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Hoi Polloi

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All my life I have always considered writing a chore. After all, whenever I wrote it was always for school, either an essay or a character analysis or some such academic exercise. So what good, I thought, could come from exploring my ability as a writer? Now, however, I realize that writing brings out so many positive qualities in me and in my readers. This writing ability, which has been engrained in all of us since our first days in elementary school, though often overlooked, is our best vehicle in expressing our opinions, concerns, morals and thoughts. It is through this art that I urge each of us to take our abilities and our minds and create written works that push others to think and create, just like the authors of these essays have in this year’s publication of Gainesville College’s student essay magazine, Hoi Polloi.

Several individuals have contributed greatly to this year’s edition. First, thanks go to Dr. Bob Croft for guiding this process through both teaching and advising the production of Hoi Polloi. I would also like to extend a thank-you to the Gainesville College English Department and the Student Editorial Board for their dedication to this publication. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Russell Greer, from Texas Woman’s University, for judging this year’s Gainesville College writing contest. Last, I would like to extend my appreciation to Anthony Smith for contributing the wonderful art to embellish this year’s cover.

All Gainesville College students interested in submitting essays to upcoming editions of Hoi Polloi please contact your English professor or Dr. Bob Croft, the magazine’s faculty advisor, for submission dates and further information.

Please note that all citations for quotations in the text refer to The Bedford Introduction to Literature, fifth edition, edited by Michael Meyer, unless otherwise stated.

Brittany Castro
Editor
Have you ever wondered which computer you should choose? While Microsoft and Intel may seem to dominate the computer world, alternatives do exist. For every Goliath, a David stands there, waiting with a stone. In the computer world, the David goes by the name of Apple Computer. Waging a war against the plain, beige Windows computers, Apple’s flair for industrial design and intuitive interfaces has begun to win users over. With their elegant design, Apples remain far superior to PCs.

PCs have an overwhelming tendency toward bland physical attributes. Look at your typical Windows computer. In colors, your choice characteristically leans toward either beige or black. While a black computer may have an appealing sense of character, eventually it can seem dreadfully dull. Most PC manufacturers try to keep down the cost of the exteriors by constructing them of cheap, flimsy plastic.

Much like the body, the soul of a PC remains devoid of character. In the world of computing, most PCs run Microsoft Windows. The problem with Windows lies in the user base Microsoft aims for. The Windows platform remains a primary design for corporations and businesses. As such, the average home user feels the burden of a bloated and inefficient operating system. The user becomes familiar with the “blue screen of death,” where the computer dies and throws up a blue screen filled with a eulogy of archaic terms describing the demise of the machine.

On a PC, not only does the operating system cripple the design, but also the lack of standards leads to a host of other problems. On the whole, PCs do not support a codified set of standards. USB, PCMCIA, ATAPI: these acronyms constitute a small taste of the alphabet soup the user must digest in order to remain in the PC arena. Without a codified set of standards, PC manufacturers can choose whatever standards they want to endorse. With the choice taken out of consumers’ hands, the manufacturers do not choose the path of innovation; instead they choose the path of lowest cost.

In addition, the lack of standards leads to a lack of integration between hardware and software companies. Microsoft does not control the Dells, Gateways, or IBMs of the world, since these companies only write the
software. In opposition, the problem remains the same: the software producers lack meaningful control over hardware design. Thus, neither the hardware nor the software manufacturers have a clue as to what the other is thinking. As a result, the hardware often experiences problems working with a particular piece of software. Likewise, software refuses to cooperate with hardware.

Unlike PCs, Apple’s appearance remains far from bland and uninteresting. In Apple’s product line such rich tones as titanium silver, matte white, carbon grey, and indigo blue offer a whole palate of color choices. The materials chosen for their cases include titanium (the same material used in supersonic aircraft) and Lucite (a type of bulletproof plastic). In Apple’s laptops, they shock mount the hard drives on rubber mounts to prevent jarring. Apple takes every care and consideration to produce a quality product.

Much like Apple’s hardware, their operating system remains light years ahead of its PC counterpart. The operating system’s evolutionary design earned it the code-name “Darwin.” Based on Free BSD, Darwin has the robustness of a commercial grade UNIX system. On top of Darwin, the Aqua interface offers an ease of use that remains the envy of the PC world. The entire system works together to provide the user with an unparalleled intuitive operating system.

The creation of such an exquisite operating system shows a dedication to the standards that PC manufacturers refuse to adopt. Apple has always adopted standards to provide a uniform basis for design. In effect, Apple has supported every standard that currently exists in the computer world. On the web, Java, HTML, and Flash have become de facto standards of an enjoyable surfing experience. Apple embraced these standards years before the PC world adopted them.

With the adoption of these standards, Apple’s integration of hardware and software became easier and much better than the PC’s. In fact, Apple designs, tests, and implements every component of their computers themselves. They code every line of their operating system “in house” and then test it on hardware they have designed. The result insure a lean, mean, integrated machine. With such integration, Apple’s computers suffer from far fewer glitches and bugs than any PC.

Without a doubt, Apple’s dedication to producing such fine computers shows that they will always remain superior to PCs. The next time you shop for a personal computer, take note of the flaws described herein.
or newspaper, though any kind of paper will do, and find gravestones that they may consider important to do rubbings on. Rubbing is the act of a Gawker kneeling on hard ground or squelchy mud, depending on where the stone is, and patiently rubbing the colored crayon of choice slowly and methodically across engraved letters worn smooth by time. Of course, this stage comes after the Gawker has plowed through knee-deep grass full of bugs, snakes, and other ominous critters looking for Aunt Priscilla’s grave in some swamp where her family probably buried in the first place so that they could forget what a nag she was.

One such Gawker that comes to mind is a spinster named Gertrude. Gertrude lives all by herself on a lonely old hill way back in the boonies. Gertrude has just one love in life, “Mr. History.” Mr. History visited the Blairsville area some centuries ago, and in his vigilance left some sentries standing guard in long-forgotten cemeteries that now lie a stone’s throw into the national forest. Gertrude loves to visit the local library and sort for hours at a time through page after page of Union County history looking for any evidence of these graves. When not at the library, Gertrude often strides purposefully through the woods in her thigh-high, muck-brown waders and faded tartan shirt looking for her next big find. She has found five so far. On her bony shoulders, a huge military green knapsack emblazoned with the words “Grave Rubber” swings ferociously from side to side. The pack, so full of papers, pencils, notebooks, and crayons, looks as if it might burst at any moment, spilling all her art supplies out of the sack and onto some soul’s final resting place.

The second member of this prestigious, somewhat morbid club is known to many as the Soulful. The Soulful is always at the cemetery. Sometimes it becomes truly hard to see who is the more permanent resident—the dearly departed loved one or the loved one still living but not really living. The beautifully manicured lawns, pathways, and iron benches in the newer cemeteries of Blairsville all lend a very comfortable home away from home for those who can’t seem to give up on what they have lost. Although it is very hard to lose a loved one, eventually one must consider that there is life after the death of a loved one. The Soulful takes his or her daily newspapers or favorite book and reads to the grave every day. Such people even take walks where they carry on conversations with the spirits from beyond. Conversations with someone who isn’t really there? Sounds odd, doesn’t it? Nevertheless, these chosen few become residents above-ground in a place where they are outnumbered by the residents below ground.

