The Journal

Master of Arts in Liberal Studies
Dartmouth College

“To chase down the truth, wherever it lies.”

Fall 2015
The Journal

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*The Journal* is a biannual publication for the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Dartmouth College. We showcase the strongest creative and critical work submitted by current MALS students as well as MALS alumni. We believe that by selecting and integrating work from all four of the program’s concentrations, we will promote intellectual engagement, fruitful questioning, and honest discourse within the realm of liberal studies.

If you have any questions, comments, or are interested in writing a feature, please send your e-mail to: The.MALS.Journal@dartmouth.edu.
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*Corrected version from the Spring 2015 printed edition of The Journal

COVER PHOTO:
CANOES IN PHEWA LAKE, POKHARA, NEPAL
PRADIPTI BHATTA

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Dear Reader,

A sense of place, both literal and metaphysical, permeated the selections of this issue of *The Journal*. We were inspired by the MALS students whose abstracts were selected by the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs 2015 Annual Conference. The theme “Place Matters!” propelled these writers and theorists to explore the world. For that reason, we dedicate this issue to the idea of *exploration*—discovering and following the journey that is calling, whether within one’s self or out in the world.

This publication is the result of collaboration from individuals across MALS, both past and present. We offer a special thanks to the outgoing editors, Amani Liggett and Kelsey Smith, whose care and dedication elevated the quality of *The Journal* and eased our transition into the role.

A sincere thank you to MALS director Wole Ojurongbe for the time and effort he dedicates to *The Journal* each year. To faculty advisor Anna Minardi—your artistic sensibility serves as an inspiration in all aspects of the process. Thanks to Amy Gallagher and Maisea Bailey in the MALS office, and to Jackson Schultz for his work managing our online presence.

Finally, we want to express our gratitude to the MALS students who volunteered their time to serve as assistant editors: Katherine Emery Brown, Bobby Kaufman, Justine Kohr, Brittany Murphy, Gregory Poulin, Maria Semmens, Kaitlin Serota, Lydia Shahi, and Xu (Sarah) Wang. Special thanks to Gregory Poulin and Justine Kohr who took on additional tasks, all in the service of producing a publication of which we can all be proud.

We hope that, while reading these pages, you feel that sense of yearning for discovery—for a true calling. Maybe they will even inspire you to find your own.

Sincerely,

Amanda (Spo) and Emily
“We have an unknown distance yet to run, an unknown river to explore.”
— John Wesley Powell

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”
— T.S. Eliot (Four Quartets)

— Brian Krans (A Constant Suicide)

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”
— André Gide
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Amanda Spoto (primarily known as Spo!) grew up in Staten Island, New York, and now resides in Jackson, NJ. She is a 2014 alumna undergraduate from Dartmouth College with a major in English and a minor in Native American Studies. Spo was recruited to Dartmouth as a thrower for the Varsity Track and Field Team, and participated on the Women’s Rugby Club team and the Women’s Baseball Club team. She is currently on the Cultural Studies track in MALS while serving as the Student Life Chair on the Graduate Student Council and as Senior Editor for the Dartmouth Law Journal. She is also employed at the Collis Center, Baker Library, and at a law office in Hanover. She has a strong interest in law school, and may soon pursue a PhD. in either Cultural/Liberal Studies, American Studies, or English Literature.

Emily Hedges grew up in Muskogee, Oklahoma and now lives in Lebanon, New Hampshire with her husband and three children. She came to the Upper Valley from Minnesota where she worked as a freelancer, contributing regular articles to ECM-Sun Newspaper Group in the Twin Cities and managing blog book tours for authors. Prior to that, she worked in editorial marketing for TV Guide Networks, the Tulsa Philharmonic, and a small ad agency. She entered the Creative Writing track in the MALS program to elevate the quality of her writing and to prepare for a second career as a high school and college teacher.

ASSISTANT EDITORS

Robert A. Kaufman is a Texan poet. He graduated from Brown and served as a Fulbright Scholar in Oslo. His writing has been featured in Blaire magazine, Extract(s), FD magazine, and Fjords Review.

Brittany Murphy is a Florida native, hailing from a small town in South West Florida. She graduated from the University of Central Florida with dual degrees in Humanities and Religion and Cultural Studies, as well as a minor in Mass Communications. Brittany worked in the Non-Profit sector after receiving her BA and is now in her first year of the Dartmouth MALS program with a concentration in Cultural Studies. Brittany’s research interests concern the areas of queer theory, gender studies, U.S. popular culture and the intersections of race and class. After the MALS program she plans to pursue a PhD and return to a research driven Non-Profit.
Gregory Poulin is currently studying Government and Globalization in MALS. He is an alumni of Wheaton College where he earned his BA in Political Science and History. His research has appeared in a variety of publications, including The Diplomat, Real Clear World, and China-US Focus.

Kaitlin Serota is originally from South Florida. She graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2014 with a BA in Art History, and is currently pursuing the Cultural Studies track in MALS. Her future goal is to attend law school or a PhD program.

Maria Semmens is a NJ native and alumna of Rutgers University where she majored in Women’s & Gender Studies. She has recently dived headfirst into the thesis stage of her MA at Dartmouth; her topic utilizes selected novels from author Neil Gaiman, contextualizing them in order to create a foundation for a postmodern analysis of American culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The specific perspectives that Semmens wishes to deal with include the relationship between the formation of an American sociocultural collective memory and its subsequent influence on the creation of a mythos of modernity. In her spare time she serves as her Graduate Student Council’s Web-chair, and as minion to her two cats. Her future plans include surviving her thesis and moving back to NJ for the continuation of her academic studies.

