunteer in Gabby's office who ran through the chaos to minister to his boss, tending to her wounds to keep her alive. We are grateful for the men who tackled the gunman as he stopped to reload. We are grateful for a petite 61-year-old, Patricia Maisch, who wrestled away the killer's ammunition, undoubtedly saving some lives. And we are grateful for the doctors and nurses and emergency medics who worked wonders to heal those who'd been hurt.

These men and women remind us that heroism is found not only on the fields of battle. They remind us that heroism does not require special training or physical strength. Heroism is here, all around us, in the
hearts of so many of our fellow citizens, just waiting to be summoned - as it was on Saturday morning.

What is required of us?

Their actions, their selflessness, also pose a challenge to each of us. It raises the question of what, beyond the prayers and expressions of concern, is required of us going forward. How can we honor the fallen? How can we be true to their memory?

You see, when a tragedy like this strikes, it is part of our nature to demand explanations - to try to impose some order on the chaos, and make sense out of that which seems senseless. Already we've seen a national conversation commence, not only about the motivations behind these killings, but about everything from the merits of gun safety laws to the adequacy of our mental health systems. Much of this process, of debating what might be done to prevent such tragedies in the future, is an essential ingredient in our exercise of self-government.

But at a time when our discourse has become so sharply polarized - at a time when we are far too eager to lay the blame for all that ails the world at the feet of those who think differently than we do - it's important for us to pause for a moment and make sure that we are talking with each other in a way that heals, not a way that wounds.

Scripture tells us that there is evil in the world, and that terrible things happen for reasons that defy human understanding. In the words of Job, "when I looked for light, then came darkness." Bad things happen, and we must guard against simple explanations in the aftermath.

For the truth is that none of us can know exactly what triggered this vicious attack. None of us can know with any certainty what might have stopped those shots from being fired, or what thoughts lurked in the inner recesses of a violent man's mind.

So yes, we must examine all the facts behind this tragedy. We cannot and will not be passive in the face of such violence. We should be willing to challenge old assumptions in order to lessen the prospects of violence in the future.

Dose of humanity

But what we can't do is use this tragedy as one more occasion to turn on one another. As we discuss these issues, let each of us do so with a good dose of humility. Rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame, let us use this occasion to expand our moral imaginations, to listen to each other more carefully, to sharpen our instincts for empathy, and remind ourselves of all the ways our hopes and dreams are bound together.

After all, that's what most of us do when we lose someone in our family - especially if the loss is unexpected. We're shaken from our routines, and forced to look inward. We reflect on the past. Did we spend enough time with an aging parent, we wonder. Did we express our gratitude for all the sacrifices they made for us? Did we tell a spouse just how desperately we loved them, not just once in awhile but every single day?

Attend to relationships
So sudden loss causes us to look backward - but it also forces us to look forward, to reflect on the present and the future, on the manner in which we live our lives and nurture our relationships with those who are still with us. We may ask ourselves if we’ve shown enough kindness and generosity and compassion to the people in our lives. Perhaps we question whether we are doing right by our children, or our community, and whether our priorities are in order. We recognize our own mortality, and are reminded that in the fleeting time we have on this earth, what matters is not wealth, or status, or power, or fame - but rather, how well we have loved, and what small part we have played in bettering the lives of others.

That process of reflection, of making sure we align our values with our actions - that, I believe, is what a tragedy like this requires. For those who were harmed, those who were killed - they are part of our family, an American family 300 million strong. We may not have known them personally, but we surely see ourselves in them. In George and Dot, in Dorwan and Mavy, we sense the abiding love we have for our own husbands, our own wives, our own life partners. Phyllis - she's our mom or grandma; Gabe our brother or son. In Judge Roll, we recognize not only a man who prized his family and doing his job well, but also a man who embodied America’s fidelity to the law. In Gabby, we see a reflection of our public spiritedness, that desire to participate in that sometimes frustrating, sometimes contentious, but always necessary and never-ending process to form a more perfect union.

And in Christina? in Christina we see all of our children. So curious, so trusting, so energetic and full of magic.

So deserving of our love.

And so deserving of our good example. If this tragedy prompts reflection and debate, as it should, let's make sure it's worthy of those we have lost. Let's make sure it's not on the usual plane of politics and point scoring and pettiness that drifts away with the next news cycle.

The loss of these wonderful people should make every one of us strive to be better in our private lives - to be better friends and neighbors, co-workers and parents. And if, as has been discussed in recent days, their deaths help usher in more civility in our public discourse, let's remember that it is not because a simple lack of civility caused this tragedy, but rather because only a more civil and honest public discourse can help us face up to our challenges as a nation, in a way that would make them proud. It should be because we want to live up to the example of public servants like John Roll and Gabby Giffords, who knew first and foremost that we are all Americans, and that we can question each other’s ideas without questioning each other’s love of country, and that our task, working together, is to constantly widen the circle of our concern so that we bequeath the American dream to future generations.

I believe we can be better. Those who died here, those who saved lives here - they help me believe. We may not be able to stop all evil in the world, but I know that how we treat one another is entirely up to us. I believe that for all our imperfections, we are full of decency and goodness, and that the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us.

That's what I believe, in part because that's what a child like Christina Taylor Green believed. Imagine: here was a young girl who was just becoming aware of our democracy; just beginning to understand the obligations of citizenship; just starting to glimpse the fact that someday she too might play a part in shaping her nation's future. She had been elected to her student council; she saw public service as something exciting, something hopeful. She was off to meet her congresswoman, someone she was sure
was good and important and might be a role model. She saw all this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.

A child's expectations

I want us to live up to her expectations. I want our democracy to be as good as she imagined it. All of us - we should do everything we can to make sure this country lives up to our children's expectations.

Christina was given to us on Sept. 11, 2001, one of 50 babies born that day to be pictured in a book called *Faces of Hope*. On either side of her photo in that book were simple wishes for a child's life. "I hope you help those in need," read one. "I hope you know all of the words to the National Anthem and sing it with your hand over your heart. I hope you jump in rain puddles."

If there are rain puddles in heaven, Christina is jumping in them today. And here on Earth, we place our hands over our hearts, and commit ourselves as Americans to forging a country that is forever worthy of her gentle, happy spirit.

May God bless and keep those we've lost in restful and eternal peace. May He love and watch over the survivors. And may He bless the United States of America.