One particular Soulful, Gene, stands out in particular. An eighty-year-old man with a kind, wizened face, and stooped back, Gene wears his long, flowing, pearl-white hair bound back with a leather thong. A native of
Blairsville, Gene tells stories of serving in the military during World War II and meeting a wondrous dark-eyed beauty named Louisa from Texas. After nearly fifty years of marriage, Louisa died. She is buried in Memorial Gardens. When Gene walks in the cemetery, swinging his long black cane with the horse head top, he is usually talking to himself and sometimes whistling Louisa's favorite song of all time, "Yellow Rose of Texas." Not only does Gene whistle this song for Louisa, but he also whistles the favorite tunes of some of his other family members, the now permanent neighbors of his dearly beloved wife. Often in the afternoon after lunchtime, Gene sits on a wrought iron bench under a huge oak tree reading sections of the weekly newspaper to Louisa and her neighbors. Louisa likes to hear about what's new in the gardening section, while George, Gene's uncle twice removed who rests in peace just behind Louisa, likes to hear about the Financials. Even in repose, some people can't get enough of the stock market. Neither rain nor shine deters Gene from his daily rounds in the cemetery. Some locals even call him the "Dear Abby" of the afterworld.

The third and final character of the cemetery club, the Romantic, specializes in soap opera-like love triangles. Yet none exists as unusual as the love triangle between a man and his dead wife, or a woman and her dead husband with a new love interest. With Blairsville being the retirement Mecca of the North Georgia mountains, retired couples are converging upon this small town by the dozens. These couples sometimes find themselves in a pickle when their spouse dies, leaving them high and dry. Some of these unfortunate losses result in the bereaved widow or widower feeling too young to go through the remainder of his or her life alone. In some ways the Romantic resembles the Soulful, but with one major difference. The Romantic utilizes the poignancy of the cemetery to help find someone new to spend the rest of his or her life with, whereas the soulful does not. The Romantic actively seeks out prospective companions by associating with the living and not the dead. These men and women read not to the graves of their spouses, but to each other in the shady bowers of the cemetery.

Fred, a grand example of a Romantic, walks and talks every day with some of his fellow widowers in the deep recesses of the local church cemetery. Fred, of course, leads the pack and also heads the grounds crew for the cemetery. Fred and his friends help to keep the graves neatly manicured, the gravel whitewashed, and the headstones sparkling with flowers. Of course, this work covers up a much grander scheme. The real reason for this upkeep is to meet certain eligible "young" women. These women, a large pack of widows, descend upon the cemetery every afternoon right after lunch. Fred has obviously experienced great success in these matters. Just by looking at the way one of the widows named Lillian runs and affectionately greets him
gives away the secret to his success. The gaggle of fellow widows trailing after her are mere pawns in her marriage game, for the marriage game is one that Lillian played well. After all, didn’t she meet the most extraordinary gentleman named Fred? Or did Fred meet Lillian according to his ultimate game plan? What a confounding quagmire!

Fred met Lillian, and Lillian met Fred while they were both going about doing their daily constitutionals at the graves of their spouses. Greetings led to book readings; book readings led to love. Fred and Lillian were married shortly after their first meeting in the very church that had held the funerals of their former spouses. When asked if this thought would affect their relationship, Fred replied, “Well no! Did dying affect the love that Romeo had for Juliet?” Now that Fred and Lillian have found a sweet aftermath to life after the death of a loved one, they actively promote the socialization of their fellow peers in poetry readings and theater productions held regularly at the fellowship tables in the middle of the cemetery.

Cemeteries are often considered places that are avoided at all costs, visited only during times of sorrow while attending the odd funeral here and there. The characters of the local country cemetery club continually show that this stereotype is untrue. Cemeteries hold wonderful treasures just waiting to be discovered. One treasure could be the discovery of a gravestone of an unknown general who served in the Civil War; another treasure could be finding that one’s life doesn’t have to end with the death of a loved one. Last but not least, some find comfort in knowing that, even though death has brought an end to these earthly lives, there still resides on the fringes of our imaginations a spiritual existence.
A small piece of silverware, the type that you probably use at home on your own table, sits proudly on display in my mother's china cabinet. Once an ordinary, functional spoon, it was nothing special. Then, one day in the summer of 2002, a transformation occurred at the hands of a street painter. On this concave canvas he created a masterpiece that fits in the palm of your hand. This tiny wonder can stimulate your imagination in ways you would never expect from a common, everyday piece of silverware.

The predominant color in the painting is blue, representing the sky in the background. The kind of blue you would stare at for hours lying in your backyard, this is the truest of blues. The closest thing to a solid color in the painting, this true blue covers a little less than half of the total area. Starting out as a brilliant blue at the top, it gradually gets lighter until hitting the landscape. It is pure and free from clouds. Somehow, the day in the painting looks warm. It almost makes the air around you feel fresher and crisper. The blend between the zenith blue in the top and the lighter blue where the landscape begins is realistically subtle. The painter finger-painted the blue because he owns no brushes; however, he blended the colors so well that not even his fingerprints are distinguishable.

Against the blue background is the main attraction of the painting: a white and gray dove. You can almost see her rise and fall in the wind. The white stands out against the background of the blue sky like blonde hair against dark skin. Effortlessly, she soars without a care in the world. The definition in the wings is beyond belief. Though you cannot see every feather, the defining strokes fall in such a way as to fool your mind into filling in the blanks. The breathtaking simplicity of the wings, captured in mid-beat, seem to say, "Oh, what joy there is in freedom!" This dove reminds me of the kind of bird your eyes would follow until she became too small to see or hit the horizon. Slipping out of the painting and into your imagination, the bird seems to transcend her two-dimensional boundaries.

After the viewer takes in the main attraction of the painting, the landscape almost seems like a side act, though it actually could be a
masterpiece in and of itself. Rolling hills, covered in exotic, colorful flowers, gently flow down the painting. When you look closely, the flowers are mostly made up of very small dots, but the overall effect from a typical viewing distance is stunning. The dots representing flowers were made with the rolled up corner of a paper napkin, and though they are barely even the size of the tip of a needle, when your mind’s eye zooms in, you can see each petal individually. To believe that so much vibrancy and color exists in such a small amount of space takes some faith. The effect of the landscape as a whole pulls your imagination in and over the very last hill to whatever land may lie beyond. You feel as though, if you could only stretch far enough or crane your neck in exactly the right way, you might see what was on the other side... a little bit farther, always just beyond your reach. Yet if your mind makes the stretch, your body no longer needs to. What lies beyond the farthest hill is whatever your imagination wishes.

Though the piece as a whole is incredibly original, the canvas may be the most original part of all: a spoon. The handle, bent into the shape of a triangle, serves as a brace for the dipper part of the spoon. Not terribly ornate or special, the handle looks quite average. The silver rim around the painting where the painter wiped away excess paint serves as a frame for the piece. It is the finishing touch. Though easily overlooked, without it the painting would spread to the edges of the spoon and would look much like any other piece of unframed artwork: unfinished.

