

The Delta Epsilon Sigma Alpha Chapter Writing Contest Winners

Vol. XXIII

May 2008

El Camino: Ida y Vuelta	<i>Elizabeth Elsbernd</i>
Little Wooden Crosses	<i>Carla Kaufman</i>
The Eulogy	<i>Annie Langel</i>
At the Memorial	<i>Amy Hall</i>
The Beauty Pageant	<i>Amy Hall</i>
The Gardener	<i>Matt Balk</i>
Stop and Go	<i>Matt Balk</i>
In My 'Hood (Neighbors).....	<i>Carla Kaufman</i>
Tomato Picking	<i>Alison Balaskovits</i>
Fried Egg Soup	<i>Alison Balaskovits</i>
Remembering Sophie	<i>Rachel Carroll</i>
Wreath Unraveled: Grief, Loss, and Transformation in Louise Erdrich's "Crown of Thorns"	<i>Elizabeth Elsbernd</i>
A Correspondence Between Two Cultures: Answering the Question of Exclusiveness in Ceremony	<i>Amy Hall</i>
Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum	<i>Kari Gossling</i>
A Postcolonial Approach to Love Medicine	<i>Rachel Carroll</i>
"Flores, Honduras"	<i>Amy Hall</i>



2/Delta Epsilon Sigma – Alpha 2008
In Remembrance of LeighElizabeth Elsbernd

Still Hanging OnAndy Kuennen

What Can’t Be HelpedAlison Balaskovits

**Courageous Primate: Pope John Paul II and the
Solidarity MovementChristopher Johnson**

The Seed Took RootFrancis C. Lehner, Ph.D.

**Loras College Alpha Chapter Winners of the Undergraduate
Delta Epsilon Sigma National Writing Contest**

**Loras College Alpha Chapter Winners of the Undergraduate
Delta Epsilon Sigma National Scholarships And Fellowships**

Delta Epsilon Sigma National Student Award

Rules for the Des Contest

Contributors

Acknowledgements



Elizabeth Elsbernd

El Camino: Ida y Vuelta

Spiritual Reflections upon my return to the United States from Spain

I have always craved unity. I think one of the reasons that I like writing so much is that I can craft things so that they cohere and make sense. Themes and thesis statements demand a clear focus, a tidy tying together of things. I like music for the way everything dances back to the refrain and art for its ability to capture emotion and action in a single portrait or sculpture. Nonetheless, I was surprised when the professor of my Intro to Painting class pointed out to me that nearly all of my paintings were centrifugal. Although not a conscious decision, I find it clear that I was always drawn to the Center.

Faith, a sturdy yet slippery thing at the center of who I am, is a series of *ida y vuelta*, of going and returning. In Spanish, the phrase *ida y vuelta* literally means departure and return, but it is always translated into English as roundtrip. I like the literal translation better, for it emphasizes not the return to a starting point, but the going away and the coming back—not necessarily to the exact place from which I departed, but to a place that more aptly takes into account the things I learned as a result of my journey. My experiences before, during, and after my time studying abroad in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, intensified my awareness of these *idas y vueltas* in my life, and in particular, in my faith life.

* * *

Fittingly, the first full day I spent in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, was a Sunday. I attended Mass at the cathedral, a stunning architectural masterpiece with a baroque façade and a Romanesque interior: beautiful, but what I perceived to be cold and spiritually empty. As I strained to comprehend the gospel echoing off the high-arched ceiling, a long-haired, hippie-looking drunken man stumbled out of a pew and shouted a few disruptive words in Spanish, which were, at the time, indiscernible to me both literally and figuratively. Things like this did not happen in my hometown



parish or at Loras College’s Christ the King Chapel. I had known instances such as this took place, but I had never come face to face with them before, least of all in a “spiritual” setting. I found myself more distracted by the reactions—or rather, lack of action—of those around me than by the man’s muttering between frequent swigs from the bottle he was carrying. It was the juxtaposition between what the priest was preaching and the reality of the situation that bothered me the most. I remember feeling deeply disturbed, suddenly uncomfortable in my own skin, because no one—including myself—did anything. I began thinking, what am I doing here? How can I sit here and listen to this gospel message and not reach out to this man? Within my first twenty-four hours in Spain, I began to sense more intensely the friction inherent in living as a person of faith.

The incident at the cathedral was followed by a series of other disheartening experiences. My host mother and brother did not attend Mass regularly, even though they were Catholic, and so for the first few Sundays I went to Mass alone. Those first weekends I went to multiple services, in search of a church with a vibrant congregation, but I did not have much luck. The cold and dampness of the ancient stone churches and the equally ancient parishioners compounded the feelings of spiritual disorientation I had begun to feel. In my mid-term evaluation for the Loras Center for Experiential Learning, I wrote in response to how I was responding to the new culture: “I think I’ve only cried twice since I arrived: one time was the result of me feeling stupid constantly, and one time was because I was saddened by the lack of vitality I felt in the churches here.” The key word here is was. After a few weeks of wandering and wondering, I began a mini-vuelta when my host mother introduced my friends Joanna, Alan, and me to don Miguel, the priest of the charming Santa María Salome parish. In addition to finally finding a vibrant faith community and joining the church’s youth choir, we were introduced to the Bible Study group that I discuss below in an excerpt from my journal:

Tuesday, January 23, 2007: Last night my friends Joanna, Alan, and I went to “Oración,” a Bible Study group composed of university-aged young people. Felisa [Joanna’s host mother] was the one who told us about it and showed us where the church—San Fernando—was. I am so glad I went, even though when we were standing outside the door waiting to go in, I felt—as Joanna said—as though it was the first day of kindergarten all over again!



Of course, the minute we walked into the room, we were welcomed by warm smiles. There were about eight other people there—all female but one young man coincidentally named Fernando. I really liked the structure of this Bible Study. We began and ended with a song, and there was also a song in the middle which was interrupted occasionally by petitions, prayers, and words of praise. It was interesting to see how another culture worships—some differences, but a lot of similarities. A nice reminder that we all share—if nothing else—the same creator. Oración meets every Monday night at 8:45 p.m. I’m really excited to go again, because not only is it a good opportunity to continue growing in my faith and understanding of my own and others’ spirituality, but it’s also a good way to improve my Spanish and actually get to know some real Spanish people my age! It was good to see that there are still some young people in Santiago who are interested in and excited about their faith.

Reading back over this excerpt from one of my earliest journal entries, I realize how much I left out. I brushed over one of the most important ideas; that is, about how there are “some differences, but a lot of similarities” between how Spanish Catholics and American Catholics worship. The Spain Bible study was far more “spiritual” and more focused on entering into prayer and song than any Bible studies I had attended at Loras. With candles lining a make-shift altar and the spontaneous bursts of whispered praise—“Gloria a Dios” or “Bendita sea, Señor”—God “felt” different there, more distant, detached, and foreign. I came to realize that the reason the same God and even the same religion looked so different to me was because I was just looking at Him and my faith from a different perspective. The following journal entry reveals the questions I encountered as a result of examining my spirituality in light of a different setting:

Tuesday, January 30, 2007: The past few days have been kind of rough, but I feel a lot better this morning. My spirits are higher and I’m excited for the day. I was just praying and thinking—about how there are so many different religions and outlooks and beliefs throughout the world, and how spirituality can take so many different forms or no form at all. I always catch myself wondering—“Who’s right?” or “Who knows the true path?” This morning the first thing that came to mind was, “Maybe we’re all a little right



and all a little wrong.” Then, when I finished my prayer and opened my Bible to the second chapter in Corinthians, the first passage I laid eyes on was “The True Wisdom of God.” [I forgot to mention that I had also prayed for wisdom.] It talks about the prophecy, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2-9). No one can be one-hundred sure of anything—because the human heart simply cannot conceive the true wisdom of God.

Sometimes I wish I could remember all the things that I think and pray about, all the wisdom that comes out of silence and solitude, all the things that occurred to me as I lived abroad in Spain, but sometimes I’m glad I can’t. Sometimes I find myself thinking, “Thank God we forget.” If I remembered everything, I would get overwhelmed. And besides, if I’ve learned anything through re-reading my journal entries, it’s that the rediscovering of things—the vuelta—deepens our understanding of and experiences in life, bringing us closer to the true Center. On a four-day trip to Rome at the end of February, I expected to experience a “boost” in my spiritual life, but, as the journal entry below reveals, I found myself slightly disappointed:

February 19, 2007: My friends were in total awe of all the churches we saw, but I just didn’t get that feeling. I really wish—to some extent—that I could feel that way, but. . . I guess I’m just not easily impressed. I don’t know, I think it’s just that it bothers me to use churches for sightseeing. I understand that it’s awesome to see the architecture and that the experience is spiritually invigorating for some people, but for me, faith is more of an inner and interpersonal journey, independent of all the depictions of angels and Biblical figures painted or sculpted or drawn in the churches. The one thing I was disappointed with in Rome was how sacred spaces turn into spectacles and tourist attractions. Although many people feel a heightened sense of connection with their spirituality when seeing all the beautiful churches in Rome, I felt more of a separation and sadness that I cannot really explain.

Is my faith rooted in place? From this journal entry it would seem not. And yet, I had begun to wonder if it was. Loras makes it convenient to worship and attend Mass, and I am often surrounded by people who are deeply spiritual, even deeply Catholic. In Spain, the services were not as “interesting” or



“entertaining” as they are at Loras, and so it became agonizingly clear to me that my commitment to God and prayer maybe wasn’t as firm as I had perceived it to be. I thought a lot about what my spiritual life would be like if I had grown up in a different family, a different country, or a different culture. I still wonder. Would I have been Catholic if I had not been so-baptized as a baby? Perhaps my faith has not so much to do with place as it does with the people I’m around. Catholicism is really about community, and, even though I became a part of the Santa Maria Salomé parish, I didn’t sense the support I had had at Loras.

* * *

Monday, March 12, 2007: I’m having a tough time spiritually right now. I really need to re-establish a regular routine of daily prayer, but I feel so scatter-brained right now, as though I can’t concentrate on anything. One of the most difficult parts of being in Spain is that I can’t help people as much as I did/do back home. I am the one who needs help here—learning the language, the customs, the culture. I’m not used to being dependent on other people, but here—I have to be. I have to be vulnerable—I am vulnerable, 24-7. I’m constantly making mistakes. I’m constantly unsure. I’m constantly rewording phrases to translate them into Spanish. I constantly feel stupid. I’m not used to these feelings. I’m usually the one in control, the one who knows exactly what she wants to communicate, the one who usually has the right answer:

Lord, I really want to renew my relationship with you. I feel so distant right now, so spiritually disoriented. I don’t know what I believe anymore. Well, I guess I never really knew. . . I do know that there is something inside of everyone—something extremely powerful. I think it’s You, Lord. When we take time to seek out this power, amazing things happen. Lord, help me fulfill my Lenten vows of being more generous with my time, my gifts, and my money. Help me regain the discipline I once had—in prayer and in everyday life. I ask this in Your name. Amen.

I always feel somewhat uncomfortable reading what I write about being a person of faith and particularly about being a Catholic. I always find myself reading it as I imagine a non-Catholic, a non-Christian, or even an atheist



would read it, and I ask myself: Does that make sense? And sometimes it doesn't, because faith is not something that's entirely logical, but something that's felt, discovered, explored and experienced. When I separate myself from my words, when I forget the experience and only read what I wrote, I sometimes feel skeptical or doubtful. But then I remember not to forget.

My spiritual life was not only challenged and enriched in Spain within the walls of a church or the silence of prayer. I was continually aware of the sacredness of my interactions with the people I met and with whom I formed relationships. In an email home after my trip to Madrid in May, I wrote:

Interestingly enough, my trip to Madrid was a success not only because of all the amazing things I got to see, but because of the people I was with. I got to travel with three people who have become some of my greatest friends, and I had the privilege of meeting and staying with a wonderful family. When they dropped us off at the airport on Monday, the good-bye was nothing less than two rounds of hugs and a few tears. Even though we had all only known each other for fewer than four days, it felt as though we had known each other forever. None of us knew how to thank them enough for all that they had done. The only thing we can do, I guess, is—when the opportunity arises—be as generous with others as they were with us.

*“Don't let the chain of love
End with you...”*

* * *

At the end of the semester, Joanna, Alan, and I chose to walk a 112-kilometer segment of the Camino de Santiago from Sarria to Santiago de Compostela. Despite finding the vibrant parish of Santa María Salome and joining the Bible study group at San Fernando, I felt increasingly more distant from God and the Church. Although I was also expecting the pilgrimage to be a cultural experience, I was hoping that it would be the catalyst for the spiritual re-connection that I was so desperately seeking. I was largely disappointed:

Sunday, May 13, 2007: It's funny, because as I'm walking what is supposed to be a spiritual pilgrimage, I'm feeling less and less of a connection and more and more doubt and frustration concerning my faith.



I struggled with my faith more while doing the Camino than at any other point during my time abroad, in part because I felt so much guilt about not being very community-oriented. I have always been an introverted person, and even though I enjoy being around people most of the time, I definitely have to have a significant amount of time to myself. I struggled between appeasing Joanna and Alan’s desire to walk together the entire way and my own intense longing to experience God in silence and solitude. Coupled with the mileage we trekked each day, the interior tensions I experienced left me feeling tired physically, defeated emotionally, and empty spiritually. Although these feelings were swirling beneath the surface, I still had many enjoyable and fruitful moments along the journey:

Sunday, May 13, 2007: By the time to set out for Mass came around, the sun had miraculously appeared and I decided to go. I couldn’t really understand the priest (because the rural people and priests speak a bit differently) and got just about as much out of the service as I had expected—not much.... When Alan and Joanna knelt down to pray after Mass, I just sat back down on the pew. No use pretending I was praying. I didn’t want to make a show of being pious if it wasn’t an authentic act of faith. So I sat there, elbows on my knees. As we exited the church, we found that it was pouring again, but just as I was putting on my wet windbreaker to avoid soiling the only remaining dry long-sleeve shirt I had, the rain stopped. Coincidence?

Monday, May 14, 2007: It’s interesting that each day seems to get progressively easier. I barely feel my pack anymore, despite the fact that I am still without a chest strap. Maybe it also has something to do with the fact that I’m wearing more and carrying fewer clothes than I was the first day. Still, as always happens on physically-challenging endurance trips like these, I realize once more that it’s not about arriving; it’s about the journey you took to there. Even though I go through my stubborn streaks and try to justify my desire to “just get there,” I always end up realizing that it’s not about “just getting there.” Unless it’s cold and rainy.

Wednesday, May 16, 2007: It was so awesome seeing Santiago below us for the first time. As we entered the city, it seemed strangely foreign. It was different not only because we entered a part with which I was unfamiliar, but



because I was seeing it from the perspective of a pilgrim, as a person who'd journeyed from afar (Sarria's kinda far...) and arrived at her destination. It seemed to take forever to actually get from the edge of Santiago to the cathedral. All the fatigue we'd felt walking that morning faded as we walked into the city.

Just as I came into Santiago from a different perspective as a pilgrim, so I returned to the United States with a different perception of Catholicism and the way my faith should play out in my life. I went through a sort of “spiritual crisis” upon returning from Spain. I googled various questions I had about Catholicism and read religious books in search of the “answers,” unaware that the answers were not on the internet or in books. It wasn't until I began to pray again and surrounded myself with friends and family that I felt in my heart the peace that could only come from God.

One of the things that was “missing” in my life in Spain was service. I hinted at this in one of my journal entries. It wasn't that I missed feeling “needed” by those whom I served, but the ability to express my gratitude by “giving back” to the community. Spending the summer after my semester abroad as an AmeriCorps volunteer was the best transition I could have asked for upon returning to the United States, because I began to give again, and not only “take” as I had in Spain.

So, how have I changed as a result of going to Spain? How has my faith changed? I certainly feel the tensions much more intensely now. Faith isn't quite the comfort quilt it used to be. It begs me to ask questions—of myself, of others, of my Church. I still don't know all the answers; I still have a lot to learn, but my experience in Spain forced me to engage more fully in my faith—to dialogue with God, myself, and others about what it means to be a Catholic. Just as saying prayers in a foreign language forced me to really think about what I was saying, spending time in Spain allowed me to explore something that was oftentimes habit and routine: my faith. Instead of seeking absolute answers and “just getting there,” I will be content to experience the *idas y vueltas* of my life and live in the midst of the paradox and tensions that are *el camino*.



Carla Kaufman

Little Wooden Crosses

They put up little wooden crosses
in rows in the open grass
at the college every year
They say that's how many fetuses are killed
An hour, or a minute, or something.
Only they call them "babies."
I know a girl at the college.
Her breasts grew large
And afterwards, they shrunk again.
Only her friends knew.
She's in college now, she didn't love him.
Her parents would have killed her.
She had to.

This year, she will look at those crosses.
Maybe she'll see a student she knows
helping a priest or nun
Line up the wooden crosses
In the ground
And she'll ask why
And the student will say
She had to.



Annie Langel

The Eulogy

I knew she was coming, but I jumped at the sound of the door bell. I got up, shut off the T.V. in my living room, and strode across the thick carpet. I shut the doors to the armoire to hide the T.V. and ran to the front door. The tile surrounding my front door felt cool on my bare feet even though it was a warm spring day.

“Hi, Sarah, how’s everyone today?” Gloria asked. It felt foreboding the way she said “everyone,” as though she was looking beyond me to my sister in the living room.

“We’re doing okay. Amy’s her old happy self, but she’s sleeping right now,” I replied. There was a breeze that rustled the trees behind her and I opened the door wider. Even though I appreciated Gloria coming, in a way I felt defeat; I should be able to take care of my sister while she had cancer. Gloria did things I couldn’t: taking Amy’s blood pressure, checking her medicine, bathing her, that sort of thing.

Amy had been sleeping while I watched T.V., but she was awake now. She sat up in bed and said good morning to both Gloria and me. Gloria flashed her big smile. They must have taught her how to do that during her hospice training. But, then again, it was genuine. I wondered if she had braces as a child.

Gloria sat on the edge of Amy’s bed and began to take her temperature. I didn’t know what to do with myself, so I excused myself to the kitchen. My husband, Bill, had left his breakfast dishes next to the sink and I busied myself washing them. I hadn’t seen Bill before he went to the office this morning, nor had I seen him before he left any morning this week. He had begun to work longer hours since Amy moved in two months ago. This was his way of coping with the situation, I suppose. I sometimes wished I could be back at work, just to take my mind off of things. It’s not like it was the world’s best job, being a bank teller, but it gave me independence and kept me from going



crazy sitting in the house, especially since Bill and I still didn't have any kids after being married for almost four years. But things were different now, with Amy here. I've always had to take care of everybody it seems. Now with Amy so sick, it's just about all I do. Besides Gloria, there's no one to help me--no one to talk to. So I kept it all in.

"Sarah, Amy's going to take her bath now--will you help us with the stairs?"

"Sure," I called back, wiping my hands on a dishtowel.

I stepped back into the living room. What a funny name for a room, yet how fitting for Amy; she really did *live* in this room. I know some people call it a sitting room, or a T.V. room, but my mom called it a living room so I suppose I always will too. Amy's red blanket had already been pulled back and Amy had her legs dangling over the side of the bed. Fluid had been gathering in her legs, making them swollen far beyond their normal size. I was waiting for the swelling to go down, but I think Amy knew it wouldn't. I always dreaded what was to come next: the slow ascent up the stairs. My heart began to rip away from my ribcage as I put my shoulder under Amy on her left side, Gloria on her right. We lifted Amy and she used us as crutches to drag her legs toward the steps. I couldn't understand how my independent sister could allow herself to be helped in such a way.

We took the steps one at a time. All the while Amy made half-hearted jokes about her great achievements. When we reached the top she was so happy and proud; you'd think she'd just climbed Mount Everest all on her own with every odd against her. Amy had always been that way. In school, every one of Amy's papers had gone on the refrigerator, regardless of the grade. To Amy, all that mattered was how hard she tried. In my eyes all she had really done was let Gloria and me half carry her up fifteen steps so someone who was pretty much a stranger could bathe her. After Amy and Gloria were in the bathroom right off the steps, I continued cleaning, gathering clothes from the hamper, putting them in the washer downstairs, sweeping the kitchen floor, anything to keep me from sitting and listening to Amy tell of her accomplishments while I waited to help her back down the steps.

* * *

After Gloria left, Amy and I ate lunch. I had leftover chicken salad. Amy tried some cereal, but she was having a very difficult time keeping anything



down. She and I played Scrabble, watched T.V.; she took a nap, and I read a little out of my book. When Bill came home, I had supper on the table and the three of us ate in the dining room. While I did dishes Amy wrote in her journal and Bill went up to his office for the night.

I remembered the way Bill used to help me with dishes and we would talk about our day. I needed that now. I thought maybe he would come down and help me, with more than just the dishes.

“Bill? Could you come dry while I wash?” I hollered up the stairs.

Silence.

“Bill?” Dishtowel in hand, I put my foot on the first step.

“Sarah? I’ll help with the dishes,” Amy called from the living room. It really was a sweet offer, but totally impractical.

“No thanks, I’m just going to go talk to Bill for a minute.”

“Okay, I’ll be right here.” I could hear the smile in Amy’s voice and one snuck onto my face, too.

Bill’s desk was covered with papers and his open laptop. The only light in the room came from the standing lamp next to the desk, and Bill sat hunched over to see what he was reading. He had tossed his jacket over the straight-back desk chair and pulled his navy blue tie loose. Even in his young age, he looked old with his glasses sliding down his nose and his blond hair pushed to one side. His once-toned chest and abs had begun to look less defined. He didn’t look bad, just not the way he once looked.

“Why don’t you have more lights on?” I flipped on the overhead light, and the pale violet walls that would look appropriate in a nursery became visible.

“What is it, honey?” Bill’s eyes rested on me like he forgot that we lived in the same house.

“Didn’t you hear me calling? I was wondering if you would help me with the dishes.”

“Sarah, I have to have this turned into Mr. Peterson by Monday. Do you really need me?”

Bill had always been quiet; I’ve always had to work to get him to talk to me. But I couldn’t understand why he wouldn’t listen. Maybe he felt cheated out of his space and freedom having Amy downstairs. But she had nowhere else to go. Didn’t he understand that? His eyes went right back to the page



he had been reading and he didn't even notice as I walked out and made my way back down the stairs. As I walked past the living room Amy yelled out, "Are you sure you don't need me?"

I stuck my head in the door and said "I'm okay" with my best fake smile. As I walked back into the kitchen, tears started to form in the corners of my eyes. I sat at the kitchen table and folded and refolded the dishtowel I had been carrying around. Barely letting the words escape I whispered, "I need you."

* * *

When I finally went to bed that night, the lights were already off, but I could tell Bill was only pretending to be asleep. I felt so frustrated; I wanted more out of my life. I thought "in good times and bad" meant not pretending to be asleep when my only sister was downstairs so sick that she needed hospice to take care of her. I undressed myself and slowly refolded my clothes, trying to put my thoughts in order. I pulled my dresser drawer open quietly in the pretense that Bill was asleep. I slipped my nightgown over my head and pushed the covers back on the bed. The moonlight spilled in through the blinds and landed on our wedding photo. I slid in between the covers and wrapped my arms around my husband.

"Bill? Bill? Can we talk?"

Nothing.

I rolled over and wrapped my arms around myself. I was so angry. Did Bill feel he was losing me because Amy took up so much of my time? If that was the case, why didn't he reach out to me? I tried to keep my tears from hitting the pillow case. I could feel the bed move as Bill began to roll over. He pushed his arm underneath me and wrapped his other arm around my waist. A gentle kiss landed on my cheek.

"I'm here--let's get some sleep, Sarah."

* * *

The next morning I got up, dressed, and went downstairs. Amy was still sleeping and I didn't want to wake her. I made myself toast and coffee. I read the paper that Bill had read and perfectly refolded before he left for work. I left my dishes in the sink and went into the living room to do the crossword on the couch.



The warm sunlight streamed through the window like rainbows streaking across the sky. The beams rested on Amy's face and the arm she had tucked under her head. I remembered when her hair flowed long and dirty blond. She never walked anywhere; she skipped or jumped or something, but now her youthful muscles had deteriorated. I wondered if I should close the blinds; I didn't want it to wake Amy. I felt kind of strange, just sitting in my living room on my overstuffed couch watching my sister sleep, wondering if she was okay. My question about the blinds was answered for me as Amy's eyes fluttered open. I noticed something I never realized; I was well aware that Amy didn't have eyelashes anymore, just like she didn't have hair either, but to see her eyes flutter as though she wanted to give the air in front of her a butterfly kiss and couldn't clutch my heart for a second. I wanted to talk about that day in the hay field when we learned about butterfly kisses, but I couldn't bring myself to do it.

"Good morning, Sunshine," Amy announced as the old grandfather clock in the hall chimed 9:30. Lost in my own thoughts, I only smiled a reply.

"Oh, Sarah, don't you remember how Dad used to walk into our room before school and announce 'Good morning, Sunshine!' in his big, booming voice? And then, Mom would have cereal and toast ready for us downstairs?"

Subconsciously, the corners of my mouth inched up; Amy could always do that to me. "Do you remember that summer she tried to make something 'good and wholesome' every day? More than just cereal...pancakes, French toast, eggs, omelets..."

I could see the light in Amy's eyes as she remembered too. She sat up in her little hospital bed that sat along the wall of my living room, just the way we sat up in bed and made memories when we were little and carefree. "And that only lasted, what, a week?" Amy leaned against the off-white wall behind her and reflected while I started thinking of food I could make that Amy could keep down.

Amy's eyes connected with mine. "Do you remember that day we spent in Aunt Mary and Uncle Jim's hay field? And no one could find us? And we made a fairy world and threw a tea party for all the fairies? And then Dad finally came on the three-wheeler..."

Oh, no. The butterfly kisses day. Why did Amy have to remember that story?



“Amy, do you want anything to eat? Maybe some Jell-O?”