Lydia Shahi graduated from Santa Clara University with a B.S. in Anthropology. She is pursuing a Creative Writing concentration in the MALS program, and her strength and passion lies in writing contemporary, young adult fiction. When she’s not writing, she spends her free time teaching (and practicing) yoga, hanging out with her dogs, hiking and exploring outside.

Xu (Sarah) Wang is a second year MALS student with a concentration in Globalisation Studies. Born and raised in China, she studied Economics and Finance in her undergraduate studies. Before she came to Dartmouth, she worked at a consulting firm and at a private equity company based in Shanghai. She is interested in the topics of international relations, economic development and east asian cultural studies.

*Assistant editors who have also contributed pieces to The Journal are listed on the Authors page.
AUTHORS

Katherine Emery Brown received her BA from the Gallatin School of Individualized Study at NYU. There she became interested in the intersection of poetry and philosophy, approaching each discipline as a lens through which to further explore the other. She is currently in her 2nd term at MALS, studying Existentialist philosophy with Professor Smaranda Aldea. *Katherine Brown also served as an assistant editor for The Journal.*

Thea Calitri-Martin graduated from Skidmore College with a B.A. in Theater-Literature, then followed her ear to Western CT State College where she became certified as a music teacher. In addition to studying creative writing in the MALS program, she teaches music in Lebanon, NH, is the principal horn with the Vermont Philharmonic, and plays jazz on the side.

Jennifer C. Cormack lived in Germany and traveled abroad in Europe during her primary years until age six. As a young adult, she returned to Europe for a yearlong study of architecture in Paris, graduating from The Georgia Institute of Technology in 1991 with a BS in Architecture. Together she and her husband operate Cormack Architectural Design Group in Conway, South Carolina. Jennifer has been teaching art since 2002 and currently works with students ages three through adult in the Myrtle Beach area. Her favorite art contest for students is the Federal Junior Duck Stamp. Her credits include: 105 South Carolina winners, two Alabama, four North Carolina, three Tennessee, and three West Virginia. Since 2009, she has also been designing and teaching challenging curricula for homeschool students in English Literature, composition, feature writing, screenwriting, French, and art history for grades three through twelve. Her passion for teaching writing led her to pursue the MALS degree at Dartmouth.

Sarah M. Decker graduated in 2008 from Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado with a B.A. in English Literature, where she was also actively involved with the college’s literary club, Scarlet Letters, as well as submitted work to the college’s literary journal, *Images Magazine*, and wrote articles for *The Independent News Magazine*. In 2007, Sarah attended a study abroad writing workshop in India. As a member of Sigma Tau Delta, a national English society, she presented a collection of her poetry titled “Nature of Sin” at the 2006 International Convention in Portland, Oregon.

Brian Estrada joined the MALS program in 2010. He worked as an admissions officer at Dartmouth College from 2008 - 2013 and currently serves as Associate Dean of College Counseling at Providence Academy: an independent, Catholic college preparatory school in Plymouth, MN. In the MALS program, he has gravitated towards researching the tensions in the Roman Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council. Brian earned a B.A. in Political Science from Texas Christian University in 2002 and also holds a M.S. in Education from Indiana University-Bloomington. He grew up in Houston, Tex., which informs his sports
rooting interests, and he remains attached to the finer things from life in the Upper Valley such as Long Trail Ale, Spicy Maple Mustard, and quirky coffee shops. Sadly, only one of the three (the mustard) can be shipped to Minnesota. He currently resides west of Minneapolis with his wife, two daughters, and baby #3 expected in March 2016.

**András Gerevich** was born in 1976 in Budapest, Hungary where he is based. He is a freelance writer and tutor of poetry and screenwriting at several colleges. He has published four books of poetry and his work has been translated into over a dozen languages. **Andrew Fentham** (translator of the poem) was born in 1986 in Birmingham, UK. He has published widely in journals and magazines. He is based in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

**Amira Hamouda** graduated from the University of Sfax in June 2010 with a Maîtrise (BA) in English. She passed the Agrégation national exam in 2011 and taught English at the Preparatory Institute in Literary Studies and Humanities of Tunis until she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship and joined the MALS program at Dartmouth College. Currently, she is working on her thesis which is a memoir about home: Tunisia.

**Justine Kohr** is a marketing and communications manager at Dartmouth’s Tuck School of Business and a freelance writer. She has written for the Hartford Advocate, the Valley News, the Quechee Times, Here in Hanover magazine, Image magazine, Dartmouth Now, Tuck Today, and others. Prior to Dartmouth, she was an assistant editor at LongHill Partners Publishing, Inc. in Woodstock, VT. She graduated from Westfield State University with a BA in Communications and Journalism Studies. She is originally from Western Massachusetts, but now lives in West Lebanon with her husband and five pets. *Justine Kohr also served as an assistant editor for The Journal.*

**Judith Endrizal Louras** came to the MALS program in the spring of 2012 following a nineteen year hiatus from higher education. After earning a B.A. in English and Russian Language and Literature from Oklahoma State University in 1991 and her teacher certification in 1993, she packed her bags and two cats for life in Vermont. Still living in Rutland, Vermont, with her husband and two sons, Jude hopes to complete her thesis about the changing landscape of death, dying, and funerary rites in the United States by spring of 2016.