The painting as a whole fills your imagination with a renewed sense of childlike awe and curiosity. You are reminded of a time when you could lie in a field of wildflowers and stare at the sky all day, and a single white bird could hold your attention until it left your sky. Tying together to make that time more real and more present than ever are this bird, this landscape, and this sky. The painting itself may not be worthy of any museum, but the effect that it has on all viewers is worth more than any Renoir.
Vincent Van Gogh, an artist from the Post-Impressionist era, took a spiritual and expressive approach in his paintings. Obtaining inspiration from various places, he painted landscapes, cities, and rooms. In October of 1889 in Arles, France, Van Gogh sat down to paint his bedroom. The resulting emotional work of art demonstrates his confidence as an artist. Through the use of content, color, brushstrokes, and shading, Van Gogh created a peaceful mood and long-standing environment in his painting *The Bedroom*.

The contents of *The Bedroom* play an important role in deciding the mood of the work. The two chairs, two pillows, and two portraits prove that more than one person inhabits this bedroom. Using this evidence, one might speculate that the owner of the room does not feel lonely. The wear and tear of the two chairs demonstrates that the two inhabitants spend a great deal of time sitting in the bedroom. Obviously, the room must create a feeling of peacefulness for them to spend so much time in it. Of the three paintings around the bed, Van Gogh chooses to give detail to the landscape painting. He merely scribbles in the other two pictures. Through this observation, the observer understands that Van Gogh prefers this picture to be prominent because it adds to the tranquility of the environment. In the corner of the room, opposite the bed, sits a table with a pitcher, a vase, a cup, a brush and two bottles on it, showing that the owners use the room for washing up either before or after going to bed. The room stays fresh and cool because of the half-open shutters behind the table, and the detail brings to life a cool breeze coming in through the window.

Although the articles in the room and their positions have great meaning, so do the colors that surround them. The most prominent colors in *The Bedroom* are blue, green, and red. The light blue color of the walls has a very calming effect, like the sky or the ocean. Van Gogh uses green to make the shutters stand out against the blue walls. Painted a lighter green, the glass within the shutters divides the quiet bedroom from the chaotic world. The red bedspread stands out among the rest of the items in the room. Significantly, Van Gogh probably decided to make the bedspread the only red article in the room because of its association with love or passion.
In addition to the tranquil colors, Van Gogh uses brushstrokes to indicate a serene environment. In the painting, vertical and some horizontal brushstrokes add texture to the walls, floor, and furniture. Consequently, this texture makes the room look old and worn. Van Gogh uses vertical brushstrokes to create the appearance of a rough floor, making it evident that the two inhabitants walk through the bedroom quite often. The brushstrokes on the doors and the walls create a worn-out, discolored look. The wooden appearance of the furniture created by the horizontal brushstrokes gives the room a comfortable and peaceful feeling.

Along with the brushstrokes that Van Gogh utilizes, many different shades used in The Bedroom generate a feeling of peace and welcoming. The shading used on the walls, floor, window, and doors gives the room depth and dimension. Using a dark shade of blue, Van Gogh succeeds in making the doors stand out against the light blue walls. He painted the three walls of the room different shades of blue, giving the room dimension and thus reinforcing the idea that the inhabitants can go to this room to get away from the chaos of the outside world. To make the floor look old and used, Van Gogh used many different shades of green on the floors, chairs, and windows. These different shades of green create a serene effect, creating the image of grass on a cool spring day.

Clearly, by observing The Bedroom, one can see that Van Gogh’s use of cool colors, details, brushstrokes, and shading gives a person a sense of peace and authenticity. Many questions arise while describing this work of art. For example: Were these the real colors in Van Gogh’s bedroom? What was he feeling when he created a painting of his own bedroom? Why didn’t he use more color? What feelings did he hope to get from people about his masterpiece? These questions cannot be answered through observations of the painting but rather only through assumptions.
I woke in a panic, clawing for the light switch and gasping for air. The disturbing images invading my dreams didn’t hold guns or chase me to fiery doom, but they still horrified me. Wearing rags and playing cheap instruments, their shrunken forms ironically reminded me of my favorite Picasso piece, *The Old Guitarist*. With his skeleton of life curled around his most precious possession, this painting gives me a disturbing impression of loneliness and despair.

The methods Picasso used to shade and define his painting set a tone of unhappiness for the piece. With his brush, the artist painted haggard, drooping lines along the guitarist’s ragged clothing, even creating a gaping hole in his robe at the shoulder. The rounded lines describing the guitar simply express its existence. No elaborate decorations adorn its surface. Shading around the lone figure adds to his melancholy. The white-haired musician casts his own long shadow onto the street corner where he sits. Another dark shadow appears on his clothing beneath his scraggly beard. Created by his head slumping toward his chest, this darker shade of blue adds a heavy weight to his person. Altogether the rough quality of the shading and the smooth, sloping lines contribute impressively to the dark, somber mood of the painting.

Building on the artist’s expressive lines and shading, the colors used in the piece further its desperate meaning. Blue usually symbolizes melancholy, and here it soaks the entire painting. Overpowering the brown guitar and the musician’s arctic beard, blue tint monopolizes the picture, stark in its uncomplimentary light. Appearing to sit on a moonlit street corner, clothed in navy, the man leans wearily against a blue wall. Any light reflected from the figure creates a blue aura around him. His skin, though pale, appears shaded and streaked in blue. A shadow-like mist forms about the guitarist, dragging him to depths of misery. In the dark folds of his clothing lie stories of darker days, and bluer, more devastating moments. The artist knew the emotional effects of the color blue, and he used them to create a psychological atmosphere of sadness for the painting. As this sadness creeps over the viewer, blue lowers the mood and deepens the hopeless, despairing image.
Like the depressing color, the drawn, grotesque shaping of the figure adds an even greater tale of hopelessness to the painting. The old man's body curls protectively around his guitar. In a loving manner, disconcerting to the eye, his fingers caress the form of the instrument delicately and expressively. Slumping his shoulders and crossing his legs, the entire figure crouches around his guitar. The loneliness created by his body position, especially that of the man's lowered head and eyes, draws sympathy for his despairing position. A thin skeleton of a man, the bones showing through his skin betray the musician's impoverished state. Though he does not appear to be dying, he still seems undernourished and neglected. Hunched over his only consolation, his form clings to sanity through this outlet. With the shape of this figure, the artist magnificently portrays loneliness at its worst. A solitary figure never felt so alone as when cramped on a street corner, plucking tenderly at hidden music. Vividly described, this figure's striking position and shape impress the viewer intensely with his loneliness.

Even greater than the figure's expressive design, the theme of an old, lone musician best forms the despairing impression of this piece. Alone and friendless, this man sings no joyful tune. From the picture flows a sad story, one of pain, tears, and lost love. Told through his lowly instrument, the tale of woe weaves a spell on the viewers, conveying to them the hopelessness of his state. His mouth, open in a silent scream, expresses incomprehensible anguish. Shameful, downcast eyes, hidden from sight, conceal a pathetic soul quivering underneath. This painting tells a story of music, of sadness, and of melancholy, not only in its color and shaping, but also in the obvious theme of the scene. As hopeless despair settles over the piece, depression appears as an obvious emotion. One last plea for comfort, however, discloses itself through his song. Perhaps he sings a song of grief, yet this tune remains his one outlet and connection to humanity. With his instrument, and dressed in rags, a lonely man plucks out a forlorn melody that hangs in the air like morning mist. The theme of this work is expressed most completely in its loneliness and despair.