“Oh, come on, Sarah, you remember that day. And then Dad came on Uncle Jim’s three-wheeler and he was so mad he wanted us to get on the back of the three-wheeler so he could take us back. But we showed him our cute brown eyes and told him he just *had* to meet the queen fairy and pretty soon he was sitting in the hay right there with us! Do you remember all of the butterflies, Sarah? The blue and yellow and orange butterflies?”

“Are you sure you’re not hungry? Or do you want to watch anything on T.V.? Or...”

“Oh, you do too remember that day, Sarah. And Dad told us that everybody kisses different. And if we wanted to kiss real soft like butterflies we had to do it with our eyelashes. Here, I’ll show you.”

She threw back her blanket and lifted her swollen legs over the side of the bed. She pushed herself up, and I knew she was going to try to totter the few steps to the couch. I knew she couldn’t do it.

“No, Amy.” I reached for her but she just took my hand and used it to support herself to the couch, rather than back to bed. She plopped, and not gracefully. I sat gently next to her, not sure what to do next. I breathed deeply, trying to keep my tears inside, for her. She leaned in and said, “Here, let me show you.” Her pale skin was like rough paper against my face and I felt the nothing of where her eyelashes should have been. One single tear escaped my will.

She leaned back--realized what had happened. More than one tear fell from her eyes. I didn’t even think, I just leaned in and blinked my eyelashes against her dry, sickened skin. I kissed her the way butterflies kiss: real soft. I helped her up. We walked the few steps to her bed. Amy had her moment of weakness, and now it was over. Just like that. That was the way she always was. I knew that my weakness was not going to go away. I thought Amy would ask for the T.V. remote or maybe go back to sleep, but then I heard her voice.

“Sarah, do you remember the eulogy at Mom and Dad’s wake?”

My head whipped around so fast to face her I heard a crack in my neck. “Amy, stop! I remember and I don’t want to talk about it.”

Her eyes, the color of sweet caramel candy, stared at the armoire that sat unemotional across the room. It was like she hadn’t heard me. Her only



focus was on making sure the words got out. “Sarah, none of who Mom and Dad really were was in that eulogy. Aunt Suzie didn’t talk about how Mom wanted to make us pancakes every day. No one ever knew that Dad taught us how to kiss like butterflies. Sarah, no one knows me like you. Mom and Dad are gone now. I don’t have a Bill like you do--I guess I’ve never just sat down long enough to get to know someone. My big sister has always been there, through school dances and graduations and Mom and Dad’s car accident and all of this--” she gestured to her body and to the bed around her--“and, Sarah, you’ve just got to tell them. Tell people who I am. Tell them all of the things I want to show them, the things I am running out of time to show. Can you do that for me Sarah--will you write my eulogy?”

I closed my eyes, willing the tears to stay inside where my anger belonged. “Amy, you are not going to die. You are going to get better.” I had to squeeze the words out. My chest was hurting. I did not want to have this conversation. I wanted it all to go away. I couldn’t even look at Amy. I tried to keep my focus from blurring by looking at the photos that were framed in silver around the room: Amy and I with our parents, Bill and I on vacation, Christmas. Amy’s voice came from behind me and I felt like it penetrated through the back of my head like a hot laser.

“Sarah, you know I will,” Amy’s voice came in a strong whisper.

And I did. But I wouldn’t admit it. Not even to myself. And not to Amy.

Amy continued a little louder, “That’s why we let the rent go on my apartment, sold my furniture; I put all my things in order, Sarah. I picked out my tombstone before I even moved in here, Sarah. You know that. Stop trying to hide it.”

Something inside me broke. I was enraged, not with Amy, but with what, I didn’t know. My sister was dying and it wasn’t fair. All I wanted to do was tear apart my own living room, push the cold silver frames off the end tables, smash the lamps against the armoire, rip the cushions off the couch, and end it all crying in a heap. That’s what I wanted to let my body do. But I held it all in the way I was supposed to. The sleeve of my sweatshirt scratched my eyelids as I wiped my tears. I took a deep breath and turned to face my sister.



“Amy, you can get another apartment, new furniture. Mom and Dad taught us to be prepared--that’s why you put your finances and things in order. You are not going to die. You’re 32 years old. You’re my little sister....”

My energy drained as I spoke. The rage that made me want to tear up the room wasn’t gone, just burning less intensely. I sank into the couch, drained and defeated. I raised my eyes and saw Amy’s staring directly into mine. She was not going to give this up. She was determined. But I was sick of being strong.

Amy’s voice remained intense. “Sarah, do this for me. Write about who I am. Please do this for me.” Her eyes pierced into mine.

“I’ll do it for you, Amy.” Even as the words came out, I didn’t know what to think. She wouldn’t really die, would she? But looking at the exhaustion and pain on her face and in her eyes hit me. It was like a weight sinking down in my stomach and hitting the bottom with a sickening feeling.

* * *

That night when Bill came home Amy was asleep and supper was on the table. I left; just took the car and started driving. Dusk had settled over my little city and the street lights were coming on in the residential area. I had nowhere to go, nowhere I wanted to go. I felt empty inside; it was really happening. Amy was going to die. I loved her. Did she know that? How could I tell her?

I somehow wound up at Hope Cemetery, where my parents are. Well, I suppose they aren’t really there. It’s strange how people say that. People aren’t at cemeteries, their graves are. I parked and turned off the ignition. Dusk turned into twilight, then into darkness. The light from a lamppost shone above me and the stars twinkled, trying to get their two cents in. My body started to move without me realizing it. I forgot everything: pancakes and butterfly kisses and Amy and cancer. The gravel crunched underneath my tennis shoes as I walked the path to where my parents were laid to rest and knelt down in the grass. The other tombstones and graves that stretched out far in daylight disappeared in the night. I was truly alone. No one was going to help me figure out how to say good bye to her--to tell her I love her.

The grass was cool against my hands as I laid my palms into the prickly short blades. I traced my parents’ anniversary on the unforgiving granite. I thought about that night. Two police officers had come to my house. Bill



answered the door. A single-car accident. Slick roads. Two fatalities. One family cut in half, ripped to shreds. I went to Amy's apartment and was the big sister. I told her what happened. I held her in my arms while she cried. I cried too, but I don't know if she knew that. She must have.

I could feel lines appear on my forehead and tears well in my eyes. "Why?" I screamed. My voice echoed through the hills of the cemetery towards the streetlights below, but no one heard it. Well, maybe God did. I was so tired of feeling hurt and lost, yet there was Amy being so strong dying in my living room. The rage that had left me flared up and I began destroying things like I had in my head before. I tore the grass and kicked at the ground. I let strands of my thick, dark hair stick to my wet checks. I wanted to strike out at something; I smacked the tombstone with my open palm and instantly regretted it as pain welled in my hand.

This time my energy truly drained and I fell exhausted into a heap on the grass. My whole body shook with each rattling breath that I sucked in and pushed out of my mouth. I don't know how much time slipped by, but I slowly began to feel cold as the air temperature dropped. I began to realize what a mess I must be. I wanted to go home. I wanted to wrap my sister in my arms and tell her if she was ready, I was ready to let her go. I wanted to tell her I loved her.

The walk back to my car and the drive home seemed to take forever, yet I don't remember very much of it. But I wanted to tell her. I wanted to be serious when I told her I would tell everyone about her. I realized it was past nine o' clock and Amy would probably be asleep, but I could tell her in the morning. I could say "I love you, Sunshine," and that would make her smile, like Dad could make her smile.

I pulled onto my quiet street and parked my car in the driveway. The house was dark except the light in Bill's study. He must have checked on Amy and made sure she was ready for sleep at the normal time and then went upstairs like he always does. It felt so eerie that I had screamed and cried and made peace at the cemetery while the rest of the world remained the same here at home. My shoes squeaked on the stone pathway to the front door and I tried to make sure my keys didn't jingle and that the door was quiet when I opened it.



An old movie was on T.V. in the living room with the sound on low. The black and white figures danced in the reflection of the glass in the picture frames and the windows. I slipped my shoes off and padded across the carpet to shut the blinds so the sun wouldn't wake Amy in the morning. I was beginning to feel some of the despair and pain from the past lift off of me. I knelt down next to Amy; as strange as it sounds, I just wanted to watch her sleep. That's when it happened. I suppose it didn't happen right at that moment, but at some point while I was gone.

I waited for her chest to move; it seemed like an eternity, but it was only a moment. I waited for the T.V.'s dancing reflection on her silver necklace to rise up with her breath, but it didn't.

I stood up slowly and moved to the edge of the couch. I didn't know what to do. Should I call Gloria? Should I call the hospital? Should I get Bill? Everything seemed to be spinning in my head. Suddenly, it all stopped. The eulogy--I had to do it for her. I pulled a notepad and a pen from the end table and began to write. Some things flowed so well--things about who Amy was and who she inspired me to be. Some things were harder--the things that made tears well in my eyes.

"Honey? Why are you still awake?" Bill had appeared in the doorway in his pajamas and robe.

I heard the grandfather clock in the hallway chime 11 o'clock. The notepad was full of cross outs and scratch marks, but it was a start. It had been a while since I had cried, but looking up at Bill brought all the tears back.

"Bill..." I choked.

"What is it, Sarah?" His eyes traveled to the hospital bed in the corner where Amy, no Amy's body, lay peacefully.

"Bill, she's gone." I swiftly got up and knelt beside her bed again. Bill pulled me away and wrapped me in his arms.

"I love you, Sarah."



Amy Hall

At the Memorial

My small ten-year-old legs
sprint up the steps until
they tire. Then
I stop and look up
at the massive columns
which tower over me
and the reflective pool
at the base.

After trudging up the last
twenty stairs, I'm finally
at the top. Turning back,
I see the tall, thin monument
in the distance, whose
reflection seems
to be spiking the water.
Mom, Dad, and Sarah
take their time up the steps
and I yell "Hurry up!"

Turning around again,
I see him.
He looks exactly as I've
pictured, minus the black top hat.
He sits regally, with one
arm on each side. I almost
expect him to reach up
and stroke his beard. But
his fingers sit patiently
without movement.



23/Delta Epsilon Sigma – *Alpha* 2008

Yet, wait. I swear I saw –
No, it couldn't be – Yes,
there it is again. His index
finger is tapping the armrest
of his chair, up then down again.
My throat tightens, and my pulse
quickens. I look to my right and left.
No one else notices.
Should I tell my parents?
“Sarah,” I whisper, as I make a motion
for my younger sister to join me.
I point upwards and she stretches her neck,
as a white dove flies from the statue's
hand to the ceiling.

Embarrassed, I tell Sarah nevermind, but
as I turn my head, I swear he winks.



Amy Hall

The Beauty Pageant¹

PREFACE²

The Beauty Pageant, one of my stranger plays, okay, my only play, evolved over a number of weeks. I first conceived of the play in the spring of 2007 in my Southern Discomfort Literature course. Because of other commitments, I was forced to put it aside for days at a time, but I kept coming back to it – mostly due to an overhanging deadline that continued to inch closer and closer.

I finished *The Beauty Pageant* in mid-April and gave it to my theatrical agent, Emily Brass. Brass was supportive and not concerned at all: “I love the idea of an outhouse on stage! You are just brilliant, Amy!”

Everyone loved the play, Germans included, and I became the most successful college playwright in the history of the world – well, actually, I’m still a struggling college student, trying to make sense of why I chose a major in English (what jobs are there in English any way!?) – but a girl can dream, right?

By the way, I never altered the cut of the swimsuit. Which is exactly why Bunny has a wedge during the pageant. Besides, I like sequins.

THE CHARACTERS

KATE: the beauty queen’s mother

BUNNY: the beauty queen

JOY: Bunny’s sister, Kate’s older daughter

¹ This work is inspired by Beth Henley’s play *The Debutante Ball*.

² Henley wrote a preface to her play describing the stages, revisions, and problems it went through. She makes certain that her readers know that she didn’t change the essence of the original play. “Although I have altered the cut of the gown, I have never changed its color. It is still red.” Henley xiv.



THE SETTING

The setting of the play is the backyard and the kitchen of a red, paint-peeling rundown farmhouse in rural Mississippi.³ An outhouse complete with crescent moon sits behind the house.⁴ The farm is restricted to the half an acre surrounding the house because the other land has long been sold away. The kitchen of the farmhouse is fairly messy (dirty dishes are piled in the sink). An icebox sits in the corner of the room and a kitchen table in the middle.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

The sun is only just rising. Next to the outhouse, Bunny, a twelve-year-old girl, whose beauty makes her look almost sixteen, is walking self-consciously in her two-piece swimsuit and tiara. She has high cheekbones, a perfect figure and a glowing smile – when she chooses to show it. On this day, however, her sparkling tiara and silver-sequined swimsuit contrast the dead look in her eyes.⁵ Her high heels make her walk look more like a shuffle, like she’s going to trip at any moment. Her mother, Kate, an unattractive, obese woman is yelling instructions.⁶

³ Henley was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and many of her plays are set in her home state or at least in the South. However, she once said, “Some of my plays don’t take place in the South. I try not to think about what kind of playwright I am. If they want to do my work because they’ve decided to do Southern plays, or women’s plays, or short people’s plays, I say, ‘OK, sign me up!’ I’m just happy to get a production.” Henley qtd. in Hodgins. Nevertheless, I’ve decided to set my play in Mississippi because it’s the state closest to Henley’s home.

⁴ Henley’s play *The Debutante Ball* is mainly set in the bathroom of an elegant mansion. I decided to imitate Henley by still setting my play near a bathroom, just in an opposite social setting.

⁵ The main character of *The Debutante Ball* is Teddy, a self-conscious girl who often takes her mother, Jen’s orders. Bunny and Kate are character imitations of Teddy and Jen. Bunny is less timid than Teddy. Although she is self-conscious, I wanted her to stray from Teddy’s character and stand up to her mom. Likewise, Kate strays from Jen’s character in some ways. In Henley’s play, Jen is accused of murdering her husband, while Kate is simply looking to increase her image in the community through her daughter. Even though she’s not very attractive, she wants to show that her own daughter is pretty enough to win a beauty pageant.



KATE: More graceful, Bunny! No, no, you’re doing it all wrong. Give me those. *(Kate takes Bunny’s heels, puts them on, and demonstrates the “graceful” walk that she wants Bunny to use at the pageant. She is not a very good example because she looks even more as if she is going to trip. The heels are two sizes too small and the fat of her feet rolls over the sides of the shoes as she walks. Bunny rolls her eyes, stops paying attention to her mother, and she flops down in the grass instead. Kate doesn’t notice her daughter’s disdain.)* See, you weren’t doing it right. Your walk has to be elegant like mine.

BUNNY: Are we done yet?

KATE: Fine. We’ll take a break for an hour. Come back out, though. We need to practice your talent. Oh, and don’t eat anything. You need to be able to fit in that swimsuit tonight and it’s already looking a little tight. I can’t believe the show is in a few hours, we have so much to do! Aren’t you excited? *(Bunny retreats into the house and slams the broken screen door behind her without answering her mother’s question.)*

KATE: Finally. *(Kate sighs and forces her hand into the pocket of her tight jeans. She pulls out a jumbo-sized Hershey’s bar and stuffs it in her mouth, almost forgetting to unwrap it.)* Mmm...so good. One little candy bar won’t

⁶ Henley’s plays often center around families – especially eccentric families. Often her characters are based on her own unconventional family. As a child, Henley once wrote, ‘I hate Momma’ and then signed it ‘Beth.’ Her mother, Lydy Becker Caldwell (an actress), simply wrote back, ‘I hate you too. Love, Mother.’ Bertram. In a newspaper article titled “The World of Men in Her New Play, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Beth Henley Switches Gears,” the author notes, “. . . family relationships, whether between women or men, are forever fodder for Henley’s imagination. She said she is struck by ‘how inevitable they are and how permanent (they are). Even if you cast off your family, it’s still a part of you somehow.’ Henley qtd. in Granieri.



hurt. (*Chocolate is smeared all over Kate's lips and chin,⁷ exposing her secret to her other daughter, Joy,⁸ who comes out of the outhouse. Tall and gangly, Joy does not share her sister's natural beauty. She hides behind her acne and long greasy hair.*)

JOY: Oh, Mama, you're off your diet again.

KATE: Yes, damnit. Don't tell Bunny.

JOY: Oh, I won't. I wouldn't. I won't.⁹ (*Joy makes a gesture to point out the remnants of chocolate still smeared on Kate's face. Kate wipes the chocolate off with the back of her hand and then on her jeans.*)

KATE: Where is that girl? She needs to practice. (*Kate retreats into the house yelling for Bunny, at the same time abandoning Joy in the middle of the yard.*)

JOY: Nice to see you too, Mama.

⁷ “I’ve always been attracted to split images. The grotesque combined with the innocent, a child walking with a cane; a kitten with a swollen head; a hunchback drinking a cup of fruit punch. Somehow, these images are a metaphor for my view of life; they’re colorful. Part of that is being brought up in the South; Southerners always bring out the grisly details in any event.” Henley qtd. in Granberry. My somewhat effective example of a split image is this grown woman, Kate, devouring a chocolate bar like a child.

⁸ Joy is a character imitation of Bliss, another character in *The Debutante Ball*. She is similar to Bliss in a few ways, including her constant desire to gain her mother’s approval and her consequent jealousy of her prettier sister.

⁹ These three lines of dialogue between Kate and Joy are very similar to a conversation between Jen and Bliss in *The Debutante Ball*. However, in Henley’s play the bad habit was smoking rather than eating junk food. Henley 9.



(Lights fade to blackout)

SCENE TWO

The sun is high in the sky now, the pageant is closer. BUNNY is standing in the yard again clumsily twirling a lasso rope around her head and in between her legs. When it reaches her legs, she trips over it and almost falls to the ground.

KATE: Okay, you're coming along. Bring it around your head again – that's it – and then around your waist. *(Bunny drops the rope as it hits her waist.)* No, Bun, pick it up again. My God, how many times have we practiced this? Go inside and take another break; we still have a few hours before we need to get you ready. But when you come back out it better be perfect. *(The light in the yard fades out and the light in the kitchen of the farmhouse comes on, revealing a loaded kitchen sink and Bunny at the pantry and ice box pulling out any type of junk food she can find – gummy worms, Twinkies, Doritos, fried chicken, leftover pizza, etc. etc. She tears open the Doritos and they fly across the room. She grabs a few chips off the table and shoves them in her mouth, leaving the rest on the floor. She proceeds to eat a few gummy worms, a piece of pizza, a chicken drumstick, and then a Twinkie. She doesn't fully swallow before eating something else, so she always has her cheeks and mouth stuffed with food. All of a sudden she sprints out the back screen door toward the outhouse, goes in, and closes the door. Within seconds, the audience hears sounds of throwing up. She comes out of the outhouse and has a pepperoni stuck to the middle of her forehead and a gummy worm hanging out of her nose.¹⁰ As she comes out, JOY is standing outside the outhouse tapping her foot with her hands on her hips.)*

¹⁰ Henley's plays are often a combination of tragedy and comedy. In *The Debutante Ball*, Henley repeatedly adds small details that add humor to a tragic situation. For example, in the scene when Teddy gets pregnant she has sex with the deformed man in the elevator because she feels sorry for him. After they have sex, he says, "Mm-mm good." Once Teddy tells her secret, Violet humorously says, "Kinda like you was M&M's or



JOY: Bunny, what the hell are you doing to yourself?

BUNNY: Oh, uh, hi, Joy. Uh...What are you doing out here?¹¹ *(She drops the gummy worm to the ground.)*

JOY: I would kill to have your opportunities and you just waste them.

BUNNY: *(Hangs her head and the pepperoni slides off her forehead.)* Joy, you don't understand. Mama expects so much from me. 'Bunny do this. Bunny do that.' I just can't take it anymore.

JOY: Well, you can't do this to yourself. You're not fat. If anyone is, it's me. Plus, I'd take your problems in a second. At least Mama likes you.

BUNNY: *(with tears streaming down her face)* Then why don't you do the fuckin' pageant! *(She runs into the house, again slamming the door behind her.)*

JOY: *(quietly)* If only I could.

(Lights fade to blackout)

somptin'." Henley 62-63. Henley wants her audience to laugh, even in the midst of tragedy. "That innate sense of humor and tragedy is critical to Henley's work because she does not appear to distinguish between the two. In Henley's mind, they intermingle, in life and on stage. And both inform her dark brand of humor. Henley admits, "That's my world view — that's just how I see things, as both funny and dark. I never see things all as dark, and I never see things all as just romantic and sweet." Henley qtd. in Granieri. In my story, the tragedy of Bunny's eating disorder is supposed to be laughed at by the audience when she comes out of the bathroom with a gummy worm hanging out of her nose and a pepperoni on her forehead.

¹¹ Henley often uses simultaneous and/or overlapping dialogue in her plays.



ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

The kitchen light is on, and the sky outside the window is dark. The floor and table still have remnants of Doritos, but the rest of the food from Bunny's afternoon binge has been put away. Joy is sitting at the kitchen table with her cheeks in her hands, watching Bunny pace around the room.

Bunny is wearing the same swimsuit from before, but some of the sequins are hanging by mere threads and most are totally missing. Some of her hair is wrapped up in the tiara and the tiara is hanging off the side of her head. She is also missing one high heel, so she paces unbalanced around the kitchen table.

BUNNY: *(Moving dishes out of the way and then vigorously washing makeup off her face in the kitchen sink.)* I – can't – believe – Mama – made – me – do – this – stupid – pageant. *(She wipes her face with a dirty dishtowel that is sitting on the counter next to the sink.)* Those girls were about two feet shorter than me and almost five years younger. God, they looked like thirty year olds trapped in five-year-old bodies.¹²

JOY: But, Bunny, you looked marvelous! Your dress was beautiful, your hair was to die for, and your makeup looked amazing – if I do say so myself.¹³

¹² Child beauty pageants are a strange tradition, much like the Southern tradition of debutante balls. Girls as young as two are made up to look like supermodels while their parents watch with a weird sense of pride. One undergrad student named Hilary Levey decided to study pageants for a sociology project. She found that, “When some of the children lost baby teeth that had not been replaced by pageant time, their parents fit them with false teeth. When a girl’s hair was too short to curl like Barbie’s, fake additions were fitted. ‘Things like this showed me that these are not just contests to judge natural beauty.’” Qtd. in Cromie.

¹³ *In The Debutante Ball*, the actual ball is never acted out in a scene. The ball is only talked about in Act Two, as if it happened in between the two acts. Similarly, the beauty pageant of my play is never seen or acted out, only talked about.



BUNNY: (*Overlapping*)¹⁴ Don't even say another word, Joy! I got fifteenth place out of sixteen girls and I was the oldest there! When Mama gets home, I'm getting outta here. She's gonna barge in here and let loose on me, like I meant to ruin the pageant for her. I mean how was I supposed to know that the lasso was gonna get caught around that skinny little judge's neck?! I couldn'tve done that if I tried! (*Bunny sinks to her knees in front of Joy and puts her hands on Joy's knees.*) What am I gonna do? (*A sputtering car is heard coming up the driveway, is turned off, and then a car door is slammed.*) It's her. (*Bunny runs out the back door right before Kate walks in the front door.*)

KATE: (*Carrying a large chocolate milkshake and a foot long chili dog, she has to shut the door with her foot.*) Where'd she run off to?

JOY: She's afraid you're mad at her.

KATE: (*Sitting down and starting to eat*) Well, why act like a banshee? Why destroy all I've done for her?¹⁵ I mean for God sakes, she had a wedgie throughout the whole swimsuit competition. There was a full moon on the stage! And then she kicked her shoe into the crowd after she came prancing out like a horse for the gown competition.

JOY: (*Overlapping*) I know, the heel hit one of the other mothers in the eye.

KATE: No kidding; she's probably blinded for life for all I know. And don't even get me started on the lassoing.¹⁶ I can't even eat I'm so upset. (*The food is already gone.*) She ruined me. She ruined me! (*She starts sobbing in Joy's*

¹⁴ This is a different way than the way Henley overlaps dialogue. The difference between simultaneous and overlapping dialogue is that: in simultaneous dialogue the characters start speaking at the same time, whereas in overlapping dialogue one speaker interrupts the other.

¹⁵ This line is directly taken from *The Debutante Ball*. Henley 67.

¹⁶ The ball in Henley's play also went awry. Teddy ruined the whole night, according to Jen, by bowing with her gown over her head, spreading cream cheese on people's shoes, and floating her hairpiece in the punch bowl. Henley 67.



arms. Joy awkwardly pats her mother's head and smiles, happy to be needed by her mother).

JOY: Oh, Mama, don't worry. Everything will be fine. Don't worry.

(Lights fade to blackout)

SCENE TWO

It is early morning. A rooster crows announcing the rising sun. Kate is running frantically through the house (she is only seen coming in and out of the kitchen) yelling for Bunny.

Joy stands near the sink, listlessly washing the mountainous pile of dishes in the sink.

KATE: Where could she be, Joy? I've looked everywhere. What have I done?

JOY: I don't know, Mama. I'm sure she's fine. Oh hey! Have you checked the outhouse?

KATE: The outhouse! *(Kate wobbles out the back door, but quickly back through again and moves toward Joy only to kiss her on the cheek.)* You're a lifesaver, Joy. *(Joy smiles widely.)*

JOY: *(Yells as Kate retreats out the door again)* Love you too, Mama!

(Lights fade from the kitchen and the sun lights the yard, a little higher in the sky now.)

KATE: *(quietly knocks on the outhouse door)* Bun, are you in there? I need to talk to you.

BUNNY: *(dejectedly heard from inside the outhouse)* Why? I thought I ruined you.



KATE: You heard that, huh? C'mon, open the door. I just wanted to say—

BUNNY: *(The door swings open, Bunny collapses into Kate's arms)* I'm sorry, Mama. I'm sorry.

KATE: I'm sorry too. Here, sit down. *(Kate puts the toilet seat down and sits, Bunny squeezes next to her.)* I was an idiot, Bun. You looked beautiful last night and I could only worry about myself. I was wrong. And I was wrong to pressure you. Joy told me she heard you throwing up yesterday.