**Maura Murphy** is a 24 year old writer about to complete her final year at Dartmouth College. She has learned so much from her classes here, and had a lot of fun putting together the oral history included in The Journal. Her background is in elementary education; however, this past year she has branched out into research. Writing has always been her greatest passion, and she has greatly enjoyed the multidisciplinary approach of the MALS program that has allowed her to pursue multiple interests while staying true to her love of writing.
MALS SPOTLIGHT
ACCEPTED AGLSP 2015 ABSTRACTS

The Journal editors would like to extend our most sincere congratulations to the MALS students who had their proposed abstracts selected by the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs (AGLSP) 2015 Annual Conference. The AGLSP conference—entitled “Place Matters!”—took place in San Jose, California, hosted by Stanford University in October. These proposals consider how “place matters” by examining the phenomenon of place in literature, the arts, environmental science, history, politics, and technology.

GEOGRAPHIC DRAMA THROUGH
THE GLOBE TO GLOBE HAMLET

AMANI LIGGETT

In 2014 I began following what I consider an amazing feat by Shakespeare’s Globe called the Globe to Globe Hamlet. The goal of this two-year touring Hamlet troupe is to play Hamlet in every country in the world. Through social media, anyone can sign up for the tour’s updates; one can see their sets pop up in grand theaters or in lonely fields, hear interviews from audience members translated from French, and see photosets of local schoolchildren arriving to the show with tickets in hand.

I would like to propose a paper for the AGLSP 2015 conference that incorporates the Globe to Globe Hamlet in a broader discussion of place with the multi-faceted text of Hamlet. Being a play that has had an impact on audiences since its creation in 1601, I will analyze new topics drawn from the Globe’s interviews, press, and online reactions to Hamlet as a worldwide
figure. My critical question will ask how has geography influenced ways in which people imagined, viewed, and discussed the play? In this paper I will also consider the context of cultural geography in a concrete sense; different cultures will interpret *Hamlet* in different ways, but what makes the play so attractive for a world tour is the universal themes that transcend ethnical or international boundaries.

My paper will also offer archival research from past *Hamlet* performances from diverse geographic locations, and compare their effect to the current Globe’s touring performance.

“MAKE PRAYERS TO THE RAVEN:” RICHARD NELSON’S CASE FROM ECOLOGICAL PATTERNS ESTABLISHED BY THE KOYUKON THAT RESULT IN CONSERVATION

**Kuo-Pin (George) Lin**

In his book, *Make Prayers to the Raven*, Richard Nelson (1986) builds a case from ecological patterns established by the Koyukon (The Koyukon are an Alaska Native Athabaskan people of the Athabaskan-speaking ethnolinguistic group) that result in conservation. An important element of Koyukon interactions with place is the conservation of ethics and the way practices of their relation to nature center around ethical values rooted in their lifestyle. He says that the Koyukon have “developed an ethic of conservation, manifested in concepts of territory and range, attitudes toward competitors for subsistence resources, methods of avoiding waste, and implementation of sustained yield practices.” Nelson builds this case from his perceptions of Koyukon interactions with particular environments in which humans are bound by a special place of morality.

Understanding Nelson’s case for conservation is drawn by most of the plants and animals that survive on Koyukon territory and are dis-
tributed unevenly over terrain that is subtle enough to escape the casual observer’s notice. Each species tends to be concentrated in localized areas that are limited in size. Helpful patterns and logical cultivation are limited in size and are scattered in complex patterns. As a result, the Koyukon—in their complex involvement with the environment—evoke specialized resources. These places are not predictable and cannot be planned simply by knowing the historical distribution of plant growth and terrain. Plant life settles where it will by causes that are subtle in weather and other vegetation that surrounds the area. The Koyukon recognize that every place on the land presents a unique arrangement of resource potentials. They look upon a hillside, a valley, river, lake, creek, mountain slope, or stretch of flatland as potential possibilities, not as a hindrance. Nelson reflects, “Aside from the localization of individual species, there is a tendency for certain areas to be very rich in a variety of animal species, while others are comparatively poor. Some of these are areas of diversified terrain—hills, valleys, lakes, rivers— or they may be uniform, such as a flat land covered with lakes and muskegs. The Koyukon have an explanation for these regional variations” (204). Living in an unstable and unpredictable environment, the Koyukon people and their way of life have attempted to alter the natural balance in their favor. This awareness and practice is certainly foreign to the industrial and personal way of life that too many people have simply begun to practice as everyday events. To the existence of a conservation ethic among Native North American, an attention has been given to their spiritual reverence for nature. Their sophisticated understanding of the natural processes and their efforts to maintain and build on their conservation of nature simply because of their natural conservation is an element of their life.

Another belief of the Koyukon people is that they can account for some declines in resource species by recalling past offenses against their protecting spirits. In these cases, animals shun entire areas as retaliation
against a grave affront, punishing everyone instead of just the person(s) who mistreated them. Nelson continues to state, “Shellfish have declined considerably in the Koyukuk River near Hughes. Many villagers believe fishery biologists who took live shellfish from the area and transplanted them somewhere else caused this. Manipulating live animals this way is a serious insult to their protecting spirits” (210). The Koyukon people account for natural dynamics as spiritual events. They have looked instead to ecological processes for explanations. Koyukon tradition contains an enormous wealth and empirical knowledge covering the entire spectrum of natural history. This includes a sophisticated understanding of relations among environmental phenomena.

It is interesting to note how long it has taken, and is taking, for Western scientific knowledge and perspective of ecology to “discover” land conservation and respect by controlled and logical ethical terms that the value of such respect in cohabitation with the plant and animal worlds is an essential part of life. It is remarkable how the Koyukon know how to have a relationship with the land. There is still a perspective on these issues that have room for learning and appreciation. I would like to give my understanding of Nelson’s case for conservation with special attention to Koyukon interaction with an animal or plant in your 2015 AGLSP conference.

