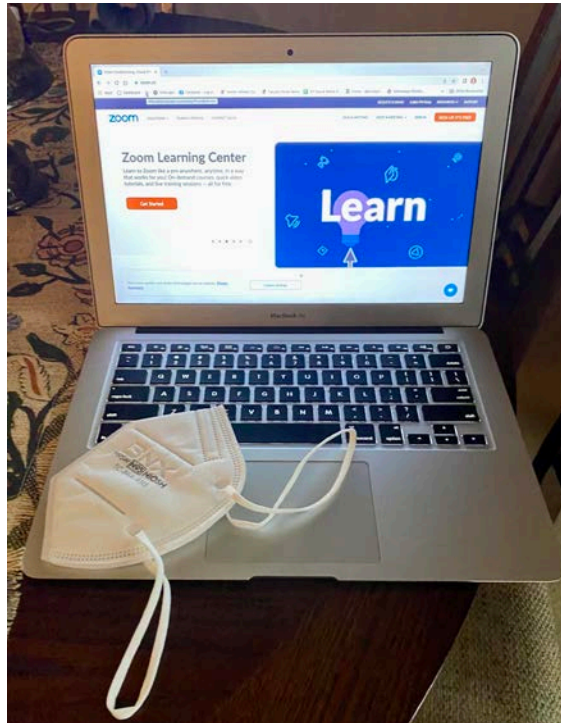


POMPA: Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association



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Editor's Note

By Lorie Watkins

The editor's note for this, the thirty-eighth volume of the *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association (POMPA)* is unique in that it memorializes a conference that we all wish had been possible. Blue Mountain College volunteered to host the 2021 conference, but as the date drew closer, COVID-19 made an in-person meeting impractical. In lieu of an actual conference, I asked members to submit the work that they would have read there, and those works are collected in this volume. We plan return to Blue Mountain, and hopefully to a more normal life in general, in 2022.

Poetry

The Poet's Prayer

By Lois Baer Barr

May you find words that glue,
like the potter's slip that seals
handles she extrudes for cups
formed at her wheel.

Her hands guide yours,
her foot on the pedal,
she tells you when to lift,
when to plunge your thumbs
to form a well. The feel
of the clay is sublime,
like the way words meld
when you lift at the right time.
Like the potter, you pray your poem
won't crack in the kiln of the reader's heart.

Words are like black sheep
scattering across on the page,
bleating from the brambles.
Like sand that stings your eyes,
chafes between your legs.

May you lead the black sheep home,
And may the sand melt to glass that peals,
and if your clay holds, you have a poem.

Tettinger tried to Sleep

By Allen Berry

Each night he dreamed
past lovers returned. Each
had betrayed him in their turn,
now promising fealty,
He was hard pressed to say
who was prisoner of whom.

Upon waking from these visions,
he found the loss keener for the illusion.
Tettinger wondered if these lovers
were heralds of some approaching doom,
sent to beguile him, to winnow his resistance,
so he would accept his fate.

It was only his grave loneliness
that kept him from cursing them,
raising an alarm,
rousing the other sleepers in the house.
That and the realization
that in their appearance
they raised some specter
within his breast,
to walk again in the world;
some portion of him long ago buried,
now warmed him, offered a species
of hope long banished from his world,
cursed as impractical,
the tomfoolery of adolescents
whose wisdom was folly incarnate.

He said that such ghosts
were merely the phantasms
that tempted doomed miners,
hypoxic and dreaming of home,
in their airless, darkened prison.
He willed himself to sleep again,
but even slumber betrayed him,
and he kept a quiet vigil, waiting
for the sun to burn away these phantoms
with its white, purifying, rays.

“Exposed” and Other Japanese-Style Poems

By John J. Han

Exposed (a haibun)

For over twenty years, globalization served as a mantra in commerce, entertainment, higher education, and other areas of human endeavors. Nations strove to come together, transcending territorial barriers, learning other cultures, and pursuing common prosperity. Setting aside mutual suspicions, humanity seemed to have reached a new level of maturity. Thomas Friedman’s *The World Is Flat: The Globalized World in the Twenty-First Century* (2006) both informed and inspired those who welcomed global citizenship.

not alone
on this autumn trail...
baby turtle

Then, the novel coronavirus came, making people wonder if the idea of globalization originated in selfishness instead of altruism. Indeed, during the pandemic, nations engaged in farcical fights over face masks, stopped exporting essential goods such as rice and pharmaceutical ingredients, retaliated each other for banning entry of their nationals at airports, and began to question the wisdom of offshore production. COVID-19 has revealed that human egotism never changes, it is difficult to transcend cultural insularity, and globalization will survive mainly as an ideal.

return of spring
a gosling tests
the waters



The Bliss of Solitude (a haibun)

Since March 2020, when mandatory COVID-19 quarantines began in my county, I have not driven more than 11 miles from my home. Despite the inconveniences of the pandemic, I still

find pleasure in hiking alone, listening to audio books, and tapping my feet to music. Life goes on even when few people rent cars and airports run below capacity.

weekend boredom
adding turmeric powder
to coffee



A Summer Night's Dream (a haibun)

For a long time, thanatology—the study of death and dying—has both fascinated and titillated me. I am particularly curious about the way people die and the things they think about on their deathbeds. Testimonies by healthcare professionals and those who have survived a near-death experience are helpful, but—like most people—I have no concrete knowledge.

still alive
bright flowers
of an old cherry tree

Recently, I dreamed about my imminent “final crossing” that seemed to hint at the mystery of death and dying. In the dream, I was standing in my home office. Suddenly my head felt light and foggy. My time was approaching. Stooping down, I thought, “This is how it ends! How many decades have I been waiting to know this feeling?” Although nothing was visible, five to ten people gathered around me as I lay in the hallway. They whispered to each other, “We need to pray for his soul.” Their soft prayers began. At one point, I had something to say but could not open my eyes or mouth. As I was trying to grab someone for attention, a dog’s bark woke me up. The clock glowed 3:50.

summer morning
the blossoming
daylily



COVID-19: Haiku & Senryu

the new normal:
handshakes yield
to elbow bumps

a pandemic year
the open and close
of schools

face mask—
the freedom to frown
at people

vegetable gardening
the frog and I
keep company

beaches closed
the old seashells
on my desk

summer fog
wondering if the virus
will ever die

pandemic summer
not noticing the roses
until they wither

social distancing
letting seawater touch
my whole being

sleeping at meetings
behind sunglasses
and a mask

descending over the valley
the solitude
of autumn mist

ice fishing
drilling a hole into
the pandemic

pandemic winter
yearning for
a Nordic train ride

out of lockdown
after viewing hundreds
of Three Stooges clips

out of lockdown
with a skill to show off—
self-haircut



A Week in the Life of a Professor: Senryu

hard to swat
the fly lands atop
Lord of the Flies

reading the last chapter first
good to know how
War and Peace ends

don't use adverbs—
his instructive sentence
has an adverb

Zoom classroom
the student says hi before
his screen goes black

teacher power
how fun it's to mute
a student

parking lot bluegrass
watching the show
with a book open

bluegrass jam
the dobro's rhythm rides

out the turmoil

hints of mortality
my doctor explains
dead skin cells

near retirement
checking my joints while
I have good health insurance

sixty-five
measuring out my life
with dental implants

count my days website
twenty years remain for me
yay!



Thirteen Ways of Looking at Northern Cardinals
(a haiku sequence)

forest edge
from high up the tree
a cardinal's song

a redbird's color...
he can't be redder
than this

marking territory—
the aggressiveness
of song

spring
a redbird attacks
its reflection

spring fever
two redbirds fight
for hours

courtship—
holding heads high
with zeal

a nest site
the female bird leads
the search

working together—
he brings twigs
she crushes them

expecting—
a male bird giving
seeds

a thick bill
the sound of
crushing shells

morning song
the redbird enters
a dream

winterization
redbirds tuck legs under
one at a time

winter solitude
adding sunflower seeds
to the birdfeeder

Two Poems

By John Zheng

Epitaph

Here lies Li Wenliang
An ophthalmologist
Whose eyes still bright

Seven Notes on Virus

virus outbreak
mom's voice
a calm river

death toll
a chill over heart
this dark night

splintered night
each star
a cold corona

spring equinox
locked down at home
from plum viewing

spring pollen
the dog twitches its nose
at the virus guidelines

virus impact
UPS shipped my packages
to the sender

yearend toll
life or death
in a breath of air

Prose

Vineyards of the Lord

By James Fowler

Perhaps Shelby Nash should have minded that he wasn't even on the vestry's list of preferred candidates for the vicar's position, but as the bishop's man in Spartanville he had a higher calling. With its dwindling membership, St. Stephen's had lost the ability to sustain itself financially. After years of diocesan support, the painful demotion from parish to mission status had come to pass, and the vestry now found itself entirely dependent on the bishop's approval as it sought a successor for Fr. Schuyler. Shelby Nash had not made the list of finalists, he had not even come close, but Shelby Nash was going to be the seventeenth presiding clergyman in the history of St. Stephen's nevertheless.

If he had been in his sixties and a hidebound traditionalist, his chances of making that list would have been much improved. That, at any rate, was the impression Shelby got from the bishop. "I want you to turn St. Stephen's around, make it move forward." These were his marching orders, and he intended not to disappoint. St. Stephen's would be his proving ground, his first command as it were. Successful church-growing with such a hard case could launch him into a plum assignment like rector of St. Michael's in Greensboro. There might be some initial heel-digging and foot-dragging, but he was confident that the momentum of innovative spirituality would sweep up most of the congregation.

As an assistant priest and youth minister at St. Margaret's in Eudora, he had introduced the bring-your-pets Eucharist, a virtual Jesus homepage, a 12-step guilt-reduction program, and an all-night rave with hardcore Christian dance music. Whatever the activity, his guiding principle was inclusion. As he figured it in one of his more memorable homilies, the Episcopal Church served as the Lord's Big Top, with room for all and a rich

array of attractions. He was fairly sure this piece had caught the bishop's eye when published in the diocesan paper and may have recommended him as a fast-track prospect. Not that he expected to win over St. Stephen's as he had the more progressive St. Margaret's. First he would gauge the temper and potential of this somewhat notorious congregation, then cultivate it in ways that would seem natural and revelatory. By the time he finished his task—at a modest reckoning, three to five years—St. Stephen's would again be a parish church, and he would be leading regional workshops on pastoral rehabilitation.

. . .

His first visit was unannounced. Strolling the grounds in civilian dress, he felt like a reconnaissance agent. The landscaping struck him as being lush yet controlled, a trim luxuriance of cannas, wisteria, and clematis. A little sign informed the wary that the bees working this garden were non-aggressive. Shelby smiled, wondering if the same could be said of the congregants.

The sanctuary itself was a long, low-pitched, stone-faced building, one of those old-guard structures that works like an architectural hush, harboring some sacred secret. As expected, it took time for his eyes to adjust once he entered. The heavy, dark-tinted windows let in a strictly subdued light. Almost everything about the interior was heavy and dark. Victorian, really, in its weight and ornamental outbursts. As he moved up the center aisle, he noted the absence of kneelers. In their stead under the pews were rows of cushions, each with a distinct ecclesiastical design in needlepoint. The very carpet under his feet, a blood-red runner up to the altar steps, told a story. For some time the major debate at St. Stephen's had been over covering or not covering the stone floor in this way. The bishop

referred to the disputing factions as the carpetites and anti-carpetites. Apparently the former had won for the time being. At runner's end Shelby shook his head over the altar, still pushed up against the wall so that the celebrant performed magic with his back to the audience. The furniture-moving that marks a new departure would start with this table. He also didn't care much for the wooden crucifix above, with its lurid, twisted figure that he associated with unhealthy religious fixations. No, his job would be to break open this crypt and let in fresh air and light.