BUNNY: Mama, I can't help it. You're always so good at staying on your diets. What can I say, I love to eat. Throwing up is the only way I can stay skinny like you.

KATE: Damn it, this is all my fault. Do you really see yourself as fatter than me? Look at me! I don't diet!

BUNNY: Are you kidding? I was throwing up for no reason?! Mama, I don't know how I'm gonna stop it. It's my life now.

KATE: Bun, we'll figure something out. I'll take you to the doctor, I'll go to the bathroom with you... something...anything. I just know you can't keep doing this. *(Kate brushes away a tear from her daughter's cheek.)*

BUNNY: I know. I don't know how I'm gonna stop, but at least I don't have a feeling anymore like it's never gonna get better.¹⁷ *(Kate smiles.)* Y'know, Mama, maybe you should put Joy in those pageant things instead; she'd be perfect for them. Everyone can see she's not the prettiest, but she'd milk what she's got.

¹⁷ This line was directly taken from one of Teddy's lines in *The Debutante Ball*. Henley 96.



KATE: Hmm, that’s not a bad idea...not bad at all. Speaking of milk...I used to have some milk and cookies around here somewhere. *(She searches under a loose plank in the floor of the outhouse.)*

BUNNY: Oh, I ate those last week. But look under the board next to it.

KATE: *(pulling out two moon pies and two glass bottles of RC Cola)* Ooh, this is perfect. My favorite combo. Let’s make a toast.

BUNNY: Yeah, to the end of beauty pageants!

KATE: And to the end of diets!

(With that, they clink together their bottles and take a huge chug of Cola and the lights fade to blackout.)

END OF PLAY

Works Cited

- Bertram, Jack. “I Can’t Imagine a World Without Her.” The Clarion-Ledger. 25 Oct. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.
- Cromie, William J. “The Whys and Woes of Beauty Pageants.” The Harvard University Gazette. 8 June 2000. 17 March 2007. <<http://www.hno.harvard.edu/gazette/2000/06.08/beauty.html>>.
- Granberry, Michael. “Beth Henley: The Play’s the Thing for This SMU Alum.” The Dallas Morning News. 5 March 2000, final ed.: 1E. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.
- Granieri, Laurie. “The World of Men in Her New Play, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Beth Henley Switches Gears.” Home News Tribune. 30 April 2006. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.



Henley, Beth. The Debutante Ball. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Hodgins, Paul. “Uphill Battle.” The Orange County Register. 21 Oct. 2006. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.

Works Consulted

Anderson, Kathryn Murphy. “Henley, Beth.” American Women Writers, Vol. 2. Ed. Taryn Benbow-Pfalzgraf. Detroit: St. James Press, 2000. 200-201.

“Beth Henley Writes Fluffy Memories of a Lost South.” The Advocate. 19 June 1989. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.

Henley, Beth. “Expressing ‘The Misery and Confusion Truthfully’: An Interview With Beth Henley.” By Jackson R. Bryer. American Drama. Winter 2005: 14. Literature Resource Center. Gale Database. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 12 Feb. 2007 <<http://galenet.galegroup.com>>.

“Henley, Elizabeth Becker.” Contemporary Authors. Vol. 107. Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1983. 205-206.

Jennings, Diane. “Writer’s the Right Role for Beth Henley.” The Dallas Morning News. 14 April 1991. Access World News. NewsBank. Loras College Library. Dubuque, Iowa. 27 Jan. 2007 <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com>>.

Padgett, John B. “Beth Henley.” The Mississippi Writer’s Page. June 1999. 27 Jan. 2007 <http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/english/ms-writers/dir/henley_beth/>.



Matt Balk

The Gardener

So there I am alone
in my garden
plantin' some veggies and
watchin' the birds glide
past that new streetlight
when my daddy comes home
from his job at the lab
and says you gotta
get yourself a dame.
I ask who and he says
I got just the girl in mind
so he whacks me on the head
with a flick of his hand and
when I wake up there's a lady with
no clothes on lying next to me.
She says she's my wife and I say
that's a real rib-tickler and she says
you're tellin me. Well, ever since
she got here it's just the darndest thing
because all the birds done left
and the darn veggies won't grow
and daddy's getting mad cuz
we been listening to that scaly
looking preacher on channel 66.
But I don't care too much
because even though that girl
is probably gonna be the death of me
she sure knows how to make one
mean apple pie.



Matt Balk

Stop and Go

Many poems have been written
describing love as a blooming flower,
a perfect organism brimming with brilliant colors
and sweet odors. However,

the ones who write these eulogies rarely sit and observe
anything more than the crossword puzzle at breakfast
while their husbands fly past them at lightspeed for the door
and their children scream for more cornflakes.

You could write about those wonderfully
lazy Saturday mornings,
curled up against warm skin and
breath, instead of

the night before when you didn't get to bed until twelve
because the kid was puking again and your wife got back
late from her meeting and how your mother in law called
complaining about how you never visit anymore and—

Stop! Love is no fragile plant! It's a
mischievous bastard that loves to drive at ninety,
braking just in time before you crash, leaving your
heart pounding and your lungs out of breath.

Ain't it great?



Carla Kaufman

In My 'Hood (Neighbors)

*♪It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood. It's a beautiful day for a neighbor.
Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor? ♪*

~Mr. Rogers

What's the deal with neighbors? Have you ever noticed how close you actually are to them? Your neighbors are in the house next to you, or right across the street. Neighbors know you well. They know when you leave, when you come home, what you wear, who comes over, how nice you keep your yard, what kind of car you drive. Everybody has neighbors -- funny ones, geeky ones, creepy ones, nice ones. Some come and go and others stay forever. There are the neighbors you despise, who steal your parking spot, and there are the neighbors you befriend, who you borrow sugar from.

The number one factor in making friends is vicinity. Think about it -- it's true. When you're a kid, your neighbors are your life. They are your buddies you walk home from school with, your partners in tag, your teammates in kickball, and your best friends. My childhood neighbors are still my friends. Molly Meloy is my favorite neighbor. She taught me how to swing, how to joke, and she forced me repeatedly to watch *Goonies* after school. Molly was my older sister's age, but got along with me better. We used to sing along to Wilson Philips in the backyard and jump on the trampoline. Molly would always do imitations of people -- mostly neighbors. Her most memorable impression besides the spot-on imitation of my mom was when she would walk right in the door and yell, "Who am I?", and we would reply "Hilary," laughing, because Hilary was the older neighbor woman who never knocked. She burst in the front door, usually yelling my mom's name loudly. Molly would also do sometimes cruel impressions of my sister, and the neighbor boy who used to talk with a lisp -- who once had to call for us over the intercom at school when he couldn't find us to walk him home. He "Totked on the tintertom."



In my Midwestern town, I had two neighborhoods -- Avalon and Wilson. My parents divorced when I was three, so I had double the neighbors from then on. Wilson was my dad's street and was a working class neighborhood, just up the hill from downtown. It is an old neighborhood with historic two-story homes, some that have been kept up, some that haven't. Avalon, in contrast, has a suburban feel with brick houses and one-story ranch homes. Most of the neighbors there hurry off without acknowledging each other and many often move in and out, to even nicer homes. Molly was a neighbor at my mom's house. Yet, she had an aunt near my dad's street and still ended up with us on the weekends. Or, she stayed the whole weekend with us and went home when we went back to our mom's. Molly's older brother also shared in my and my siblings' joint custody visits because he was best friends with my older brother. They chased tornadoes together, calling themselves "Nado Busters." They made up their own tag game with a Freddie Cougar glove, called "Freddie's helpers." They even shared time in detention together. Now, they talk on the phone for hours, and while they live in different cities, they are neighbors at heart.

The Staudenraus's are a family of neighbors from my mom's neighborhood that my family keeps touch with. Josh was friends with my brother and dated my sister. He was the token geek, he wore glasses, played Nintendo, and was afraid to play sports. Lacey was my friend, even though she always called me "Darla." We shared in our love of Magna-Doodle and Oreos after school. Neighbors can be influences, good or bad. I used to admire their sister Shannon, whom I once saw crawling out the window at night with a blue sequined dress on. She was the rebel of the family. Their mother, Rose, became good friends with my mom. They stood outside for hours talking about husbands, divorce and their children. Since Rose passed away, our family keeps her youngest son close. He has become best friends with my littlest brother, although they are not neighbors.

Neighbors become important again as adults. Children often 'go to the neighbors' forcing adults to once again make friends with the neighbors. These neighbors can come in handy for giving rides to school or the mall. As an elder adult, your neighbors become even closer. Old lady neighbors sit on the porch together. Old men stand in the yard talking about the lawn. Family members die, move away, mobility lessens, and neighbors become important.



They may even save your life. The little old lady on the corner of my mom’s house always sat outside on her porch. She had short, white, curly hair and was old and slow; however, when my brother ran down the street naked, she was fast enough. She saved him from running into the busy street.

My dad made friends with all the neighbors. When someone moved next door in the house perpetually for sale, my dad would be over there within a week. College kids, or a young married couple, he was always invited to parties or was receiving pottery. One neighbor that my dad spent a lot of time with was John Schissel. All Schissels are characters. John had long hair for the majority of his life, went shirtless often, and wore short cut-off jeans while mowing the lawn. He was often drunk and when he came over he went straight to the fridge for a beer. His son, Jake, is taking after him. Jake is my life-long neighbor; he continues to live a house away from me. I wave to him every morning and he usually yells my name with force.

This life-long neighbor takes being a neighbor extremely serious: I love neighbors like this. Jake thinks that sharing a street makes you family. He listens to rap music, wears baggy pants, and constantly stands on his porch on his cell phone or smoking a cigarette. He thinks he’s a gangster and just recently told me, “I would kill for your family.” Jake lies to people saying that we are “next-door” neighbors. I usually confirm this lie. So, what is so much more special about a next-door neighbor? The title “next-door” implies closeness, enforcing the idea that vicinity is so important in friendship. Jake said that if he won the lottery he would “build a bridge from our deck to his back door.” To build this bridge, we would have to arch it over our real next-door neighbors’ house, the Kunkels. Kyle Kunkel is my little brother’s age, and Stacey is between me and my older sister. As kids, Stacey and I were close and played make-up together. Kyle and John watched wrestling and played with action figures. To this day, Kyle walks right in my house and thinks he has family rights. This kid regularly buys and sells things to people. If you want a DVD, a CD player, subs, he’s got ’em.

The weirdest neighbor I ever had is Greg Buelow. His eyes were always squinted and his face had so many freckles that they all connected somehow. He had a signature laugh, similar to Nelson’s on the Simpson’s, which kids imitated. This neighbor would give anything to be like our family. He used to steal from us when we were little. I chased him home after he stole a loaf



of bread once. This kid wasn't poor or hungry; I think maybe he just wanted a part of us. When we got older, he would peek through our windows. I fell asleep in the living room once and woke up to his face through the window. I was always creeped out by this, but my dad didn't mind. He would wave him to come inside.

The Mulgrews also lived on Wilson and are good friends with the Meloy's, further connecting my two neighborhoods. Maddy Mulgrew and I used to plot about setting up her mom with my dad, so that we could be sisters. They owned the nicest house on the street, and their aunt starred in Star-Trek. At Maddy's 23rd birthday party, there were so many neighbors there that her brother teased her, "What did you go to Hill Top Park and yell 'Hey guys, wanna come to my birthday party tonight?'"

There are parks by both my neighborhoods -- Hill Top and Hillcrest (Turtle Park to the old school kids). Parks are a part of neighborhoods. In both of my neighborhoods, parks were only a few houses down the street. Turtle was by my mom's house and had a big lookout tower that we would crawl on the roof of. Molly once got stuck on it and I had to get her mom to help her down. Hill Top was by my dad's house, almost directly behind my backyard. Hill Top was an important social spot in my adolescence. It was where the Wilson kids mingled with the W. 8th and Caledonia kids. There have been fights over the red bouncy balls that some W. 8th kids continually busted there.

My house was the neighborhood hang out. As a child, kids were in and out and as a teenager, kids hung out there. As a young adult, we had many parties where most of the neighborhood showed up. The Meloy's, Schissels and Mulgrews would be there, even the Staudenraus from my mom's neighborhood. But, the partying somewhat separated the neighborhood. Because some neighbors, especially Greg Buelow, wanted to come and usually weren't invited. Eventually, they called the cops enough about the noise and the parties slowed.

Whatever happened to the block party? Do people not have interest in each other anymore, or have our lives become too busy? I remember going to parties with all of the neighbors. I ran around in the blocked-off road, feeling free because our parents didn't seem to be keeping as close of a watch as usual in the street. Adults kept their eyes on everyone's kids. Neighbors shared food, drink, and conversation. Back then, all neighbors seemed to be friends.



I never see block parties anymore. People would rather have blocks between them than block off the street to be enclosed together. We should revive the block party, for neighbors to get to know one another or for just catching up.

When people asked me where I lived when I was younger, I would always say Avalon Road, to the reply, “Oh, that’s a nice neighborhood.” So, what makes a nice neighborhood? Why is one neighborhood better than the other? The core word in neighborhood is neighbor -- the heart of the hood. Now I live in my dad’s old house on Wilson. Although people don’t say it’s a “nice neighborhood,” the neighbors stay close. Some would even kill for us, and get away on the bridge connecting two houses together.



Alison Balaskovits

Tomato Picking

An elegy to Marian Cabay (1911-2007)

They're ready to go
All ripe and wrinkled flesh
We plucked them by the handful
No time to linger except to
Pay my respects
By taking the best

Look at this one
At the end of the line.
Not verdant-vined; crinkled.
Its coarse weight bears up brown,
Finished leaves.
It has given the last of its worth
In bleeding berries.

All that is done must come out
I heave and haul until it seems I'm
Six feet below green
And covered in living dirt.
Our roots grow longer than this,
Down into the core.

Every sickly yellow insignificance
I choke down my throat
Remains, rots,
On memory's green backbone.
On which death itself
Hangs defeated in wet,
Brightly shining seeds.



Alison Balaskovits

Fried Egg Soup

Careful as you are you drop some
On your right breast and
I can't help but stare.
It's that breast.
God, *that* breast, like a blue flower
And pink elephant.
I just want to say, Mom,
My perfect, healthy tits and I understand.

I know nothing.

You dab it with a napkin and smile,
“Silly me.”
God, Mom, *stop wiping it away*
It isn't going to vanish no matter how
Hard you scrub.
If I could trade this insipid, peach-skin health
So that you and I
Could cross the gulf of plastic tables,
Embrace over the muddy soup,
If you and I could do that,
Just once in understanding,
I'd take that rot right there
And bring it into me.



Rachel Carroll

Remembering Sophie

Taking one last swig of his whiskey-laden coffee and letting the numbness settle firmly into his limbs, Joseph got up from the table, tossed his empty mug into the pile of last night's dishes and walked into the empty yard, allowing the screen door to bang shut behind him. He knew that when the auction started in a few hours this place would be swarming with eager farmers, each hoping to snatch up a solid piece of land for a decent price. Hands in his pockets, Joseph strolled slowly across the well-worn dirt path behind the house, heading out toward the fields. His walk seemed purposeful, his gaze fixed on some object in the distance, yet the intent was unknown to his conscious mind. He paid little attention to his surroundings until he was brought back to reality by the tall cylinder of a grain bin blocking his path.

As his eyes traveled up the shiny steel sides, Joseph felt an inkling of some unidentifiable emotion—fear, he suspected—the first real emotion he had felt since his wife's death nearly eight months before. He had avoided this grain bin since then on principle, though it used to be his favorite place on the farm. The tip of the cone-shaped roof was a prime thinking spot, an ideal location for daydreaming about the markets rising so he could purchase that shiny blue tractor he'd been eyeing or, more often, for contemplating the fate of a small farmer struggling to keep his head above water among the rising tide of corporate giants.

Grasping the cool bar of metal, Joseph put his foot on the first rung of the ladder and began the climb up to the top of the grain bin. His progress was slow, the mental exertion of trying to overcome the reluctance he had borne for the past eight months plainly evident on his face. Still, the desire to look down over the thousand acres he had lived on since he was a boy, knowing that this could very well be the last time, conquered his fear.

Joseph sat on the pinnacle of the grain bin and gazed out over the fields. He felt naked, exposed, unprotected by the open sky. The light of the rising sun was dimmed by the clouds that cast a dark pallor over the monotonous



rows of green. Turning to the right, toward the house, he beheld a small dark patch of dirt, once a lively jumble of vegetables—tomatoes, cucumbers, onions—now abandoned to the mercy of the tangled weeds. The ruins of the garden reminded Joseph of small hands, crudely whittled with the cracks of labor and nails stubbornly refusing to let go of that last speck of dirt. He closed his eyes and felt a gentle touch like leather on his cheek.

The corners of his eyes prickled, but he squeezed them tightly shut before quickly focusing instead on the rows of corn spread out before him. Though it was summer and the stalks were only half height and green, Joseph remembered a different time when all he could see was a forest of dusty gold towering above him. A small hand with a firm grip pulled him along, weaving and twisting through the flaxen haze and encouraging him with a girlish laugh like the tinkle of a wind chime in a soft breeze.

All at once she stopped and said, “Listen, Joey. Can you hear that?” Both children stood still as the wind blew across their faces and the dry leaves whispered and crackled around them. Each stalk quivered as if attempting to suppress a rollicking gale of laughter.

Joseph glanced at the freckled face beside him, a gap-toothed grin plastered on it as she remained silent, listening. Suddenly, his hand shot out, poking her in the stomach. Sophie twitched violently and gave a high-pitched squeal which quickly turned to indignation. As soon as Joseph heard that tone change, he turned and sprinted off down the road, ignoring her outraged cries of “You get back here, mister!”

Joseph chuckled softly to himself as he opened his eyes and glanced down at the ladder beneath his feet. Without warning, that same childish grin flashed into his mind, shining on a face that was as worn as the faded blue jeans she wore over her slim frame. Only her eyes seemed untouched by time, still sparkling with the same vitality as when she was twelve years old. She gave him a mischievous look and put her hand on the rung of that ladder on which he now sat, nearly eight months later.

Joseph protested that he was perfectly able to climb up inside the grain bin and fix the stirator, which had completely ceased sifting through the multitude of corn kernels just that morning, despite personal misgivings about the ankle he had sprained earlier today. Sophie, as usual, ignored him and continued to



the top, calling back that supper and a hot bath were waiting for him after this job was finished.

Joseph waited at the bottom of the bin, sinking down against the cool steel side and listening to her tinkering around up there.

“How’s it comin’?” he called, after a few minutes.

“Almost got it,” she replied in a muffled voice. “I just need to get the... connected... oh for Christ’s sake... hold on, I’ll be... in just one...” Fragments of her words were blown away by the wind that was beginning to pick up.

“Well, take your time, no rush,” he called back, closing his eyes for a moment and losing himself in images of tender roast beef and steaming mashed potatoes.

“Joseph...” he heard again, faintly, “I think I...” The rest of her sentence was lost in the howling of the wind. He hoped that meant that she had finished, and he stood up, shading his eyes with his hand as he looked for her form to appear at the top of the bin.

Tapping his foot impatiently against the ground he called again, “Sophie! Are you ready?” He could discern no answer and sighed, thinking she could probably hear his voice from inside the grain bin about as well as he had heard hers. He relaxed against the side again and waited, trying his best to ignore the rumblings of his stomach. Joseph could not understand what on earth was taking Sophie so long; the bearings that rotate the stirator around the bin are easy enough to replace, and it sounded like she had finished ten minutes ago.

“SOPHIE!” He called again, as loud as he could, but heard no reply. He could just see the indignant expression on her face when she realized he had climbed up there to check on her, but the slightly panicking voice in the back of his head compelled him to ignore the throbbing of his ankle and climb up the ladder.

When he finally reached the top, at a somewhat slower pace than his usual scamper, Joseph put on his best apologetic face, poking his head through the opening on the roof and expecting a reprimand at any moment. He couldn’t see her at first, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the dim light before he carefully swung his legs inside and stepped onto the crust of the corn. The image that greeted him sent a shocking wave of ice through his body—a small, dark form was sprawled out on the far side of the bin.



“Soph!” he cried, his anguished voice echoing around him. The rustling and popping of the kernels that flew out from under his feet as he stumbled quickly across the corn bed sounded harsh as it was magnified in the enclosed chamber. He hurried over to her limp form, jumbled thoughts of imagined scenarios racing through his head, each competing for recognition as the most difficult to bear.

“Sophie,” he uttered again, his throat catching on the last syllable as he gently turned her over, observing but not comprehending the stillness of her chest, the coldness of her face. His trembling fingers gripped her shoulders tightly as he repeated her name over and over, certain that she would at least hear his voice and open her eyes.

The tears began to fall thick and fast from Joseph’s eyes, blurring his vision of Sophie’s lifeless form and bringing him back to the present. Who would have thought that a heart attack could strike so suddenly and fatally without warning? He put his head in his hands as wave after wave of grief gripped him, oblivious to the far off sounds of car doors slamming and the laughter and chatter of voices as people arrived for the auction. When he opened his eyes again, all he could see was drab green fields under a faded gray sky that felt heavy upon his hunched shoulders. His hands clenched the edge of the cold steel as if he could gain some control over the deluge of thoughts that engulfed him. He could still hear the patter of the corn kernels as they fell against one another like a light rain on a tin roof, disrupted by the movement of his feet. The beat echoed in his head, putting his thoughts to rhythm. *Why did I let her go up there? Why did I? Why? Why?* The sound was magnified till it filled his mind, no longer a light drizzle but a downpour driving out all other thoughts and feelings till he was filled with nothing but self-loathing and regret.

Joseph stood up suddenly. He had to get it out of his head—the pounding, the rhythm, the thoughts that he had kept hidden in the back of his mind for the past eight months. It was all too much. He couldn’t handle this. He was just one person, alone. No Sophie, no farm, nothing left to stick around for. He had lost everything that he loved. The memory of that one unjustifiable event tainted everything around him—the fields, the machines, the grain bin that he was sitting on.



He had thought that selling the farm was the only way to escape from the pain, but it seemed only to intensify it. He would move away, leave all this behind, but he would still be haunted by the memories. They would creep up on him on some dark and lonely night, catching him at unawares when he flipped past the farm market report on AM radio before he could find the ball game. There was only one way to silence the thoughts for good. He had to escape, escape from the world, a world that had no purpose for him anymore—a small farmer, a dying breed in an increasingly commercialized world. His sole supporter, his lone confidant, his Sophie had left him with nothing but heartache and painful memories.

She had always been there for him when no one else had—when his dad died suddenly, leaving the farm when grain prices were low and yields weren't much better. No one had thought that the outwardly cocky but inexperienced young man had the determination or the ability to turn the place around without some serious outside help that would leave him in debt for quite a while. But Sophie had. A junior in college then, she had left to marry him, using her accounting skills from the degree she would delay for years to come to help organize the carelessly kept books his dad had left him.

He could vividly remember the phone call to her house the night before his dad died. It was late, and he was tired after spending most of the day at his father's bedside in the hospital. Joseph returned home to look after the farm while his mother stayed with her sister in town, closer to the hospital. He couldn't sleep and went outside to look at the stars, staring up at them with tear-filled eyes, what-if thoughts running through his head. The blackness of the night around him seemed to seep into his soul, filling him with an incredible sense of loneliness and fear as the vast emptiness of the flat farmland around him seemed to engulf his own small, insignificant self. The need to reach out to someone, to make a connection, to soothe the emptiness he felt inside compelled him to go inside, pick up the phone and dial her number, even though time had already crawled into the early hours of the morning.

He anxiously waited through the first three rings, praying that she would answer, even pinning his hopes for salvation from this nightmare on the sound of her voice.

"Hello?" A muffled voice, heavy with sleep that was nevertheless as familiar to him as his own home came over the line.



“Soph,” he said, his voice filled with both relief and anxiety.

“Joe? Are you alright? What’s wrong?” He could almost feel her tense up as her voice became clearer with each word.

“I’m sorry for waking you. I just...I needed someone to talk to.”

“What’s the matter, Joe?”

“It’s Dad,” he said, his voice breaking on that word. “He’s worse. I don’t think...I mean, tomorrow might be...” His breathing became labored, and he couldn’t finish the sentence.

“Where are you, Joe? Are you at the hospital?”

“No, Mom sent me home to look after the farm. I’ll go back tomorrow morning...well in a few hours...to be with them. I just couldn’t sleep.”

“It’s okay,” she said, her voice soothing as a mother trying to calm a screaming child. “It’s going to be alright, Joey.”

“I just don’t know what I’m going to do, Soph. When Dad... If Dad...the farm...” His voice trailed off, and he could feel the strong façade he had put up for his mother began to crumble. The lump in his throat had swelled and threatened to spill out in a storm of tears. He took a few short breaths, attempting to call himself.

“Hold on, Joe. It’s okay. It’s okay.” Sophie’s voice sounded concerned, and he tried to picture her face in his mind. Tears blurred his mental vision of her, and a sob escaped his lips before he could contain it.

“Oh Joe...just cry if you need to. Just cry. I’m here.”

There was a pause as Joseph’s muffled sobs increased in intensity. He clutched the phone, holding fast to that lifeline. He tried to control his emotions, sucking air into his lungs in deep gulping breaths, but it only resulted in a renewed burst of agony inside of him.

“Okay...okay,” Sophie said, in an attempted soothing tone that was betrayed by the tension underneath. “Just stay right there, Joe. I’ll be over there in an hour or so.”

“What? Soph...no...don’t come all the way up here for me. Don’t worry. I’ll be okay.” Joseph wasn’t sure how much of that was understandable or how much of it he really meant. At the same time, he felt a huge surge of relief stream through him.

“I’ll be there as soon as I can,” she repeated, calmly, determined.