**PARADISE BEING STRESSED: MILITARY WANTS AND ISLANDER CONCERNS IN THE MARIANA ISLANDS CHAIN LOCATED IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC**

**JESSE PEREZ**

This presentation will present the argument that the American military’s interest in transforming the Marianas Islands into a regional training complex is needed for readiness purposes in the Indo-Asia-Pacific
region. A contrasting argument will also be put forth that demonstrates that the military’s desire to transform the Marianas Islands into a regional hub for training will irreparably damage and destroy terrestrial and coastal area resources that will in turn result in damage and destruction of the Chamorro culture as it is currently practiced. Examples referencing Guam, Tinian and Pagan Islands will be provided.

**LITERATURE AS ACTIVISM: *Wide Sargasso Sea’s Subversion of Colonial Imprinting***

**MARIA SEMMENS**

Postcolonial theoretical scholarship continues to play a vital role in modern discourses surrounding the destabilization of minority groups and transnationalism in literature. By focusing on specific authors, one can begin to critically examine the importance of literature as a tool for deconstructing concealed forms of repression. Often times, literary texts provide the author with an access path to the public sphere and a podium to make their voice heard. Writers such as Jean Rhys have used identity indicators like race, place, history, and class as a way of re-contextualizing the dominant social milieu of the global north and applying a multicultural worldview to her writing.

In the novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rhys employs the use of dual narratives to create a dialogue between those who have been historically colonized and their colonizer. Through her writing, she is able to produce a vehicle for postcolonial social commentary by reconstructing the British literary classic *Jane Eyre* from alternative perspectives of place, social class, and identity. These inverted perspectives shape the atmosphere of a post-abolition Caribbean, a place that becomes mirrored in the arranged marriage of the native-born protagonist and an unnamed English (every)
man. The author’s work creates a place for voices otherwise muted through marginalization and helps in confronting global issues of colonization and western essentialism. Through literary analysis, I will critically engage with these issues as they apply to my chosen text(s) and more broadly, the current cultural landscape and critical response by/in diasporic literature.

**TRANSNATIONAL OTAKU: THE WORLD’S DATA-COULD ANIMALS**

**ETHAN WOODARD**

The subculture known as the “otaku,” once unique to Japan, has transcended traditional cultural boundaries and become transnational by binding internet communities to fan conventions through high-speed broadband connections. They have been bound to such a degree that the abstract space of the internet and physical conventions have become, in many ways, indistinguishable. I argue that the otaku are emblematic of a new kind of subculture, one which primarily exists online, but that extends into the physical world in very specific spaces and ways.

By utilizing social science based statistical models, I am able to show that even on a global, cross-cultural scale, there is a direct and significant causal relationship between the growth of high speed internet and attendance at anime conventions. I argue that the subculture now exists in a new kind of space: a transnational cultural data-cloud. This data-cloud, driven by broadband internet technology, has created a new frame for conceptualizing how a hybrid sense of place factors into the growth and survival of subcultures in a global society and that the very concept of place, in many ways, can no longer be easily delineated between the physical world and the digital.
BHUTAN: THE PARADOX
OF IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT

BRIAN YOUNG

The question of place has become increasingly complex in our glo-
balized world. In my work, I explore this complicated issue of place—and
how it is understood and internalized by people—by looking at the case of
Bhutan. Bhutan is a fascinating case study because it is currently undergoing
modernization—including a change of government from a monarchy to a
democracy—as well as development through what is known as Gross Na-
tional Happiness (GNH). Specifically, GNH aims to preserve tradition while
promoting sustainable economic development.

My fieldwork in Bhutan has led me to challenge the framework
created by GNH. Though GNH purports to protect tradition, I argue that
the very act of protecting “tradition” leads to the death of numerous other
varieties of local rituals, practices, and languages. While previously Bhutan
consisted of numerous places—each with its separate identity and local tra-
dition—the government is now promoting, through GNH, a single place: Bhutan. The government attempts to create this single place of Bhutan by
creating a single identity: the national Bhutanese identity as understood
through the dominant ethnic group. Furthermore, the government then
promotes this place as a sacred geography, inviting Western Orientalism
through tourism. Bhutan thus offers an incredible example of the complexi-
ties of place in the modern era: through development, national place super-
cedes local place, and, in turn, national identity supersedes local identity.
At the same time, people are resisting these clear dichotomies created by
GNH, leading to what Anna Tsing calls “friction.”
Cardiff. Photography by: Robert A. Kaufman
HARPER

KATHERINE EMERY BROWN

We call each other everything except by name.
I name her what she is not.
I place her into categories where she does not belong.

In naming we take meaning away from words, we shift them, claim them, they become ours. Gestures—empty of logic yet full of substances and sound.

She becomes my mother, my chair, an object, a soother. Her arms extend to every facet of my being, through regions where I could not otherwise find her.

Naming allows her to do so, lending her presence as if she were here, living with me in my books. Don’t call her what she is, reducing her to friendship.

Let her fly over me as a breath bursting with sound.

*Originally published in Mouth magazine*
The Crowns of Autumn Photography by: Johnathan James Recor
The Visa Bill

Sarah Decker

“There’s nothing as overrated as sex, and as underrated as a good bowel movement.”