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At first it seemed the good people of St. Stephen's would be as immovable as the altar, which happened to weigh several tons, and over the years had become fused to the floor. There wasn't even enough room for a second working altar between it and the communion rail. But if he had to practice priestcraft facing the wall, it would not be with an outdated prayer book. That jig was up; even the most recalcitrant elders had to see the impossibility of keeping up the ruse.

His predecessor had winked at the use of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer at the 8 a.m. service. While the bulletin indicated an order of service from the '79 edition, the early birds actually followed the old rite in cherished personal copies of the Book—originally in tablet form—lugged down the mount by Moses. They even brought these officially mothballed texts on his first Sunday, but as Shelby soon made clear to the vestry, the most he could do was use Rite One from the '79 prayer book. He strongly suspected that they had been flying under the bishop's radar on this count and knew they would lose on appeal.

When he spoke the words of dismissal, ending that first service, nobody moved. He thought they might simply be lost without their '28 road map, then he wondered if they were being sullen and sheeplike in the worst sense. Finally, one of the acolytes whispered, "Father, the candles." Usually when addressed this way, he countered with, "I'm not your daddy." Now he merely responded, "What about them?" "They're still lit." Ah, a cult of fire worshippers. For a moment he entertained the fancy of letting them sit in the pews until the candles burned out sometime Thursday afternoon. But with a look of patient indulgence he said, "Okay, go extinguish the candles."

Afterward he stood shaking hands offered with no warmth. One woman, thin, bolt upright, in an outfit breathing sobriety and expense, simply stood before him and pronounced judgment: "singularly unimpressive." Had decorum permitted, Shelby felt, she would have coldcocked him with her '28. This was Constance Ryall, matriarch of St. Stephen's, contributor of the \$10,000 annual pledge and periodic memorial gifts. Her deceased husband, Vergil, had been senior warden for an era. And while she did not think it proper for a woman to serve on the vestry, she used all her capital to order things to her satisfaction behind the scenes.

Shelby soon realized that he would have to find a way to conciliate her without letting her get the upper hand. In fact, the strategy he devised for dealing with her might work with the old guard in general. The trick was to seem receptive, even sympathetic, without committing himself to anything reactionary or unacceptable to the bishop. So in a vestry meeting he would listen calmly while a retired pharmacist complained of the church's evangelizing by the world, then he would deftly defer a motion that St. Stephen's develop a dress code for attendance at worship. Sometimes it appeared as if the old guard, God's

frozen people, wanted the church to implode, so they could take the only authentic body of faith to their graves, leaving the unwashed to flounder in the outer darkness of campfire hymns and group hugs.

His business, however, was invitation, the filling of pews. In the spirit of inclusion, he would not press for much rehabilitation of the early service; in turn he expected not to face resistance when overhauling the ten o'clock service. If St. Stephen's were to have a future, it would have to be more welcoming of families. The high service would be themed accordingly, with special prayers and activities for parents and children. Silencing looks from forbidding grown-ups would give way to a gladsome noise in the house of joy.

To that end he ran ads in the local paper and participated in family-oriented public events, from pancake breakfasts to nighttime softball. His presence in the community announced the new Episcopal attitude of outreach. And what distinguished him from the other pastors, although he avoided the least hint of competition, was his relaxed, life-affirming, non-judgmental manner. People liked the fact that he drove a Jeep and wasn't above arguing with an ump. Without his collar on he hardly seemed like a preacher, more like an all-around nice guy.

This come-as-you-are example led one family after another into the St. Stephen's fold. Many of them were previously unchurched, but a few drifted in from hardline Protestant denominations. They had had their fill of sermons on sin and eternal damnation. The only reminder of that fabled dungeon at St. Stephen's lurked at the bottom of a stained-glass window depicting the Final Judgment. In general Shelby disliked the church's thick, murky glasswork, but it did have the advantage of making people overlook a negative scene

like this. To counteract the darkness, he had some spotlights installed over the pulpit and chancel. He also recruited children to carry colorful banners in the processional.

While not talking much about money outside the stewardship season, he did keep close tabs on giving and noted the boost to the bottom line afforded by the new membership. The old guard had grown complacent about pledging, as all the St. Stephen's buildings were mortgage-free for some time now. They seemed to think it should cost less to belong to the church than to the country club. With the prominent exception of Constance Ryall, whose five-figure pledge was calculated to place her in a leveraging class by herself.

Lady Ryall had taken to expressing her displeasure with Shelby's innovations through her hats, whose brims were growing steadily wider. Doubtless this was partly a reaction to the improved lighting. Her fellow members of the ancien régime squinted and shaded their brows as they approached the altar rail. She reposed beneath a woven ledge, making it more and more difficult for Shelby to reach her lips with the sacrament. This minor battle wasn't worth fighting, so he had the lights dimmed for the early service, an outward expression of an inner reality, he concluded.

. . .

His success with families encouraged him to take the next step of inviting college students. One of the state's better private colleges was located just a few blocks from the church, but little effort had been made to welcome its young people. The church members must have assumed that the Spirit would lead whom It would, not needing any help from them. Shelby meant to remedy this complacency by wooing the college kids without

seeming to. He would have to be even more laid-back than he was with prospective families, but this, after all, was his specialty.

Dressed casually, he started to frequent the coffee-houses, funky sandwich shops, and music stores on the campus outskirts. He prided himself on knowing the bands and books that were the current undergrad favorites, and had little trouble striking up conversations. At first the kids took him for a cool, new assistant professor. When they found out he was a priest in denim and cable-knit, they didn't recoil. Being Episcopal, they figured, he was like a friendly, low-pressure salesman for God stuff. He also had an activist streak and pitched in when the college chapter of an aid organization renovated substandard housing or raised money for clearing land mines. That was cool, too.

At first he didn't even promote the church to them as a place of worship. Instead, for them it would be another place to hang out and shoot the breeze, or a hub for activities. They could attend the 10 a.m. service if they wished, but he had something more radical in mind. Once he had gathered a group of six to eight regulars, he and they would design an experimental service to suit their more free-form spiritual interests. It would best be held in the afternoon; that way the kids could sleep in and still get to "church" on Sunday. But at this faith gathering the doors would be blown wide open, skylights would be cut in the roof, and God would be out of the box. Shelby smiled to imagine how far divinity would emerge at St. Stephen's between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

. . .

What he did not imagine was the comparable gulf between two of his college recruits. The first accosted him in the religious section of an independent bookstore.

“I understand that you are the new Episcopal priest. I am pleased to make your acquaintance. My name is Leonidas Oxford.”

The young man with his hand extended looked as formal as his talk. Although on the heavy side, there was a spruceness about him, from his slicked hair and wire-frame glasses to his completely buttoned shirt and suspenders. Shelby knew the type: earnest, maladjusted, looking at eighteen much as he would at forty.

“My studies in British culture have given rise to a keen interest in Anglicanism. I would like to make an appointment to discuss the precise relational dynamics between the Anglican Communion and the American Episcopal Church. I am thinking seriously about becoming a member of St. Stephen’s, especially now that a new chapter in its history has begun.”

Thus began a series of weekly meetings for which Shelby actually found himself having to prepare. At times he felt like a student again, cramming for a tutorial. Gazing at his relentless inquisitor, he could easily see him as an English clergyman of 1940s vintage, with his picture on the sleeve of some stuffy ecclesiastical volume.

What was to be done with him? Clearly he wouldn’t fit in with the other college students, and he might scare the children at the main service. Then the beauty of the remaining option struck him: he would offer Mr. Oxford as a gift to the 8 a.m. crowd. With this throwback in their midst, they might feel less threatened by other fresh faces in the congregation.

After all, one of those faces sported three rings in the left earlobe, two in the right, a larger circlet in the left eyebrow, and, with mouth open, a stud in the tongue. The effect was heightened by spiky hair tipped variously according to some personal color wheel. Once the

wielder of all this fashion started to notice the traditions of the church she had decided to adopt, she offered to highlight in standing with the liturgical calendar. That way, her hair would match the priest's vestments. Shelby soon learned to take such remarks in stride, knowing their source. Dru Pearce simply operated through a mercurial mix of baiting and ribbing, provocation and pranking. A major in women's studies, she considered the church one of her labs, although Shelby suspected she didn't take anything too seriously.

With Leonidas ensconced as lector at the early service, and Dru handling alternative spiritual exercises at the five o'clock gathering, the necessary distance between these volatile elements was maintained. Of course, this arrangement left Shelby some fending to do on either end. Leonidas had started to talk up the salutary effects of personal confession, and his mainly senior conversants saw the advantage of a ninth-inning wipe of the scorecard. Shelby figured he would rather do cartwheels down the length of the Natchez Trace than be subject to a litany of paltry vices week after week. So he let it be known that personal confession was best reserved for the most grievous of transgressions such as murder, adultery, and tax fraud. This strategy worked very nicely. He later heard that he had a strange ally in the Duchess of Ryall, who declared she would no more confess to him than to her maid.

At the same time, he was having to deflect the militant sallies of Dru Pearce. When she invited him to join a group going to heckle anti-abortion protesters at a woman's clinic, his brain's excuse center instantly started firing. Then he recalled that he'd promised to show Leonidas how to set up his C. S. Lewis Web site that afternoon, so a minor headache turned out to stave off a major one.

Dru's next thrust was not so easy to parry. Idly flipping through the prayer book, she had spotted a ceremony for blessing civil marriages. Having seen Shelby bless animals and SUVs, she decided it was time to push the sacramental envelope. Among her friends she numbered a pair of girls who had been a romantic couple for two whole semesters. "Now I know even the Episcopal Church isn't enlightened enough to allow gay partners the marital dignity they deserve, but you could break ground by blessing their companionship. It would be so cool to send this message of unconditional love from the depths of Mississippi."

Shelby's instincts and long practice told him to express personal frustration with the Church's slow progress while acknowledging his vows to observe its authority. His hand went semi-consciously to his collar, partly in a gesture of obligation, partly because it was feeling tight.

"But I practically promised them that you would do it. I count on you. You're special, you've got ways of getting things done."

Shelby supposed that simply taking the girls to lunch wouldn't pass muster with Dru. Knowing her, she had probably pressed the idea on them, and then run off as if their appointed emissary. So he told her that he couldn't do anything before they were members in good standing at St. Stephen's. They would also need to come in for counseling sessions on the meaning of long-term commitment. This ploy of his was risky, but it would buy him a good half year. He was betting that the whole thing would vaporize when tested, being a Dru-instigated lark.

Despite his efforts to keep them moving in separate spheres, somewhere Leonidas and Dru crossed paths. The resulting hostility and contempt was virtually instinctive. Shelby likened the chance meeting to a disastrous conjunction of planets, as if Jupiter had

suddenly bellied up to Venus. Each came to refer to the other only by nickname: Dru was Ms. Lilith, while Leonidas was installed as Pope Leotard.