He could remember pacing around his house for the next few hours, upstairs and downstairs, repeating the same pattern over and over again, concentrating solely on the methodical movement of his feet and blocking out all other thoughts. When he heard the sound of Sophie's car crunching on the gravel road in front of his house, he practically ran out to her, opening her door before the car had even been shut off and pulling her into a fierce embrace. Relief and joy, an emotion unimaginable under the circumstances, coursed through his body.

But where was she now? No smiling face to greet him at the door with a hot supper. No stern look, hands on her hips, as she admonished him for walking all over the kitchen floor in his work boots. No one to keep him company for a few rounds as he drove the combine through dusty fields on a crisp autumn day.

Yes, he had been left alone, as his Sophie was cruelly snatched away from him but who was to blame for this? Certainly not her, not after her unflinching support throughout the years. When it came down to it, he was the one who deserved to be left alone here. How often had he really told her how much he appreciated her? Hadn't he just assumed most of the time that she would always be by his side? Hadn't he been the one to let her climb up that grain bin to fix the stirator?

He didn't think of himself as ungrateful, but he knew there were times when he had forgotten to show her how much she was appreciated, forgotten to thank her, forgotten to tell her he loved her. His initially rough start with the farm only intensified his desire to show the world that this young kid could make it on his own. Joseph entered each new season with renewed vigor—to be quicker, more efficient, more productive than before. He was on track one harvest to be finished in good time, spending long hours each day out in the fields. Sophie was as attentive as ever, managing to keep the house clean, care for their toddler son and still bring meals to him out in the field. He came home late each night, enthralled with the progress they had made that day—they were already one hundred acres ahead of last year's crop. If he had been less caught up in the harvest and his own sense of pride and determination, he might have noticed the weariness in her eyes as each night she waited up for him and listened to his chatter before they both collapsed in a deep sleep.



He had noticed the storm clouds gathering in the northwest the day before, but he hoped a brief shower at night would be the worst of it. Instead, he awoke the next morning to the sound of his son’s cries and dark, foreboding rain clouds looming over the house. Wrapped in his own thoughts, Joseph was quiet at the breakfast table, letting Sophie respond to their son Joshua’s endless babble. He ate his food quickly and then hurried out to get started on the day, kissing his family goodbye and letting the screen door slam shut behind him.

The rain came less than a half an hour later, falling across the fields in thick gray curtains. He spent some time changing the oil in the combine and the tractors and then headed back home, cursing the weather and the wasted day. He unlaced his boots in the garage and opened the door, his mind reeling with numbers and figures over how much time and profit he had lost that day. Sophie stood in the kitchen, facing him with her hands clasped behind her against the countertop, wearing nothing but a faded blue apron and a smile. All thoughts of productivity flew from his mind as he stood there in the doorway, mouth gaping in surprise. Swiftly he crossed the threshold between them, scooping her up in his arms as he had done on their wedding night and looking deeply into her eyes as he softly kissed her mouth. Still without speaking, he carried her to their bedroom and locked the door behind them.

They spent the day together wrapped up in blankets and each other’s arms. Sophie had left Joshua with a neighbor for the day so the house was quiet except for the pattering of the rain on the rooftop. Joseph sat stroking Sophie’s wavy auburn hair as she rested her head against his chest. Suddenly, she pulled away from him, searching his face, and he could see the longing and question in her eyes.

“I’m glad it rained today, Joe,” she said, tentatively.

Joseph pulled her close to him again and sighed, thinking of the day of harvesting he had missed. Her small frame stiffened against him, and he felt suddenly guilty for all the extra hours of work he’d put in just to finish ahead of schedule. He realized that he’d barely seen his wife and their young son during the past two weeks since harvest began.

“I’m sorry, Soph,” he said, softly, looking down at her head resting against him. “I haven’t been around much lately, have I?”



“Well, I know you’ve been busy with harvest and trying to get it all in early this year. You’ve been working hard, and I’m proud of you for that, but...” she paused, suddenly shy.

“But you’ve been working hard too...especially taking care of Josh.”

They were both quiet as Joseph recalled the past few nights. He had come home, excited about the progress they had made in the fields that day, rambling on about this year’s crop and prices and the expected yield. Now that he thought about it, she had nodded and groaned in all the right places but her eyes lacked their usual interested expression. She must have been exhausted, but he had been so wrapped up in his own thoughts and tiredness that he hadn’t even realized it.

“I’m really sorry, Soph,” he said, gently turning her to face him. “Thanks for being so great. You know I never would have made it this far without you.”

He looked into her eyes, searching to make sure she understood that he appreciated everything she had done for him more than he could ever say. Then she smiled, and he felt the heaviness of the cloudy day lift. He took her face in his hands and kissed her, then pulled her close to him and squeezed her tightly.

“I love you, Soph,” Joseph said, as contentment washed over him.

“I love you, too,” she replied, her voice muffled and her lips tickling his chest.

He wished now that he had said more, that he had really told her how much he cared about her, all the things she had done for him. He wondered how many other times he had forgotten to say thank you, forgotten to tell her he loved her.

Guilt overtook him then, lodged inside of him like a rock caught in the head of the combine. He imagined he could hear the sounds of bidding, picking out the voice of Ben Andersen above all the others. Joseph shuddered as he pictured the wolfish grin on Andersen’s face as he received the deed to the farm, adding yet another trophy to his collection of small farms in the area. The image was so poignant that Joseph found himself gasping for breath, longing for a way to escape from the present. He could think of only one solution to this nightmarish reality, silently praying that Sophie would understand.

He edged one foot out over the rim of the lid and looked down, taking one last look over his land. His eye was caught by a rusty John Deere tractor,



stashed away in the trees behind the house like an old toy stuffed in the back of a closet after it has been outgrown. He sighed, thinking back to that first meager harvest when he and Sophie proudly drove that John Deere and a wagon full of corn to town.

That first year was rough—endless suppers of rice and beans, short tempers and cold nights. She would get angry that he wouldn't hire anyone else to help him; he told her that she didn't understand anyway. The summer was dry, but autumn brought with it a succession of rains that left the young couple worried that there would be no harvest. He spent the brief interval in between rains sitting in the combine, praying that the moisture content in the corn would be low enough for him to do something other than sit around the house and pout.

It was his third attempt at putting the Jolly Green Giant, as Joseph called the combine, to some use. He sat in the cab, eating a hot turkey sandwich Sophie had just brought out to him and preparing to make the first round around the perimeter, hoping against hope that this batch would be dry enough to start combining.

He turned toward Sophie, who was sitting next to him and said, "Well, I guess we'll give'er one more try for the day." He turned the key, and the Giant rumbled beneath him as the engine roared to life. The outer edge of the field was rough, and it was still wetter than he liked, but he kept with it because he knew that they wouldn't survive without some harvest for the season. Still, luck must have been with him that day because the field seemed to get drier as he continued. The more ground he covered, the straighter he sat, looking proudly down at the corn stalks being eaten away in front of him, a grin tugging at the corner of his mouth. On the edge of his vision, he could see Sophie smiling, but she remained silent, letting him be the first one to comment.

"Looks like we might get somethin' from this field after all," he said, turning toward her with raised eyebrows. She laughed, at last breaking the unspoken tension that had remained with them throughout the stress of these past few months.

Sophie rode with him in the combine until they had enough corn to take into town. He grinned as he pulled up alongside Bill, their neighbor who had come to help with harvest and was pulling the grain cart, but waved away the other man's offer to drive the tractor with the load into town.



Joseph climbed down from the combine and shook Bill’s hand, then pulled Sophie up beside him in that old John Deere tractor. They bounced along the road, backs straight and eyes up, acknowledging everyone they passed with the customary two-fingered salute.

“I couldn’t have done it without ya, Soph,” he said lightly, looking to see if she had caught the real meaning of his words.

“Oh, I’m pretty sure you would have done just fine without me,” Sophie said, grinning. “But it would have been a whole hell of a lot less fun.”

“I don’t know if I would consider rice and beans every night for supper fun.”

“Like you could cook for yourself.”

“Hey, now,” he protested. “Remember those hamburgers I made the other night? Those weren’t too bad.”

“Yep, you just keep working on those, honey. I’m sure they’ll get better over time. Don’t give up yet,” she said, rolling her eyes. Then she paused, and he watched her face grow serious as she softly repeated: “Don’t ever give up, Joe.”

Joseph heard those words echoed in his head in the same gentle tone, so clear that he turned around, convinced she was standing right there behind him on top of that grain bin. Of course there was nothing there, and all he could see was the corn swaying in the breeze. He watched it ripple across the rows as the leaves danced until it reached him, softly caressing his cheek. It felt as refreshing as a cool drink of water, and he took a deep breath, letting the smell of the fresh earth fill his nostrils and trickle down into his lungs as the burdens seemed to fall from his shoulders. The sun peeked out of the clouds as Joseph stretched, pushing up like a young shoot breaking free from the confining darkness of the soil.

He stopped suddenly in mid-stretch, remembering that the auction was going on at this very moment. Fear gripped him, pricking across his arms and legs like a winter frost creeps over the bare ground. Into his mind, unbidden, came an image of himself years from now, his skin drooping with wrinkles and his eyes glazed and hollow, lying on a bed in a nursing home in a city far from here. The view outside his window was of people and cars and cold, featureless buildings—civilization, as some would call it. He could no longer breathe the fresh air or smell the earth. He felt as though the smog from his



reverie had already infiltrated his lungs, and he hacked, taking deep breaths to clear them.

He knew that he had only this one moment to act, to save his farm, and himself, from being swallowed up by a world that he had almost surrendered control to. He clambered down the ladder, jumping the last few rungs as he neared the ground. Then he took off running, up the worn dirt road and past the fields of waving green, dust clouding around him as his feet pounded the earth. He found himself panting as he sprinted toward the house, his thoughts in unison with the cadence of his feet—*so sorry, Soph, so sorry*—but all that came out of his mouth was a wheezing “ssssssssshh.”

He reached the lawn where a group of farmers was gathered, intent on the cacophony of voices calling out bids. The talking ceased abruptly as he approached, and all stared in alarm at him, bent over double and gasping for breath.

“No, I can’t... You can’t,” he panted, unable to spit out the words that were clashing in his head like cymbals.

“Easy there, Joe,” said the drawling voice of Ben Andersen, whose boots were as well-oiled as the three combines he used to farm his sprawling acreage.

Ignoring the murmured protests and irritated voices of the crowd, Joseph walked up to the auctioneer, grabbed his microphone and said, “I’m sorry to interrupt these fine proceedings, gentlemen, but there won’t be any auction here today. Thanks for coming all the way out, but I’ve changed my mind. I’m planning on stayin’ right here on this farm where I belong.”

Handing the microphone back, Joseph walked through the crowd, his back as straight and proud as the day he and Sophie delivered their first load of grain. He smiled to himself, inordinately pleased despite the events of the day, and said softly to himself, “What would I do without you, Soph?”



Elizabeth Elsbernd

Wreath Unraveled: Grief, Loss, and Transformation in Louise Erdrich’s “Crown of Thorns”

Painfully candid, Louise Erdrich’s intense exploration of the vicissitudes of grief in *Love Medicine’s* “Crown of Thorns” is heightened by an equally powerful examination of guilt and redemption. When Gordie Kashpaw, a native Ojibwa, is faced with his wife’s death, he struggles to cope but ultimately fails to find a healthy way of doing so. Further intensified by his abuse of alcohol, his refusal to acknowledge the depth of his own grief, and his occasional split with reality, Gordie’s situation unravels into a string of desperation, denial, delusion, and, ultimately, defeat. In avoiding his grief and running away from his memories of his wife, June, Gordie feels trapped and contaminated by guilt and his subsequent denial. The coping methods to which Gordie resorts only further serve to incarcerate him as the story unfolds, leaving his self-diagnosed “contamination” more concentrated and difficult to bear. Ultimately, Erdrich both employs and ignores particular Aristotelian principles of literature in order to demonstrate the complexity not only of grief, but of the Native American reality in the United States today.

The delicately linked sequence of events in “Crown of Thorns” unfolds to reveal Gordie’s search for redemption. His search, however, is complicated by his newly developed reliance on alcohol. Gordie, afraid of what will happen if he allows his thoughts to be silent, his hands still, and his mind sober, begins drinking heavily a month after June’s death. The alcohol becomes a coping mechanism that allows him to avoid the grief and guilt he feels as a result of June’s death but conversely incarcerates him as he is unable to “let go.” The intricately complex link between Gordie’s guilt and his feeling of being trapped is established through his abuse of alcohol. Gordie feels incarcerated by his guilt, and consequently begins drinking as a way to escape grief’s powerful grip. However, while the alcohol gives the illusion of escape, it only leads Gordie into another trap of denial. While the alcohol succeeds in numbing Gordie’s



mind, it fails to make his hands forget. The repeated allusions to Gordie’s hands—“hands that made him drink” and hands that “struck June”—reveal not only Gordie’s eschewal of responsibility, but also his inability to directly confront the reality of June’s death (212). His hands, in fact, could be seen as a metonym for his self: restless, unclean, and subconsciously but painfully aware of June’s death.

The “contamination” that Gordie feels is intricately linked to both his alcoholism and the denial that is slowly poisoning his heart and mind with toxic sorrow. Without understanding how Gordie has complicated his situation by his heavy drinking, the reader could not comprehend how he progressed from an understandable state of desperation to such an extreme state of denial. Initially, Gordie subconsciously attempts to rid himself of his self-diagnosed “contamination” by calling June’s name out loud, hearing her in the “waves [rustling] against each other like a woman’s stockinged legs,” and seeing her face, “wild and pale with a bloody mouth,” in his bathroom mirror, but he concurrently attempts to evade his guilt and grief by drowning out all sounds and running away from all images that remind him of June (218). Gordie flees from the house in fear that June was “coming for him” and speeds off for town in his Malibu. Hence the sequence of events thus far helps to explain Gordie’s motivation for and constant need to run away. As a consequence of his denial, Gordie’s response to reminders of June is to flee, for he has nowhere else to turn. He fails to realize that in his attempts to run away, he is only cornering himself in a progressively constrictive prison of grief and guilt.

In running away, one loses a sense of what is real: images blur, perceptions become distorted, and people and places once familiar become foreign. Gordie finds that he can only run so far. Eventually he finds himself straddling the threshold between illusion and reality. In Gordie’s various confrontations with the deer he hits on the road, Erdrich conveys the extent to which Gordie feels contaminated, for, after “resurrecting” itself, the deer looks into Gordie’s eyes; and, according to Gordie, sees within Gordie how he’d woven his own “crown of thorns.” The deer holds an extraordinary power over Gordie, for in its ability to elicit the relief “jammed” on Gordie’s brow, it is almost as though the deer has somewhat released Gordie from the confines of his anguish, if for only a moment. His confrontation with the deer seems to represent how Gordie is falling into illusion as a replacement for facing reality head on.



The thin line between illusion and reality is further explored when Gordie's guilt leads him to believe that he has killed June—not a deer—with his crowbar. However, instead of running away as he customarily would, he feels himself “cracking” and losing control, allowing himself to fall into “an area of terrible vastness where nothing was familiar” (222). This ostensible “free fall” that results in a confession to Sr. Mary Martin appears to suggest that Gordie is on the verge of liberation and detoxification. Gordie attempts to release himself from his self-imposed prison by telling Sr. Mary Martin that he killed June. “I came to take confession. I need to confess it,” Gordie says to Sr. Mary Martin, almost pleading. The desperation, denial, and delusion that led Gordie to this point collide in this moment; he finally surrenders control and allows someone else to share his grief. Gordie is at last able to weep and confront the reality of June's death.

However, while Gordie is finally able to unleash some of his emotion, his situation at the end of the story is left far from being resolved. Erdrich incorporates the Aristotelian “element of surprise” and “recognition and reversal” in her depiction of Gordie after his confession. Because the act of confession is tightly linked with reconciliation, the reader expects that Gordie's declaration of guilt will result in a sense of newfound peace and relief. However, Gordie instead seems to have retreated more deeply into his grief. While he has discovered a means of release through his weeping, Gordie still feels trapped and contaminated by his guilt. Indeed, when Sr. Mary Martin approaches, he still feels the need to flee: “When he saw that she was coming at him he stopped in the middle of a bawl. He stiffened, windmilled his arms, and stumbled backward in a cardboard fright” (229). While it appears as though Gordie has transcended the stages of denial, he has clearly not overcome his tendency to run away. The very visceral image of Gordie “crying like a drowned person, howling in the open fields” indeed seems to insinuate that his guilt has only become more acute and overwhelming (229). Unable to rid himself of his “contamination,” Gordie ultimately faces defeat. His coping mechanisms have not only failed him, but they have broken him. The act of confession, which could have potentially led Gordie to redemption, merely reduces him to an almost sub-human creature bawling in an orchard and does little to lift the load of Gordie's heavy burdens.



Erdrich certainly follows Aristotle’s principle of plot unity; that is, that a plot ought to be “so constructed that, when some part is transposed or removed, the whole is disrupted and disturbed.” However, it is not until the concluding paragraphs that the reader is able to fully comprehend the truth behind Uncle Eli’s words to Gordie at the beginning of the story. In response to Gordie’s lament regarding “fighting the big one,” Eli says, “You did fight the big one.... You got beat” (213). These simple words, seemingly insignificant, have a profound impact on the story, for they foreshadow the defeat that is eventually to befall Gordie and concomitantly color the lens through which the reader views Gordie. Gordie himself responds: “It wasn’t even no contest. I wasn’t even any good” (213). This exchange of words between Gordie and Eli blatantly outlines the pattern of action in the story. Without it, the story would lose an element of cohesiveness; for the reader would neither be aware of Gordie’s past defeats nor comprehend the extent of his utter self-disgust.

Another element of the story that initially seems isolated and unimportant in light of the rest of the plot is the section about Sister Mary Martin. The world in which Sister Mary Martin lives, an “insulated” world of midnight songwriting, seems grossly out of place within the larger context of the story. However, this section is included not only to expose the disparity between Sister Mary Martin’s safe, secure world and Gordie’s largely unpredictable and oftentimes terrifying one, but also to examine more closely the dissonance of the cultural tensions between these two very different worlds. With the inclusion of this section, the reader discovers that Gordie’s grief runs far deeper than his suffering over June’s death, that it stems, in fact, from the loss of a larger part of himself—his heritage and the root of his very identity. Sister Mary Martin, representing the “civilized” Western culture, simply does not understand Gordie. In fact, “hearing nothing but the music,” she “did not hear him approaching and only realized his presence at the window when the sill rattled” (224). Reluctant to listen to Gordie’s confession, “knowing and not wanting to know,” Sister Mary Martin’s actions parallel those of Caucasian Americans in their stripping away of land from Native Americans.

The inclusion of this passage, therefore, is essential to understanding Gordie’s reaction to Sister Mary Martin at the end of the story: “When he saw that she was coming at him he stopped in the middle of a bawl. He stiffened, windmilled his arms, and stumbled backward in a cardboard fright” (229).



Although Sister Mary Martin gains a better understanding of Gordie and the source from which his grief and guilt are stemming, she still does not and cannot take away his pain. Due to the introduction of Sister Mary Martin, Gordie's experiences are broadened to embrace not just a personal loss, but a cultural one.

The tightly knit story Erdrich weaves, which closely follows Aristotle's principle of plot unity, ends vaguely and, revealing no apparent resolution, lacks a traditional Aristotelian ending. Paradoxically, the very lack of resolution is, perhaps, Erdrich's way of resolving the issue of dealing with grief and guilt. While Erdrich strays from Aristotle's principle that a well-constructed plot should have a clear resolution, she does so for a good reason. Like the structure of Aristotle's ideal plot, dealing with grief is complex. In real life, as in "Crown of Thorns," guilt and sorrow are not easily alleviated; and so, in leaving Gordie's situation unresolved and the conclusion vague, Erdrich speaks to the blurriness surrounding these complex emotions. The sequence of the story's events reveals the progressive nature of Gordie's contamination, for he falls into trap after trap after trap, making it more and more difficult to escape his grief and easy to see why his situation may in fact never be resolved.

The absence of a plot resolution also parallels the lack of resolution in the lives of real-life Native Americans. Indeed, the problems Native Americans face today as a result of their displacement and dispersal such as a dissipated sense of identity and belonging, are still largely unresolved, and, as revealed in the scene of Sister Mary Martin's midnight music making, it is an issue that has remained virtually unacknowledged by the world today. Even though Sister Mary Martin finally gets a glimpse of where Gordie is coming from, she is unable to make up for or completely alleviate the suffering that Gordie has had to endure. In leaving the ending unresolved, Erdrich is challenging her readers to acknowledge a situation that has been left unresolved, but, more than that, to do something about it.

In order to adhere to Aristotle's principle that literature should represent universals and not particulars, Louise Erdrich must, paradoxically, break the Aristotelian principle of plot resolution. Aristotle argues that "it is the function of a poet to relate not things that have happened, but things that may happen." By leaving the plot unresolved, Erdrich is in essence saying that there is still much to be repaired and resolved in regards to the Native Americans' loss



of land and identity, for solving deep-seated problems that thread their way through the generations involves a very long, complicated process that may not have an established finish line. The absent resolution parallels the lack of closure experienced by Gordie and the larger community of Ojibwas.

Through Gordie's struggles with alcohol, denial, and disillusion, Erdrich outlines the many traps into which human beings are capable of falling. However, the defeat that befalls Gordie should not be seen as intrinsically devastating. Rather, Erdrich gives the reader a sense of comfort and—something even more essential to the human condition—hope that we are indeed capable of being transformed, if only in the minute and incomplete manner of Gordie.

Works Cited

Erdrich, Louise. "Crown of Thorns." *Love Medicine, New and Expanded Edition*. New York: Harper Perennial Publishers, Inc., 1993.



Amy Hall

A Correspondence Between Two Cultures: Answering the Question of Exclusiveness in *Ceremony*

ATTN: Leslie Marmon Silko
Gallup, New Mexico
Laguna Pueblo Reservation

March 1, 2006

Dear Mrs. Silko,

My name is Anne White. I am a high school English teacher on a Navajo Reservation in Arizona. I am writing to you to ask you a few questions about your book *Ceremony*. I am very offended at how white people, specifically the white teachers, in your book are portrayed. The white teachers are represented as the people who take away the Indians' culture. It is narrated, "[Tayo] had believed in the stories for a long time, until the teachers at Indian school taught him not to believe in that kind of 'nonsense'" (19). You, a mixed blood Indian yourself, should know that your main character, Tayo, needs to define himself with both sides of his culture, the white and the Indian. Tayo is a mixed blood and chooses to embrace only his Indian culture and evokes the feeling of approval in your readers when he is accepted fully in the Pueblo culture. On the other hand, Tayo's cousin, Rocky, embraces the white culture and is meant to evoke feelings of shame and regret in your readers. Therefore, your novel is one-sided; the white culture in your novel is seen as very corrupting. Tayo starts to realize this fact when he contemplates:

If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world... the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years



white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. And always they had been fooling themselves, and they knew it (191).

I don't know about other white people, but I, for one, did not know that I was fooled. Please share with me this "white witchery." The white culture is not all bad and corrupt. The technology and wealth that you portray as "hollow" are actually very good things that the whites have contributed. Without technology, the world would not have computers, cars, and even modern day medicine. Why did Tayo choose not to embrace, at least, these parts of the white culture? Tayo accepts every part of his Pueblo culture—the good and the bad (although the bad side is not very well portrayed in the novel, and if it is portrayed, it is the fault of the whites)—so why can he not accept both sides of his white background, as well?

Your novel is not inclusive as many critics would like to believe. The ceremony that Tayo goes through and the one-sidedness of the novel both contribute to the exclusiveness of Tayo's journey. No white person could be "cured" by the exclusive ceremony that you portray in your novel. I agree with the many critics who say that "the novel's curing ceremony is fundamentally flawed because it ultimately excludes white Euro-Americans by reducing them to being a primary manifestation of the witchery that is destroying the world."¹ I will not be teaching your novel to my students because they will get the wrong idea about the white culture. Please enlighten me as to why you chose to portray the two cultures in this way. Why could Tayo not accept both cultures? I believe that your writing is reverse discrimination on the white culture. How is blaming the white culture for your problems going to solve anything? Thank you for your time.

Cordially,

Anne White

¹ Auge.



Attn: Anne White
Navajo Reservation, Arizona

March 9, 2006

Anne,

Thank you for pointing out your opinions about my book. However, I would like to clear up a few misconceptions. Let me start off by saying that I don't think about Indian and white. What I wanted to do was clarify the interrelationship between the stories I had heard and my sense of storytelling and language that had been given to me by the old folks, the people back home. The way I figured it, there would be some Native American people who would be interested in it and some Laguna Pueblo people who would be interested in it. This book is for people who are interested in that relationship between the spoken and the written.²

This book is also important because it demonstrates the relationship between health and illness in more than a physical or cultural way. The ritual that Betonie creates for Tayo is focused on more than just his physical and mental ailments. If Betonie only emphasized the cure for Tayo's current despair, the problem would simply return again; the cure would only be temporary. Therefore, Tayo's ceremony does not end with the cure, instead he must move beyond it into a stronger and continuing relationship with his people (both native and white), land and culture, and ultimately with himself.

Personally, I can relate to Tayo in many ways, which is why I chose to make him the main character in *Ceremony*. Both of us, being mixed-blood, have insecurities and hardships because we felt like outcasts many times throughout our lives. In my experience, I wanted to embrace the Laguna part of my background because the culture is so strong. I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna.³ And I think the Laguna culture is so strong because of the storytelling. The stories are always bringing us together,

² This is a direct quote from Leslie Marmon Silko in an interview about her book *Storyteller*. However, I think that this quotation is also very relevant to *Ceremony*. Barnes 326-327.

³ Silko, referenced in Nichols.



keeping this whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together.⁴ The emphasis on storytelling in Laguna society is exactly what helps Tayo complete his cure. He has to go back to the clan and add his story to the traditional stories. However, the stories are not the only part of Tayo’s cure.