Because of its disturbing effect, The Old Guitarist's emptiness has always strangely appealed to me. The magnetic power of each of Picasso's paintings possesses the viewer and envelops the mind, bringing many sobering messages to light. Even grotesque and disturbing images display important characteristics that support his broader conviction. The ability of his work to capture the senses and affect an idea so completely amazes us, and we must never forget its sober impressions.
Jeremy Boleman  
A Teacher Becomes a Student

“Everywhere we look someone is learning from us, and we from them. We often do not know what we give, when we give it. And we seldom realize the value of what we are receiving at the time we accept it.” (“Devotional for Week of September 23, 2001.” University of Arizona Lutheran Campus Ministry). When a person is questioned regarding the impact of others on his or her life, I am certain that some particular individuals quickly come to mind. Undoubtedly, parents, grandparents, and teachers leave lasting impressions on others’ lives, including my own. When I think of the person who has had the biggest influence on my life recently, however, the image of a small seven-year-old black boy overshadows all others.

I encountered this child during a church mission trip this past summer. I was one of many teenagers assigned to interact with some abused children in Florida for a few hours each day. We were expected to play games with the children and share some lessons and values we have learned while growing up. When we arrived at the rundown, trash-strewn playground surrounded by housing projects, I never expected to be the one receiving the lessons— that is, until I met Brady.

Like many kids I met that week, Brady seemed to have everything going against him. He had been discarded by his family, and he was being forced to grow up without a loving parent in his life. Brady loved basketball. Sporting the famous number 23 Bulls jersey and sticking his tongue out with every shot he took, he idolized Michael Jordan. But, being one of the shyest children on the playground, he simply held onto his basketball, refusing to tell anyone his name.

Uncertain how to relate to the children, a few of us decided to play basketball on one of the lower goals. When I began dunking the basketball, the eyes of the miniature Michael Jordan lit up; and he came running across the field, holding onto the back of his oversized shorts. He begged me to raise him so that he could dunk the ball as well. All it took was the first dunk and Brady was addicted. For hours on end, I lifted Brady to the goal, allowing him to imagine that he was in the NBA, dunking against basketball’s greatest stars.
We continued this routine until my arms were stinging from exhaustion. Finally, I convinced him that we needed a water break.

During our break, Brady and I grabbed a Dixie cup of refreshing water and retreated to the only tree on the playground to escape the sweltering midday heat. It was beneath this tree that I met the real Brady and my lessons began. Trying to break the conversation barrier, I asked Brady about the latest movies he had seen and what he enjoyed doing in his free time. Somewhere between *Scooby Doo* and pretend dinosaur attacks, the hardships of this young boy's life were revealed. Brady informed me that he did not have a dad because his dad was in jail. He said he did not remember his mother and that he had an older brother once, but he had been shot. I immediately began to realize the value of my childhood and how, daily, I take it for granted. This was the first of some important lessons that Brady taught me throughout the remainder of the week.

When the mission vans pulled up the next day to the playground, we began pouring out, and I immediately searched for Brady. As I had expected, he was on the basketball court, waiting for me to come watch him win game seven of the basketball championships or to dunk over Shaq. Following our routine of endless dunks, we once again retreated to our tree for rest and discussion. Brady was very eager to show me his new necklace, which was a cheaply made dragon pendant hanging from a silver chain. To Brady, though, it was more valuable than gold. It was his birthday, and the pendant was the only birthday present he had received. He was so proud of the gift that he showed every child on the playground, asking each of us at least twice if we had seen his prized possession. Because he was worried about breaking the necklace, he removed it to play basketball. Unfortunately, when it was time for our break and Brady went to retrieve his necklace, he discovered that it was missing. Fear and disappointment were evident in his young eyes. He devoted the remainder of his playtime to searching for the lost pendant, just like Sherlock Holmes dusting for clues. When the missing item was finally found, Brady was ecstatic. Unaware of his being a teacher, Brady had explained another valuable point to me through his actions. Because most of us have grown up in a society where all of our needs and wants are fulfilled, most children would have complained about receiving only one present for their birthday. Furthermore, other children might have quit searching for the necklace and continued playing because they did not value the importance of their gift. They might have expected a better gift to come later or the gift to be quickly replaced, but not Brady. Once again, Brady had taught me a valuable lesson.

The most memorable moment I shared with Brady is one that I will never forget. As we neared the week's end and camp was coming to a close,
both the children and the teenagers knew that our time together was ending. When the moment came for final good-byes, I knew that leaving Brady would not be easy. When I told him goodbye, he responded, "Bye, see you tomorrow." After informing him that I was heading home to Georgia the next day, he replied, "Don’t leave me, Daddy." Those words continue to tear at my heart. I was expected to end my mission trip simply having enjoyed the time spent playing with the children and eventually move on with my life. However, that simple plea from a desperate child crying for attention and love is something that will be replayed in my mind for years to come. Even now, when reflecting on important moments in my life, I am quickly taken back to the rundown playground where, in the sweltering heat, a small boy tugs on my shirt, begging me to raise him to the rim, "Just one more time."
Anna Dunn
An Unknown Creature

War is a distant creature. War happens in other times, in other countries, and to other people. Before September 11, to many Americans, war was a mythological creature that did not exist except in fairy tales told by grandparents who claim they were there to see it or actually took part in harnessing the beast. Children listened to the stories with large eyes and fell peacefully asleep when the story ended, content that such danger could not possibly harm them any more than the witch in Sleeping Beauty could. September 11 made all the fairy stories reality. Children are finding that what used to be an exciting, make-believe story is now a true account of their or their parents’ daily lives. The fabled creature is alive again in all of its horror. Now, the retellings of the old stories and poems such as Wilfred Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est” and Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” evoke deeper, more personal, and more familiar emotions in readers.

Governments have always encouraged people to believe that “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” or “it is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country” (28-29), that is, as long as the believer is not the one dying. In his poem “Dulce et Decorum Est,” Owen tells the horrendous truths of war that the people crying and declaring this oath have been sheltered from experiencing. He tells of the unrelenting, toilsome misery soldiers experienced marching from one battle to the next. He brings to life the soldiers “bent double, like old beggars under sacks . . . coughing like hags” as they “cursed through the sludge . . . but limped on . . . drunk with fatigue” (1-7). He conveys the tormenting chaos and fear the soldiers suffer as they fumble for their gas masks, “fitting the clumsy helmets [on] just in time” (10). He recounts the story of a soldier dying because of the gas, plunging at the narrator who watches helplessly as the “guttering, choking, drowning” man fails to put his mask on in time (16). He then describes the “wagon that we flung [the dead soldier] in” and the soldier’s “hanging face, like a devil’s sick of sin” (18-20). After all of this description, Owen leaves his reader with “the old lie: Dulce et decorum est / pro patria mori” (28-29). The graphic images that Owen is able to conjure prove to his reader that war is no sunny day
outing resulting in glory and fame. Instead, war is a gruesome and gory task that should not be glorified in any way. While war is a hideous beast, unfortunately, it is too rarely avoided. Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem “The Charge of the Light Brigade” honors the celebrated cavalry that faced a battle with courage unlike any that men in other occupations will ever encounter or possess. His poem is the story of the Light Brigade which rode “into the valley of Death”: all because “someone had blundered” (7, 12). The soldiers knew their fate when they rode in but followed their command because “[their’s] but to do or die” (15). The company was “voleyed and thundered; stormed at with shot and shell [yet] boldly they rode and well” into the midst of their waiting enemy (21-23). The brigade “flashed their sabers bare . . . sabring the gunners there” and “right through the line they broke; Cossack and Russian reeled from the saber-stroke” (27, 29, 34-35). The company rode “into the jaws of Death” and “into the mouth of Hell” and came out again though the losses were many (24-25). In the last lines, Tennyson calls upon his readers to “Honor the charge they made! Honor the Light Brigade, noble six hundred!” (53-55). Tennyson paints such a gallant picture of the Light Brigade’s charge, though success was not in their favor, that the reader is filled with pride for the daring and heroic souls who made the attack.