Unwittingly demonstrating the justice of his epithet, about this time Leonidas approached Shelby and offered to serve in the new capacity of verger. “I sense a hunger among my fellow worshippers for additional ceremony and traditional observance. As verger I could safeguard the solemnity of the service. To that position I would be willing to add the duties of a thurifer. Miz Ryall has kindly said she will underwrite the cost of robes and vessels appertaining to the office.” Shelby had to look up *verger* and *thurifer* in one of his reference works. Basically, Leonidas wanted to dress up and sling smoke. This could prove a good lesson for the smells-and-bells folk. As soon as they got a snootful of burnt incense, their old hacking lungs would dispel the hazy romance. Besides, Constance Ryall was footing the bill, and he could only be charged with indulgence, which would warrant his own future initiatives. So three Sundays later St. Stephen’s introduced a verger at its early service.

Leonidas, dressed to the nines in crisply pleated garb that Shelby knew must have cost a bundle, played his part with impeccable decorum. Before him he carried a sort of rod or mace tipped with the church’s emblem. The whole get-up, done in shades of blue, made him look like a liturgical cop. Shelby imagined him issuing citations for Host chewing or failure to genuflect. When it came time for him to cense the congregation, he swung the vessel in mighty arcs that would have been mightier had Shelby not barred him from doing loop-de-loops. There followed some stifled coughing, but as they later filed out the door, people made a point of saying how much they thought a verger added to the service. Nobody complimented Shelby on his sermon.

He could have lived with this standoffish reception from the early-morning crowd. After all, more members called him Fr. Shel with affection than with a trace of irony. But the anonymous letter to the bishop was going too far. According to it, he planned to celebrate holy matrimony between two females. When the diocesan office notified him of the charge, he explained it away as breezily as he could, given his annoyance. Then, drawing up a list of suspects, he recalled how two Sundays previous Dame Ryall had not even given him her customary, curt “Reverend,” but simply glared at him as if he had peed on the grave of a Confederate boy spy. The cud of resentment he chewed kept coming back up when he tried to swallow it. He experienced moments that seemed the opposite of charity. Come Lent he would enjoy daubing old-guard foreheads with the ashes of a torched '28 prayer book.

A phone call from the bishop interrupted another such fantasy. He thought it might be a good time to pay a pastoral visit. It would give him a chance to meet the new members and preach on the topic of spiritual adventure. Shelby found his tone friendly and upbeat but knew the visit would be a tour of inspection just the same. The bishop went on to apologize for the short notice: his packed calendar had only one open date, two weeks from Sunday. For a man who had been fantasizing so freely just moments before, Shelby felt headlocked by reality. Hearing himself say how much he looked forward to the visit, he hung up and slumped over the desk.

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By that afternoon he had rallied enough to survey the situation for tactical advantages. Luckily the bishop would only be at the ten o'clock service. Shelby could

count on the little children with banners for the big-happy-family look. It was the oversized children who concerned him. He needed to keep the eight o'clock and five o'clock factions from crashing the party. Muted announcements of the visit would be best. He even considered disinformation, letting the old guard think the bishop's sermon topic would be "Our Friends the Wiccans." And to discourage the gender-forward set, the homily du jour would be "Female Clergy: A Reassessment." But he had to shake off such amused reveries and stay focused on his game plan.

Of course, Leonidas came running when he got his first whiff of bishop flesh. Performing before a prelate was like his shot at a big audition. Shelby appealed to his aesthetic sense in demurring. If there was a slight pearls-before-swine overtone to the collegial explanation, this bit of disingenuousness could be forgiven. In fact, Shelby congratulated himself on a smooth block until the bishop in a follow-up call happened to mention a weakness for incense. So Leonidas would be on after all, but in a limited walk-on role without the verger costume.

Dru he would pack off to a youth ministry leadership camp. In explaining his selection, he praised her free spirit and verve, gifts that any church with a future needed to embrace. She pulled a skeptical look, scraped her tongue stud, and asked about the camp's gender parity.

By the day of the bishop's landing, Shelby had done what preliminary damage control he could. He had employed a general vagueness and specific instructions as needed. As a sign of his success, at the end of the early service Constance Ryall demanded, "Reverend, you said the bishop would be here today. Where is he?" She may as well have accused him of drugging the man and stuffing the body in a linens chest. He clarified for

her what had formerly been obscure and sensed the debate that ensued behind that narrow forehead. It would seem undignified of her to attend two services on the same day.

Besides, she was the type to suffer the little children. If she could, she would rent her own pew. As she left in higher dudgeon than usual, the odds of her returning seemed less than even.

Once the bishop arrived, Shelby managed to steer him toward some of the more presentable congregants, although Leonidas bubbled in the wings for an interview. Then he kept him occupied with professional chatter as they vested in the small room reserved for clergy. A few minutes before ten, he shepherded him to the narthex. As the organist was playing the final prelude, Dru Pearce breezed in, accompanied by a couple of willowy, whispery girls. She was wearing a ludicrous, flouncy white dress that made her look like a Catholic punk ten years late for her first Communion. Shelby shot her a startled, disapproving glance, but she merely said the camp lacked a vegan menu, and led her guests toward the front of the nave.

In a double blow to his confidence, during the processional he saw that Dru's entourage was seated almost directly across the aisle from Constance Ryall, whose anti-magnetic powers had secured her most of a pew. Flustered, Shelby lost his place in the hymn, then started to read the opening sentences from Rite One rather than Rite Two. Through force of will he pulled himself together and proceeded with mechanical correctness.

But something was still wrong, a kind of background dissonance. By the psalm he had located the problem. Dru and her guests were replacing all male references in the text with female or neutral ones. Sticklers like Leonidas and Constance Ryall could only assume

mischievous and mockery behind it. Both were scowling at the girls. Shelby realized that Dru had known nothing but revision and experiment at the five o'clock service, so might not be fully conscious of the offense.

Her behavior during the sermon made him less inclined to excuse her. She sat winking and making eyes at the bishop, causing him to stumble and garble a few sentences. This caused her cohorts—presumably the ones whose wedding banns he announced to his office walls—to emit stifled snickers. Meanwhile in the choir stall Leonidas was turning three shades of livid. Shelby tried to signal him to calm down, but his eyes were riveted on the devil's own.

The girls were now emasculating the Creed, and had gotten as far as, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Bearer, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Mother and the Child." As if possessed, Leonidas suddenly leaped up, grabbed the censer and, swinging it like an Olympian, hurled it with a roar. Shelby thought he glimpsed a look of blessing in Constance Ryall's face as the missile flew toward its target. But the high trajectory took it over the girls and through a stained-glass window, beheading the church's patron saint.

In the stunned silence that followed, Shelby found his mind a blank. He simply noticed the beam of light that came through the opening and felt he would like to approach and raise a hand to it.

The bishop took over as celebrant and managed to see the service through to its conclusion. Assisting like some awkward acolyte, Shelby wondered how he had come to exchange a splendid mustachio and top hat for a gigantic pair of floppy shoes and honkable nose.

At the door to the narthex the congregants filed past with funereal reserve. Constance Ryall kept an ox on her tongue. Dru came up twiddling her eyelids, and it dawned on Shelby that she had been having trouble with her contact lenses. Still, even she looked chastened by the blow-up. He tried to ease the tension by welcoming her guests. “You must be Melissa and Beth.” Dru froze, then said as casually as she could, “Actually, this is Rachel, Melissa’s new friend.”

As Shelby entered the vesting rooms, he met Leonidas slinking away. That crestfallen athlete murmured something about penance, beat a retreat to the parking lot, and drove off in his grandmother’s Fury.

The bishop left Shelby with this summary judgment: “Needs work.”

That afternoon, as he sat on a bench in the garth, Shelby absently scanned a plaque listing the rectors of St. Stephen’s. Beside each name were the years served in that capacity. His entry was incomplete, 1996- , but somehow he doubted that he would hold the record for shortest term in office. On the contrary, a premonition was coming over him with the force of what was once quaintly called a sinking spell. Had he tried to define it, he might eventually have settled on the word *destiny*. In more concrete terms, he foresaw a span of years that surpassed even the tenure of old, beloved Fr. Schuyler.

Critical Essays

To My Sons as a Window to Harold Bell Wright's Life, Philosophy, and Art

By John J. Han

Introduction

Although Harold Bell Wright (1872-1944) is almost forgotten in academic circles, he was one of the most popular novelists in the early twentieth century. After suffering disdain from academics and critics for decades, he is now being rediscovered by those interested in the intersection of popular culture and American literature. In addition to readers dedicated to his engaging novels, such as *The Shepherd of the Hills* (1907) and *The Winning of Barbara Worth* (1911), Wright draws increasing critical attention from scholars in popular Christian writing. Other scholars find his fiction insightful in understanding the cultural history of various regions, including the Ozarks, southern Arizona, and Southern California. It is also worth noting that Pittsburg (KS) State University, UCLA, and the University of Arizona have special collections on Harold Bell Wright.

This paper discusses Wright's autobiography, *To My Sons* (Harper and Brothers, 1934), as an excellent source material in understanding the author's life journey, ideas, and art. At the beginning of *To My Sons*, Wright explains that his narrative is unconventional in its selective, non-chronological use of materials: "Life, you know, does not come in all one piece like a cheese; it resembles, more, linked sausages—a series of events all in a string" (2). He adds that his narrative includes only the facts that were crucial to his artistic,

philosophical, and spiritual development. What Wright does in his book is not out of the ordinary: autobiographical writers tend to focus on certain aspects of their lives.¹

Wright was reluctant to write *To My Sons* for many years. At the age of sixty, however, he decided to write it for his sons with two specific purposes in mind. First, it was a form of self-exploration. He wanted to reflect on his life experiences and the formation and development of his art, philosophy, and spirituality. Throughout the book, he records the pleasures and pains in his life and the way they shaped his worldview. The author recalls his deprived childhood, his adolescence and young adulthood as a “poverty-stricken, homeless nobody” (163), his aspirations in life, and his seemingly miraculous “impressions” (6) that guided him in times of need. Second, the book grew out of his desire to let his sons know more about him. He particularly wanted to correct some of the inaccuracies about him as reported in newspapers and magazines over the decades. In addition to revealing some of the key events in his life, *To My Sons* sheds light on some of the themes of his novels, such as *That Printer of Udell’s* (1902-03), *The Shepherd of the Hills*, *The Calling of Dan Matthews* (1909), and *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* (1919).

Wright’s Life Story in His Own Words

In *To My Sons*, Wright regrets that, for almost thirty years, there was much misinformation about him in various periodicals. Writing this autobiography was an opportunity for correcting some of it. For instance, the author clarifies that he did not have a college education. He attended Hiram College, a Disciples of Christ institution in Ohio, for two years, but he took pre-prep classes at the level of middle school: “This pre-prep

department was, roughly, something less than high school, and it was as far as I ever won toward a college education. It is said that I was a student of Hiram College, but the sad fact is that while I was a student at Hiram, I left that place of learning long before I could have entered the college” (151).² A bright young man with little formal training, he harbored high academic dreams, including studying abroad. However, economic hardships prevented him from achieving them.

In the book, Wright adds intriguing biographical details. He explains that he is of reputable ancestral roots. The family line began in County Essex, England, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, and the Wrights moved to Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1640. Since then, the clan has produced “authors, educators, preachers, reformers, poets, farmers, missionaries, scientists, doctors, lawyers, [and] governors,” among others (11). Overall, his ancestors “lived in honor and served God and their country worthily” (24). Although Wright acknowledges that genealogy hides irrefutable facts, such as thievery and murder some ancestors may have committed, he is proud of his lineage. Further, he believes that “being well-born” matters (24). According to him, “[m]uch of the talk about human equality is ill-considered and empty. There is no such thing as equality among human beings or anywhere else. The law of *inequality* is the law by which all life is preserved and perpetuated” (24). Indeed, his fiction features many country people who are noble in their motives and principles. A prime example is Old Matt in *The Shepherd of the Hills*, who tells the title character, “Our folks all live back in Illinois. And if I do say so, they are as good stock as you’ll find anywhere” (Wright, *Shepherd* 41). Old Matt is one of the good characters in the novel who possess “good blood” (Wright, *To My Sons* 25).