Your letter showed me that you have a few false impressions about my book and its purpose: the first is that you think my book is saying the white culture is responsible for the witchery; the second is that I do not portray any bad parts about the Indian culture; the third is that Tayo does not accept his white culture whatsoever; and your final misunderstanding is that this book was made to show an inclusive cure.

First of all, not once in *Ceremony* did I write that the white culture was responsible for the witchery. It was, in fact, the exact opposite:

Long time ago
in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European . . .
This world was already complete
even without white people.
There was everything
including witchery.

Then it happened.
These witch people got together . . .

Finally there was only one
Who hadn’t shown off charms or powers . . .
This one just told them to listen:
“What I have is a story.”

At first they all laughed
But this witch said . . .

⁴ Silko, referenced in Nichols.



*Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
[are] white skin people . . .*

*Then they grow away from the earth . . .
They see no life . . .
When they look
they see only objects . . .*

*They fear . . .
They destroy what they fear . . .*

*It's already turned loose.
It's already coming.
It can't be called back (132-138).*

The witchery created white people and it is not only the fault of the white people, but also the fault of the Indians, that they believe in the power of the witchery and the witchery's lie. The lie is that one culture can be superior over another. In this case, the whites presume that they are superior over other cultures, including the Indian culture. However, Indians are also at fault for believing the lie and for accepting that they are a subordinate culture.

In your letter you also argued that I depicted the Indian culture without any faults. This is entirely untrue. Besides the fact that Indians believe the lie, they are also at fault for blaming the whites for all their problems. I wrote, "The witchery would work so that the people would be fooled into blaming only the whites and not the witchery" (249). And before that, Betonie explained the significance of the witchery and the lie. They want us to believe that all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates" (132).



We are all tools that the witchery manipulates, as long as we believe that we can't rise above the lie. The problem throughout the novel is the Indians (such as Emo, Rocky, Pinkie, and Harley) who refuse to trust in their tradition and culture which has been overcome by the witchery.⁵

Because they lose trust, they distance themselves from each other and from their culture. They lose their identity, as well. Those who lose trust in the culture start to live static lives that abandon any remaining ties to their community. This is best observed in Tayo's final interaction with his old friends. Earlier that night, Tayo is excited to see his friends drive up to him. "He was smiling and suddenly close to tears because they had come when he needed friends most" (238). However, once he starts drinking with them, his thoughts evolve. "He needed to rest for awhile, and not think about the story or the ceremony. Otherwise it would make him crazy and even suspicious of his friends; and without friends he didn't have a chance of completing the ceremony" (241). Now, instead of an outright acceptance of his friends, Tayo has to convince himself they will stay true to him. However, Tayo's confidence does not last for long, as he finally realizes his friends are part of the witchery. Rather than supporting him, Tayo's friends try to destroy all that he has worked for. "Suddenly it hit him, in the belly, and spread to his chest in a single surge; he knew then that they were not his friends but had turned against him...He was not sure why he was crying, for the betrayal or because they were lost" (242). Tayo comes close to traveling down the same path as his friends, however he realizes the danger before it is too late:

He was thinking about Harley and Leroy, about Helen Jean and himself. How much longer would they last...But it didn't make much difference anyway. The drinking and hell raising were just things they did, as he had done sitting at the ranch all afternoon, watching the yellow cat bite the air for flies; passing the time away, waiting for it to end (168).

And in my novel, it is Tayo's job to start to bring the Laguna back to the old ways and to nature before he loses trust in his culture and himself. Without identity, Tayo would not be able to function in any culture; likewise, those

⁵ Silko, referenced in Wallace 325.



who lack trust do not function in either culture for very long. Each character who dies in the novel first loses trust and his own sense of self.

The third accusation you made in your letter was that Tayo does not connect with any part of his white culture. I admit that Tayo ultimately embraces his Laguna background, but he can not be cured without connecting partly with his white culture, as well. This is obvious when Tayo's family must send him to Betonie. Ku'oosh, the first medicine man, is too traditional for Tayo's sickness. Ku'oosh's methods are not updated for the changes that have taken place in the world. Betonie knows that Tayo needs an evolved ceremony in order to be cured because his is an evolved sickness. He says,

But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies... The people mistrust this greatly... that's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more (126).

Betonie's changed ceremonies are a mixture of the two cultures, and his everyday life demonstrates that belief, as well. For example, Tayo sees Betonie's hogan as a reflection of both the Indian and the white,

Under the medicine bags and bundles of rawhide on the walls, he saw layers of old calendars, the sequences of years confused and lost... He wanted to dismiss all of it as an old man's rubbish, debris that had fallen out of the years, but the boxes and trunks, the bundles and stacks were plainly part of the pattern (120).

Tayo can only be cured by this evolved ceremony because to eliminate either world would mean that he is denying reality. However, the Laguna culture doesn't allow for the blending of two cultures, and Tayo must choose one culture over the other.⁶ The fact that Tayo is a mixed blood Indian gives him great leverage in being able to bring his people back to the stories, tradition, and nature. Mixed bloods, a real consequence of colonization, are in a position to bridge the chasm between cultures.⁷ Despite originally thinking that his

⁶ Cutchins 6.

⁷ Silko, quoted in Wallace 325.



mixed-blood status prohibited him from speaking for either of his cultures, Tayo is actually in a better position than anyone else because he is able to speak for both cultures. His place “in between” opens new possibilities; his cure allows for change within the culture, such as the addition of modern stories. It’s important for Tayo to link both cultures in this new ceremony because the link brings about change. Change is a natural and very important part of life because without it, people and cultures would remain static, and would eventually die. On the other hand, it is very difficult to avoid the trap of monotony. Mary Douglas in her book *Purity and Danger*, which discusses the idea of “pollution” in cultures, quotes Sartre:

...there are people who are attracted by the permanence of stone. They would like to be solid and impenetrable, they do not want change, for who knows what change will bring...they want to adopt a mode of life in which reasoning and the quest for truth play only a subordinate part, in which nothing is sought except what already has been found, in which one never becomes anything else but what one already was (163).

Abiding by Sartre’s observation are the other war veterans in *Ceremony* who find it hard to adjust to life on the reservation after the war. Their lives become static; they refuse change. The “quest for truth” is far too difficult, so they settle for what they know. Although Tayo’s adjustment is far from easy, he eventually becomes open to change, open to a new ceremony, open to a stronger relationship with himself and his culture. Tayo can never change the color of his eyes or the circumstances of his birth, or even his exposure to the white dominant culture, but he possesses and acts upon the ability to make his marginality a part of his identity as a Laguna.⁸

The final misinterpretation you had about my novel was that it was meant to demonstrate an inclusive cure. If someone reads this without thinking about the historical and cultural aspect, they will lose the novel’s whole identity. My book tells the story of an Indian family, but it is also involved with the search for a ceremony to deal with despair, the most virulent of diseases – the despair which accounts for the suicide, the alcoholism, and the violence which occur

⁸ Wallace 325.



in so many Indian communities today.⁹ I definitely agree with you that anyone who comes from a different background than Tayo would have difficulty being cured by his ceremony. Whether it's a white person or even someone who's 100 percent Indian, they will not benefit totally from Tayo's blended ceremony. However, people who read my novel can be a *part* of the ceremony and story. The intolerance, discrimination, and disharmony among the different cultures in the novel make the reader more aware and compassionate toward those people who are treated differently. The reader can take a great deal away from this book, tell people about what they read, and spread the book's message of harmony. Even though Tayo doesn't necessarily come to terms with both halves of his background, the readers of this novel can break down the barrier between cultures. Then whites and Indians can unite through participation in the story/reality.¹⁰

I appreciate your letter and opinions because if you misinterpreted some aspects of my novel it's possible that many other people did, as well. I hope my letter helps clear up some misunderstandings that you had, and I hope that you will come to terms with *Ceremony* and possibly even teach its message to your students someday.

Sincerely,
Leslie Marmon Silko

Works Cited

- Auge, Andy. "Debate Question for Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*." Handout.
- Barnes, Kim. "Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko." Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 74. Ed. Thomas Votteler. Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1993. 326-331.

⁹ A direct quote from Silko which is very appropriate for the discussion of whether the ceremony is inclusive or not. Silko, referenced in Votteler 321.

¹⁰ Ruppert 341.



Cutchins, Dennis. “So That the Nations May Become Genuine Indian: Nativism and Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony.” Journal of American Culture 22 (1999). Academic Search Elite. EBSCO. Loras College Library, Dubuque. 4 Apr. 2006. Keyword: Leslie Marmon Silko.

Douglas, Mary. Purity and Danger. London: Routledge, 1999.

Nichols, Nafessa T. “Leslie Marmon Silko.” Postcolonial Studies At Emory. Fall 1997. Emory University. 4 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/Silko.html>>.

Ruppert, James. “The Reader’s Lessons in Ceremony.” Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 74. Ed. Thomas Votteler. Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1993. 338-341.

Silko, Leslie M. Ceremony. New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Votteler, Thomas, ed. Contemporary Literary Criticism. Vol. 74. Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1993.

Wallace, Karen. “Liminality and Myth in Native American Fiction: Ceremony and the Ancient Child.” Contemporary Literary Criticism Vol. 114. Ed. Timothy J. White, Deborah A. Schmitt, and Jeffrey W. Hunter. Detroit: Gale Research, Inc., 1999. 319-330.



Kari Gossling

Jesus Nazareus Rex Iudaeorum

around your neck
banding your finger
an ink mark near your ankle
brand you as His.

deep gashes
thick, warm blood
splinters in His skin
brand Him as yours.

wearing his penance around your neck
doesn't bring you His pain
His last antagonizing breaths
Before you ripped away the last
Of his dignity, pride
his humanness
distributed among you
like his stolen garments.

did you call out
begging the answer
or
are you content to simply
wear the question
around your neck?



Rachel Carroll

A Postcolonial Approach to *Love Medicine*

“Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind” (Johnson 10). Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine* brings to mind the reality of life for the Native American people, struggling to assert their own identity against the controlling force of the dominant Euro-American culture. Examining Erdrich’s novel using Edward Said’s principles of decolonization induces the reader to become more aware of the Ojibwa people as a culture different from the colonizers’ perception of them. Only then can one come to a more comprehensive understanding of humanity as a unified whole.

Edward Said’s analysis of decolonization begins with an act of resistance, in which the oppressed people, in this case the Ojibwa people, recognize that Western culture is being forced upon them. Resistance is described by Said as “the conscious effort to enter into the discourse of Europe and the West, to mix with it, transform it, to make it acknowledge marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories” (216). Erdrich enters into this discourse by using the Western form of a novel to expose the negative effects of the Euro-American culture on the Ojibwa people. However, despite the form of literature used, *Love Medicine* remains essentially Ojibwa, even in its structure. While on the surface it mimics a Western novel, a deeper inspection reveals how Erdrich weaves different stories of individual characters in such a way that displays the interconnectedness of all members of a tribe, in contrast to the Western ideal of individualism. This subtle message is reiterated much more obviously through the interactions among many of her characters and the dominant Euro-American culture.

Said’s model can be used in the examination of several main characters in Erdrich’s novel to analyze how *Love Medicine* exemplifies this process of decolonization for the Ojibwa people. White society is set against the more traditional Native American way of life through the diametric opposition of



characters such as Nector and Eli, Marie and Lulu, who can be categorized as essentially traditional or assimilated. The oppressive influence of assimilation on many of the characters in *Love Medicine* is a strong indictment of the inherent flaws in colonization and constitutes an act of resistance described by Said.

Several of Erdrich's characters demonstrate clear acts of resistance against oppression in their own lives as they recognize the effect of European colonization of the Americas. For example, Rushes Bear, the mother of Nector and Eli, opposed the government's imposition of white education upon Native American children, instead recognizing the value of a traditional Ojibwa knowledge. Therefore, she only allowed Nector to be sent to the white-influenced government school, "but [had] hidden Eli, the one she couldn't part with," keeping her favorite son to be raised on the reservation (Erdrich 19). Lulu also resisted against the government school, longing so much for her mother and the traditional way of life she represented that she ran away many times, until her Uncle Nanapush wrote the letters that would bring her back to live with him on the reservation.

Resistance is also shown in the dominating presence of Catholicism on the reservation, represented by Sacred Heart Convent, whose nuns act as missionaries to convert the Ojibwa people. From her childhood, Marie had been instilled with the notion of conforming to white society. She viewed the convent on the hill above the reservation as an ideal to strive for, despite Sister Leopolda's insistence on Marie's inherently evil nature. Leopolda's subsequent harsh treatment of Marie is a clear example of the oppressive force of colonization on the subjugated peoples, whose true identity is denied legitimacy, in the same way that Marie's Native American heritage was completely rejected by Leopolda. Echoing Said's process of decolonization, Marie must first recognize that she has her own distinctive identity, apart from the devilish nature that has been imposed upon her by Leopolda, before she can begin to define her true self.

While Marie eventually began to develop some sense of her own identity, Nector remained a pawn of those more powerful than he throughout his life. His white-influenced education also placed within him a desire to belong to this dominant culture, inducing him to seek entrance into that world through a career in Hollywood, although that culture ultimately rejected his aspirations because of his Native American heritage. However, his return to the reservation



does not result in a reconnection with tradition; rather, his dual nature allows him to be used as an instrument for the government to exert control over Native American society. The epitome of this disconnect is, of course, Nector's role in the repossession of Lulu's land. Though he was not the instigator of this deed, he allowed himself to be used by white society to further oppress the Native American people. Nector turns his back on his true heritage, choosing instead to attempt to conform to a culture in which he will never truly be accepted.

Once the oppressed group has recognized and resisted the culture which has overpowered it, it seeks to recover its true identity that has been deformed by colonialism (Said 216). In *Love Medicine*, Erdrich once again uses the lives of her characters to demonstrate the establishment of a nationalist identity through a reconnection to their Ojibwa roots. Traditional Ojibwa conceptions of nature, time and family are quite different from the views of modern American culture and can be observed through the actions of the more traditional characters like Lulu, but also in the opposing assimilated figures of Marie and Nector.

Lulu, in addition to returning home to the reservation from school, seeks a further reconnection with her Ojibwa heritage by forming a traditional union with Moses Pillager, a hermit who has completely rejected assimilation into white society, distancing himself even from the reservation. Although Lulu eventually returns from the island to the world of the reservation, she brings values with her that are somewhat foreign to Euro-American society. For example, Lulu's encounter with Moses leaves her with a more fluid idea of time in contrast to its rigidity in the civilized world. Although confining life to a limited time scale conveys a sense of control, in reality, it is the hours, minute and seconds which govern the person. Lulu does not allow herself to be defined by this idea of time, choosing instead to be subjugated to the movement of the world, rather than trying to control it. "All through my life I never did believe in human measurement. Numbers, time, inches, feet. All are just ploys for cutting nature down to size. I know the grand scheme of the world is beyond our brains to fathom, so I don't try, just let it in" (Erdrich 281).

In contrast, Marie's defining nature is toward domestication. Her influence over both her husband and her family indicate her instinctive need to control her surroundings. This desire is thwarted by both June and Rushes Bear, who refuse to conform to Marie's controlling influence. June ultimately cannot



subdue her wild nature and leaves Marie going to live with Eli in the woods. Rushes Bear, on the other hand, forces Marie to rethink her regulatory nature when Marie must submit to her care and lack of authority during her difficult pregnancy. This renouncing of control is coupled with Marie's recollection of the old Ojibwa language, showing the dichotomy between two cultures: one which attempts to control its surroundings and the other which is in tune with the natural progression of the world.

Through his study of traditional Ojibwa culture, Hollowell asserts that the "social relations between human beings and other-than-human persons are of cardinal significance" (145). This idea is manifested in Erdrich's novel through the relationship between the characters of Marie and Nector. After Lipsha's failed attempt at curing Nector using a hybrid version of traditional Ojibwa love medicine, both Marie and Lipsha felt the presence of Nector's spirit return to them. The Ojibwa felt that encounters between humans and other-than-human persons are of special occurrences and allow for the passage of wisdom to individuals. In this case, Lipsha learns from Nector of the binding power of true love, whose healing power transcends both magic and medicine in its ability to cure.

Finally, a successful attempt at decolonization must avoid the entrapment of what Said refers to as "nativism," in which the colonized group moves beyond asserting their own identity into the realm of mythic fantasy in which the oppressed culture is raised above all others (Said 228). The culture must transcend this nativist attitude, stepping beyond a purely nationalist consciousness to a more inclusive view of a human community united in spite and because of ethnic differences. This process of liberation involves refusing to confine identity to one single thing, instead integrating different pieces into a diverse, but unified whole (Said 229).

In addition to Said's conception of liberation as an amalgamation of different cultural influences, Stuart Hall expands this notion through his description of cultural identity as a dynamic process. He calls for people to look beyond the entrapment of characterizing the past as a static representation of identity, instead describing it "as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (110). This process must not only incorporate the shared experience of cultural oppression, by Euro-American society in the case of the Ojibwa, but must



also be defined by the differences in the way previous oppressed people or cultures have dealt with the repercussions of these past experiences. Because of this, cultural identity can never clearly be defined in monolithic terms, but is always changing even as a group of people themselves are always recreating themselves (Hall).

Erdrich's characters can, for the most part, be objectively characterized in terms of whether they are primarily assimilated or more traditional. Nector's Euro-American education, his alliance with the reservation government in the dispute over Lulu's land, even his collaboration in the painting *The Plunge of the Brave*, a Euro-American depiction of the Native American in which Nector poses, surrendering his dignity in exchange for money—all demonstrate his assimilation into white society. Similarly, Nector's wife Marie also represents Native Americans who have conformed to Euro-American ideals. Her desire for acceptance into the community of nuns, as well as her need for domestication, convey this sense of assimilation. Nector's and Marie's struggles to incorporate themselves into white society ultimately result in negative consequences in which they adopt values that are in opposition to their true natures.

Against these characters are set the more traditional figures of Eli and Lulu. Eli has remained connected with his Native American heritage throughout his life, living in communion with nature and being known for wisdom in the ways of the wild. His obvious overall positive characterization is demonstrated in Erdrich's portrayal of both Nector and Eli as older men. "Now, these many years later, hard to tell why or how, my Great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while Grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild" (Erdrich 19). Without explicitly condemning Euro-American education, Erdrich has nonetheless portrayed its negative impact through her characterization of Nector in his return to childhood with age.

Lulu, though not as traditional on the outside as Eli, nevertheless is guided by Native American values. She rejects the notion of a nuclear family, still managing to be a very good mother to her children and protecting them from the negative influences of civilization. She retains the Native American notion of the sacredness of the earth, refusing to cede her land to the white government and opposing the construction of the artificial tomahawk factory. These characters are portrayed positively throughout the novel, endorsing a return to a more traditional Ojibwa culture.



Categorization of Erdrich's main characters allows the reader to determine Erdrich's overall positive or negative feeling toward the individual, based on his or her actions, feelings and circumstances, and then to determine how this demonstrates if Erdrich is ultimately able to transcend the nativist attitude and achieve a more enlightened view of liberation. Analysis of the traditional characters of Lulu and Eli versus the assimilated figures of Marie and Nector show that Erdrich appears to favor a return to traditional Native American values. This viewpoint is enhanced further by the character of Marie, who despite being primarily assimilated, is shown more positively when she moves toward a return to the Ojibwa culture, as in "The Beads" when she recollects the old language at a critical time in her life.

Despite the evidence garnered from these figures which would suggest Erdrich's ultimately nativist attitude, it can be argued that she does not wholly succumb to this simplistic trap of characterization by examining a few key passages and characters that are central to *Love Medicine*. The first passage requires a reconsideration of the character of Lulu in the story "The Island." Lulu's union with Moses Pillager constituted a return to the more traditional ways of Native American life. While this fact cannot be denied, Lulu's eventual return to the reservation must be taken into account as well. Had Erdrich meant to promote the idea of a complete return to the Ojibwa culture that was present before European colonization, Lulu would have remained with Moses, who is an emblem of this lost civilization. However, Lulu leaves Pillager, returning to her life on the reservation without her husband, but retaining some important traditional values that continue to govern her life throughout her subsequent marriages. This suggests that while Erdrich may be advocating a reconnection to tradition, she certainly does not propose a complete rejection of the dominant society.

James Clifford's discussion of the concept of identity in the Mashpee Indian tribe of Cape Cod demonstrates the difficulty in defining an identity that incorporates both traditional Native American values and the influences of the modern Euro-American dominated society. The Mashpee's lawsuit concerning the loss of tribal land opened up a Pandora's box of questions relating to the definition of an Indian tribe in a white world. Chief Flying Eagle who taught in a public high school, a devout Baptist and influential churchwoman who nevertheless believed that God and the Great Spirit are one and the same, a



medicine man who is also the owner of an oil company whose purpose, as any corporation, is to make money—each of these are different attempts by the Mashpee to assimilate themselves into white society, while at the same time retaining former traditions. Clifford reveals this struggle to situate this liberationist viewpoint in a modern world. “The Mashpee trial seemed to reveal people who were sometimes separate and ‘Indian,’ sometimes assimilated and ‘American.’ Their history was a series of cultural and political transactions, not all-or-nothing conversions or resistances” (Clifford 342). Instead of gravitating toward one or the other end of the spectrum, the Mashpee hover somewhere in the middle assuming characteristics of both cultures in a way that creates a new, hybrid identity.

Likewise, Erdrich seeks to demonstrate the hybridity of the Ojibwa through her characterization of Albertine and Lipsha, who in many ways represent different sides of the same coin. The effect of assimilation is felt more comprehensively in the lives of this younger generation, as Euro-American society continues to encroach upon the Ojibwa culture. Although Lipsha’s upbringing prevents him from being a truly traditional character in the same sense as Eli, his values and lifestyle suggest a shift toward the more traditional end of the spectrum. Albertine, in contrast, has very much assimilated into white society as she pursues her ambition to become a doctor. Despite this fundamental difference between these two figures, both Lipsha and Albertine come to accept a broader notion of culture and humanity over the course of their lives as presented in *Love Medicine*.

Although her mother’s dominating influence and emphasis on the importance of Native American tradition drive Albertine away from the reservation as a young girl, she returned home, to reconnect with her Ojibwa culture. June, who served as a positive mentor for Albertine, counteracted the negative controlling forces of Zelda and the rest of the family. June’s death caused Albertine to rethink her initial decision to leave all ties to her Native American culture behind her as she made a life for herself in white civilization. Albertine went back home, still firm in her place in society and pathway through college, but ready to forgive and with a mind open to at least reexamine the traditional beliefs. For example, she questioned Grandpa Nector concerning his memories of life on the reservation when he was younger. “I wanted to know it all. I



kept asking questions as we walked along, as if he'd take the hook by miracle and blurt the memory out right there" (Erdrich 19). Albertine's move toward the acceptance of a more liberationist viewpoint is underlined in the final scene of "The World's Greatest Fishermen." Though the pies that Zelda and Aurelia spent so much time baking have been completely demolished by King, Albertine attempts to put the pieces back together:

I spooned the fillings back into the crusts, married slabs of dough, smoothed over edges of crusts with a wetted finger, fit crimps to crimps and even fluff to fluff on top of berries or pudding. I worked carefully for over an hour. But once they smash there is no way to put them right. (Erdrich 42).

Albertine makes an effort to reconnect with her heritage, attempting to salvage what has not been lost through her awful childhood, though the pieces cannot be put back exactly the way they began.

The movement toward liberation propagated through Albertine is enhanced further in the character of Lipsha, who in many ways represents the Native American people as a whole. His confusion over his true identity recalls Hall's assertion about the dynamic nature of cultural identity and echoes the struggle of the Native American people to determine their place within the colonizing influence of Euro-American culture. Lipsha, though raised by the domesticated Marie, nevertheless values the traditional Ojibwa culture, fostered by his decision to drop out of school and return to the reservation. Despite this rejection of the Euro-American notion of education, Albertine points out that Lipsha "read books about computers and volcanoes and the life cycle of salamanders. Sometimes he used words I had to ask him the meaning of, and other times he didn't make even the simplest sense. I loved him for being both ways" (Erdrich 39). His immersion in both Euro-American and Ojibwa views allows for a more comprehensive examination of the world. This observation is further developed in Lipsha's experience with attempting to heal his grandfather through a combination of the traditional love medicine and Western ideas that culminates in his acceptance of a more liberating worldview. After the incident with the turkey hearts which fails to cure Grandpa, Lipsha learns that neither magic nor medicine could save him.



Love medicine ain't what brings him back to you Grandma. No, it's something else. He loved you over time and distance, but he went off so quick that he never got the chance to tell you how he loves you, how he doesn't blame you, how he understands. It's true feeling, not no magic. No supermarket heart could have brung him back (Erdrich 257).

Love is the ultimate force that transcends all differences in culture, values and lifestyles. This illuminating realization is echoed in Lipsha's final words at the end of *Love Medicine*: "I'd hear that this river was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land" (Erdrich 367). Native Americans were once that ancient ocean that stretched across the land, living in harmony with nature rather than attempting to dominate it. Although Lipsha's nostalgic view of the past is perhaps idealized, he does not succumb to Said's concept of "nativism" by glorifying this past identity above the present reality. For Lipsha, hiding within the reservation behind the traditional Ojibwa society and refusing to interact with the encompassing Western world is the easy way out. However, he recognizes that his people can no longer escape from the modern world, but must instead learn to live with it. This does not mean giving up on their traditional cultural values, but learning how to accept both cultures through a worldview that looks at humanity as a whole, rather than dividing it into separate, distinct groups that cannot interact with one another without dissonance.

In addition to Erdrich's positive portrayal of such hybridized characters as Albertine and Lipsha, who have moved beyond the entrapments of one singular identity, either Native American or Euro-American, *Love Medicine* as a whole demonstrates Hall's notion of cultural identity as that which not only acknowledges the shared past experiences of a group of people, but necessarily describes their differences in handling the incident of colonization. Erdrich does not characterize the Ojibwa as a uniform group of people with the same response toward the impact of Euro-American culture, but rather expresses different aspects of this effect on the Ojibwa. Several of the characters, in particular, Lulu and Eli which were discussed previously, predominantly reject the influence of Euro-American culture in their lives; while others, such as



Marie and Nector, have adopted various aspects of white society in their lives. Then, of course, Erdrich presents characters of Lipsha and Albertine, who have attempted to reconcile both influences into a hybridized culture. These various representations of different ways the Ojibwa have sought to categorize themselves demonstrate Erdrich's attempt to capture the differences in the culture that are as much a part of their identity as the shared experience of colonization.