Regrettably, war is no longer a distant, unknown creature, but a very close monster that gobbles up everything in its path. War has now become the living truth that everyone in America wakes up to. “Dulce et Decorum Est” reminds the reader how he was once told and believed in the old lie that “it is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country” (765). “The Charge of the Light Brigade” fills its readers with pride yet makes them weep for the soldiers currently charging into uncertain battles with more courage than any human was thought to possess. While the poems were written many years ago about people their readers have never met, after September 11, the soldiers in the poems are not strangers to them. They are the friends, family, citizens, and other allies who are currently fighting the battle against the terror that was felt by all on September 11.
Randall Jarrell’s short poem “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” takes place during the time of World War II. Even so, some critics attempt to argue that this poem relates to abortion; for example, Charlotte Beck asserts, “The [poem’s] ending . . . in effect describes an abortion” (Worlds and Lives). This view, however, does not present the best interpretation. Actually, Randall Jarrell simply wanted to portray a soldier who unwillingly fell into the Army; that is all. Statements supporting this interpretation, and thus refuting the abortion angle, lie in all five lines of “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner.”

Critics have been trying to voice their opinions that this poem is all about a mother having an abortion. To them, the first line, “From my mother’s sleep, I fell into the State,” implies that the fetus, being only a few months developed, had fallen from his mother’s womb where he was peacefully sleeping. Actually, the first line in this simple, yet complex poem states that the “soldier” is a young man still living with his mother. This first line implies that the young man had a close relationship with his mother. After growing old enough to be drafted, the young man was sent into the State or Army during World War II. The significance of this first line is key to understanding the cause for the man’s surprise: first, that he was unfortunate to be drafted into the Army and, second, that he was far away from the place he felt safe, his home.

Again, critics try to oppose the obvious, and say that the “fetus” Randall Jarrell is describing is “hunched in its [mother’s] belly,” meaning that the baby is lying in a fetal position inside his mother’s womb. The wet hair and protective enzymes that a fetus is covered in describe the “wet fur” in this line. But any reader of this poem can clearly see that the young man is now a soldier who has been trained and sent on a dangerous mission. From this line again, one can tell the time in which this story takes place, World War II. “Till my wet fur froze” is a statement that suggests that this young soldier was in a WWII uniform flight jacket that was wet, probably from the rain and cold air at such high altitude. At that time, flight jackets had fur collars on them. The word “hunched” also relates to the situation that he found himself in.
is crouched in an uncomfortable position between two .50 caliber machine guns, which are used for his protection. The uncomfortable position can also imply that the young soldier is concerned, or worried, about his situation in combat.

The next few lines in the poem throw another curve ball at critics who believe that this poem relates to an abortion. The poem implies that the young man is up in the air on a B-17 or B-24 bomber plane that is literally flying “six miles from the Earth.” Anyone who can imagine being 31,000 feet above the ground can also imagine the young man “loosed from its dream of life.” Terrified at hunching in the belly of an airplane with only two guns and a glass shell to protect him, the young man drifts out of life, or in other words, he blacks out.

Critics suggest that the third line in this poem, “I woke to black flack and the nightmare fighters,” implies that the fetus is now under attack and that the abortion is now underway. They want to paint a picture that Randall Jarrell is now describing the doctors viciously killing the fetus, which once was safe in the warmth of his mother’s womb. But it is absurd to think that black flack has anything to do with the murdering of an unborn child. Instead, the black flack is, of course, the debris of shells exploding in the sky, where the terrified young soldier rests in his combat-ready position. The nightmare fighters are obviously a special group of enemy pilots who are attacking the plane the young soldier is in.

The critics who support the claim that this poem is all about an abortion use the last and final line of this poem, “When I died, they washed me out of the turret with a hose,” to imply that when the fetus is finally killed, the doctors simply clean the fetus and embryo out of the mother’s womb. To achieve this feat, the doctors use techniques with their special equipment, or simply a hose. Once again, the real meaning of this line is to show that this young soldier, who has been taken away from his home, has been drafted and trained, has been assigned a mission, and now at the end, has not made it back alive. Either from the massive amount of black flack, from enemy shells exploding in the air, or from bullets shot by enemy aircraft, the young soldier will not make it back to his mother’s safe place. After all the effort by the soldier and his crew, all the Army does is wash his remains out with a pressurized hose and, of course, find a replacement.

Thus, the poem clearly tells a story not about abortion but about a young man snatched from his sleep and the safeguard of his mother and drafted into the Army. He makes his way through training and flies his mission, bent in a tube-like structure made of glass. The only protection he has is a wet flight uniform, two machine guns, and a prayer that he will make it back alive. Critics and company can squabble about the meaning of this poem over and
over again, but undeniably since Randall Jarrell was in the Army Air Corps
during this time, he had the opportunity to see just what happened to the
bomber planes. He also had a first-person view of what happened to such poor,
unappreciated ball turret gunners and was inspired to write this poem.

Works Cited

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"Kubla Khan," a poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge to which many critics have tried to attribute various meanings, seems to be as puzzling as the most complicated of mazes. Every word leads one on a different path for interpretation. One such interpretation is that of celestial enlightenment and a man’s longing to be in closer proximity with The One, whether as one of purity or as a demon (Rookmaaker 229). Another interpretation is one of sexual references and copulation. This interpretation is highly likely since Coleridge had forced himself away from his love, and several passages from the poem could imply that he wanted her back ("Kubla Khan’ and the Implied Critic’s Decision Style"). Coleridge’s belief in pantisocracy is also interesting because during the early nineteenth century many new ideas of government and social contract were being born. Such thinkers as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau were bringing their own ideas into the spotlight. Coleridge supposedly finished editing this poem after his return from Germany, where he would have undoubtedly been influenced by these writers’ idealism (Rookmaaker 232). With these facts about Coleridge’s political beliefs as a basis, this poem could be a representation of a man’s entrance into a society out of nature as well as a man’s vision to rule them both.