Wright's autobiography also describes the poverty and starvation he experienced as a child and young man. His alcoholic father, Will, "lived as a poor carpenter, working by the day, dragging his wife and children from place to place, existing from hand to mouth, sinking deeper and deeper, as the years passed, into the slough of wretched poverty" (21). After his mother, Alma, died when he was eleven,³ Will abandoned his children. The young Harold lived with foster parents and his relatives, toiling for room and board. Some manual works assigned to him were beyond his bodily frame and strength, and he often endured starvation. Not surprisingly, some passages in his fiction sound autobiographical. For instance, the beginning chapters of *That Printer of Udell's* present Dick Falkner who is "hungry, cold and weary" in Boyd City, a fictional city modeled after Lebanon, Missouri (Wright, *Printer* 15). A tramp looking for employment, he has not eaten for days and has no place to sleep in. Considering him a nuisance, the community does not want his presence. Church-going Christians wish him well without helping him, and a police officer tells him to "[g]et a move on now" (24). Dick does not request a handout; he simply wants to work for food. Likewise, hunger was a continuing problem in Wright's younger years, but he refused to accept handouts from others.

Although Wright's mother died in his childhood, he had formed a deep emotional connection with her. Married to a man who failed to provide for his family, she quickly changed from a beautiful woman with many dreams to an "overworked housekeeper, cook, washwoman, scrubwoman, wife and mother" (Wright, *To My Sons* 35). However, she endured her tough lot for the sake of her children's future. She introduced Wright to good books and the beauty of nature. He fondly remembers reading Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha*, a copy from his mother's girlhood: "She gave it to me, and read it with me,

taught me to love it, and encouraged me to commit much of it to memory” (57). His mother also opened his eyes to the beauty of the natural world: “She taught me, before I knew books, to wonder at the beauty of a snowflake, to marvel at the patterns of frost on the windowpanes, and to note the delicate traceries of ice forming in a tub or bucket of water” (56). Wright recalls how he used to delight her by bringing everlasting flowers from the pasture after tending a cow: “To take those flowers home to mother was as natural for me as to eat the breakfast she would have ready when I returned to the house” (59). It is no wonder that Wright so often portrays in his fiction the pristine beauty of the countryside and the peaceful existence that accompanies it. To him, the country is better suited than the city for the human soul’s health; in his Ozark novels, the region appears as a place of spiritual renewal.

In addition to his beloved mother, Wright recalls some figures outside the immediate family he fondly remembers. Regarding Auntie Sue, his father’s sister, he recalls, “Next to mother, she is the brightest star in my boyhood sky” (60). A “rare and beautiful soul,” she gave Wright and his siblings *The Youth’s Companion* every Christmas and managed to spend part of her vacation with them in their childhood (60). She appears in his novel *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent* by the same name. Like Wright’s aunt, she is a retired schoolteacher in whose eyes “beautiful inner light [shines]” (Wright, *Re-Creation* 15). In the autobiography, he also records the positive influences of two artistic painters on his life: a farmer-artist in his early childhood and an internationally known painter in his young adulthood. Unsurprisingly, mentoring for young people is an important theme in Wright’s fiction. For instance, Dad Howitt—the title character of *The Shepherd of the Hills*—takes Sammy Lane under his wing. Initially, she “[knows] nothing of the laws and customs of

the, so-called, best society,” but through his mentoring, she gains not only refinement but also knowledge (Wright, *Shepherd* 47).

In *To My Sons*, Wright also recalls those who left a negative impression on him. One of them is his father, Lieutenant Will. A negligent, ineffective head of a household, he lived in past glory as a Union soldier. After his wife’s death, their young children were forced to fend for themselves; they sometimes did not even know where he was living. He may have served, at least in part, as a model for the father of Judy, a deformed mountain girl in *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent*. Wright also remembers pious, hypocritical Christians he met in his life, which likely played a role in formulating his idea of faith in action. After Alma’s death, he was sent to live with a small farmer and vegetable grower, who held a high position in the local church but failed to live out his faith. Wright recalls, “He rarely, if ever, spoke to me without a curse. To make me the butt of an obscene or cruel joke delighted him” (*To My Sons* 80). Wright’s next master, who owned a much larger farm, offered long, fervent prayers at the dinner table but manufactured and peddled fake vinegar: “I cannot say that I reaped a bountiful spiritual harvest from these table blessings, the pious admonitions, and my forced attendance at Sunday school and church” (86). In his fiction, the author often mocks sanctimonious Christians. For instance, in *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, Wright speaks through the mouth of Dr. Oldham. A compassionate physician, Oldham deplors “the unspeakably cruel, pious, self-worshipping, churchified, spiritually-rotten people” in town, who “denied [a young woman named Grace Conner] the poor privilege of working for the food she needed” only because her father had a bad reputation (Wright, *Calling* 280).

***To My Sons* as a Gateway to Wright's Philosophy of Art and Life**

To My Sons reveals much about Wright as an artist and thinker. One of the common critical attacks against him is his sentimentalism, and the attack is valid to a certain extent. His characters tend to be either good or bad, there is much sermonizing in his fiction, and the ending of a story is highly predictable. In his autobiography, Wright acknowledges his “foolish flare for sentiment” (61), adding that he was born to be a sentimentalist and cannot help it. He also has a clear target of his readership: he writes not for the highbrow, but for commoners who like to read heart-warming, uplifting stories. Perhaps his excessive use of tenderness, sadness, and nostalgia in his fiction comes from his lack of academic training. It may also result from the memory of his mother's gentle care, of losing her early in his life, and of hunger and homelessness he experienced as a young man.

One of his earliest recollections of his mother concerns an incident in which she washed his mouth with a rag, laundry soap, and ashes after a dirty word had come out of his mouth (36). The episode left such a lasting impression on him that he held a lifelong abhorrence of dirty talk. Indeed, nowhere can one encounter indecent language in his novels. In addition to avoiding offensive language, he launches a crusade against it: “These indecencies in present-day books and plays are all the more revolting because they are so unnecessary” (40).

Wright's fiction typically shows the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Good characters are not necessarily wealthy or well-educated; rather, they have moral integrity

and strive to do the right thing in all situations. Wright believes that humans should be judged by their inner wholesomeness and purity, not by their superficial qualifications:

Wealth, social advantages, schools—these may result in a surface polish that seems to indicate good blood. But look beneath the acquired manners for motives, guiding principles, instinctive reactions and impulses: in these, I say, you will find evidence of the quality of breeding. (25)

In *The Shepherd of the Hills*, Ollie Stewart promises Sammy luxurious life in the city yet lacks integrity, whereas Young Matt is poor but, as a man of character, wins the heart of Sammy Lane. In *That Printer of Udell's*, Dick Falkner is initially homeless but becomes an influential man through hard work and honesty, whereas a rich man's spoiled son comes to a tragic end.

In *To My Sons*, Wright briefly mentions Charles Monroe Sheldon's religious novel *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (1896). Wright decided to read his first novel, *That Printer of Udell's*, to his congregation in Pittsburg, Kansas, as Sheldon had done at his Topeka, Kansas, church, a few years earlier. Sheldon and Wright are comparable in their emphasis on Christian moral living rather than doctrinal matters. They also criticize the excesses of capitalism, stressing the importance of helping the needy. However, Wright diverges from Sheldon in his focus on self-reliance and industriousness. According to him, one should avoid the extremes of neglecting the neighbor on the one hand and encouraging laziness by giving unlimited assistance on the other. Whereas Sheldon was a Christian Socialist who participated in a broad range of reform movements, such as feminism, equality among

races, vegetarianism, and animal rights, Wright was a compassionate capitalist who advocated traditional Protestant values, such as faith, hard work, honesty, patriotism, and humaneness.

In *To My Sons*, Wright reveals his Anglo-Saxon, Puritan heritage by repeatedly emphasizing the sacredness of manual labor. Instead of preying on others' labor or being in debt to someone, one should work hard to earn bread. As the first sentence of his novel *When a Man's a Man* (1914) states, "There is a land where a man, to live, must be a man [...] and a man's strength must be as the strength of the primeval hills" (3). Not surprisingly, Wright shows contempt for the crafty people who exploit other people's labor. Although he acknowledges that scholarship provides one with foundational knowledge for different areas of life, such as grammar, history, and philosophy, he believes that scholarship devoid of practical application is empty.

One of the main ideas of Wright's book is practical Christianity, the kind of Christianity that advocates the social gospel. For him, the purpose of living is to serve humanity. Some Wright readers today mistakenly assume that he was a conservative evangelical. In Wright's view, Christians should learn from the life and ministry of Christ, making society better instead of engaging in doctrinal disputes. Indeed, he was a liberal Christian who thought that the faith in action—not church doctrine—forms the heart of religion. A theme related to his idea of service is the hypocrisy and ineffectiveness of the church. Instead of Christian love, Wright finds unkindness and legalism in the modern church. In *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, he speaks through the title character, who serves as his mouthpiece, "It is not the spirit of wealth, of learning, or of culture that can make the

church of value, or a power for good in the world, but the spirit of Christ only” (390). This statement highlights Wright’s perspective on what truly constitutes Christian faith.

Despite his criticism of modern-day America as a country of consumerism and selfishness, Wright is fundamentally an optimist about the future of humanity. According to him, history may ebb temporarily but is designed to push forward, as a river keeps flowing until it reaches an ocean. He views history as a succession of privileges held by different classes of people. The “Royalty of Strength” ruled primitive times. Following the age of physical strength was the age of divine right of kings, which was marked by cruelties and oppressions. Tyrannical kings have disappeared in modern times, which are now ruled by those who have “Privilege”—the cunning people who sacrifice less fortunate humans “in the name of commerce and industry.” Finally, and fortunately, the “Royalty of Service” is rising: “From this new royalty the righteous edict shall go forth to all mankind alike: ‘SERVE!’” (Wright, *To My Sons* 237-38). These new rulers follow Jesus, the “Master Servant of all ages” (146).

Overarching his narrative is his theory of “the onward-flowing River of Life” (237), which reflects his fundamentally optimistic view of human life. The image of life as an onward-flowing river appears repeatedly in *The Re-Creation of Brian Kent*. In Chapter 21, for instance, the narrator explains how the destinies of Brian Kent and Betty Jo become intertwined: “What was this mysterious, unseen, unknown, but always-felt, power of the river that sets the ways of its countless currents as it sweeps ever onward in its unceasing flow?” (284). As expected, the couple ends up marrying, fulfilling their fate, which is part of the ever-flowing river.

Conclusion

In *To My Sons*, Harold Bell Wright says that he does not include all of the events—especially embarrassing ones—in the book. As a book written for his own sons, however, he sounds genuine—even more so considering that he hesitated to write it for many years. As a nonfiction genre, autobiography is not always a reliable source for understanding one’s fiction and ideas. In the case of *To My Sons*, however, the narrative comes across as a suitably reliable resource in understanding the author’s life, values, art, and life philosophy.