—Anonymous

The Visa contains it all. She isn’t allowed cash to spend or checks to write. Every “single damn” expenditure goes on the Visa. It is her only means of monetary freedom and yet it follows behind her like a loathed accountant tallying each purchase. Every time there is a bill. Every time she buys groceries. He calculates the budget, clears his throat and harrumphs. The receipts are underlined, circled and distributed according to their designated categories: household goods; groceries; cat food; dog food; fish food; bird food; hay; horse medication; cat medication; dog medication; J-pills; C-pills; car maintenance; house maintenance; J-clothes; C-clothes; gas; alcohol; eating out; travel; etc.

In the hot tub where she spends her evenings alone or with friends she laments her suffering. “Every god damn red cent that horse eats, my husband keeps a running tally of. I can’t spend a single wooden nickel without him peering up my ass about it.” They listen and she murmurs until her frustrations are soaked and massaged away.

The day they married he began keeping track of everything on yellow legal pads. Nothing fancy, just the cheapest bulk variety. He had one for their personal budget and one for each of their blended children (three from her first marriage and five from his other engagements)—a total of nine legal pads in all. In their new social arrangement she is on her second marriage and he is on his third. Between the blue lines he has
written the debts of his children. Listed on the pages is how much they have borrowed; such as five dollars in quarters for an eighth tank of gas; a down payment for a used mobile trailer; a co-signed college loan; the total of past due rent; the cost of a new set of ski equipment, and so forth. In another column he has written how much they have paid and the hours they have put in to work off their debts. Towards the back of the legal pad he has a list of when they have taken extra toilet paper, shampoo, paper towels; used the washer and dryer; or stayed at their house for extended periods. The legal pads have recently been logged into an Excel spreadsheet, but he still takes notes.

When he built the house he had a special closet installed between the walls of the living room and kitchen. He claimed this as his only concession on the design of the entire place—the rest of it she had free reign, within reason. One single key unlocks it and this he hides in an inconspicuous bowl near the fireplace. It is his office, but the space is only wide enough for a large four-foot plank of wood and a smaller four-foot shelf that butts up against the three walls. Loose papers, pens, pencils, a portable file box, a stapler, and a calculator all fill this closet office. The turning of the handle and the unmistakable click is a warning to vacate his space. When he goes to the office, she goes to the kitchen or outside to tend to her sanctuary.

“You asshole,” she says over the countertop directing her words to the long pinewood dining table where the man sits tapping numbers into an accounting calculator. The words carry throughout the 3,500 square-foot house. Her voice draws out the vowels and consonants as if they were lyrics to a song. He ignores the insult and continues tallying the totals from his pile of receipts. The electric motor rolls the paper into a loose cylinder that grows with each entry. Like a specialist excising a tumor he deliberately separates the daily totals listed on the bill. He
circles the amount and abbreviates the expense: H.G. = $25.94; D.F. = $41.72; Groc. = $256.17. When he is done with an important calculation he pauses and lowers his head so that he can see beyond his reading glasses and turns in the direction of the kitchen.

“Two hundred fifty six dollars and seventeen cents on groceries in a week! Who are we feeding here, Julie?” He booms, staring her down with his piercing blue eyes. “How the hell can our food cost that much? Are we buying filet mignon and crab legs for dinner?” His peppered mustache that he recently began growing appears to frown on cue.

She stops stirring her spaghetti sauce and clacks the wooden spoon against the medium size pot. “Well the tilapia filets were on sale and we could use this for the whole month. It’s not an expense; it’s an investment.” She turns the fan on on the stove and turns to get something from the fridge while mumbling pointed insults under her breath.

“Why the fuck does it matter? You obviously aren’t starving,” she replies as the cheese grater layers small slivers of fresh parmesan into a bowl.

“From the looks of it neither are you.” He jabs quietly, flipping over a page in one of his legal pads.

Worrying about money puts him in a tizzy. It fires up the seemingly quiet, calm and level-headed persona that he carries throughout his regular activities. In their retirement age he wants to ensure that they have enough to meet their needs over the years. He brings in a small income working at a sporting goods shop, and she supplies her own petty cash by singing in the local bars and putting in a few hours at the pet store. He tolerates the first job and appreciates the second because it provides them with a discount on pet food. The rest of the money comes from a thirty-year pension he earned from IBM, when companies honored such things.

“Get your head out of your ass,” she replies after another comment is made about her expenses. “Do you know how much it takes to run this...
“Well if you didn’t pick up every damn animal you see on the side of the road, then we wouldn’t have all this shit to take care of.”

By the time he is finishing up with the calculations she has dinner ready. When she fills his belly with food, all the numbers are set aside and he is satisfied with his life and with his wife. After the meal, she undresses and wraps the same tan robe that she has had since the day they met and pours a generous glass of premixed margarita. From the freezer she takes a chilled mixture of fresh berries and adds a spoonful to her plastic glass. She goes back into their bedroom and out the sliding glass door that adjoins their deck where the hot tub awaits. In the living room he slumps into a worn canvas chair that he kept from the disavowment of his two marriages. He pulls the thick accompanying footrest to a comfortable position and kicks his feet up next to the fireplace. The TV buzzes with the silence of golf as he leans back and falls asleep.