The first lines read, “In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure-dome decree: where Alph, the sacred river ran through the caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea.” This place would be the society man set up in order to remove himself from a state of nature. Theoretically, Kubla Khan was a great ruler, a ruler said to be better than his predecessors. This status would make Kubla Khan an ideal figure to use as the leader of a utopian society known as Xanadu, or paradise. This society is said to be “a stately pleasure-dome.” The usual idealizations made when a new society or government is set up—that everything will be perfectly balanced and everything will run smoothly—are encompassed in the image of the pleasure-dome. The society is to be set up by the river Alph, which is a sacred river. This name is significant since “Alph” derives from Alpha (the first letter of the Greek alphabet) and hence the beginning. People usually mark such
places as sacred, as in the Middle East, which is where all civilization theoretically began and where the sacred city stands. The society that Coleridge presents stretches far and wide and is in ruins, prompting Kubla Khan to take control and build a utopian society. With these descriptions, Coleridge sets up a general vision of the poem’s idealized setting.

In the next stanza, Coleridge expresses the setting in greater detail. The sixth and seventh lines state: “So twice five miles of fertile ground with walls and towers were girdled round.” Locke and Hobbes both note the importance of property in their discussions of society. “Twice five miles” would be ten square miles of the “fertile ground.” Land was one of the first possessions of societal value. The line referring to “walls and towers [being] girdled round” is significant because it shows the importance of protecting this property. Although Coleridge’s poem makes no mention of why the walls and towers are there, the answers may indeed be found in the philosophy of Locke and Hobbes. Locke’s theory of human nature states that man created society out of fear that he would lose his possessions (Locke 194; Hobbes 211). In these lines, Coleridge seems to acknowledge how society and property came to be seen as objects to be owned and not just laid out haphazardly in a state of nature for all to use.

In lines twelve through twenty-eight, numerous actions appear to take place, and they all begin with a savage location that is covered in cedar trees. This site, which lies in a low spot and is said to be haunted, presents a very unpleasant area. Such an area would be grounds for dissatisfaction that might lead to revolts and/or aggression, as seen in the following lines: “And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething, as if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing, a mighty fountain was forced.” This quotation is most notable when making reference to sexual activity as the subject of this poem. If part of the poem is seen as the growing population, growing so dense that people have to move out almost all at once in order to escape the “ceaseless turmoil seething,” then the interpretation changes. All of these people would then begin to fight over land as they began to spread out. They would try to settle down, but they would have to move on when stronger settlers arrived. This consideration leads to the next lines which state: “Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail.” Interpreting the next few lines as metaphors of battle, we are led to the twenty-fourth line which states: “It flung up momentarily the sacred river.” This image would be the equivalent of a riot which momentarily causes chaos but ultimately settles down. Then, in lines twenty-five through twenty-eight the poem states: “Five miles meandering with a mazy motion through wood and dale the sacred river ran, then reached the caverns measureless to man, and sank into the tumults of a lifeless ocean.” These lines are symbolic of different societies popping up
everywhere and leading to new states of existence (caverns). These societies are not accomplishing anything (meandering) and end up dying out by sinking into “lifeless oceans.”

Voices prophesying war subsequently come to Kubla. Since all of these different societies have emerged, they will want to overcome others in order to exert their primacy. Hearing these prophesies, Kubla realizes the state that such societies have reached. He envisions, “The shadow of the dome of pleasure float[ing] midway on the waves,” and realizes how to solve the problem of the scattered, warring societies as if by an epiphany: “Where was heard the mingled measure from the fountain and the caves. It was a miracle of rare device, a sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!” Though a society already existed, it was loosely formed and restless. At this moment Kubla decides to build a utopian society and to define what society should be.

Bringing together all of the societies into one is the great undertaking that needs an effective means by which to achieve it. In lines thirty-seven to forty-four, we see what enlightens Coleridge as to how he will accomplish the task of bringing together all these imperfect societies to build his own utopian society: “A damsel with a dulcimer in a vision once I saw: it was an Abyssinian maid, and on her dulcimer she played, singing of Mount Abora.” Kubla knows the influence that a beautiful woman can have on a man and how he can use persuasion of a similar kind to draw the civilizations to him. Knowing that this form of persuasion is so strong, he continues: “Could I revive within me her symphony and song, to such a deep delight ‘twould win me.” So, even if he were vulnerable to such a persuasion, it still must be the perfect way to build his “pleasure dome.”

Finally, in the last lines the pleasure-dome begins to take the shape of a government not unlike a monarchy. Kubla states,

That music loud and long, I would build that dome in the air,
that sunny dome! Those caves of ice! And all who heard
should see them there, and all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair! Weave a circle round him
thrice, and close your eyes with holy dread, for he on honey-
dew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise.

The music swells loudly and long like the trumpet announcement for a king. The sunny dome would then be his castle amid the moat. Stating that the pleasure-dome’s shadow floated midway on the waves, lines thirty-one and thirty-two easily depict a castle sitting in the middle of a moat casting its shadow about the waves of the moat. The caves of ice then are the stone hallways of the castle. A king usually rules with fear as a motivator, hence the “Beware! Beware!” Further, the king is often envisioned in some heroic pose: “flashing eyes, his floating hair.” These characteristics are also
synonymous with descriptions of unholy possessions such as demons from horror tales. Thus these phrases also indicate the corrupting ability of power. The “circle weaved around thrice” can be symbolic of the crown worn by monarchical figures. Monarchical rulers often justified their reigns by saying that they were endowed by God to rule over man. Coleridge may be using the feeding on “honey-dew” and the drinking of the “milk of paradise” to illustrate the lifestyle of a king. Both terms have biblical connotations of being God’s blessings (land of milk and honey). All of these images are Kubla’s vision within Coleridge’s dream – hence the alternate title “A Vision in a Dream” (Meyer 1152).

An important point to remember is that Coleridge was a poet, not a philosopher. And, although Coleridge was surely proud of being a poet, since he was also a believer in pantisocracy, this poem may have been speaking out against the monarchical government, thus turning it into Coleridge’s retort to Rousseau’s claims. If the poem had ended in the fall of Kubla Khan, then the subject of the poem would be more understandable as a revolt against monarchical government. Since the poem is unfinished, however, we see only Kubla Khan deciding to rise to power and not the fate that awaits him.

Works Cited


Most parents claim to love their children unconditionally, but what happens when a parent refuses to accept his or her child as the child truly is? In Arthur Miller’s play *Death of a Salesman*, Willy Loman struggles with the temptation to apply his professional selling skills to his relationships with his family. Due to a lack of confidence in his own life, Willy tries to live vicariously through the dreams he paints for his sons, particularly his oldest son Biff, and sells him an idealized version of life and of Biff’s potential. Willy’s relentless hard sell and willful ignorance of Biff’s actual identity eventually ruin his relationship with Biff.

Willy’s ability to weave a fantastic future out of the common threads of their ordinary lives initially fosters a great affection between himself and Biff. Their relationship functions on some level in the beginning because both characters craft idealized versions of the other’s personality and worship them. Riddled with insecurity, Willy feeds off Biff’s admiration for him and deeply appreciates moments such as when Biff promises to “break through for a touchdown … just for [him]” (Miller 1835). While a group of Biff’s friends wait for him in the cellar, Willy delights to hear Biff dismissively say, “Ah, when Pop comes home they can wait” (Miller 1836). In return, Willy looks blindly on all of Biff’s flaws and affords him great latitude to act freely without discipline or criticism. Treating each other like gods, they both labor to build up one another’s self-esteem and sell themselves as products. Willy’s golden tongue serves him best in his own household, where he spends years assuring Biff of their future successes. Like a true salesman, he considers the truth a commodity, present only to serve as a starting point for embellishment. When Biff contemplates a business involving sporting goods, Willy is quick to cry that Biff “know[s] sporting goods better than Spalding” (Miller 1850). Such unfailing support serves as a heady and welcome gift for Biff at first, making it difficult for Biff to believe anything to the contrary.