In the book, Wright admits to his lack of formal education, his lack of literary training, and the sentimental nature of his fiction. Yet, the enduring popularity of his fiction—especially among Christians who enjoy reading feel-good stories about good and evil or those who can relate to the settings of his fiction—evidences the value of his art. As Erin A. Smith rightly notes, “[R]eading and writing are rich, immensely complicated cultural practices and [...] self-consciously literary writers and readers represent only a tiny part of the literary field” (217). Indeed, it would be incomplete to assess the development of early twentieth-century American fiction without including popularly oriented authors, such as Harold Bell Wright, Zane Grey, Dashiell Hammett, and Winston Churchill (1871-1947).

In the sense that *To My Sons* is both autobiographical writing and thesis writing, Wright’s work is akin to St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, which combines life stories with the author’s philosophical and theological ideas, such as lust and purity, sin and suffering, and time and eternity. Augustine’s candidly confessional tone may sometimes blind readers to the fact that his story was an edited text. As admitted at the beginning of *To My Sons*,

Wright offers an edited version of his life story as well. Although the text does not reach Augustine's erudition and sophistry, both the *Confessions* and *To My Son* appeal to readers with their candid tones, captivating narration, and intriguing discussions of philosophical and theological matters.

Notes

¹ While stressing that he is an honest storyteller, Wright acknowledges that his understanding of the events may not always be correct: “I can only say again, the things I tell you in this book are true; I may or may not be right in my understanding of them” (Wright, *To My Sons* 74). Daniela Schiller, a Mount Sinai School of Medicine neuroscientist, explains, memories are untrustworthy and are liable to change as time lapses: “Each time you retrieve a memory[,] it undergoes this storage process.[...] We don’t really remember the original; we remember the revised version” (qtd. in Rojahn). However, Wright’s words should be taken as a gesture of humility that acknowledges a fuzzy memory, which happens in most memoirs.

² Some of the websites give the (perhaps unintended) impression that Wright attended Hiram College as an undergraduate student. For instance, the “Biographical Note” of the Arizona Archives Online states, “Wright attended Hiram College in Hiram, Ohio until the late 1890s when he was forced to leave school to combat a serious illness” (“Harold Bell Wright Papers”).

³ This number is based on Chapter 5 of *To My Sons*, which opens with the following statement: “Mother’s illness began, so far as I knew anything about it, one wash day. I was in the kitchen with her when it happened. I was eleven years old. At that time nothing could have been farther from my thoughts than her death” (68). According to some biographers, his mother died when he was ten. In his 1916 biographical sketch of Wright,

Elsbery W. Reynolds—his publisher in Chicago—states that the author became motherless at the age of ten (“Harold Bell Wright”). In *The Old Shepherd of Branson*, Carroll F. Burcham notes, “When he was ten in 1882, his mother [...] died, and the light of Harold Bell Wright’s life almost went out” (23). Meanwhile, Arizona Archives Online states that she died when he was ten (“Harold Bell Wright Papers”). As quoted above, however, Wright recalls his mother becoming ill when he was eleven; without explaining exactly when she died, he then tells his sons that he worked as a farm boy in a neighboring farmhouse at age twelve. In his book *Harold Bell Wright: Storyteller to America* (1986), Lawrence V. Tagg states, “Her final illness began when Wright was 11,” which is in line with the information in *To My Sons*.

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The Breakfast Club and Eco-cosmopolitanism

By Andrew D. Nelson

“The main thing a musician would like to do is to give the listener a picture of the wonderful things he senses in the universe” --John Coltrane

Responses to the Coronavirus—or as epidemiologists have categorized the virus: severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)—revealed some fundamental truths about the ways different societies throughout the world coordinated efforts to address, and overcome a world-wide health crisis that threatens human life all over the globe. Although the virus may have originated in China, that country reports substantially lower case totals, and deaths than many other nations, as of 9 June 2021, with just over 91,000 cases and around 4,636 deaths (Reuters, Petterson, et. al.). While many news outlets have questioned the reliability of China’s coronavirus reporting, in terms of cases and deaths, one fact cannot be denied: the nation took decisive action to combat this pandemic. The Chinese government instituted strict social controls early on, acknowledging the severity of the outbreak. Similarly, the governments of South Korea, and Germany also instituted aggressive steps to fight the illness. In the early days of the pandemic, China locked down Wuhan province, and neighboring Hubei province, quarantined at-risk citizens, availed free testing and treatment nationwide, deployed contact tracing, and marshaled resources that culminated in the construction of hospitals to specifically combat coronavirus. Literally in days, an entire hospital was constructed in the

heart of Wuhan (Butler). In Germany “...there are also significant medical factors that have kept the number of deaths in Germany relatively low, epidemiologists and virologists say, chief among them early and widespread testing and treatment, plenty of intensive care beds and a trusted government whose social distancing guidelines are widely observed” (Bennhold). Again, in Germany, the leaders of that nation understood the severity of coronavirus, and more importantly, the citizens of that nation also realized the need for social controls in the form of social distancing. Arguably, the country that took the most aggressive measures to fight the coronavirus outbreak, and subsequently succeeded preventing unnecessary spread is South Korea. Expanded testing and contact tracing highlighted the South Korean approach. Buttressed by the countries’ approach to public health, which includes universal healthcare, the country established a covid 19 hot-line for anyone experiencing symptoms of the virus. An individual in South Korea could call the hotline, discover the location of the nearest testing center, meet with a doctor, and have a nasal or oral test done. That process was either free, or cost less than \$20 (Kim, Kung, and Abdelmalek). Imagine the psychological and emotional ease citizens in South Korea must feel when they know the efforts to combat this life-threatening illness are coordinated, and led by a government that can be trusted. As an American, I envy the leadership in South Korea, China, and Germany.

Contrasting the humane, science-based approaches of China, Germany, and South Korea, is the disastrous response to the coronavirus pandemic on behalf of the Trump administration in the United States. Any discussion of the United States’ national response to the coronavirus pandemic begins at the top. At a February 2020 political rally in South Carolina, instead of addressing the severity of coronavirus the way leaders in China, South

Korea, and Germany did, Donald Trump accused his political opposition of using the coronavirus as a political weapon, calling the coronavirus the Democrat's (sic) "New Hoax." Trump ridiculed mask wearing throughout the pandemic, failed to invoke the Defense Production Act to manufacture personal protective equipment for healthcare workers, endangered the working class by refusing to allow mandatory paid sick leave, and did not mandate occupational safety conditions for workers. Trump's failed response to coronavirus will go down in US history as one of the greatest disasters of all time.

Federal stay-at-home orders certainly could have reduced the number of coronavirus cases, and saved lives. In fact, stay-at-home orders proved widely successful globally. In an interview on MSNBC, the lead researcher of an early, landmark study on policies and their effect on the spread of coronavirus—Solomon Hsiang—pointed out "In the United States, what we see is that business closures, people working from home, people staying in their homes those have very large health benefits" (Hsiang). Hsiang went on to express utter amazement that individuals sacrificed themselves in a collective effort to help reduce the spread of coronavirus. These individuals continue to act as responsible members of a local community, a nation, and a global community.

The central governments of China, South Korea, and Germany are to be commended for their efforts to combat coronavirus through policy. Also, local governments in the US, led by the nine states that issued early stay at home orders, certainly slowed the spread of Covid 19. As Hsiang pointed out in his June 8 interview, these central and local governments could not have implemented anti-contagion policies, such as staying at home, and wearing masks when in public, without the help of ordinary citizens. These citizens were certainly acting in their own health interests, but also acting in local interests, national

interests, and global interests when they sacrificed so much by adhering to say-at-home orders. This pandemic, just like other pandemics, is not just a local, or national problem, but a global problem. Probably unwittingly, these citizens were acting as *cosmopolites*, subconsciously realizing that their actions benefited the global community.

Cosmopolitanism—the notion that individuals are citizens of a global community—has its origins in ancient Greece. The concept has been widely studied, discussed, and needs to be emphasized more than ever in the contemporary setting, as individuals all over the world are continually brought closer together for both good and bad. Cosmopolitanism can serve as both a baseline and as a springboard for an area of eco-criticism called eco-cosmopolitanism. Both will be explored here, and used as a critical tool for a discussion of the 1980's film *The Breakfast Club*.

Directed by John Hughes, and released in 1985, *The Breakfast Club* received contemporary reviews from an uninterested Roger Ebert, *The New York Times*, which complained Hughes forced the dialogue between the main characters, and *The Hollywood Reporter* that warned movie-goers *The Breakfast Club* will be sentencing its audience members to view the film in the same way the characters were sentenced to all-day detention. Clearly, these three reviews missed the impact the film would have on cinema, as David Sims writing for *The Atlantic* in a 2018 review accurately points out “*The Breakfast Club* undeniably laid the foundation for a whole new kind of teen drama—one motivated less by plot, and more by mood” (Sims). Additionally, Sims exposes the obvious: the film’s lack of racial diversity, and the accompanying white privilege enjoyed obliviously by the five main characters. Amanda Ann Klein remembers how much she loved the film as a teenager, as many of us did, but 30 years later, she understands the film’s “myopic whiteness” (*The*

Breakfast Club). All five of the students in all-day detention are white. Hughes' choice to cast five white high school students in the film coincides with the biographical, historical and demographic realities the film portrays. Freda Moon identifies the setting of *The Breakfast Club* as Des Plaines, Ill., the area, in which, Hughes spent his adolescence after his family left Detroit for the Chicago area (John Hughes Biography). The 1980 U.S. Census data indicates Des Plaines had a total population of 53,568, of which, 51,161 people were white. In the 1980 US census, the suburb only had a total of 160 black residents. That racial makeup, by percentage, was 95.5% white (1980 US Census). Hughes' choice of casting five whites in the main roles was completely consistent with the historical, and demographical data obtained by the 1980 US Census. If Klein, or any other scholar/critic, wishes Hughes would have included a more racially diverse cast of characters, then racial demographics of Hughes' hometown as depicted in the film's *mise en scene* would have been inconsistent with a historically accurate representation of reality. Additionally, with a population skewed toward racial homogenization, race would not have been on the minds of the film's characters nearly as much as social status, class, and identity generally. Certainly, in this country, race is a vitally important part of public discourse. So are, as Moon points out "issues of class, status, and consumerism as well as the tension and attraction between suburb and city in 80s America" (Moon). These are all themes that Hughes explored in *The Breakfast Club*, and his other teen films. Offensive, homophobic language, typical of adolescent, hyper-male masculinity in the 1980's, also adds an unfortunate realism to the film.

Hughes clearly wished to paint a realistic portrait of the imperfections of 1980s suburban Chicago adolescence. He succeeded in not only revealing the weaknesses of the

adolescent experience, but from a larger perspective, Hughes reminded us that as humans we are imperfect, raw, and at times, hateful. We all share these shortcomings, no matter age, race, sexual preference, gender, or socioeconomic class. To be imperfect is, and always will be, part of the human experience. Molly Ringwald, who played one of the lead characters in the film, reminded us of the reality of human imperfection in an article she wrote for the *New Yorker* over thirty years after she starred in the film. Writing about *The Breakfast Club*, and other teen movies of the time, Ringwald recalls the homophobia and misogyny embedded in *The Breakfast Club* within the context of the #metoo movement. She also remembers an encounter she had with an influential gay, black activist named Emil Wilbekin. Ringwald re-tells the encounter with Wilbekin as a moment that occurred at a social gathering, in which, Wilbekin thanked Ringwald for her performance in the film. Ringwald then informs her reader that she had repeatedly wondered to herself why a gay black male would appreciate a film in which there were no gay black males. A later phone conversation clarified the issue for Ringwald, as she quoted Wilbekin's perspective on the film as he grew up in the 1980s in Cincinnati with "other people like me who were struggling with their identities, feeling out of place in the social constructs of high school, and dealing with the challenges of family ideals and pressures." These kids were also 'finding themselves and being 'other' in a very traditional, white, heteronormative environment.'" The lack of racial diversity, and homophobia as depicted in the film didn't bother him, he added, 'because the characters and storylines were so beautifully human, perfectly imperfect and flawed'" (Ringwald).