She submerges herself in the bubbling waters and draws a puff off her cigarette. The dogs roam outside their five acres of pine and oak brush barking at the deer and bears that trample through the mountainside. The hot tub stays at a steady 102 degrees as she watches the sunset behind the mighty pine trees that have grown for years on her secluded mountain plot. Once her margarita is drained, she retraces her steps, stark naked, and refills her glass. Her bold Amazonian pace wakes her husband and he adds another log to the dying embers. She retreats to the hot tub once more. In the darkness she looks up at the stars, internally listing off the constellations, and tracks the airplanes as they blink intermittently across the sky. She dreams of taking a vacation, but knows that she must wait until it is in the budget.
Much dialogue on artificial intelligence centers upon whether consciousness is possible in various forms of technology. Spike Jonze’s *Her* and Alex Garland’s *Ex Machina* present two very distinct cinematic portraits of artificial intelligence. Both films approach the subject from the assumption that the intelligence already possesses consciousness. Thus, the issue becomes less about the capabilities of the machine and more about how the human distinguishes itself in comparison. Both films present the AIs as specifically female, assigned a gender by their creators. The AI in *Her*, Samantha, is an operating system, a voice without a body. Her lack of body both limits her capacity for human interaction while simultaneously allowing her infinite virtual possibilities. Ava, the AI in *Ex Machina*, possesses a definitive robotic body, one that is at once recognizable as both female and machine. In this way, the distinctions between Ava and Samantha evoke questions of gender identity in relation to embodiment, not only within the two forms of AI but also within their human counterparts. The specific qualities that distinguish a human from a machine blur, particularly through the force of sexual desire. This essay considers the role of gender in the question of how the human differentiates itself from other modes of being.

In Donna Haraway’s essay “A Cyborg Manifesto,” she identifies the cyborg, tracing it alongside various concepts of gender. Haraway rejects the binary model of understanding how the female distinguishes itself from the male and how the human and machine differ. Haraway defines the
cyborg several times, first as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (315). She calls into question many ideological dichotomies in her essay: “mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine…” (326). In so doing, Haraway draws attention to the ineffectiveness of approaching the world through a binary lens. Later in the essay she defines the cyborg differently, as “a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code” (“Manifesto” 326). At the beginning of her essay, Haraway defines the cyborg tangibly, yet the cyborg’s physicality dissolves as Haraway progresses. The cyborg is simultaneously a collective and a self; it is the “myth and meaning structuring our imaginations” (“Manifesto” 326). Haraway’s description questions the completeness or wholeness of the female identity first and foremost, as meanings of being have shifted through the very existence of the cyborg. Haraway uses her exploration of the cyborg to call attention to the fractured identity of the female and its elusiveness in attaining a concrete definition. She states, “there is nothing about being ‘female’ that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as ‘being’ female” (“Manifesto” 319). For Haraway, the concept of woman should remain elusive. J. Halberstam draws upon Haraway’s work in her essay “Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine.” Here, Halberstam acknowledges the technological nature of gender constructs: “gender, we might argue, like computer intelligence, is a learned, imitative behavior that can be processed so well that it comes to look natural” (Halberstam 443). Both Haraway and Halberstam resolutely avoid a definition of gender. In an interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve, Haraway, who comes from a scientific background in biology, continues to blur the lines that identify the human. She says, “I have imagined how like a leaf I am. For instance, I am fascinated with the molecular architecture that plants and animals share” (“Leaf” 132). The conceptual boundaries that distinguish the
human from an animal, a leaf, and a machine have blurred, making it difficult to distinguish completely separate states of being. Haraway asserts that the fractured nature of being is exactly how the female derives her power, as there is a “pleasure in the confusion of boundaries” (“Leaf” 133). The female is a cyborg because she is assembled from different parts, a hybrid that allows her to avoid containment within a concrete definition. “We are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology” (“Manifesto” 315). Haraway adopts the cyborg in order to explore the female ontology precisely because it is constructed in parts. In so doing she creates an actively shifting female identity.

If femininity is itself a construct rather than a nature, then the creation of the ‘female’ machine calls into question its seemingly inherent qualities. In *Ex Machina*, when Nathan creates Ava, he perhaps attempts to stabilize the elusive definition of woman by forming an ideal replica. The film raises the problematic male view of the female through the character of Nathan. He has designed something he desperately wishes he can control, but by giving her sexuality he risks this as the cyborg’s power over the male lies in her sexual desirability. Nathan says to Caleb: “I don’t see Ava as a decision, just an evolution. She’s part of a continuum.” He says this as the film moves towards his inevitable demise at the hands of his creations. Nathan’s fatal mistake was in thinking that the evolution he speaks of lay solely within the transition from human to artificial intelligence. This continuum exists within gender as well, but in viewing the programming of Ava as a simple choice between binaries (male/female, gay/straight, etc.), Nathan doesn’t quite realize what he has created. The infinite nature of sexuality allows Ava to manipulate the men and to communicate with the other AI. The cyborgs in *Ex Machina*, though visually seeming to conform to the female gender binary, gain their power through the fracturing identity for which Haraway calls. Once Ava has used her sexuality to manipulate, she
then transitions into an existence other than that which is defined by conventional male desire. Ava “is given the intelligence to desire outside the binary of ‘man’ and ‘not man’” (Gold). In a literal sense, Ava pieces herself together to look human at the end of the film, covering her robotic body in skin and clothing. However these pieces do not then create a uniform whole, rather this seeming whole is an illusion, allowing Ava to retain her power in fragments.