Though Willy first endears himself to Biff with heaps of praise and sparse discipline, his selling techniques soon cause their relationship to crumble as Biff discovers himself ill equipped for the rigors of real life. Biff often finds Willy acting as a pal rather than a parent, complicating his ability
to learn proper behavior and consequences. Willy’s unconscious grooming of Biff into his own sort of salesman with a malleable view of issues such as morality makes it only harder for Biff to become the sort of man they both purportedly want him to be. After Biff steals a football for practice, he and his father share a chuckle over the theft as Willy remarks, “Coach’ll probably congratulate you on your initiative” (Miller 1834). Thanks to his father’s extravagant promises, Biff expects an easy ride because “it’s who you know and the smile on your face” rather than perseverance and genuine substance that count for a salesman. Near the end of the play, Biff finally crys out, “You blew me so full of hot air I could never stand taking orders from anybody” (Miller 1884). Biff claims Willy’s earlier coddling of him long prevented him from learning to take direction and submit to authority.

While their relationship could have recovered from Willy’s unrealistic visions and spoiling of Biff, the greatest destruction to Willy and Biff’s relationship occurs when Willy refuses to accept the death of the salesman personality in Biff and continues to tout his son as a future great man. As Willy becomes increasingly reliant on others to feed back to him bits of the dream he’s pushed off on them for years, Biff embraces a more honest and self-aware take on the Loman family. No longer willing to engage in revising history, Biff is unable to keep up the charade Willy so desperately craves. After Biff’s disappointing visit to Oliver, Willy adamantly refuses to listen to the truth. He demands, “I’m looking for a little good news to tell your mother ... so don’t give me a lecture about facts and aspects” (Miller 1872) and acts wholly uninterested in any negative realities Biff tries to demand that he face. In one final attempt to make his father see his true character, Biff notes, “I am not a leader of men” (Miller 1885). Nevertheless, Willy does not accept mediocrity and hotly states that he and his family are “not a dime a dozen” (Miller 1885). The unbearable weight of these unreal expectations and Willy’s refusal to stop treating his son as a top of the line product prove too much for Biff, who wearily asks Willy to “take this phony dream and burn it before something happens” (Miller 1885). Willy responds inappropriately by joyfully sacrificing his life under the delusion that his death will serve to sell himself to Biff and secure his love. Willy says hopefully, “[Biff] will see it with his eyes once and for all, he’ll see what I am” (Miller 1882) as he envisions for himself a lavish funeral with hundreds of attendees.

Throughout the play, Miller describes a salesman whose relentless attempts to portray his son as a great man and whose refusal to accept anything less destroy his relationship with his son. Though parents’ blind encouragement and dogged belief in their child may temporarily increase the good feelings their child harbors towards them, such emotions are as ill-founded as the parents’ depiction of their child as a flawless creature. If
parents seek to be truly helpful to their child, they should strive to assess their offspring with honesty and make efforts to help them grow. Such a difficult task is the biggest one parents face, yet their efforts will eventually endear them to their child’s heart more deeply than anything else.
The Apostle Paul wrote, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). In order to become more Christ-like, Paul felt people needed to mirror the death and resurrection of Christ by surrendering their former ways of the flesh. A devout Catholic, Flannery O’Connor frequently wrote stories focusing on people who are spiritually dead and slaves to a carnal existence. Her short stories “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” “Good Country People,” and “Revelation” all feature people who have some key obstacle blocking their religious growth. In each story, O’Connor’s characters undergo a figurative death in order to resurrect a dead faith.

In “Good Country People,” Hulga’s pride in her intellectual way of thinking acts as her biggest obstacle to the acquisition of genuine faith. Considering herself superior, Hulga goes so far as to think of herself as a true genius that can “get an idea across even to an inferior mind” (O’Connor 404). Her atheist intellectualism separates her from God. Changing her name from Joy to Hulga, a symbolic assertion of independence from her mother, parallels her willful denial of her spiritual parentage. Manley Pointer sees the effort involved in her disbelief and chastises, “You ain’t so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born” (O’Connor 409). Numb to the majority of her feelings, Hulga responds to her first kiss with mental detachment more than any other emotion. A dead object, a piece of wood fashioned into a leg, remains the one sacred object in her life in place of God. After the cunning Pointer steals the limb and outsmarts her, he removes the hindrance to her acceptance of God. Everything to which she clings disappears, leaving her empty and free to accept God. O’Connor notes, “It was like losing her [Hulga’s] own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his” (O’Connor 407). The absence of such a detrimental spiritual weight leaves Hulga free to accept God.
Rather than flatly denying God’s existence like Hulga, the prideful Mrs. Turpin, in “Revelation,” firmly trusts in the security of her status as a good Christian, obstructing her opportunity to find genuine belief in God. Quick to criticize others whom she deems as lower class, this “respectable, hard-working, church-going woman” (O’Connor 419) nevertheless believes herself to be the epitome of piety. Therefore, Mary Grace’s verbal and physical assaults stun her. Yet even during the challenge to her fraudulent faith, Mrs. Turpin never seems to doubt that God is the source of the condemning message. She simply resents Him for it and doggedly resists acknowledging her need for change. Only after lashing out at God and receiving his subsequent rebuke does she find herself humbled. Finally able to relinquish her former moral superiority, Mrs. Turpin absorbs “some abysmal life-giving knowledge” (O’Connor 423) that causes her to realize how little her contributions thus far in life have meant, as her former impure motives lead only to her supposed “virtues … being burned away” (O’Connor 423).

Much like Mrs. Turpin’s virtuous masquerade, the grandmother’s main impediment, in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” is her indulgence in hypocritical behavior, rendering meaningless her profession of religious faith. Deluded into thinking that she is a good Christian woman, she nonetheless acts with a moral relativism that allows her deceitful behavior and selfish actions. Until the grandmother encounters The Misfit, O’Connor portrays her as an extremely disagreeable woman who seems most adept at nagging and ordering around her family. The Misfit’s appearance transforms her. Though she initially tries to appeal to him with promises of money to secure her release, an entirely different person inhabits the end of the story. No longer focused on herself or trifles such as status and wealth, she extends her hand to touch The Misfit and remarks in awe to the troubled man, “Why, you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!” (O’Connor 394). This daring action is full of the unconditional love and acceptance of a parent, much like the love that Christian teachings suggest God offers, and is markedly different from her prior treatment of her own son Bailey. At this point, she abandons her former selfish outlook to thoroughly embrace Christ-like values. The grandmother’s literal death hints that she is the one character who most fully changes out of the three people featured in these stories. “Legs crossed under her like a child’s” (O’Connor 394), the grandmother gives up all aspects of her former life and submits to God.
Throughout the stories, Flannery O’Connor places her characters in trying situations that serve to create them anew in Christ by forcing them to lose their old ways of life. The Misfit observes, “If He [Christ] did what he said, then it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him” (O’Connor 394). Like attempting to fully serve two separate masters, living simultaneously for God and the flesh is impossible. Instead, one must cast off one life for the other to flourish.
Webster’s College Dictionary defines “communicating” as “the imparting of knowledge; making known; divulging; and giving to another.” Some of the characters in Anne Tyler’s novel *The Accidental Tourist* have a huge communication problem. These people “experience language barriers that hinder communication more often than they succeed in overcoming those barriers” and “these limitations of language make communication very difficult” (Croft, *Companion* 143). As the book’s main character, Macon Leary holds the unique position of the common thread running through all the characters in the novel, yet his communication skills are very unconventional. His wife Sarah tells him, he “[doesn’t] even communicate when [he] communicate[s]” (Tyler 131). Macon uses proper grammar to try to keep his life in order; however, he communicates with the people around him in unusual and sometimes disorderly ways.