The uncensored, raw ways in which Hughes' characters interact with each other anticipates the interactions of Quentin Tarantino's characters in films like *Reservoir Dogs*,

and *Pulp Fiction*, and harkens back to the literary naturalists like Norris, London, and Dreiser. This *cinematic post-naturalism* transcends the mere descriptive fiction that literary naturalism often descended into, and offers a way out of the existential morass described in texts such as *McTeague*, and *Sister Carrie*. In other words, Hughes, and Tarantino don't describe merely for the sake of describing—these directors work within the descriptive mode to ultimately make an argument. For example, in *Pulp Fiction*, a vividly descriptive film both visually and in terms of language, Jules Winfield, played by Samuel Jackson, expresses the desire to escape the life of organized crime, and he realizes the way out of the criminal life is through good deeds and charity, evident in the film's memorable closing diner scene. Tarantino succeeded in communicating this powerful message to theatergoers.

Hughes begins to communicate his cosmopolitan message in *The Breakfast Club* with five students in detention (something they all have in common), and a letter read by Brian “the Brain.” As punishment for wrongdoings, the students were each assigned an essay, in which, they are supposed to describe to the principal who each student thinks they are. Brian isolates the stereotypes placed upon each student by the authority figure—the principal, and concedes that the students are whatever the authority figure wants them to be—a brain, a criminal, a basket case, a jock, and a princess. In the letter, Brian speaks for the group, by acknowledging that at the beginning of detention, the students all perceived each other by their stereotypes; however, the letter implies that something changed throughout the day, and the students no longer look at each other in the same way. Before the students break through these stereotypes, and begin to recognize each other as equals, Clair, “The Princess” condescends to Brian “The Brain” for belonging to a non-social club, and the two hyper-masculine males—the “Criminal” and the “Jock” literally come to

physical blows with each other. The criminal picks on Brian for his status as a nerd, and the jock tells the criminal “You might as well not even exist at this school” (Hughes). These students quite simply despise each other.

The initial breakthrough the group experiences results from the inquiry initiated by the criminal—John Bender (Judd Nelson). Bender successfully points out that the social clubs the princess—Clair Standish (Molly Ringwald) belongs to are essentially no different than the academic clubs the brain—Brian Johnson (Anthony Michael Hall) belongs to. Members of both clubs engage in social events, and socialization; hence, both individual’s clubs function in the same way. Bender’s inquiry results in placing the princess and the brain on equal social footing, so that there is no reason for Clair, to whom the inquiry is primarily directed, to think that her social status is hierarchically superior to Brian’s. This discourse demonstrates the students do not need to think of themselves in cliques, separate from each other, and existing in separate communities; on the other hand, the students can conceive of themselves as equals, and belonging to the same community: the human community.

Furthermore, the group coalesces around the criminal, as he plays a prank, by removing a screw from the swinging door separating the students from the principal’s office. This prank causes the door to remain shut—a violation about which the principal is furious. The group laughs in unison at the clumsiness with which the principal attempts to fix the door. Humor serves as a unifying element, helping break down stereotypes. Upon questioning the students as to who removed the screw, no one breaks and tells on the criminal. This show of unity, around the old “no one likes a tattler” trope further unites the group. These initial, seemingly trivial events lead into later breakthroughs the group experiences as they grow tighter.

Later in the film, marijuana, smoked communally, serves as a social lubricant for the group, and as a unifying element. Indigenous societies for thousands of years have performed rituals that brought the community together in this manner. The group then shares stories about their home-life, pressures to succeed, and the real reasons why the individuals in the group ended up in detention. Honesty, in this therapeutic setting, seems to be a cathartic force. The group therapy session culminates with the brain serving as DJ, putting on a record by Karla DeVito. The song titled “We are Not Alone” contains the following lyrics in the song's chorus:

**We are not alone
You'll find out when your cover's blown
There'll be somebody there to break your fall
We are not alone
'Cause when you cut down to the bone
We're really not so different after all, after all
We're not alone (DeVito).**

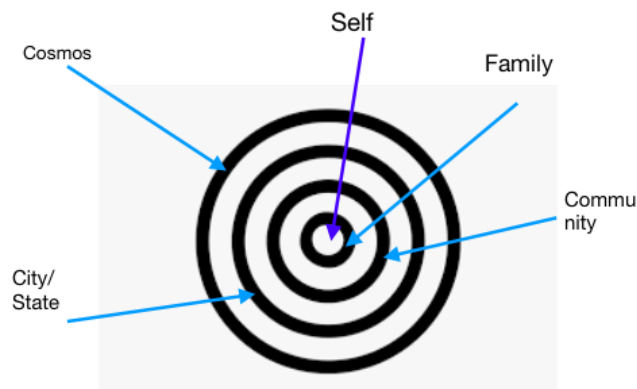
As the songs blares loudly throughout the library’s public address system, a memorable low-angle, medium shot captures the males dancing in rhythmic unison. Even though the individual stereotypes may not have been permanently smashed, as evidenced by the

princess,
who
thinks
things will
go back to



normal for the group come Monday morning, the seeds of unity have been planted within these individuals. Each member of the group realizes they are all citizens of the human community. They are all cosmopolites.

In *The Birth of Politics* Melissa Lane traces the development of cosmopolitanism as existing within political and philosophical discourse during Aristotle’s lifetime. A radical thinker named Diogenes is credited with initially coining the term cosmopolitanism. When questioned as to where he was from, Diogenes is reported to have replied “I am a citizen of the cosmos.” The implications of his answer can be seen in his rejection of any local, political affiliation; rather, he thought of himself as belonging to the polis of the universe. The Stoic school took the philosophical concept of cosmopolitanism “ in a subtly but crucially different direction, to include a positive vision of cosmic citizenship in which local forms of citizenship are subsumed but not abolished” (Lane). The Stoic conception of cosmopolitanism included the basic assumption that humans feel an affinity toward each other. Using the model of concentric circles as an image to help understand the levels, to which, humans feel affinity—or *oikeiosis*—the individual self is situated at the center of the diagram. The circle immediately surrounding the individual self is the level of most affinity—the family. Passing through community, and then city/state, the largest circle encompassing the self is the cosmos:



The Stoic notion of cosmopolitanism is important for two reasons, and probably many more. One, the Stoics correctly understood that individuals do not live in a vacuum on their own. The relentless pursuit of self-interest, currently somewhat in vogue in the West as evidenced by the Libertarian streak running through contemporary right-wing political discourse, is impossible because of the interconnectedness of humanity. Very simply, humans need each other. We always have, and we always will. We begin life dependent on our family, and when our infantile survival needs are met, we establish relationships outside of our immediate family. This is a natural part of the progression of life, which informs the second important facet of the cosmopolitan model. As we mature, we realize our connections to others. We transcend our affiliations to our immediate family, and we begin to make connections to others. Eventually, when we understand our affiliation with the human cosmos, we have reached one of the highest states of existence; hence, the cosmopolitan model can serve as a progression to a higher understanding of ourselves. If we remain selfishly locked into only what we feel is necessary for ourselves, as the Libertarian model argues, our growth is permanently stunted. In effect, we never mature beyond the infant stage of life-development. Cosmopolitan consciousness is certainly existence at one of the highest levels; however, the challenge for all of us is to transcend even this level of existence, and conceive of ourselves as *eco-cosmopolites*, placing ourselves and our relationships with other humans second behind the natural world.

Eco-cosmopolitanism receives attention from Ursula K. Heise in *Sense of Planet and Sense of Place: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*. Within the broad area of studies known as eco-criticism, Heise attempts to trace the development of eco-studies, and eco-criticism from the late 1960s to the contemporary setting. The challenge for eco-studies,

according to Heise, involves the tension between thinkers who emphasize the local as a path toward ecological understanding contrasted with thinkers who view ecological studies from a larger, and at times, global perspective. To help illustrate her point, Heise's "textual analyses focus on works that offer conceptual and formal countermodels to ecolocalism...principally meant to point to ways of imagining the global that frame localism from a global environmental perspective" (Heise 9). To further buttress her general preference for conceiving ecological studies in global terms, Heise claims, "...ecological thinking has yet to come to terms with one of the central insights of current theories of globalization: namely, that the increasing connectedness of societies around the globe entails the emergence of new forms of culture that are no longer anchored in place..." (Heise 10). Again, analyses of literary texts, films, and even visual arts help support this claim, along with a technological breakthrough she believes can serve as a model for individuals to understand the vast interconnectedness of ecological systems in our planet. Before arguing on behalf this technology as a metaphor for understanding global ecological awareness, Heise recalls several metaphors, tropes, and visual aids that attempted to steer individuals in the direction of the global; for example, the memorable photograph of the earth from space; concepts of "the global village," and, Buckminster Fuller's allegory of spaceship earth. Heise points out that these metaphors have fallen short of portraying the Earth, and its ecological systems as perfectly in balance, as biologists have noted the dynamic, often unstable realities of Earth's systems. To fill the void Heise sees in understand ecology from a global perspective, she offers Google Earth as both a technology, with which, users can interact, and a way for users to observe the Earth both locally and globally. Heise believes Google Earth "more metaphorically, points the way to some of the

information, as well as formal structures, that eco-cosmopolitanism of the kind I have described here can rely on, and through which it can express itself” (Heise 67).

Clearly, Heise has placed a significant amount of faith in Google Earth as a technological tool for the awareness of not only the ecological global, but also the way in which she conceives eco-cosmopolitanism, and how the idea can be effectively communicated. When Google swallowed up the creator of this technology—Keyhole Inc.—in 2004, the company followed that acquisition by launching Google Earth, and Google Maps the following year (Heise 67, Kollwe). By the time Heise published *Sense of Planet and Sense of Place: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* in 2008, the multinational technological giant had acquired Youtube, and Android—Google was well on its way to becoming a juggernaut in the financial-tech sector. Along with economic success at this level comes ethical and moral questions for Google, or any other company that achieves the market share this company enjoys. Writing for the *New York Times Magazine* in 2020, Noam Sheiber and Kate Conger expose some of these ethical shortcomings. Sheiber and Conger begin their article with the story of several Google employees who desired to form a union within the company. The right for workers to unionize is protected under the 1935 United States National Labor Relations Act. Google fired four of these workers, who were leaders of a union-activist movement within the company. One of those workers had been an engineer with the company for ten years. Sheiber and Conger also document Google’s hiring of an outside consulting firm that specializes in blocking unions. Arguably, even more troubling is Google’s work within the military industrial complex as the technology firm “quietly entered into a contract to help the U.S. Department of Defense track people and vehicles in video footage captured by drones” (Sheiber and Conger). Writing for *The*

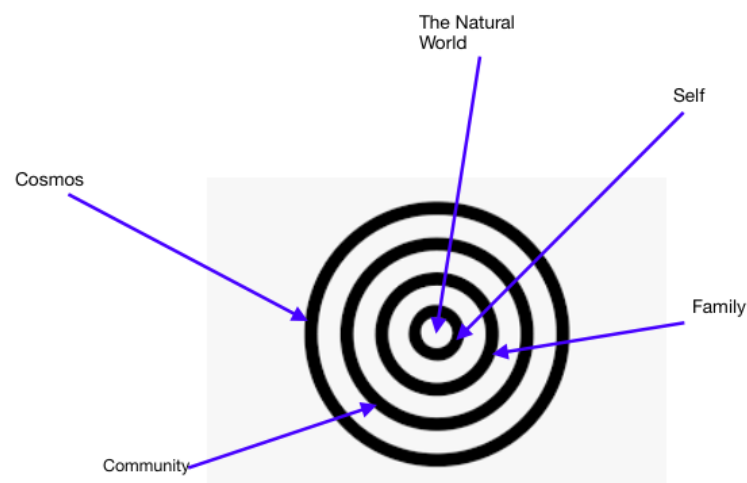
Intercept, a publication that obtained a cache of documents chronicling the U.S. drone program during the Obama administration, Ryan Devereaux cites research by Larry Lewis. Lewis was principal research scientist at the Center for Naval Analyses and spent years studying military raids in Afghanistan. According to Devereaux, Lewis' research in Afghanistan demonstrated "drone strikes in Afghanistan were 10 times more likely to kill civilians than conventional aircraft" (Devereaux).