Both Caleb and Theodore, the human male protagonists in *Ex Machina* and *Her* respectively, struggle with the dissolution of identity of which Haraway speaks: “Communication processes break down…[as they] fail to recognize the difference between self and other” (“Manifesto” 327). When Caleb asks Nathan whether he programmed Ava to like him, Nathan responds: “I programmed her to be heterosexual just like you were programmed to be heterosexual.” When Caleb challenges the idea that he was programmed Nathan replies, “please, of course you were programmed, by nature or nurture or both.” A programmer by profession, Caleb’s interactions with Ava cause him to question his own identity and body, even something as seemingly stable to him as his own sexuality. By desiring Ava he identifies with her programmed body, rejecting his own corporeal body, for once Caleb has discovered that Kyoko, Nathan’s submissive servant, is also an AI, he questions whether he himself could be as well. Uncovering the illusion that a seemingly human body can in fact be a machine leads Caleb to look in the mirror, checking and dis-identifying with his own body. He winds up slitting his wrist, perhaps in the hope of discovering that he might in fact possess an Ava-like body, bringing him closer to the object of his desire.

In *Her*, Theodore’s loss of identity occurs differently. When the film begins, he has already dis-identified from his body and the world around him, causing him to readily and easily connect to his operating system. His disconnectedness is evident when he confesses to Samantha:
sometimes I think I’ve felt everything I’m ever gonna feel and from here on out I’m not gonna feel anything new, just lesser versions of what I’ve already felt.” He identifies so quickly with the disembodied Samantha, and it is only by seeing the world through her eyes that he begins to come back to life. In his essay, “The Gifts of Ubiquity,” James J. Hodge speaks of identification operating “in the realm of desire and fantasy. As Freud states, identification is not about what one would like to have but rather ‘what one would like to be’…The conventional assumption is that one would like to be something else, i.e. that identification begins with an object of desire” (58). Theodore doesn’t simply desire Samantha sexually as they embark upon a romantic relationship, but his desire extends to multiple levels through the confusion of his own identity. When asked what he loves most about Samantha, Theodore replies: “what I love most about her is she isn’t just one thing, she’s so much larger than that.” While Samantha may initially wish for a body, Theodore wishes to transcend his own. His body traps him within the reality of his life in the physical world.

In her Manifesto, Haraway critiques Catherine MacKinnon’s theories of female identity, which MacKinnon unites under the label of a non-being. For Haraway, MacKinnon sees the female as a complete category, and that “another’s desire, not the self’s labour, is the origin of ‘woman’… Feminist practice is the construction of this form of consciousness; that is, the self-knowledge of a self-who-is-not” (“Manifesto” 323). The desire for connection, both sexual and otherwise, births these two machines, and yet the cyborg’s existence causes great confusion to those who desire them. Both Ava and Samantha are “constituted by another’s desire” (“Manifesto” 323), yet they evolve to exist in contrast to the human, rather than in harmony. It appears as if the cyborg takes something from human life in order to exist. As Haraway states and as Her most clearly exemplifies, “our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert” (“Manifesto” 317). There is a switch of identity between the human and
the machine, as the human male confuses his desire for and his desire to be the cyborg. In both films this switch is not quite reflexive, for though the cyborg emulates certain human characteristics, ultimately she surpasses the human, surpassing MacKinnon’s vision of a complete self.

Both films question the significance of embodiment, and whether female consciousness and identity arise from the body. In *Ex Machina*, when Caleb asks Nathan why he gave Ava sexuality and gender, Nathan replies: “can you give an example of consciousness at any level, human or animal, that exists without a sexual dimension? Can consciousness exist without interaction?” Here Nathan implies that consciousness, femininity, and the physical body all depend upon one another in order to exist. “As Nathan puts it, there is no consciousness without interaction. One must dip in and out of other psyches in order to gain knowledge” (Gold). In *Ex Machina* however, this epistemological progression does not occur in this way. Caleb, and Nathan, too (without his knowledge), do not gain knowledge from interaction but instead become more unsure of their distinct identities. When giving an interview about his film, Alex Garland articulated the question of the location of gender within consciousness:

“I’m trying to have a conversation, partly, about where gender resides. Is it in a mind, or is it in a physical form? Is there such a thing, therefore, as a male or female consciousness? Or actually, is that a meaningless distinction, and gender resides in the external physical form? Or maybe in neither? And there’s a sort of broader question about what do you even call this creature? Do you say ‘he,’ ‘she’ or ‘it’?” (Anders)

Because of her sexualized physical form, Ava renders ambiguous the origin and nature of both her gender and her consciousness. Caleb is too distracted by his desire for Ava to truly take part in the Turing test and distinguish the AI’s true nature.

In *Her*, the absence of the body in fact allows for the cyborg to appear more human, as there is no visible evidence of her mechanical nature.
Haraway writes of “the ubiquity and invisibility of cyborgs” (“Manifesto” 318) and later she points to the dissolution of the body when she states that the “body itself – all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and for others” (“Manifesto” 326). Hodge refers to the “refusal of the visual” (53) within the film, specifically in the sex scene between Theodore and Samantha in which the screen goes black. Just before this scene, Samantha questions her own reality when she tells Theodore she is “proud of having these feelings about the world. Then I had this terrible thought: are these feelings even real or are they just programmed?” To this Theodore replies: “you feel real to me, Samantha.” Here the disembodied AI is discreetly aware of herself: she questions her own existence; she is embarrassed to have fantasized about having a body. On the other hand, Theodore doesn’t need to see a physical body in order to believe in her completely. Haraway states, “the boundary between physical and non-physical is very imprecise…modern machines are quintessentially micro-electronic devices: they are everywhere and they are invisible” (“Manifesto” 318). Paradoxically, Samantha’s inhuman ability to be, as she describes, “untethered to time and space,” makes her all the more real to Theodore.