A postcolonial examination of *Love Medicine*, based primarily on Edward Said's principles of decolonization—resistance, nationalism and nativism or liberation—demonstrates Erdrich's ability to capture the struggle of the Ojibwa to cultivate and define their own identity in the midst of a Euro-American dominated world. Ultimately, through the use of hybridized characters such as Lipsha and Albertine, Erdrich shows the necessity of a liberationist worldview. This view recalls the trial of the Mashpee Indians and allows for the adaptation of both Euro-American and Ojibwe values in the formation of a new, dynamic cultural identity that takes into account not only the shared past experiences of the oppressed people, but also reflects the differences in the way they have handled such events. Thus the novel endorses a concept of hybridity in identity rather than a uniform description of culture.

Works Cited

Clifford, James. "Identity in Mashpee." *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1993.

Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Contemporary Postcolonial Theory. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, 1996.

Hallowell, A. Irving. "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View." *Teachings from the American Earth*. Ed. Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock. New York: Liveright, 1975.

Johnson, Samuel. "Preface to Shakespeare."

Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.



Amy Hall

“Flores, Honduras”

In a desert valley
garbage is piled on the sides of roads,
comida for the starving
donkeys, horses and cattle.

But the people’s spirit
climbs over their poverty.
Faith and courage are the true *montaños*
that conquer the harsh wasteland.

This little boy’s *ropa* is shabby and mismatched,
this little boy’s feet are bare,
his face and hands are clearly dirty
despite his dark Honduran skin.

But his gap-toothed smile emerges,
and his eyes crinkle.
His crushing hug and sloppy *beso*
are, for me, an awakening.

Amor, la fe, espíritu, and ambición
are everywhere in this “third world,”
in the giggle of this little boy,
and in the mountainous faith of this tiny country.



Elizabeth Elsbernd

In Remembrance of Leigh

The building, red-brick and ancient, leaned against the cloudless spring sky, out of place. Its enormous physique eclipsed the mid-afternoon sun as Leigh Cybill steered her rusty Dodge Caravan into the bulky shadow of the parking lot. A pair of old ladies sat on the bench to the right of the main doors, watching the cars roll lazily by, or maybe they were just sleeping. They wore oversized, clip-on sunglasses and navy blue shorts, and the sun glared off their papery skin. They looked lifeless, like statues.

“Ok, Dad,” Leigh said, shifting the car into park and flipping off the ignition all in one fluid movement. “Ready to go?”

Leigh glanced over at her father. Gerald Patricks was struggling to get his seatbelt off, his eyebrows knit in intense concentration. Lower jaw jutted out, mouth slightly ajar, his tongue lolled on his bottom lip as his thumb worked to push down the release button. Leigh’s son, Dave, did the same thing with his tongue when he worked in the garage, operating the skill saw and working on carpentry projects he never finished. There was still sawdust on the floor and a skeleton of a shelf leaning against the far wall of the garage, even though Dave had left for college over eight months ago.

“Here, Dad, let me get that for you,” she said. She felt her skin fold into rolls as she leaned over to unbuckle her father’s seatbelt.

“I’ve got it, honey,” he replied sharply, pushing her hand away.

Leigh pulled back, her feelings slightly bruised. It still stung when her father was short like that with her, even though she knew it was the disease—not her father—that was speaking. She opened her door, and stepped out onto the damp black asphalt, avoiding a puddle left over from that morning’s rain shower. She surveyed the grounds as she made her way to the passenger side door, noticing that one of the two ladies was now inching toward the door, heading back inside. Leigh knew that if she were living here, she’d stay outside all day long on a beautiful day like this. She found the rooms in nursing homes



so dark, so depressing, so *stifling*. She couldn't understand how anyone could live in such a place, where there was no privacy, and no freedom.

Now Leigh opened the Caravan's passenger side door just as the seatbelt flew out of her father's hands. Her father slipped his shoulder out of the strap, and Leigh resisted the urge to hold out her hand as she watched his penny loafers carefully maneuver the step down to the damp pavement.

"Got a little rain, I see," her father commented, landing hard on his left foot as he stepped out of the vehicle.

"Sure did, Dad," Leigh replied.

"Won't be too long I'll be in the fields again."

Leigh was silent. Her father, not waiting for her to shut his door, began shuffling his way across the parking lot. Leigh locked the van and hurried to shut the door before turning to follow her father toward the ancient doors of Oakwood Knoll. The old lady on the bench rotated her head slowly toward them, stared stoically for a moment at them from behind her sunglasses, and then languidly returned her gaze to the street. So she hadn't been sleeping.

Leigh passed her father and pulled open the heavy glass door. The aroma of vegetable beef stew and plastic upholstery hung in the air. It was a heavy, oppressive smell, the kind that stuck to your clothes and pressed down on your eyelids, triggering an insatiable longing for sleep and an almost tangible sense of despair.

"Think we must have gotten the wrong address, Leigh," Gerald said matter-of-factly, glancing down the long, windowless hallway and up at the dusty chandelier hanging from the entryway ceiling. He turned to go back out the door. Leigh grabbed a hold of his arm.

"No, no, Dad. We're in the right place," she said, then remembered the Alzheimer's ward was on the other side of the building. "Or at least we're getting there."

* * *

It was ironic that it was such a beautiful day, a spring day. Leigh had put this day off for months now. She would have put it off longer, but her husband, Neil, had insisted: her father had become too big a burden.

"We spent the last twenty years raising Dave, Leigh," Neil had said. "I don't want to have to baby-sit your father."

"It's not you who's baby-sitting him, Neil. It's me," Leigh had replied. "Besides," she had added, "I don't consider it baby-sitting."



And it was true. Leigh didn't think of it that way. And even if Neil did see it as a duty, it was not he but she who made sure the car keys were out of Gerald's sight, she who told him three times a day what they were having for dinner, *she* who calmly convinced her father every night why he didn't have to go do chores. Gerald had taken care of her; now it was her turn to take care of him. She felt she owed it to him somehow. He had, in a sense, taken care of her far longer than his duties as a father required.

She had been able to deceive her husband for a time. Before even calling Oakwood Knoll, the only nursing home in Trent county, she had told her husband that there were no rooms available at the present time, that there was a waiting list to get in, and that the nurses predicted it would be at least two months before there were any openings.

"See," Neil had responded. "Other people are putting their folks in homes. It's not such a horrible thing as you're making it out to be, Leigh." And then, folding up his *Farmer's Home Journal* and flinging it down to the shaggy yellow carpet, he had pulled the handle on the recliner and flipped on the television.

But it was a horrible thing, to Leigh. Her father filled the void that Dave left when he headed off to Minnesota State last fall. Gerald gave her a sense of purpose, took her mind off other things. She took pride in her patience with him. Most people could never do what she did. That was why the most middle-aged Americans just dropped their parents off in nursing homes for someone else to feed them, paint their fingernails, hand them the remote control. But not Leigh. Her own chronic weariness was set aside out of love for her father, the man who had taken her in his arms that summer fifteen years ago, held her like a child as she wept, though she was in principle grown up, married and with a child of her own.

Throughout the course of the past few months, Gerald had been acting strangely, putting himself and others in danger. And he had begun to forget who Leigh was. When Leigh woke up one cold, April night two weeks ago, she had found her father wandering around outside in just his boxers and a white undershirt, looking for the barn. She knew Neil had been right. She couldn't take care of her father anymore. Reluctantly, she had called Oakwood Knoll the next day.

Although her final decision to admit her father to the nursing home really had nothing to do with Neil's prodding, it was—in addition to her obvious inability to hinder her father's mental decline—significantly influenced by her



decaying relationship with Neil. Even while she grieved the thought of losing her father, she began to realize that she grieved the loss of her *self* more, and she saw in her resolution to leave her father's care in the hands of those more qualified than she the opportunity for freedom and escape.

The time between now and the day she called Oakwood Knoll had passed in a blur. She kept picturing how her father had looked that night, his hair disheveled, his posture slightly slumped, his face lined with dark shadows. She felt completely and utterly alone, terrified.

This morning, April twenty-fourth, Leigh had driven out to Oakwood Knoll, to fill out the necessary paperwork and unpack her dad's belongings in the cramped, stall-like room. She had placed a dog-eared copy of a large print *Reader's Digest* on the bed stand, and a family picture, taken twenty years ago, on top of the dresser. Sitting down on the bed covered only with a mattress pad and a cold white sheet, she had let out a long, tired sigh and stared at the photo, remembering. Her mother had been alive then. She and Gerald sat side by side, clenching each other's hand tightly, their two daughters and sons-in-law standing fanned out behind them. Leigh studied herself, how slender she had been then, and how happy. She and Neil had just found out they were going to be parents. But that had been a long time ago.

Fifteen years ago, Leigh and Neil's marriage had begun to fall apart. Or at least that's when Leigh had realized that things were falling apart. Married right out of high school, Neil and Leigh had tragically mistaken lust for love. Due to the gradual deterioration of physical feelings and youthful sanguinity, there had been no inciting incident that signaled the decline of their relationship. As their passion died away, so, too, did their marriage. Neil and Leigh had never really been in love with each other; they had only been in love with the idea of being in love.

Although the decline in their relationship took place slowly, over a period of time, like the accumulation of hours on a humid summer day, the realization that their marriage was dead came upon her suddenly. She had been knitting in her rocking chair, Neil had been sleeping on the couch after a long day in the fields, and Dave had been over at a friend's house at his first sleepover. The only sounds filling the silence were the clicking of Leigh's needles and the ticking of the grandfather clock situated in the corner of the room. It had probably been Dave's absence that triggered her realization that she no longer loved Neil, that she had never really loved him to begin with. But more than



anything it was the silence that magnified the emptiness of the house and the hollowness of Neil and Leigh’s relationship.

She and Neil never should have married, and it was with this regret that she had hauled Dave over to her parents’ house that summer fifteen years ago. Her father had held her, told her things would work out, but that she must stay with Neil for Dave’s sake. Gerald, a staunch Catholic, had serious qualms in regards to divorce.

“Leigh,” Gerald had said. “I trust that you’ll make the right decision.”

Leigh knew that, according to her father, she had made the right decision in staying with Neil; but now, looking back, she was almost certain she had not. Only her numbness and her desire for her son to grow up in an intact household had allowed Leigh to stick around the last fifteen years with her husband.

But now Dave was in school and her father’s mind was gone and he was going to be absent physically now too and Leigh didn’t know what she was going to do.

* * *

The nurse in the Alzheimer’s ward took charge, introducing Gerald and Leigh to Esther and Viola and Richard and Art, the residents presently sitting in the community area of the Alzheimer’s ward. They were watching a Lawrence Welk rerun.

Leigh kept glancing over at Art, who was pumping a stress ball. It was bright yellow, with two black dots and a broad black semicircle imprinted on it. His hands worked slowly, steadily, distorting and then restoring the smiley face as he squeezed and released, squeezed and released.

Suddenly her father leaned forward and lightly slapped his right thigh.

“I better get going, hun,” he said. “The cows don’t milk themselves.”

Leigh leaned forward on her seat, too, placing her hand on her father’s knee.

“Just a minute, Dad,” she said. “Let’s finish watching this show first.”

But he didn’t seem to hear her. “I need my jacket,” he called loudly to the nurse.

“Where ya goin’, Gerald?” she asked. She was helping a resident take her medication. “You just got here. Sit back and enjoy the show.”



Gerald looked at Leigh, about to protest, but then emptiness replaced the earnest intensity in his eyes as he forgot what it was that he was about to say, what it was that had been so urgent.

“Have a seat, Dad,” Leigh said. “Lawrence Welk is on.”

Gerald sat down to watch the show. Leigh watched Art squeeze the stress ball, until he fell asleep and the two black dots and the semicircle smiled up at her blankly from the palm of his hand.

* * *

The slant of the sunshine filtering in through the windows reminded Leigh that it was time to leave. After the Lawrence Welk show was over, Leigh had read aloud to her father the last ten pages of *Tuesdays with Morrie*, which she had been reading aloud to her father for the past week and a half. Leigh had spent the better half of the last half hour reassuring her father that the chores could wait when the nurse began passing out bowls of vegetable beef soup and little packages of crackers.

“Aren’t you staying for supper, hun?” Gerald asked, when the nurse neglected to set a bowl in front of Leigh.

“No, Dad. I’ve got so many leftovers at home, I think I’d better get rid of those,” Leigh said, hating to lie to her father but acknowledging it was the only way she would be able to leave Oakwood Knoll. “But you enjoy your dinner.” She gave her father a hug and a peck on the cheek, and then asked the nurse to let her out of the ward. This had been easier than she thought it would be. She had expected her father to want to come with her, to create a scene. A part of her wished he had.

The air was chilly when Leigh stepped out the door into the parking lot. The sun hung just above the horizon, a glowing orange globe giving off gorgeous light but not much warmth. Leigh slid into the driver’s seat of the van and threw her purse in the back seat. It landed on top of the suitcase she had stowed behind the passenger seat the night before.

Leigh sat for a long time without starting the car. She didn’t know where she was going to go, but she knew she wasn’t going back home. No one needed her anymore. Not Dave, not Gerald, and certainly not Neil.

Finally, she turned the key and started the ignition. She decided she would head east, in the opposite direction of the setting sun.



Andy Kuennen

Still Hanging On

Cooped up here
Mother's brown afghan on my lap
pills and a pile of crumpled tissues at my side

AM radio on the fridge
plays the same commercials as yesterday
I know them by heart

I wait for a visitor
a voice to say hello
someone beside the man on the radio
just to ask me what I had for lunch
or what I think about all this snow

A voice
a handshake
warm eyes shining more brightly
than the stained glass hummingbird in the 1 o'clock sun

Pulling the afghan up to my chin
I stare at the faded poinsettia
near the window
a leftover from December
but still hanging on



Alison Balaskovits

What Can't Be Helped

My sister was late.

“Should we order without her?” I asked my mother and grandmother who sat across from me at the small pancake house.

“That’s rude,” said my mother. She glanced at her mother and me, her eyes fluttering to the menu and back again. “Isn’t it?”

“It’s more rude for her not to be here on time. You told her when and where, didn’t you?” my grandmother asked my mother.

“Twice.”

“And you,” she turned to me, her wrinkled eyes and cheeks distracting me from the difficult decision of Eggs Benedict or Eggs Florentine. “You reminded her?”

“Sure did,” I said. I hadn’t.

“I don’t understand that girl.” My grandmother waved away the waitress with a wrinkly, heavily jeweled hand. “She thinks because she has a fancy medical job she can make her own family hours.”

“Maybe they had some kind of emergency case,” I murmured.

“She’s a foot doctor!”

“Well,” my mother said placidly, “maybe someone stepped on a nail.”

My sister opted to show up then, carrying what looked like a Gucci bag. I could, at this point in our relationship, distinguish the large G from the LV of Louis Vuitton. Versace still gave me trouble occasionally. I mentally groaned when I saw her shirt. Twenty-nine years amongst our grandmother and mother and she had yet to learn.

“Hey sis,” she said, making hand motions for me to scoot over.

My grandmother started first. “For God’s sake, Nina, cover your chest.”

Nina, predictably, rolled her eyes and shuffled into the seat next to me. I handed her a menu.

“I can’t help it that I have large tits,” she said. “They’re going to show no matter what I wear.”



“You can do the decent thing and cover them up,” said Mother. “Men are just going to look at you and think the wrong things.”

“Like what?” Nina challenged, her voice beginning to sound slightly sharp.

“Like you know what,” my mother said cryptically.

But of course we knew. How could any woman not?

Nina scoffed and peered at her menu. Having sat through many similar conversations and already bored with the vernacular, I opted for a safe topic.

“So why are you late? Did someone step on a nail?”

“I’m not late,” she said, glancing at her watch. I was amazed she could read the time without getting distracted by the rhinestones. “Am I late?”

“By almost twenty minutes,” I responded, grinning conspiratorially. “We almost ordered without you, which, I have heard, is the height of rudeness.”

Grandmother threw me a glare as she waved the waitress over. I only hope that, when I am that old, I too will have similar coordination of aversion and desire.

We ordered.

“So really, what was keeping you?” asked Mom, her hands twisting the napkin. “Are you okay?”

Nina shrugged. “I was shopping.”

I thought about groaning out loud, but that was too obvious. So, instead, I tried to cower into my seat.

“Shopping! Really, you blew us off to go shopping!” My grandmother said. “Did you have any consideration at all?”

Oh, no, there’s that look in her eye.

“I could be dead in a year... less! And you go shopping instead of spending time with your family!”

“I needed something for tonight! Pete asked me out.”

“Oh so it’s for a boy,” grandma hissed. She patted the fine, fixed feature of her grey, curled hair. “Obviously he’s more important than us. More important than your family.”

“Grandma,” Nina said imploringly.

My mother looked upset as well. “What did you buy?”

“Just a shirt and a necklace.”

“Is it another booby-shirt?” asked Mom.



Booby-shirt. I hate that. It sounds childish.

“Mom. Grandma. I can’t help it. My breasts are huge. They’re going to show,” she slumped, her eyes rolling at me. I shrugged.

Mom was glowering. “All the more reason to cover them up.”

“They are,” I said, jumping into the conversation even as I knew I should keep the hell out, “a natural part of the female physique. She should show them. Ra-ra feminism.” I waved a half-hearted fist in the air, and predictably not a single woman rushed to my cause. Perhaps I ought to have lifted my fist higher?

“It’s a private part,” said Grandma. “And any lady who would... would burn her bra and let it all hang free is just a loose lady.”

“Those crazy kids,” I muttered to myself.

“Also,” continued Grandma, “who is going to buy the cow when the milk is free? And low cut shirts like that scream come one come all.”

Nina was irritated. She had a tell; her lip quivered. “Thank you for implying that a man wouldn’t want me because of who I am. You think they’d only want me for--“

“Milking?” I added helpfully.

“Sex,” Nina finished.

Well, I was close.

The food came. We managed to not discuss anything as our food was laid in front of us, though I had a hard time not sniggering; my Eggs Benedict had, due to unfortunate parsley placement, an amusing resemblance to our current topic.

“Look,” said my mother, carefully cutting her pancakes into small sections. “We’re not saying a man isn’t going to like you because of your mind or your personality or anything like that. We’re just saying it gives the impression you’re offering more than the normal girl.”

“You’re calling me a whore!”

My grandmother hurriedly hushed her. “Don’t use that word.”

“What will the wait staff think!” I said in mock horror, putting my hand to my mouth for emphasis.

“You hush,” my mother said to me. “You’re not helping.”

I smiled at myself, since no one else would.

“Excuse me,” my sister waved her fork about. “We’re still on the topic of my grandmother and my mother calling me a whore.”



“I thought we agreed that was a no-no word,” I said.

“It is amongst ladies,” said Grandma, looking at me. “But some people aren’t ladies here.”

“Really?” I asked. “Because we’ve all got lady parts. You know, breasts and the like. What else makes a lady?”

“Oh for goodness sake,” Grandmother said, placing her melon down.

“The breasts make us whores, apparently,” said Nina, scowling.

“We never said that!” my mother protested. “We’re just saying that you could make an effort to cover them up.”

“But I like the way I look,” my sister said. “I like my breasts.”

“That doesn’t matter,” said Grandma. “What matters is that men like them too much.”

“That makes no sense!” said Nina.

“I agree,” I said. “Why should we bend to the male patriarchy that has, for years mind you, oppressed our breasts? Screw oppression!”

My grandmother scoffed. “I was raised through this *oppression* of yours, and I can tell you, little missy, that there was never anything wrong with keeping one’s self to one’s self.”

“There is when you can’t help it!” my sister said, breaking off my comeback about how Gertrude Stein or Virginia Woolf might have something to say about it. “I’ve had large tits my whole life. I know men see them as some sex object but you’re--“ she paused.

“Trivializing?” I said.

“Yeah, trivializing me when you imply that men only like me for my tits.”

“I don’t think anyone said that,” my mom said, belatedly playing peacemaker.

“You *implied* it,” Nina hissed.

“Well, implication or not, what about this Pete fellow,” said Mom. “Have you ever seen him staring at your chest?”

“Yeah,” said Nina, uncomfortably.

“See?” said Grandma, as if some point had been proved.

“That doesn’t mean anything,” I said for my sister.

“It means that he’s thinking about having sex with you,” said Mom.

“Well, then, why doesn’t he ask me into bed right away? Why go through the trouble of asking me for a date?”



“That’s how they do it. You should know that by now! It’s wine, dine and then straight to bed.”

“I think he actually likes me,” said Nina, quietly. Too quiet. I immediately felt bad for her.

“He can’t like you too much if he’s distracted by your breasts,” said my grandmother.

Even my mom had the grace to look abashed at that. She reached over and placed a hand on my sister’s. “Sweetie, we just want the best for you. We want you to have a man who will be good for you and really like you for you. That’s all we want. We love you, darling.”

But Nina wasn’t listening. She must have been beyond it.

“I can’t help it! Okay! I can’t help it! What can I do? They’re there. I just can’t help it!” My sister threw her arms up, the saltiness of her voice betraying that she was probably going to cry soon, which meant that her face will soon be splashes of pink and red.

So I put my hand on her shoulder and said, “It’s alright. It’s not the most important thing. Not at all.”

My grandmother’s harsh lines softened, and I could see warmth starting in on her dark eyes. “How long have you known this boy?” she asked.

“For a couple months now,” Nina said cautiously.

“Well. That’s a lot better than some guy picking you up at a bar,” said Mom.

“I thought Grandpa picked you up at a bar,” I said to my grandmother. I smirked as I said it.

“It was not a bar,” she said, haughtily. “It was a church dance.”

“Was there alcohol?” I asked.

“Of course. We were all of age at the time.”

“Well, that’s like a bar,” I said.

“Things were different then. Men had more respect for women,” my grandma said. “They opened doors for you, and paid for your dinner in full. None of that half-and-half stuff.”

“Wasn’t there also rule of thumb?” I said.

My sister looked curious. “What does that mean, anyway?”

“It means,” I said with the air of the brilliant scholar, “That husbands were allowed to beat their wives so long as the stick or whatever wasn’t thicker than your thumb.”



I think my grandma thought I was implying something, because she said, “My husband never took his hand to me.”

“I didn’t say he had,” I replied. “Just that it was legal to do so. It’s just weird, that they’d open the door for you but they could legally beat you if the fancy struck.”

My mother was not one to easily get side-tracked. “The reason we keep bringing up the shirt,” she said to Nina, “is that we don’t want you to have a man break your heart.”

“Just because my breasts are showing doesn’t mean a guy is going to break my heart.”

“Darling, men are visual,” said Mom. “They think with their other head more often than not.”

“Dad too?” I asked her. She threw her napkin at me.

“You’ve a dirty mind,” she said fondly.

My sister pursed her shiny lips. “How come you never get mad at her,” she indicated me, “when she wears a low cut top?”

“Because she doesn’t have anything to show,” my mother said.

“Woe is me,” I said. “The breast genetics fell far from my tree. Hey, that rhymes. I’m a poet and I didn’t know it!”

“You’re also lame,” said Nina.

“That too,” I agreed.

Nina was looking at our mother. “Why don’t you ever wear anything low cut?” she asked.

“Pardon?”

“You should show yours off.”

“I’m a married woman!”

“It’s indecent,” said my grandmother. “At her age.”

My mother frowned. “I’m not that old.”

“Exactly,” said Nina. “Why don’t you show them off? Just because you’re married doesn’t mean you don’t have sex appeal.”

“I’m not trying to attract anyone. I’m more than happy with your father.”

“You don’t have to show ‘em off just to attract someone,” said Nina.

“Yeah,” I said. “It gives confidence.” My mom was narrowing her eyes at me. “Well, not that I would know, having little to no breasts.”

She smiled at me. “You have other things men like.”



“Oh jeez, let’s not get into that,” I said. “I think it’s the epitome of unattractiveness is having to have your mother tell you what men will like.”

“But you’re a beautiful girl!” said Mom, my grandmother agreeing with her with a nod of her wrinkled face.

“And you’re a beautiful woman,” I said. “So you should show off your breasts.”

“I don’t think so,” said Mom, but I could tell she was pleased with the compliment.

We talked of other things, including but not anywhere limited to shoes, ships, ceiling wax, cabbages, and queens. Of course, as we gathered our bags and coats to go off on our separate ways, my mother could not hold back one last comment on the subject of my sister.

“You will try to cover them, won’t you? For me?”

“There’s nothing to be done for them,” said Nina. “They’re there.”

Nina is right. She can’t help her breasts as much as Grandma can’t help that her own sag like the great weights of her memory. Her breasts carried children nursing at the teats amongst the great wars. They were encased in yellowed lace during times of peace, growing heavier and lying lower as the moments pass her by. And she won’t be able to help it when, in a few years time, her breasts will sag with her to the grave.

And my mother can’t help the weight of her own. They’ll get The Disease in only a few, short months, and her life will be changed forever because of it. No matter how carefully they were concealed they will be attacked for their existence, and she cannot help that. Years down, when they announce her a survivor with pink ribbons darning her wrist, she’ll present them proudly as victors over an oppressor she never saw.

My sister’s will be appreciated, finally, not only by Pete who dropped down on his knees before her after two years of gentle courtship, but also by her daughters, twins, who bob their blond heads in joy whenever Nina enters the room.

As for me, well, I won’t take notice of them until a boy I like jokingly refers to them as ant-hills, belatedly saying he thinks they’re *nice that way*. I’ll stand in front of mirrors, hundreds of them, and push them together and up with cupped hands until I have enough money saved up to change them. When I see myself, after bruises and scars have faded back to health, I’ll see them first on the long trail up to my face.