So Google has entered into a partnership with the US military to help enhance technology within the drone program that has been a deadly force in killing innocent civilians in not only Afghanistan, but also in Yemen and Somalia. Activism within the company is the sole reason cited that eventually pressured Google to end the relationship with the US military. In 2018, had workers not advocated strongly to end what was dubbed Project Maven, Google may still be partnered with the US military in this financially lucrative endeavor. Google also developed a software, part of a campaign it called Project Dragonfly, that would help the Chinese government censor search results that would be critical of the government. Clearly, the social controls China instituted, which helped fight the outbreak of coronavirus, were not ethically consistent with the social controls the government institutes quelling freedom of information. Google seemed to be open to helping the Chinese government censor any information in the digital domain that it sensed would be damaging. *The New York Times* also reported Google gave one of its former executives a \$90 million severance package, after the company found a sexual-misconduct complaint against the executive was credible. Furthermore, in another 2018 *New York Times* article Kate Conger co-authored, Google admitted "...it had fired 48 people for sexual harassment in the last two years" (Conger, Wakabayashi, and Benner).

As far as Google's direct involvement with the well-being of planet Earth is concerned, the technological giant has "made 'substantial' contributions to some of the most notorious climate deniers in Washington despite its insistence that it supports political action on the climate crisis" (Kirchgaessner). Writing for *The Guardian*, Stephanie Kirchgaessner reveals the tech giant's financial contributions to more than twelve organizations that have campaigned against climate change legislation. Among the organizations, to which, Google has contributed are the Competitive Enterprise Institute. This group was instrumental in lobbying the Trump administration to pull out of the Paris Climate Accord. Google also contributed to the umbrella organization The State Policy Network. The State Policy Network has been described as radically anti-science, and has publicly ridiculed the teenage climate activist Greta Thunberg. Google also contributed to the American Conservative Union, chaired by Matt Schlapp, who spent ten years working for Koch Industries, shaping the company's radical anti-environment policies in Washington D.C.

Google's well publicized ethical shortcomings; in terms of: anti-union activity; sexual harassment in the work place; partnerships with the military industrial complex; anti freedom of information campaigns in China; and most troubling of all, its political lobbying on behalf of, and financial contributions to anti-climate change organizations place Heise's reliance on the company's technology for global ecological understanding on shaky ground. Technology, when used ethically for the betterment of planetary life in all forms, should be supported; however, Google as an avatar for global ecological awareness seems frankly inappropriate, and ethically and morally unsound.

Since Heise’s metaphor for, and expression of eco-cosmopolitanism involves Google Earth, owned by the multi-national corporation with highly suspect ethical credentials, an alternative for understanding the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism seems necessary. Returning to the Stoic notion of cosmopolitanism discussed earlier, a metaphor extending from that model seems like a less complicated way of understanding the concept of eco-cosmopolitanism than Heise’s argument for Google Earth. Very simply, eco-cosmopolitanism extending from the Stoic model would place the Earth and its natural systems at the center, rather than the individual. At this time in the Earth’s history, unless we approach ecology from an Earth-centric position, humans are doomed to continue the behavior that has caused the climate to warm drastically since the industrial revolution. Also, as many environmental theorists have argued, humans are part of the natural world, not separate from it. The environment does not exist as some exotic “other,” we humans are intertwined with its complex systems. This interconnectedness of life in all forms, with the natural world at the center, needs to be incorporated into a simple model that can be effectively communicated:



Notice in this model city-state has been eliminated. Politics—especially when unchecked, unregulated capitalism aids in extending its tentacles to suffocate the Earth’s natural systems—has largely been a force of destruction for our planet. By eliminating politics and the state from ecological discourse, the focus becomes on the Earth, and by creating individual awareness second, extending to the family, the immediate community, and then the cosmopolitan cosmos. None of the eco-cosmopolitan circles need to be eliminated, or emphasized over another. That is consistent with the Stoic notion of cosmopolitanism. With eco-cosmopolitanism, if an individual prefers the local—or place—to understanding the global, then that person needs to be supported wholeheartedly. We can have relationships with all of the human circles, extending to the cosmopolitan cosmos, as long as the earth remains in the center—that is eco-cosmopolitanism in a nutshell.

The time to position ourselves as eco-cosmopolites is now. With climate disruption comes a real threat to our ecological systems. Taking a cue from the ancients, who were wise enough to understand the interconnectedness of humans, that world view can be easily and simply extended to our interactions with non-human life on Earth. We need to begin this eco-cosmopolitan consciousness with another simple, accessible concept—humans are connected with each other, no matter place, religion, gender, political affiliation, race, economic standing, or any other identity category. With a film like John Hughes’ *The Breakfast Club*, an unfortunate crisis like covid-19, or any other text in which the triumphs and shortcoming of humanity are realistically portrayed, we need to be striving toward a consciousness that celebrates life on Earth in all of its forms. That higher consciousness could be eco-cosmopolitanism. Let’s adopt that mindset before it is too late.

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Young Adults and Social Activism as a First-Year Writing Experience

By Shanna L. Smith

Introduction: Stirrings of Social Justice in Millennials & Generation Z

Engaging First-Year College Writing students is a challenge, as they often arrive with failed senses of themselves as writers. With this in mind, I sought a topical, provocative approach for the critical thinking necessary for the nuts and bolts process of writing. In the past seven years, college student unrest and protests were spread at disparate colleges including the following: Bethune-Cookman College, The University of Maryland, and Yale University. Additionally, cities around the country became synonymous with the names of the young adults murdered there: Sanford, Florida; Ferguson, Missouri; and more recently, Louisville, Kentucky. Young men and women were killed while the world watched on social media. The repetition of death, televised, at the hands of an un-penalized law enforcement stirred a visceral reaction as the names of the dead mapped a trail of bloody unrest in the United States.

Oscar Grant, murdered 2009	Age 23	Oakland, California
Trayvon Martin, murdered 2012	Age 17	Sanford, Florida
Jordan Davis, murdered 2012	Age 17	Jacksonville, Florida
Renisha McBride, murdered 2013	Age 19	Detroit, Michigan
Michael Brown, murdered 2014	Age 18	Ferguson, Missouri
Tamir Rice, murdered 2014	Age 12	Cleveland, Ohio
Sandra Bland, killed 2015	Age 28	Hempstead, Texas
Freddie Gray, murdered 2015	Age 25	Baltimore, Maryland
Philando Castille, murdered 2016	Age 32	St. Anthony, Minnesota
Jordan Edwards, murdered 2017	Age 15	Balch Springs, Texas
2 nd Lt. Richard Collins III. Murdered 2017	Age 23	College Park, Maryland
Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, murdered 2017	Age 23	Portland, Oregon
Heather Heyer, murdered, 2017	Age 32	Charlottesville, Virginia
Botham Jean, murdered 2018	Age 26	Dallas, Texas
Atatiana Jefferson, murdered 2019	Age 28	Fort Worth, Texas

Ahmaud Arbery, murdered 2020	Age 25	Glynn County, Georgia
Breonna Taylor, murdered 2020	Age 26	Louisville, Kentucky
Daunte Wright, murdered 2021	Age 20	Brooklyn Center, Minnesota
Adam Toledo, murdered 2021	Age 13	Chicago, Illinois

These are representative names that comprise both Millennials and Generation Z, the very ones we equip ourselves to teach, train, and convince with in our classrooms. These are students who, in learning outcomes in Jackson State University’s (JSU) course catalogue for Composition classes, we charge to:

- 1) Compose for specific audiences and purposes
- 2) Compose using language and grammar appropriate for a variety of genres
- 3) Read and use evidence critically to formulate and support arguments
- 4) Interpret and compose in a variety of media
- 5) Describe and apply appropriate writing processes individually and collaboratively

These learning objectives are met with often ill-equipped or unmotivated young adult writers, so why not meet them where they are – in the midst of a social media age that records conflict and procures tweets, posts, and video for on-line information gathering and activism. Professors can use such conflict as a backdrop to eke out critical thought, research, and analysis while parsing fact from “fake news” and uniformed opinion.

The goal for teaching “Young Adults and Social Action” thematically in Composition is collaborative. Students are invited to participate in finding solutions to social problems by first developing a thesis statement and argument, collecting source material for analysis, practicing citation, addressing differing points of view, and drawing conclusions. These practices are foundational to rigorous research applicable to collegiate coursework in all major areas. The theme broadens the scope of research that students engage in, which enriches their experience for future professions. Teaching in this way, at this time, collides with current controversy on Critical Race Theory (CRT Harris). This theory acknowledges racism as “structural and systemic”; however, the theory is not one

dimensional; it is also a study of “how race interacts, or intersects, with other kinds of identities, and that racism is enduring and manifests differently over time” (Flaherty). Even if not teaching CRT directly, avoiding touchy or controversial topics leaves a vacuum in engagement and instruction of Mississippi’s own literary treasures Richard Wright, Jesmyn Ward, Angie Thomas, Natasha Tretheway, and Margaret Walker. Again, the goal of composition is the development of argument and ideas through research and writing. To limit the instructional interest of college students at a research-serving institution, particularly at a Historically Black College/University, negates the cultural core of that institution and experience of its students. Therefore, the thematic approach is inclusive, timely, and critically engaging.

In media sites, Baby Boomers and Generation Xers position themselves as primary social commentators as the murders of Millennials and Generation Z rage out of control. What do they have to say about what is happening to them, and their peers? What news mediums inform their views? Are they abreast of the facts or responding to tweeted posts? What are their personal experiences with violence shown daily? Are any of them actively participating in protest? Finally, how can they connect present social movements to those of the past – all concerning and involving young adults – and put them into context? These were the questions that came to mind as I designed “Young Adults and Social Action” as a writing course.

While masses of young activists wrestle with the statement, “Black Lives Matter,” and go about the work to ensure that mattering is central in socio-political discourse, some college students rally to make black lives matter in the classrooms and lived experiences in their communities. In similar ways prior to this, young adults participated in tent

communities, united as “Occupy Wall Street” against corporate greed. Not all protest in this manner is thematic, and tactics utilized do not always involve taking to the streets. What makes Millennial and Generation Z activism unique to past generations’ style of protest, is the use of technology by way of social media and video streaming. The real-time and immediacy of social media presents social issues, promotes a social justice response, and provokes particular social action. It invites national and international allies to respond, to re-post the issue to inform others, and to rally more localized action. So, what of the history of social justice activism at Historically Black Colleges and Universities? How can unearthing such activism in the past through research engage and equip current first-year writing students?