Macon and his wife Sarah appear to have lines of communication that just do not convey the same message. The problems existing in Macon and Sarah’s relationship are obvious from the beginning of the novel. Describing Macon and Sarah’s communication problems, Patricia Willrich writes, “Sarah leaves him in the first chapter, in part because of their inability to connect, to help each other” (503). Anne Jones adds, “Their efforts to talk end up, habitually, in the same cul de sac: Sarah blames and criticizes Macon and Macon withdraws” (12). Especially after the death of their son Ethan, Macon and Sarah cannot communicate well enough to help each other through life. Macon believes that “they [are] like people who run to meet, holding out their arms, but their aim is wrong; they pass each other and keep running” (Tyler 9). In *Anne Tyler: A Bio-Bibliography*, Croft comments, “They are definitely not communicating, if they ever did” (77). Strangely, Macon’s aloofness attracts Sarah to him at their initial meeting; yet, ironically, the same inability to communicate ultimately drives Sarah away from him. Since they cannot seem to work out the communication issues that exist in their relationship, Macon and Sarah have a relationship that “no longer has any room for growth or change” (Bail 123). Macon and Sarah’s marriage disintegrates seemingly because of communication discrepancies they cannot mend.

In stark contrast to Sarah, Muriel Pritchett communicates with Macon in very different ways. Rather than becoming angry and pushing Macon’s
vagueness away like Sarah, Muriel chooses to investigate Macon in great depth because she “senses his isolation and tries to draw him out of it” (Croft, Bio-Bibliography 78). The ways in which she examines Macon irritate him to no end initially because, unlike Macon, “Muriel uses language as a kind of background music” (Bail 124) as she talks non-stop during obedience lessons for Macon’s dog, Edward. Incredulously, she ends the second lesson by announcing to Macon, “Next time, I’ll stay longer and talk” (Tyler 104). Muriel never gives up on Macon, even though he is more than reluctant to begin a relationship with her and very resistant to her persistence. In fact, even though Macon corrects her grammar, “Muriel continues talking and attempting to open lines of communication with [him]” because “she knows that she has lessons, perhaps more important than grammatical ones to teach him as well” (Croft, Bio-Bibliography 79). Even though her constant babble sometimes drives him crazy, Macon eventually realizes that her “strong will is a quality that [he] lacks and desperately needs in order to keep from gradually fading away into lifelessness” (Bail 125). Communication for Macon with Muriel, though difficult for Macon in the beginning, ultimately draws him out and makes a world of difference in his life.

Aside from Muriel, her son Alexander also communicates with Macon’s heart. Unlike his mother, however, Alexander silently and subconsciously sends signals to Macon, unknowingly and accidentally communicating to Macon his need for a father figure. For his part, Macon, perhaps initially without even knowing why, accepts this challenge. Possibly, Macon decides to step in as Alexander’s second father because, as Paul Bail notices, “Alexander is Macon’s mirror image; by helping Alexander, Macon is restoring himself” (125). Another reason for Macon’s acceptance of Alexander as a second son could be that Macon feels he communicates with Ethan through Alexander. His new connection with Alexander conjures up both good and bad feelings within Macon. Unfortunately, this “affection has made Macon feel vulnerable again – not only for himself but for this little boy exposed to the risks of existence in the world” (126). On the other hand, “part of the healing that Macon obtains . . . comes from his relationship [with] . . . Alexander” (125). His traumatic experience with Ethan causes Macon to spiral downward. Oddly enough, however, his rebirth into fatherhood through communication with Alexander does not send him further downward but propels him back upward into normalcy and contentment.

Not only his “second son,” but his biological son, Ethan, also causes Macon to communicate strangely. Ethan’s death forces Macon to withdraw even further and hold his thoughts, emotions, and words even more in check from everyone around him. In fact, as Sarah broaches the subject of his communication skills, Macon says with disdain, “Oh, communicate,” which is
“his least favorite word” (Tyler 131), especially regarding Ethan. Not surprisingly, the restrained way Macon grieves over Ethan communicates indifference to the rest of the world. Most see Macon reacting in a “heartbreaking attempt to carry on as though nothing has happened” (Bail 122). Macon even tries to communicate the love and attention he longs to give Ethan to Edward, choosing to overlook the dog’s misbehavior simply because he had belonged to Ethan. In a way, though, Ethan seems to lead Macon gently into the future as Macon sees a French boy with a similar appearance to Ethan at the novel’s end. Through this boy, Ethan seems to give Macon his blessing to move on as the boy “lift[s] a hand in a formal goodbye” (Tyler 341). Communication regarding Ethan presents obstacles for Macon to overcome, but Ethan also indirectly helps Macon break free and live a more abundant life.

Even stranger than his interactions with Ethan, Macon and his siblings tend to communicate in the most peculiar ways of anyone in the novel. Their last name, “Leary,” perfectly communicates how the siblings feel about connecting with people outside their own family. The Learys seem to speak a language all their own, “engaging in interminable, ritual discussions whenever any minor decision has to be made” (Bail 126). For example, the Leary siblings play a card game called “vaccination.” The rules conform to the opinions and moods of the siblings and the siblings only, making the possibility of anyone else learning to play impossible, which is exactly what they want. A Leary invents new rules whenever he or she deems necessary, and only a Leary can disregard old rules that no longer fit the desire of those playing the game. This game represents a perfect parallel to the Leary lifestyle in that the foundation of both is based on the use of strange words and stranger rules. Though unusual, this methodology communicates the strong, impermeable bond these siblings share and wish to keep.

Obviously, Macon Leary communicates with his loved ones in strange ways despite his desire for order in his life in Anne Tyler’s The Accidental Tourist. Jonathan Yardley tries to praise this novel as he says, “Words fail me” (qtd. in Croft, Bio-Bibliography 80). This statement seems ironic for a novel so full of examples of communication. Robert Croft sums up Macon’s communication struggle perfectly in An Anne Tyler Companion:
Tyler’s characters are faced with the dilemma of reconciling their desire to communicate with those around them, especially those they love and care about, with the limitations of language and their own fears of making such connections. Usually they either fail to make the effort to communicate, or more often, make the attempt only to be misunderstood. (64)

Sadly, Macon Leary does not really even communicate with some of the most important people in his life; however, he ultimately learns how to live a happier life by communicating with others as he gradually comes to realize that perfect grammar does not always equal perfect communication.

Works Cited


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