Christopher Johnson

Courageous Primate: Pope John Paul II and the Solidarity Movement

On June 2, 1979, Pope John Paul II, the former Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Krakow returned to his homeland as the triumphant ruler of the Catholic Church. The return of the beloved former archbishop of Poland gave hope to an embattled people faced with the oppression of the communist government and its strict labor unions. The hope that sprung from the visit from their Pope gave the people courage to stand up for their beliefs. Pope John Paul II wanted the people of Poland to stand up for their rights and reclaim Poland as a Catholic nation. Once this occurred, the people began to seek to change other things. The Pope's journey served as the uniting and culminating factor for the people of Poland to make some changes in their homeland. From the inspiration of his appearance in Victory Square in Warsaw, in 1979, where he spoke to 250,000 Polish citizens and thousands more via the radio, to his explicit support of Solidarity through letters, appointments, donations and papal documents, Pope John Paul II sent a very clear message to the people and government of Poland and the world, that Pope John Paul supported Poland and was going to do his best to protect his home nation. Pope John Paul II was a religious leader who worked to protect Catholicism and human rights in Poland; he did this while simultaneously serving as a political leader strategically protecting Solidarity in order to achieve his religious objectives.

In studying previously conducted research, four pathways of thought emerged; the first was that Pope's strong religious belief inspired the Solidarity movement, the second was that Solidarity did not have much interest in religion, rather only what was advantageous for achieving its goals, the third was that John Paul's actions in Poland were more political than religious, and the fourth was that John Paul had no influence at all.

The first view path was represented by George Weigel, Bogdan Szajkowski and Jonathan Luxmore. George Weigel wrote *The Final Revolution: the*



Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism and *Witness to Hope*. He is an apologist for the influence that John Paul had upon the fall of communism and the rise of Solidarity, and both of these books outline this idea. Bogdan Szajkowski, a Polish professor, describes the influence that the Catholic Church had in Poland and John Paul had upon the fall of communism in his book *Next to God...Poland*. Szajkowski argues that the Church aided in the collapse of communism in Poland. Jonathan Luxmore wrote *The Vatican and the Red Flag*, detailing the evolving relationship between the Pope, the Vatican and communism. Luxmore points out John Paul's consistent encouragement of the Church in Poland to support human rights and Solidarity from the very beginning.

While the first group argues that Pope John Paul II greatly influenced Solidarity and assisted in its rise, the second group argues that the cooperation between John Paul II and Solidarity happened merely out of mutual advantage for both sides. In other words, Solidarity benefited from Pope John Paul II speaking in their favor, and Solidarity accomplished the Pope's goal of ending communism in his home nation. This group is represented by Timothy Garton Ash and Lawrence Goodwyn. Timothy Garton Ash's *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* is the premier resource on Solidarity, and the basis for much of the research on Solidarity. Ash wrote the book during his time as a journalist for the *London Times* in Warsaw. Much of the book is written in first person point of view and contains his impartial views on the rise of Solidarity; the rest of it is his interpretation of others' views. The book is very neutral when it comes to the religious influence upon Solidarity because the author did not have an agenda in the writing of the book, unlike many of the other authors who wrote to give recognition to Pope John Paul II and his accomplishments. Lawrence Goodwyn wrote *Breaking the Barrier: Solidarity*, which outlines the extensive history of Solidarity as a political and labor organization with very little consideration for the religious aspect of the movement.

The third group argues that Pope John Paul's involvement with Solidarity was motivated by political objectives. This viewpoint is represented by John Cornwell in *Pontiff in Winter*, Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts in *Averting Armageddon* and *Pontiff*, and Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi in *His Holiness*. These several different authors' views provide interesting insights on the subject. Bernstein, Politi and Cornwell disagreed with Weigel on events



in the evolving relationship between Pope John Paul II and Solidarity. *The Pontiff in Winter* focuses on John Paul's actions during the late Cold War and his contributions to ending communism. Cornwell evaluates John Paul's actions in relation to Solidarity, and argues that they were not religiously motivated, rather simply political activities.¹ Similarly, Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan Witts in their book *Averting Armageddon* evaluate John Paul's actions in Poland and describe Pope John Paul II as an important and influential part of Polish society and Church policy. Thomas and Witts saw Pope John Paul II as having a significant amount of political influence upon the growth and development of Solidarity. His alleged donations and political and doctrinal maneuvers were an impetus in the rise of Solidarity. In *His Holiness*, Pope John Paul II is shown as the wise political strategist who directed the bishops of Poland in keeping control of Solidarity and the people to prevent harm from coming to Poland.

The fourth group is represented by David Yallop and argues that Pope John Paul II had no influence upon the political scene in Poland. In *The Power and Glory*, Yallop says that Pope John Paul II had no influence upon Solidarity in Poland, and that it was a story fabricated by his admirers. Yallop argues that the Pope was given credit for the works of the Church in general, and that his supporters gave Pope John Paul II credit for what they did.

This essay looks at the simultaneous political and religious influence that Pope John Paul II had upon Poland with a strict focus on his influence upon the Solidarity movement. The other studies only dedicated a few pages to John Paul II and his relations with Solidarity. There are no books or articles that just focus on John Paul's relationship with Poland and Solidarity. This gives room for research to be completed evaluating the influence he had as the Polish Pope upon his homeland from his election until the mid-1980s. Also, few of the secondary sources take into consideration much of the writing that John Paul II did between 1979-1981 that was both pastoral and political in nature. This essay will argue that in allowing his religious beliefs to influence his political beliefs and actions, Pope John Paul II played a key role in ensuring the success of the Solidarity movement through his relations with Lech Walesa

¹ John Cornwell. *Pontiff in Winter*. (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 104, 121.



and the assertion of his influence upon the Catholic Bishops of Poland and the communist officials in the Soviet Union and Poland, the writing of his Papal encyclicals, and his physical aid to Solidarity during the martial law period. These actions were done because Pope John Paul II firmly believed that the Polish people would enjoy full freedom to practice Catholicism only after they had overthrown the communist government.

Pope John Paul II: A man whose political beliefs were guided by his faith.

Pope John Paul's involvement with Solidarity began following his return to Poland in 1979, when he received a letter from Lech Walesa, an electrician and union organizer. Lech Walesa was unhappy with the conditions in the Lenin Shipyards, the rapidly rising food prices, and the laborers' inability to organize into groups without fear of losing their job.² Walesa told John Paul that he liked his document *Redemptor Hominis (On Redemption and the Dignity of the Human Race)*, and that it inspired him to name his new labor union "Solidarity." Pope John Paul wrote back to Walesa and told him that he approved of the name.³ This began a regular correspondence between the two, both over the phone and through the mail. The purpose of these conversations was for John Paul II to show Walesa that he had an ally in Rome. These conversations continued for the next year until after the rise of Solidarity, and both General Secretary Stanislaw Kania of Poland and General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party Leonid Brezhnev made their displeasure known.⁴ Even after this, John Paul and Walesa still kept up contacts using Vatican officials traveling back and forth.⁵

Pope John Paul II's initial actions were guided by the beliefs he had, which were made known through his writings. Some of these writings will be explored to set the context for Pope John Paul II's beliefs and actions. His

² George Weigal, *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 138.

³ Thomas, *Averting Armageddon*, 25.

⁴ Thomas, *Averting Armageddon*, 24.

⁵ Thomas, *Averting Armageddon*, 24.



writings reflect his religious values that in turn, reflect his political beliefs. In his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, which so greatly inspired Lech Walesa, John Paul II discusses the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In describing the humanity of Jesus' life, John Paul II pointed out the importance of respecting the humanity and inner divinity in all people. Thus, John Paul II says that the Church is charged with protecting human rights, "Church, because of Her divine mission, becomes all the more the guardian of this freedom, which is the condition and basis for the human person's true dignity."⁶ This belief statement was the guiding attitude in Pope John Paul's tenure as a priest, bishop, and finally Pope. From the beginning of his career as a priest, Fr. Karol Wojtyla was an advocate for workers.⁷

Throughout *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul develops the theme of human rights, focusing on the idea of worker's rights:

She (the Church) must likewise be aware of the threats to man and of all that seems to oppose the endeavour "to make human life ever more human" and make every element of this life correspond to man's true dignity-in a word, she must be aware of *all that is opposed* to that process. We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent. The person, who, on the one hand, is trying to draw the maximum profit and, on the other hand, is paying the price in damage and injury is always man.⁸

John Paul II is speaking out against businesses that exploit the labor of workers. He feels that workers have a right to safe working conditions and a reasonable wage. Pope John Paul draws his inspiration from the Vatican II document *Gaudium Et Spes* (*The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*), a document he was instrumental in writing.⁹ The intention of

⁶ Pope John Paul, *Redemptor Hominis*, (Rome: The Vatican Press, 1979), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html (accessed November 6, 2007).

⁷ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 46.

⁸ John Paul. *Redemptor Hominis*.

⁹ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 166.



the document was to attempt to resolve many of the problems in the modern world. In this document, the rights of workers are described: “Among the fundamental rights of the individual must be numbered the right of workers to form truly representative unions which contribute to the proper structuring of economic life, and also the right to play their part in the activities of such associations without risk of reprisal.”¹⁰ This is the theme that caused Pope John Paul to take such a firm stance in support of Solidarity.

John Paul II vehemently believed that the Church had a responsibility to stand up for workers and encouraged and supported whatever efforts were necessary for workers to achieve the freedom they desired. *Gaudium et Spes* says, “The first step is to engage in sincere discussion between all sides; but the strike remains even in today’s conditions, a necessary, although an ultimate, instrument for the defense of workers’ rights and the satisfaction of their lawful aspirations.”¹¹ The belief in the rights of workers to strike is made clear through his actions in support of Solidarity later on.

On August 16, 1980, Lech Walesa and fellow workers at the shipyards in Gdansk began their strike against the government, which caught much of Poland, including the Catholic Church, off guard. The strike was a result of many years of frustration with the government, working conditions and high food prices. The boiling point was the firing of a popular labor leader Anna Walentynowicz.¹² There was much confusion and mixed emotions on what should be done. Cardinal Wyszynski was the first to react to the strike and he called for the Polish nation to calm down and think rationally. “Although man has the right to rest, although sometimes when he has no other means—he has the right to make his stand also by refraining from work, yet we know that the argument is also very costly. The cost of this argument runs in the billions, which burdens the whole nation, the family and each individual.”¹³ Wyszynski

¹⁰ Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes*.” *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Rome: The Vatican Press, 1965. http://www.osjspm.org/majordoc_gaudium_et_spes_part_2.aspx

¹¹ Second Vatican Council., “*Gaudium et Spes*.”

¹² Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 38-39.

¹³ Bogdan Szajkowski, *Next to God...Poland*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 96.



encouraged the workers to consider the costs of their strike before advancing on with it. “I think one should refrain from too many demands and claims, just so peace and order may prevail in Poland.”¹⁴ Wyszynski then encouraged the strikers to be reasonable in their demands and do what was best for the nation. This speech was televised, broadcast on the radio, and used by the government as propaganda to attempt to calm the strike and protests.

Pope John Paul II was briefed about the strike in Gdansk and Wyszynski’s response calling for the workers to reconsider. John Paul II then reacted to this by calling upon the Cardinal and the bishops of Poland to stand up for the rights of the workers and support them in their quest for their human rights. Pope John Paul II went out on the balcony during his daily Angelus and began to pray for Poland and the workers. “Workers who are striving for moral, social, economic, and cultural rights.... I pray that once again the Episcopate with the Primate at its head may be able to aid the nation in its struggle for daily bread, social justice and the safeguarding of its inviolable right to its own way of life and achievement”¹⁵ As one could imagine, Pope John Paul II was very upset that his own bishops would fail to uphold the values to which he himself was so dedicated. Pope John Paul then gave a radio address on August 29, the feast day of Our Lady of Czestochowa,¹⁶ entrusting, “the great and important problems of our country to Our Lady....”¹⁷ He also confirmed to the strikers, and “the problems they were facing were real and could only be resolved by bringing ‘peace and justice to our country.’”¹⁸ These statements were significant because the Pope is the universal head of the Catholic Church, and his support meant a great deal to the workers and gave them a significant morale boost.

¹⁴ Szajkowski, 96; Goodwyn, 223; CIA, Situation Report—Poland, August 27, 1980.

¹⁵ George Weigel *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 401.

¹⁶ Our Lady of Czestochowa, also known as the Black Madonna, is the Patroness of Poland and is a deeply respected figure in Polish culture. She was declared the Patroness of Poland in 1655 by King Jan Casimir. The shrine is located in Jasna Gora, Poland.

¹⁷ Ash, 68.

¹⁸ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 402.



It also brought a great deal of attention to the cause of the workers. In this gesture, John Paul appealed to the religious side of the strikers, encouraging them to hold out during negotiations until they achieved the goals they desired. John Paul took a stance quite opposite of Primate Wyszynski; he felt that the values of social justice outweighed the concerns for national security.

The support was religious in that it was based upon religious values John Paul II strongly supported and that were previously mentioned. In supporting the workers, John Paul II was aiding in the slow breakdown of communism, an ideology that he was strongly against in its practice. John Paul took a strong stance against communism throughout his tenure as a clergyman and bishop in Poland. John Paul II's stance was based upon his concern about the desire of communism to become a moral authority and dictate morals for its people. "One can understand that a man may search and not find; one can understand that he may deny; but it is not understandable that a man may have imposed on him the dictum—it is forbidden for you to believe."¹⁹ Pope John Paul's belief in religion caused him to challenge the common man to resist the social and religious control that communism was attempted to put upon society. This challenge in turn motivated the people of Poland to resist communism and the control the government had over their lives, and caused incidences such as the strike in Gdansk.

John Paul II chastised the Primate for his lack of fortitude and his cowardice in a time of need, calling him, "an old man who no longer had a sense of orientation about events."²⁰ Following this criticism, Wyszynski called together a session of the Council of Polish Episcopate, on August 27, 1980, and wrote a communiqué calling on the Polish Politburo to respect the workers' rights and negotiate with the striking workers. Included in this document were the demands, "...the right to truth...to daily bread...to a just remuneration for work...the right of association, to the independence of workers' representative organisms and self management.... Respect for the freedom of speech."²¹ This

¹⁹ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 226.

²⁰ David Yallop, *The Power and the Glory: Inside the Dark Heart of Pope John Paul II's Vatican*. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007), 93.

²¹ Yallop, 94.



document showed a great change in the opinions of the bishops and moved the bishops from a negotiating position bordering on appeasement, to a position as protectorate of the people. This is the position from which the Church in Poland would waver back and forth during the greater part of the 1980s.²² It was the encouragement from John Paul II that brought the Church to support the strikers and push the government to negotiate with the strikers. The support of the Church was crucial in giving the strikers the determination to keep negotiating and wearing down the negotiators. At the end of the sixteenth day of negotiating, on August 29th, the government negotiator, Deputy Prime Minister “Jagielski . . . [was] instructed to negotiate a peaceful settlement as fast as possible.”²³ This led to the signing of the Gdansk Agreement on August 31, 1980, that legalized Solidarity and gave the strikers the freedoms they desired. The signing was a momentous occasion and featured Lech Walesa signing the agreement with a Pope John Paul II photo pen.²⁴ When Walesa was asked what motivated him to stand up and challenge the status quo, he pointed to a cross and said the visit in 1979 gave him the courage to act out.²⁵ Lech Walesa recognized without the aid and encouragement of Pope John Paul II, the Gdansk Agreement would have not been signed, and his new labor union would not have been formed. Lech, along with all of the other strikers, found the encouragement and support of John Paul II, and later the bishops, essential in keeping their spirits up, encouraging them in their fight for their goal of an independent union- Solidarity and attracting the attention of the world, which ensured their safety.

On May 28, 1981, Cardinal Wyszynski died of cancer. Pope John Paul II then called upon the Polish bishops to give him names from which to choose a replacement for the Primate. Pope John Paul II only received one name, Wyszynski’s former secretary, Archbishop Josef Glemp of Warmia. This happened to be the person that Wyszynski requested to be his replacement; however, Pope John Paul II thought that he was too weak to take over the

²² Michnik, *The Church and the Left*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xiv-xv.

²³ Ash, 62.

²⁴ Ash, 67.

²⁵ Weigel, *The Final Revolution*, 141.



position as the head of Poland, and hesitated for six weeks to name Glemp as Primate. This hesitation was a sign of the lack of support and trust that John Paul II placed in Glemp.²⁶ The role of Primate was an important one in historic Poland. Traditionally, the Primate was second only to the King in rank. In the absence of a King, the Primate ruled Poland, until a replacement was coronated.²⁷ This title is symbolic because this meant the people put a great deal of trust in the Primate and generally respected him and his opinions. The fact that Pope John Paul II doubted the abilities of Glemp from the start was a sign that their relationship would not be a fruitful one. It soon became clear to the nation who was dictating church policy in Poland; “the real primate of Poland was in Rome, and he was not going to be silent about matters in his homeland.”²⁸

Cardinal Glemp soon made it clear that he had different views than Pope John Paul on how relations with the communists should be conducted.²⁹ The first test of this new arrangement was in December of 1981, when Prime Minister Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law in Poland to gain control over Solidarity.³⁰ At 11:57pm on Saturday December 12, 1981, all the telephone lines in Poland were cut, roads were blocked, and the military took to the streets. All the leading members of Solidarity were arrested at the hotel in Gdansk where they were meeting, and Walesa was dragged out of his bed in his apartment.³¹ Glemp was notified of the declaration of martial law at five o’clock a.m., and not long after he proceeded to give a speech calling upon the citizens of Poland

²⁶ Szajkowski, 130.

²⁷ Ash, 176.

²⁸ Weigel, *The Final Revolution*, 147.

²⁹ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 460.

³⁰ Prime Minister Jaruzelski felt a great deal of pressure from both officials in his cabinet, as well as officials in the Soviet Union to put an end to Solidarity’s activities. There was an extreme amount of unrest within the workforce, with almost one unsanctioned wildcat strike a day. Faced allegedly with the possibilities of Soviet military intervention if he did nothing, Jaruzelski declared martial law to allow for a decisive and sudden crackdown on Solidarity activities and a mass arrest of its leaders.

³¹ Ash, 262.



to not resist the martial law and to remain in their homes. “There is nothing of greater value than human lives...do not start a fight of Pole against Pole.”³² Glemp feared a major uprising that would result in the deaths of many Poles, something he did not want to see. He encouraged the people of Poland to be patient; to wait and see what would come of the declaration of martial law.

Pope John Paul II, hearing about the declaration of marital law, immediately wrote a letter to General Jaruzelski calling upon him to release Walesa, and find “an end to...acts of bloodshed against the Poles...and a return to the peaceful dialogue that since August 1981 has been solving the problems involved in the renewal of society.”³³ The letter was signed by the Pope and then hand delivered by Archbishop Luigi Poggi and Monsignor Janusz Bolonek to Jaruzelski.³⁴ In standing up for the rights of the people, and working to free the leaders of Solidarity, Pope John Paul II ensured that Solidarity could continue to exist. Pope John Paul was also fighting for the freedom of all Poles to travel as they wished and enjoy their natural human rights. Although his letter did not change the status of the declaration of martial law, it gave the people the knowledge that someone did care for the people of Poland, and that they were not alone. In this gesture, John Paul confirmed that he indeed was the true Primate in Poland, the one who would stand up for the people and work to protect their rights.

In addition to writing a letter to Jaruzelski in 1981, Pope John Paul II also wrote *Laborem Exercen*, a very politically motivated encyclical dedicated to workers’ rights and the role of workers and the economy in the modern moral world. *Laborem Exercens* had some deliberate allusions to the political situation in Poland. Szajkowski suggests that the time of the encyclical’s publication was very deliberate and political in that it was released in the midst of the tension between the Polish government and Solidarity. The document can be seen as an open letter to the Polish government describing both the necessity of labor unions and their responsibilities.³⁵ Pope John Paul II titled one section of his

³² Information Center for Polish Affairs, Uncensored Polish News Bulletin. No 20, 1981, 21.

³³ Szajkowski, 163; Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 434.

³⁴ Szajkowski, 163.

³⁵ Szajkowski, 135.



encyclical “Worker Solidarity.” After the rise of Solidarity, John Paul II made it a habit to use that term when discussing workers’ rights. This usage of the term “Solidarity” became his way of supporting the labor union and bringing attention to the issue. This section discusses the rights of workers to unite.

The call to solidarity and common action addressed to the workers—especially to those engaged in narrowly specialized, monotonous and depersonalized work in industrial plants.... It was the reaction *against the degradation of man as the subject of work*, and against the unheard-of accompanying exploitation in the field of wages, working conditions and social security for the worker. This reaction united the working world in a community marked by great solidarity.”³⁶

Pope John Paul II is covertly referring to the situation in Poland, while keeping the language open to refer to any situation in which workers need to unite to protect themselves and insure their dignity. The usage of the term “solidarity” was not accidental; it is used deliberately to trigger recognition of advocacy for the Polish movement, but not restrict his message to a specific political context. John Paul refers specifically to a movement that occurs among laborers of an industry who become upset with the conditions and rise up to change the world, and this movement happened in Poland. John Paul is advocating for the right to protest for better conditions and human rights.

The overriding theme of *Laborem Exercens* is the dignity of the worker and the dignity of working. John Paul II encouraged employers to see men not as cogs in a machine to exploit, or as another natural resource to use, but rather as dignified beings that need to be respected. “. . . the Church considers it her task always to call attention to the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated, and to help to guide the above-mentioned changes so as to ensure authentic progress by man and society.”³⁷ Pope John Paul II fully believed that since Man is created in God’s image, he should be treated with respect. He believed that men should

³⁶ John Paul, *Laborem Exercens*.

³⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*. (Rome: Vatican Press, 1981). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html.



not be used as tools to reap profits, and working conditions should be fair, safe and allow men to support themselves and their families. This ideology also comes through with the idea of labor over capital, which means that workers should not be exploited in order to create huge profits. George Weigel describes *Laborem Exercens* as John Paul's document on "the principle of labor over capital... [in which he] defends the right to employment, just wage... and right to organize... including the right to strike."³⁸ The right of men to own land is also essential with the idea of the need for man to provide a living for himself. Pope John Paul II believed this was a legitimate right, and this was one of the reasons he opposed the communist system of collectivization of land. Pope John Paul II supported Solidarity because it promoted the religious ideas of protecting the dignity of workers by ensuring that they were not exploited in their labor. In supporting these ideals, John Paul II was also making a political statement against communism.

Pope John Paul: A man whose actions were directed by his faith

John Paul II was a man deeply guided by his faith; he allowed his values guided by biblical and doctrinal teachings to be shown through both his writings and his spoken interventions with Lech Walesa, the Catholic bishops of Poland and Jaruzelski. These beliefs that he courageously made known to the people of Poland had a major influence upon the political events of the time. Pope John Paul was not content with simply voicing his values; he also made them known through his actions in challenging General Secretary Brezhnev and Prime Minister Jaruzelski as well as his donations to Solidarity.

The letter to Prime Minister Jaruzelski was not the first time that Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to a communist official calling upon him to not resort to violence. In December of 1980, John Paul II wrote to Secretary Brezhnev and asked him not to invade Poland. Pope John Paul II, like many people, was worried about Poland because of the unrest caused by Solidarity as a protest of the Polish government's refusal to register Solidarity. In response to this lack of action, Lech Walesa and Solidarity organized a one-hour strike on October 3rd. The purpose of the one hour strike between noon and one o'clock p.m. was to encourage

³⁸ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 420.



the government to expedite their efforts to legalize Solidarity.³⁹ On October 24, 1980, Judge Zdzislaw Kóscielniak of the Warsaw Provincial Court announced that he legally registered Solidarity but added a clause stating that Solidarity recognized the Communist Party's leading role in society and international alliances.⁴⁰ This statement undermined the intentions of Solidarity: to free the laborers from the oversight of the government labor unions. If Solidarity accepted this statement, it would not have been completely independent. This infuriated Solidarity's eight million members, and another strike was set for November 12 if this clause was not removed.⁴¹ The other Warsaw Pact states around Poland watched nervously and began their preparations as ordered by Brezhnev to invade Poland. Brezhnev did not want to lose Poland, and saw this small act of defiance as the first step in a movement to end communism and separate Poland from the other Warsaw Pact nations.⁴² Pope John Paul II was also watching these proceedings nervously. On November 10, the Polish Supreme Court struck down the lower court's ruling.⁴³ The tension was over for the short term, but an invasion by the Soviets seemed inevitable, as long as Solidarity existed. Rumors circulated that an invasion was to happen at the beginning of December from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ It soon became clear that this invasion was scheduled to occur on December 7, 1980. In response to the threat of invasion, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to Brezhnev, reminding him of the Helsinki Final Act and the history of Poland. In this letter, he asked him to withdraw troops from the borders of Poland, and to respect her sovereignty.⁴⁵ This letter was then hand delivered by Bishop Paul Marcinkus to Brezhnev.⁴⁶

The invasion did not occur, and Poland kept her sovereignty; however, the influence of the letter upon Brezhnev, and the order that the events occurred

³⁹ Ash, 79.

⁴⁰ Ash, 81.

⁴¹ Ash, 82.

⁴² Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 404.

⁴³ Ash, 83.

⁴⁴ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 405.

⁴⁵ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 406. Szajkowski, 111.