Margaret Walker Alexander, Jackson State University, & Student Social Action of the 1970s

Jackson State University students have the unique opportunity to mine the archives of writer-scholar, Margaret Walker, an English Professor at the Jackson, Mississippi, campus from 1949-1979. Using the archives, students can learn about primary source material, about the process for archiving documents, and browse Walker’s journals, letters, and articles. This provides an opportunity for students to compare social issues and how they were handled during Walker’s years at JSU with today. In 2017, JSU professors Kathi Griffin, Tatiana Glushko, and I earned an Open Educational Resources Grant to develop a Composition I course utilizing Margaret Walker’s archival materials. To place a Composition Professor like Walker – a prolific poet, historical fiction writer, oral historian, and proponent for social justice – at the center of a consideration for a Composition course on Young Adults and Social Action – and at Jackson State University – is appropriate.

During her years there, she developed a writing program for freshman and black studies program, in addition to teaching courses on literary criticism and literature (Tate 30).

In 1972, Walker penned the following words on the second anniversary of the Jackson State University Massacre, which left JSU junior, Phillip Gibbs, and high school senior, James Earl Green, dead:

We know now that the eruption of violence on campuses all over the nation was not a spontaneous thing. It was planned an organized and powerfully manipulated by forces outside our control In the words of a high official of the state, 'The responsibility rests with the protesters.' This is what the forces of repression would have us believe. ("Reflections" 178)

On May 14, 1970, the two students were killed by local law enforcement after police fired rounds into Alexander Hall, a girls' dormitory, after rumors of a sniper in the building (Wyckoff). This massacre was violent culmination of tensions built between black and white community members in and around the Jackson State campus. Margaret Walker was called to respond to the President's Commission on Campus Unrest that same year. In "Reflections on May 1970: The Jackson State University Massacre" she wrote:

How best can we memorialize these two young men who were victims of disaster on the morning of May 15, 1970? How can our lives best serve their memory? ... Are we dulled in defeat or are we awakened to a new awareness of man's continual struggle to be free? Must we forget so soon or do we dare to remember? What is the mandate these martyred men have handed us? ("Reflections" 181)

While university professors of various departments teach about the massacre as campus history and for research practice, Walker's writings about the subject offers a particular nuance to utilizing archival material for Composition courses. She had a response to the questions that she posed: Remember what happened on this campus two years ago.

Remember and think again. Ask yourself: and remember. On pain of your own death – do not dare to forget (“Reflections” 182).

However, what she professes is an active remembering that insists on 1) service 2) continued study of history and its application to current issues and conflict 3) continued striving for freedom for all and 4) living our best lives. This is the mandate. It is a remembering that propels people and communities forward. Walker was not speaking solely to students, though they may have been her main audience, but to the faculty, staff, administrators, and community members touched by the events that day. She also provided an instructional tool.

Walker quotes her friend and fellow poet, Mari Evans, who insists, “to identify the enemy is to free the mind” (181). Then she challenges JSU students by asking: “What is your role as students in this black struggle for freedom?” (“Reflections” 181). This places the critical and analytical ball back into the hands of young adults to chart their own course. However, Walker also realizes that previous generations of professors offer a blueprint for students as they develop plans for social action. In her charge to students in 1971, she provides a response to her initial question:

Instructional Answers:

- 1) Our first step is an understanding of the forces that seek to enslave and re-enslave us.

2) Understanding the potentials and the uses for your education. Is it relevant and viable?

3) Your dedication to the struggle for the complete liberation (“Reflections” 181)

Again, as a professor – a Composition professor – she utilized principles of analytical thinking and application as course objectives. Walker addresses students and issues them a challenge; she also encourages professors to work these objectives into course plans, possibly as a prerequisite for a JSU education. So, what does this look like in practice for professors?

Crafting a Social Justice Curriculum for 1st Year Composition

The first time I taught “Young Adults in Social Action,” it was to summer school Composition students in the rural Pennsylvania mountains where I was the only brown, ethnic “other” in the room. The second time, at the same primary white institution, there were four African American males -- two enrolled through the culmination of the semester. Why is this important? In 2015, a stirring was going on across college campuses against sexist and racist policies and practices. News reports, articles, and blog posts made fresh reading material each week to pair with complementary short stories, poetry, and essays already prepared for the course.

At the start of class, provocative quotes for writing responses set the tone for readings and discussion. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. provided the first example: “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people; but for the appalling silence of the good people.” Students had five minutes to respond to the quote, considering what the repercussions of silence would be and how society could repent. Following writing time, classmates would pair to discuss their views before sharing as a

collective body. At this time, together we would define “vitriolic” and “appalling” and I would introduce terms such as “apathy” for definition. This class would require a cataloguing of vocabulary terms throughout the semester, including social justice, social action, and millennial. This became important as collaborative groups were assigned a project to identify a millennial leader who was engaged in social justice issues. I would have to explain that Barack Obama and Donald Trump were not millennials, and point out young adult figures who did represent what I was looking for in their assignment: Malala Yousafzi, the Pakistani teenager shot for the crime of seeking an education as a young girl and later Nobel Peace Prize or Bree Newsome, the Black young woman who climbed a South Carolina state flag pole to pull down the confederate flag after the Charleston Massacre, where nine black parishioners were killed during a prayer service by a young white nationalist.

In addition to daily writing responses and vocabulary, discussion leaders were assigned to each reading of the day. Students had the opportunity to volunteer for the various articles assigned on topics such as: “Youth and Social Movements: Key Lessons for Allies,” “Are Millennials Lazy or Avant-Garde Social Activists,” “Millennials are Disillusioned with Politics: Here’s a Way that Might Change,” and “Charleston, Dylann Roof, and the Racism of Millennials.” Discussion leaders had to provide an overview of the article, develop three strong questions from the reading, and lead the class in discussion of the topic. This process was modeled by me prior to students taking charge of it, which is the point. Students took ownership of critically engaging the reading material that featured millennials – their peers. Especially with the article concerning the racism of millennials, students were forced to challenge assumptions. Our “post-race” ideology at the election of

Barack Obama suggested that not only is racism over, but also that the current generations are free of racist beliefs and practices. Students questioned, responded, and challenged each other. My role was to point them back to reading material, make connections with prior readings and other learning, contextualize the issues, and provide deeper questioning. There were times of awkward silence, of under-developed student questions, and of surface responses to work through. I reminded them each time that the topic matter is uncomfortable; it is supposed to be. As college students, they sift through the issues to evoke thought and seek solutions. It is their responsibility as citizens and points back to what Margaret Walker insisted upon in her mandate.

Throughout the semester, students were required to compile reading response notes and to keep binders of the responses with articles, class notes, writing reflections, vocabulary logs, and other daily assignments. We viewed the documentaries *re#Generation* and *The Freedom Riders* to compare the similarities and differences among social justice practices currently and in the 1960s. By the end, they were equipped with resources and language to conduct individual and collaborative research projects that asked them to identify and discuss the contributions of young adults engaged in social justice work. Those projects had to include correctly written, referenced, and cited material, and develop a multi-media project. In essence, students had to do the work of advocacy to feature a peer who was successfully advocating the social action we were studying. They now had a road map and model, even if I did not necessarily approve of chosen subjects – for example, the group who selected Miley Cyrus as a millennial leader for social justice.

Students had the agency to choose, endorse, and defend their own leadership representative of the social issues significant to them. The group of students who chose

Cyrus used my own lecture notes and practices to develop a well-researched project, one which earned them the highest grade in the class. Part of our instructional tool-kit as professors has to include student agency in these ways, even as it goes against the grain or pushes us uncomfortably past a generational divide. Composition students, in this way, become instructors in our collective course.

Crafting a Campus Specific 1st Year Composition Course: JSU

While much of the prior course material can be used in a similar course at Jackson State, this campus, any HBCU has rich resources to connect students with the history of the school. JSU has Margaret Walker, whose poetry collection *For My People*, won the Yale Series of Younger Poets. She began research for her nominal work, *Jubilee*, prior to joining JSU in 1949. As her writings and work are archived in the Margaret Walker Center in Ayres Hall, it invites a freshman student introduction to 1) primary documents 2) archives and the archival process 3) a nationally acclaimed writer with a local connection with Jackson and a personal connection to JSU.

As a composition professor, I incorporate her words in the writing response questions and utilize passages of hers to comprise some of the discussion of readings. Current events of Millennial and Generation Z activism are paired with these works for comparison/contrast and argument essays. Walker had a heart for student activism, and of the activists during the early 1970s she wrote: “The youth culture or organized student movement was, moreover, berated and vilified as being constituted of “bums,” “hippies,” “junkies,” and young hoodlums. This radical and revolutionary student group was openly attacked and summarily put down as a part of total repression” (“Reflections” 178-79). She understood the impact of faculty support of students, and used her time to do so:

Mentorship is important to developing well-informed student leaders, and Jackson State University's English Department has one in retired instructor and former Black Panther, Frankye Adams-Johnson, whose archives are also housed with the Walker Center. Adams-Johnson has shared with students in classrooms and symposia about her experience as an activist, the history of the organization, and her thoughts on current social movements. To sum up the necessity of the scholar-activist as mentor, Luis Acosta insists, "Every generation must champion and see its own cause and it's the responsibility of elders to act as elders in support of our young people ..." (Gamboa). Guest presenters who mentored in these ways included Mr. James "Lap" Baker and Ms. Gailya Porter, survivors of the JSU massacre. Baker and Porter regaled students with oral histories of their experience while standing along the spaces where state police shot at them on May 15, 1970. In this case, there is an opportunity to teach a mini-lesson about oral history and to have students interview Adams-Johnson, Baker, and Porter, or other activists here in Jackson. Students not only have access to the archives in the Margaret Walker Center, there are also resources at the nearby Council of Federated Organizations Center (COFO) for research.

Concepts taught through the literature and interviews are contextualized in visits to the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, where student and volunteer docents, like Hezekiah Watkins, the youngest Freedom Rider, provide walking tours. Personal engagement with civil rights survivors provides deeper perspectives and analysis that enriches individual research and presentation. The experiences are invaluable as the connection from past to present and campus community is solidified and moves outside an ivory tower. Margaret Walker understood the significance of the role of the university in these ways. In her essay, "Revolution and University," she argues:

“The university is called upon to move beyond the times and lead the world by example in learning what is just, what is true, what is real, and what leads to freedom and peace. If the university cannot do this, then the university does not deserve to exist” (“Revolution” 225). Her words speak to the role that research and scholarly engagement has, one that transcends disagreement about theories. Peering into the future, she also spoke directly to the twenty-first century student:

The university must therefore continue to work toward education for peace and progress; education for a multiracial society; education for a new age in the twenty-first century; education that is innovative and relevant and that touches the razor-sharp blade of life and hones that blade to its ultimate cutting edge. (“Revolution” 225)

Reflecting on Walker’s comments in a final essay, considering contributions of young adults to social action in historical and contemporary ways, analyzing the issues that prompted past action, and developing solutions to current ones, is a fitting end to a comprehensive composition course. It serves the memory of Walker, and those lost to injustice, to continue to equip young adults with tools for inquiry and research, then set free the resulting expression. She exists as a standard bearer, specifically to JSU and for other institutions of higher education, to lay groundwork to create a new litany: one of leadership through the written and spoken word.

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