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Pontiff*, 494.



in are debated by historians. Yallop quotes Brezhnev as giving the Catholic Church in Poland credit for calling off the invasion, “It is clear to us that a confrontation with the Church would only worsen the situation.”⁴⁷ By this comment, he meant that the problems with Solidarity and unrest would be intensified by invading Poland and bringing the Catholic Church into the matter. Yallop argues that the letter was sent to Brezhnev, but not until after the threat of an invasion had diminished; therefore, it had no influence upon Brezhnev at all,⁴⁸ while Thomas and Witts argue that it was sent in the fall while the tensions were being built up.⁴⁹ Weigel agrees with Yallop that it was sent in December, but he still believes it had an influence upon Brezhnev,⁵⁰ while Szajkowski argues the letter was sent during the build-up of tensions.⁵¹ The *New York Times* wrote an article in January of 1983, which agreed with Szajkowski, as their source in the Vatican confirmed the existence of a letter written in late fall 1980.⁵² Therefore, whether the letter actually influenced Brezhnev’s decision, cannot be precisely determined; however, it did demonstrate the fact that Pope John Paul II was looking out for Poland, and it did show Brezhnev that he needed to be careful about what he did. As Thomas and Witts argue, “The Russians had not invaded. But neither could Brezhnev forgive or forget John Paul’s position on Solidarity; the defiant Polish Pope was indeed a man of immense influence and real power. He might prove even more troublesome to the Soviets in the future.”⁵³ Brezhnev may have come to the decision to not invade Poland independently of John Paul II, but he came to see an adversary in John Paul who challenged him and would not allow him to control Poland as he would like.

⁴⁷ David Yallop, *The Power and the Glory: Inside the Dark Heart of Pope John Paul II’s Vatican*. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007), 103.

⁴⁸ Yallop, 103.

⁴⁹ Thomas. *Pontiff*, 495. Thomas, *Averting Armageddon*, 26.

⁵⁰ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 406.

⁵¹ Szajkowski, 111.

⁵² Henry Kamm, *Vatican Aide Hints Pope Wrote Letter to Brezhnev*. *New York Times*, 30 January 1983, 8.

⁵³ Thomas, *Pontiff*, 495.



As mentioned earlier, Pope John Paul II wrote to General Jaruzelski following the declaration of martial law. In his letter to the leader of Poland, John Paul II pleaded “with an urgent and heartfelt appeal...an appeal for an end to the shedding of Polish blood...an appeal to your conscience, General, and to the conscience of all those who must decide this question.”⁵⁴ While the General’s response is unknown, it was soon made clear to John Paul II, that Jaruzelski was the one who initiated the declaration of martial law. Jaruzelski believed he did the right thing for Poland by declaring martial law and ensuring that the Soviet Union was not going to invade.⁵⁵ Initially, John Paul II accepted this excuse but soon it became clear that Jaruzelski was not going to end martial law anytime soon. As Weigel argues, “The Soviet Union was in no position to intervene militarily in Poland in December 1981. He misread the threat... [and] missed an opportunity to accelerate the process of Poland freeing itself from the Soviet orbit.”⁵⁶

John Paul II soon recognized the fact that martial law was not going end in the near future, and challenged Jaruzelski to recognize the rights of people to freely assemble and to have labor unions, and thus lift the ban on Solidarity and end the period of martial law. According to CIA, in a Sunday radio broadcast, “The Pope denounced the martial law crackdown with the harshest terms to date....”⁵⁷ “Pope John Paul II made his strongest statement in favor of Solidarity to date...the Church will press vigorously for the lifting of the legal sanctions against the union.”⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II was initially understanding of the intention to protect Poland from the Soviet Union, but after a month of martial law, John Paul II was ready to see Jaruzelski end the period of military rule and give Solidarity and the people their freedom back. These challenges to Jaruzelski to end the martial law and re-recognize Solidarity

⁵⁴ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 433.

⁵⁵ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 433.

⁵⁶ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 433.

⁵⁷ CIA. “Poland: Readying Government Programs.” 11 January 1982. ; Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi, *His Holiness*. New York: Doubleday Publishing., 1996), 353.

⁵⁸ CIA. “Poland: Regime Concerns.” 2 January 1982.



as a legitimate labor union breathed hope for the resurgence of Solidarity within Poland. John Paul II believed that his appeals would be successful, as Jaruzelski was a product of a Jesuit education in his youth before communism and was rumored to secretly practice Catholicism.⁵⁹

In addition to John Paul II's contributions to Solidarity through his theological writings in support of labor unions and the need for labor reform, and his letters to communist officials in support of Solidarity, John Paul also actually physically aided Solidarity through donations. These donations came through equipment, money and other supplies and were semi-secretive, somewhat controversial and done with the help of others. John Paul depended upon help from others, in order to keep within the definition of the role of the Church in the modern world that he established, "the Church must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person."⁶⁰ Therefore, John Paul II depended upon the Mafia and American labor unions to do his overtly political work. The details of how this work was carried out are the subject of much speculation and scandal. Allegedly, Pope John Paul II sent \$50 million dollars from the Vatican Bank to aid Solidarity through the AFL-CIO labor union.⁶¹ There are also theories that the money was sent through Robert Calvi, the chairman of Banco Ambrosiano, with alleged Mafia ties.⁶²

⁵⁹ Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 440.

⁶⁰ The Second Vatican Council.

⁶¹ Luxmore, 246; Marek Chodakiewicz, "Miracle of Solidarity Ended Communism. *Human Events* 9 (Jan 2005):701 Database online. Available from EbscoHost.

⁶² Allegedly, Calvi and Bishop Marcinkus were caught in a scandal that resulted in the Vatican Bank paying some of the debts for the defaulting Banco Ambrasiano and Calvi found dead hanging under a bridge in London. Both Calvi and Marcinkus were wanted in connection with the scandal and alleged corruption charges by the Italian government. Neither was charged. Calvi was found dead before anything could be done, and Marcinkus was protected by Vatican immunity. For further discussion on this see Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witt, *Pontiff*. The substance of this book is dedicated to this topic.



Regardless of which method Pope John Paul II used to give the money, there is a consensus among historians that John Paul II did provide funds to Solidarity to assist in their operations, publish materials and support the unemployed Solidarity members. Keeping with the principles established in *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope John Paul II avoided publicly giving money to Solidarity. The direct and public donation of funds to Solidarity would have been an overt political maneuver. Rather, John Paul II did it secretly and discreetly, as a manner of charitably supporting Solidarity in its work to protect the dignity of workers.

Pope John Paul II, in talking to the members of the American labor union AFL-CIO, also convinced them to donate printing equipment, such as fax machines, printing presses and copy machines to Solidarity to continue their underground publication of materials after their printing presses were destroyed in the wake of the declaration of martial law.⁶³ These actions demonstrate the devotion that John Paul II had to ensuring that human rights were protected; he solicited donations for Solidarity to ensure that they could continue to publish their materials. These donations of both funds and printing equipment were absolutely essential in helping Solidarity survive underground during the martial law period. Without these donations, it would have been nearly impossible for Solidarity to successfully keep in contact with its members, keep its values alive and recruit new members.

Pope John Paul II was a significant political and religious figure during the 20th century. His ascension to the papacy was a revolutionary event that began a great process of change in Poland. John Paul II made it clear to the world that the dignity of workers was very important, and it was the responsibility of the Church to protect these God-given rights. The bishops of Poland soon came to recognize after much insistence from Pope John Paul that the dignity of workers was an issue much more important than their safety. John Paul encouraged these workers, namely Solidarity, to challenge the government of Poland by standing up for workers and not budging from their stance on this issue. Pope John Paul II himself also challenged the leaders of Poland and the Soviet Union to respect the rights of Solidarity, and all Poles to be free. These

⁶³ Gordon Thomas and Max Morgan-Witts also explore the relations between Pope John Paul and the AFL-CIO in the book *Pontiff*.



ideas of freedom and human rights were also made clear in the encyclicals that John Paul II wrote. Thus, it can be argued that allowing his religious beliefs to influence his political beliefs and actions, Pope John Paul II played a key role in ensuring the success of the Solidarity movement through his relations with Lech Walesa and the assertion of his influence upon the Catholic Bishops of Poland and the communist officials in the Soviet Union and Poland, the writing of his Papal encyclicals, and his physical aid to Solidarity during the martial law period. These actions were done because Pope John Paul II firmly believed that the Polish people would enjoy full freedom to practice Catholicism only after they had overthrown the communist government.

In the end, Pope John Paul II succeeded in achieving his ultimate goal of bringing down the communist government in Poland and ensuring complete religious freedom for the Catholics in Poland, as well as ensuring that the rights of workers were protected. Without the political, moral and physical support from John Paul II, Solidarity would not have survived to go on to change the history of Poland. In 1989, Solidarity once again became a legalized union. Shortly afterwards, it became a political party and initially won 35% of the seats in the new Sejm, the Polish Congress. Solidarity soon won every contested seat in the Sejm and 99 of 100 Senatorial seats. Through negotiations, Wojciech Jaruzelski was elected president in the newly structured government. Solidarity Party member Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected as the Prime Minister of Poland, becoming the first non-communist prime minister in Poland since 1945 and the first anywhere in Eastern Europe for 40 years. In 1990, Lech Walesa became the first Polish President elected by popular vote in Poland.⁶⁴ Since then, Poland has enjoyed a democratically elected government where workers' rights are respected, labor unions are legalized and people are able to provide a living for themselves.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Ash, Timothy Garton. *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

CIA, "Situation Reports: Poland." 27 August 1980. CIA Archives.

⁶⁴ Ash, 270.



Information Center for Polish Affairs. Uncensored Polish News Bulletin. No 20, 1981, 21.

Kamm, Henry. *Vatican Aide Hints Pope Wrote Letter to Brezhnev*. New York Times January 30, 1983, p8.

Michnik, Adam. *The Church and the Left*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*. Rome: Vatican Press, 1981. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html> (accessed November 6, 2007).

—, *Redemptor Hominis*. Rome: The Vatican Press, 1979. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis_en.html> (accessed November 6, 2007).

Second Vatican Council. “Gaudium et Spes.” *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Rome: The Vatican Press, 1965. <http://www.osjspm.org/majordoc_gaudium_et_spes_part_2.aspx>.

Secondary Sources

Bernstein, Carl and Marco Politi. *His Holiness*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

Chodakiewicz, Marek. “Miracle of Solidarity Ended Communism. *Human Events* 9 (Jan 2005):701 Database online. Available from EbscoHost.

Christensen, John. “Pope John Paul II: Cold Warrior with a cross.” *CNN.com Interactive*. <<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/19/spotlight/>> (accessed October 20 2007).

Cornwell, John. *The Pontiff in Winter*. New York: Doubleday, 2004.



Goodwyn, Lawrence. *Breaking the Barrier*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Luxmore, Jonathan and Jolanta Babiuch. *The Vatican and the Red Flag*. New York: Geoffrey Chapman. 1999.

Miller CSB., Archbishop J Michael. *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*. Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division.

Morneau, Bishop Robert F. “Laborem Exercens.” *Themes and Theses of Six Recent Papal Documents: A Commentary*. Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul Press, 1985.

Szajkowski, Bogdan. *Next to God...Poland*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983.

Thomas, Gordon and Max Morgan-Witts. *Averting Armageddon*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984.

—. *Pontiff*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983.

Weigel, George. *The Final Revolution: The Resistance Church and the Collapse of Communism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

—. *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*. New York HarperCollins, 1999.

Yallop, David. *The Power and the Glory: Inside the Dark Heart of Pope John Paul II’s Vatican*. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2007.

Works Consulted

Primary Sources

CIA. “Implications of a Soviet Invasion of Poland.” 24 July 1981.

—. “Poland: Status of Papal Visit.” 6 July 1982. CIA Archives.



- . “Poland.” 20 October 1980. CIA Archives.
- . “Poland.” 7 November 1980. CIA Archives.
- . “Poland’s Prospects Over The Next 12 To 18 Months.” 25 March 1982
CIA Archives.
- . “Poland’s Prospects Over The Next 12 To 18 Months.” 1 September 1982.
CIA Archives.
- . “Poland: Regime Concerns.” 2 January 1982. CIA Archives.
- . “Poland: Readying Government Programs.” 11 January 1982. CIA
Archives.
- . “Poland Situation Report.” 18 December 1980. CIA Archives.
- . “Poland-USSR: Cautious Reaction by Solidarity.” 21 September 1981.
CIA Archives.
- . “Situation Reports: Poland.” 28 August 1980. CIA Archives.

Pope John Paul II, *Slavorum Apostoli*. Rome: The Vatican Press, 1985. <http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_19850602_slavorum-apostoli_en.html>.

Secondary Sources

Craig, Mary. *Lech Walesa and His Poland*. New York: Continuum, 1986.

Rhodes, Anthony. *The Vatican in the Age of The Cold War*. Norwich, Great Britain: Michael Russell Publishing Ltd, 1992.

Will, James E. “Church and State in the Struggle for Human Rights in Poland.” *Journal of Law and Religion* 2 (1984): 153-176. Database Online. Available from JSTOR.



Francis C. Lehner, Ph.D.

The Seed Took Root

In October 1938, Rev. E. A. Fitzgerald, then Dean of Studies at Loras, prepared the soil for a national Catholic academic honor society when he sent a questionnaire on the issue to one hundred and twenty Catholic colleges and universities. Encouraged by the strongly favorable response to his poll, Father Fitzgerald was ready to plant the seed; in April 1939, in an address to the National Catholic Education Association, he reported the results of his probe and talked up the idea of an honor society. The seed took root quickly. A Committee of Founders, consisting of thirty-two prominent educators, was formed, and Father Fitzgerald, elected chairman, appointed three committees: one on constitution, one on name and motto, and one on insignia. In March 1940, a constitutional convention convened in Kansas City. There a provisional one-year constitution was adopted, to be followed by a permanent one, and chapters were granted to 32 schools that had previously applied for membership. Delta Epsilon Sigma had blossomed into being. In recognition of Father Fitzgerald's generative efforts, Loras College was designated Alpha Chapter.

In the half century since that time, Alpha Chapter has been a vital unit in the society. Over the years several Loras educators have filled national offices. Rev. E. A. Fitzgerald, Rev. F. J. Houlahan, Rev. Norbert C. Barrett, Rev. Clarence W. Friedman, Rev. Robert L. Ferring and Rev. Neil W. Tobin all served as National Secretary-Treasurer. Father Friedman, after he had left Loras to take a position with the NCEA, served as a member of the Executive Committee. After he had left Loras to become pastor of Sacred Heart parish in Dubuque, Rev. Neil Tobin was elected National Vice President in 1982 and President in 1984. From 1963 to 1978 Dr. Frank Lehner edited the *DES Bulletin*. Dr. Donna Bauerly was a member of the Executive Committee from 1995 to 2000.

On the local level, the record is equally impressive. There can be no doubt that over the years members of Alpha Chapter have contributed considerable intellectual and cultural leaven to life at Loras. More specifically, one can point to the annual DES seminars and to the tutoring service provided by the chapter for



students needing academic assistance. In 1985, under the leadership of moderator Dr. Donna Bauerly, the chapter preceded (one would like to say anticipated) the national officers by some five years when it launched a college-wide writing competition in four areas—fiction, essay, non-fiction, and poetry. Each year winners' works are printed in a journal. **For this year, 2007-2008, students again won two prizes in the National Undergraduate Writing Contest. Honorable Mention went to Jody Iler for her poem “elegy,” and Honorable Mention went to Michael Danaher for his non-fiction “Kebobs.” No 1st or 2nd place winners were chosen for the non-fiction section. Recipient of the 2006-2007 Fellowship was Thomas McNamara and recipient of the 2006-2007 Scholarship was Elizabeth Elsbernd. Last year's National Student Award medal winner was Abby Erion, Alpha Chapter President. Winner of the 2007-2008 National Fellowship is Brian Tlach, and winner of the 2007-2008 National Scholarship is Maria Jimena Gonzalez. The nominee for the National Student Award Medal is Elizabeth Elsbernd, this year's Alpha Chapter President.** The annual chapter dinner, long a tradition here, not only serves as a function for the induction of new members but in a sense honors all chapter members who attend. Father Fitzgerald's idea of an honor society to foster intellectual and academic achievement is alive and well at Loras College.

In a composition class many years ago, during a digression on, as I recall, overemphasis on high school sports, a student remarked on the great thrill of winning an important football or basketball game. I asked if it had ever occurred to him that other people might get a similar thrill of achievement from composing a sonnet or writing a short story. He just looked at me. But the entrants in this year's writing competition, and especially the winners whose work appears in this publication, surely know whereof I speak. Samuel Johnson was wrong when he said, in what must have been a cynical moment, that only a blockhead ever wrote for anything but money. For writers, seeing one's work in print ranks high among the pleasures of life.

*(Alpha will continue to include Dr. Lehner's ever-timely article as a tribute to this dedicated DES member who was Editor of the Society's Journal for 15 years. Each year's update of winners will be **boldfaced** within the article.)*



**LORAS COLLEGE ALPHA CHAPTER WINNERS OF THE
UNDERGRADUATE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL WRITING
CONTEST (National Catholic Honor Society)**

Year	Contestant	Entry	Category
1992	Emily Meixner	“Remembering Childhood”	Poetry
1993	(no entries this year)		
1994	Anne Finnerty	“Without You”	
		“At the Kitchen Table”	Poetry
	Matthew Russell	“Learning to Pray”	Informal Prose
1995	Mark Evans	“The Last Few Vanishing Inches Between Us”	Poetry
	John Ham III	“Age”	Fiction
1996	Jaci Dunne	“Lessons”	
		“My Vietnam”	
		“This Is Supposed to Be”	Poetry
	Lina Vitkauskas	“Self-Preservation”	Fiction
	Lisa Higgs	“When an Angel Smiles”	Informal Prose
1997	Lisa Higgs	“The Ninth Month”	Poetry
	Robert Kelly	“The Transfiguration of our Savior”	Fiction
1998	Amy Fabricius	“Where Are You Going?”	
		“Where Water Slowly Carves”	
		“Divorce”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“Downtown” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Tricia Behnke	“Your Father Looked Hot In Roller Skates”	Informal Prose
1999	Lora Krogman	“My Juliet”	Poetry
	Catherine Wegman	“Dorothy’s Lake District”	Non-Fiction
	Melanie Mausser	“Unborn Sleep”	Fiction
2000	Kristyn Kuennen	“The life you create on the front lawn”	
		“Office Visit”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“Reveille”	Fiction
	Elizabeth Loebach	“Broken America” (Hon. Men.)	Informal Prose
2001	Katherine Levantthal	“Saturday”	Non-Fiction
	Cressant Swarts	“Grass Fires”	Poetry
	Melanie Mausser	“The Crate” (Hon. Men.)	Fiction



124/Delta Epsilon Sigma – *Alpha 2008*

Year	Contestant	Entry	Category
2002	Erich Haught	“Pressures”	Fiction
	Celia Venhuizen	“Mute”	Poetry
	Lacianne Schmidt	“Climbing Out” (Hon. Men.)	Non-Fiction
2003	Rosette Golpashin	“The Night of the Falling Stars”	Non-Fiction
	Ryan Lubben	“The Janitor” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Peggy Lucas	“America’s Bleeding Pilgrim” “In the Land of Blue and Red Doors” (2nd place)	Poetry
2004	Ryan Lubben	“Movieland” (2nd place)	Fiction
	Emily Griskavich	“Matthew in the Kitchen” “Joseph” (Honorable Mention)	Poetry
2005	Jody Iler	“The Gray Ghost”	Fiction
	Alison Brogan	“To China” et. al.	Poetry
	Amber Gille	“For Our Memories’ Sake” (Hon. Men.)	Non-Fiction
2006	Quentin Smith	“Snake Skin”	Fiction
	Barbara Simon	“To My Birthday” “February” “Indian Summer” (2nd place)	Poetry
	Jessica Urgo	“The Silver Band” (2nd place)	Fiction
2007	Barbara Simon	“A Moment” (2nd place)	Poetry
	Michael Danaher	“Yorick’s Illusion” (Hon. Men.)	Non-Fiction
	Jody Iler	“elegy” (Hon. Men.)	Poetry
2008	Michael Danaher	“Kebobs” (Hon. Men.)	Non-fiction

*unless indicated, all winners were 1st place.

Loras College began its own DES Writing Contest in 1985. The **National** Contest began in 1991 with the first winners announced in 1992. With the exception of one year, when there were no entries, Loras College has always won at least one first place.



**LORAS COLLEGE ALPHA CHAPTER WINNERS OF THE
UNDERGRADUATE DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL
SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS (National Catholic Honor Society)**

Year	Winner	Fellowship/ Scholarship	Year	Winner	Scholarship
1992	Matthew Guzzo	Fellowship	2003	Laura Becker	Fellowship
1994	Kyle Murray	Scholarship		Tim Cundiff	Scholarship
1995	Kristin Duppong	Fellowship	2004	Rachel Rickertsen	Fellowship
1996	Rosalyn Juergens	Fellowship		Nathan Bahr	Scholarship
1997	Jennifer Peters	Fellowship	2005	Kathleen Volk	Fellowship
1998	Michelle Ruggaber	Fellowship		Stephanie Theisen	Scholarship
1999	Jennifer Gerlach	Fellowship	2006	Stephanie Theisen	Fellowship
2000	Scott LeGrand	Fellowship		Megan Campana	Scholarship
	Elizabeth Rogers	Scholarship	2007	Thomas McNamara	Fellowship
2001	Celia Venhuizen	Fellowship		Elizabeth Elsbernd	Scholarship
2002	Maria Alarcon	Scholarship	2008	Brian Tlach	Fellowship
		Fellowship/		Maria J. Gonzalez	Scholarship

DELTA EPSILON SIGMA NATIONAL STUDENT AWARD

(3.9/4.0 GPA and evidence of scholarly research. In the year 1998, the Executive Board decided to award only **one** per institution.)

Year	Winner	Year	Winner
1994	Susan Liddiard		Laura Rusch
	Charles Longo	1998	Carissa McDonald
1995	Regina Doering	1999	Jennifer Gerlach
	Kristin Duppong	2000	Teresa Duppong
	Doug Fischels	2001	Elizabeth Rogers
	Patrick Green	2002	Karen Kuhle
	Beth Hill	2003	Sara Wieland
	Karla Manternach	2004	Rachel Rickertsen
	Kyle Murray	2005	Kathleen Volk
1996	Rosalyn Juergens	2006	Kathleen Glady
	Matthew Roeckers	2007	Abby Erion
1997	Lisa Gerlach		
	Jennifer Peters		



RULES FOR THE DES CONTEST

1. One submission per person per category.
2. Open to all students attending Loras College.
3. Manuscripts may be submitted in any of four categories: for creative writing (a) poetry, or (b) prose fiction or drama; for expository writing, either (a) informal, personal essays, or (b) scholarly, research-type work. Prose manuscripts: 1,500-5000 words acceptable. Scholarly papers should attach an abstract, include primary sources, and aim at the achievement of some fresh understanding or original insight. Emphasis placed on the quality of writing. Documentation should follow one of the established scholarly methods such as MLA or APA. A long poem should be submitted singly; shorter lyrics may be submitted singly or in groups of two or three.
4. Proposed length: 1-10 pages for prose; 1-3 pages for poems (50-150 lines total).
5. Audience: the paper should be directed toward an educated audience—not one, necessarily, completely knowledgeable in the subject area, but one interested in discovering new ideas.
6. Verification: the paper’s facts must be verified by a faculty member of the concerned department (only needed for research abstract). Faculty signature: required on the cover sheet after facts are verified. No signatures needed for other categories.

The annual deadline is February 14. You must submit 1) two typed copies AND 2) a copy of the document in Microsoft Word on either a CD-ROM or as an e-mail attachment. Send to the DES Vice President, designated each year. Direct any questions to Dr. Donna Bauerly, *Alpha* Moderator, donna.bauerly@loras.edu. Next year, Dr. Elizabeth Raschke will moderate *Alpha*.



CONTRIBUTORS

Balaskovits, Alison	Park Ridge, IL	English Literature English Writing
Balk, Matt	West Union, IA	English Literature English Writing
Carroll, Rachel	Wheaton, IL	English Literature
Elsbernd, Elizabeth	Postville, IA	English Literature Spanish International Studies
Gossling, Kari	Ossian, IA	English Writing English Literature Teacher Education
Hall, Amy	Orland Hills, IL	English Literature English Writing
Johnson, Christopher	Andover, MN	History Teacher Education
Kaufman, Carla	Dubuque, IA	English Literature English Writing
Kuennen, Andy	Dubuque, IA	Undecided
Langel, Annie	New Vienna, IA	Elementary Education English Writing

Delta Epsilon Sigma

“It is the mission of a wise person
to put things in order.”



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MODERATOR, ALPHA CHAPTER: Sr. Marlene Pinzka, Ph.D., *Professor of Mathematics*.

ALPHA COORDINATOR: Donna Bauerly, Ph.D., *Professor Emeritus of English*.

2008 EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS: Becky Barnhart, M.A., *Alpha Copy Editor*; Donna Bauerly, Ph.D., *Professor Emeritus/English*; Joanna Brady, *Alpha Chapter Vice President*; John Eby, *Associate Professor of History*; Elizabeth Elsbernd, *Alpha Chapter President*; Amy Hall, *Alpha Chapter Secretary*; Christopher Johnson, *Alpha Chapter Treasurer*; Kenneth McLaughlin, *Professor of Physics and Engineering*; Renee Menne, *Barnes and Noble Loras Director*; Julia Omarzu, *Associate Professor of Psychology*; Sr. Marlene Pinzka, Ph.D., *Professor of Mathematics*; The Reverend Douglas Wathier, S.T.D., *Professor of Religious Studies*.

2008 EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS not judging this year: Elizabeth Raschke, *Assistant Professor of English*; Randy Steward, *Head Wrestling Coach*.

COPY EDITOR: Becky Barnhart, M.A.

The Delta Epsilon Sigma Alpha Chapter Writing Contest Winners is published annually at Loras College, 1450 Alta Vista, Dubuque, IA 52001. The annual deadline date for the contest, open to all Loras undergraduate and graduate students, is February 14.

Front cover: “The Pecking Order”; back cover: “Riff Raff” both by Michala Lensing (’11, Integrated Visual Arts and Athletic Training).

Printed by Fidlar Printing, Davenport, IA.

Special thanks to Helen Kennedy and Mary Kay Mueller, institutional marketing-graphic arts, our special helpers “to put things in order.”