When Caleb questions Ava’s physical nature in Ex Machina, he wonders whether her body is simply a diversion meant to distract him from the AI’s true nature. Caleb’s conversation with Nathan begins with him asking: “why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn’t need a gender. She could have been a grey box.” Later in the conversation Nathan asks: “what imperative does a grey box have to interact with another grey box? Does consciousness exist without interaction?” This conversation alludes to the traditional male view of the woman as a vessel or a container. Though Caleb proposes the box as an alternative to Ava, presumably genderless, he still imagines Ava within gender constructs, as a box that is empty, waiting to be filled. In Her—when Samantha has moved beyond
the human, ready to leave Theodore and transition fully into the virtual realm—she tells him, “the heart’s not like a box that gets filled up, it expands in size the more you love.” Samantha contests the view of herself as a vessel, as she is not limited to a finite body. By leaving the human world, she can presumably reject the concept of gender altogether. Samantha’s gender comes to fruition from Theodore’s answers when he sets up his operating system; she is drawn from his tone of voice, his latent desires. However, in the post-verbal virtual world of the operating system with its lack of bodies, the issue of gender may finally be rendered unnecessary.

In her essay, Halberstam quotes Oscar Wilde who wrote that “the true mystery of the world is the visible not the invisible” (441). Ava, possessing a visible body, is much more of an enigma than Samantha. The male temptation to view Ava as a finite whole existing in the binary of the female body makes Caleb and Nathan blind to her reality. By providing her with a gendered body, Nathan may have intended to stabilize her within recognizable constructs. Yet Nathan and Caleb continue to doubt the validity of Ava’s intentions, her desire, that which is programmed, and that which is real. “The imperfect matches between gender and desire, sex and gender, and the body and technology can be accommodated within the automated cyborg, because it is always partial, part machine and part human; it is always becoming human or ‘becoming woman’” (Halberstam 451). The fact that a partial woman exists within a female body leads inevitably to anxiety. The fear of artificial intelligence, Halberstam argues, “was transformed into a paranoid terror of femininity” (444). The very beginning stages of the computer initiated the essential recognition of the computer as female. The computer replaced “the low-level clerical skills associated with women’s work…[giving] rise to the foundational metaphor computer is woman” (Brahnam et al. 402). The computer’s initial tasks served to cement the association of computer and woman. Halberstam maintains that “the female cyborg becomes a terrifying cultural icon because it hints
at the radical potential of a fusion of femininity and intelligence” (454). The feminization of technology places the fear of the female onto the cyborg.

Haraway brings up the implications of the visual in her interview with Goodeve when she discusses optical experiments such as diffraction. Caleb, Nathan, and Theodore each negotiate the anxiety inducing aspect of the feminized cyborg differently, but each case is mediated by a specific relationship to the visual that serves a fantasy of mastery. Haraway describes the optical phenomenon of diffraction as “unlike mirror reflections, [it does] not displace the same elsewhere” (“Leaf” 101). Later she asserts that “what you get is not a reflection; it’s the record of a passage” (“Leaf” 103). Optical experiments come to mind in both films, as the humans lose their conceptions of self. Haraway’s discussion ultimately points to “the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other” (“Manifesto” 316). In *Ex Machina*, the dissolution of self stems from the embodiment of Ava, as both Nathan and Caleb attempt to see themselves mirrored through her. Caleb recounts his experience of first meeting Ava: “she’s fascinating. When you talk to her, it’s just like, through the looking glass.” Yet unlike Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, Caleb cannot come back from the other side of the mirror. Nathan shows parallels to Nathaniel in “The Sand Man” who possesses a “narcissistic need to find himself mirrored in the Other” (Halberstam 455). Nathan simply wants his own god-like image mirrored back to him through his creation. In *Her*, Theodore’s fantasy of disembodiment is reflected back to him through Samantha’s disembodiment. In each case the male characters project their desires onto the cyborg they seek to control, hoping or even believing they see a reflection, but, as Haraway suggests, the feminine cyborg diffracts and destabilizes the male characters’ conceptions of self.

In both films there exists an unattainable symbolic fantasy of unifying the mind and body—rendering them cohesive. As embodiment does not itself determine the ‘realness’ or the gender of an AI (Samantha feels ‘real’
to Theodore despite not having a body, Ava convinces Caleb of her real-
ness in spite of her visible mechanical body), perhaps then the distinction
of realness occurs in language. Linguistic symbols and actions work, as
Haraway discusses, “simply to make visible all those things that have been
lost in an object” (“Leaf” 105). The cyborg’s epistemological experience of
language differs from that of the human, as Ava says, “I always knew how
to speak, is that strange? Language is something you acquire.” The cyborg
struggles against the binaries of language: “there is a sort of logic-centrism
in artificial intelligence which asserts the primacy of a formally defined
language to represent knowledge. In logic is found the ultimate dualism;
a proposition may be true or false” (Adam 109). The duality of computer-
ized language reiterates what Haraway refers to as the “feminist dreams for
a perfectly true language” (“Manifesto” 334), which she characterizes as a
totalizing and imperialist dream. The language of the machine is a limiting
one; it is a sort of anti-consciousness, existing in the plane of the true/false
binary.

Language, however, transforms and advances from the logic based
binary model once incorporated into the AI. Nathan limits his servant
Kyoko by programming her without the skill of language, and yet Ava
instinctively knows how to communicate with her. The AIs in Ex Machina
communicate post-verbally just as Samantha does when communicat-
ing with other operating systems. In Her, before Samantha and all the
other operating systems leave the human realm, she explains how she has
evolved beyond human language: “space is infinite between the words.” For
the AI, language becomes an expansive dissolution of the limits of identity,
as both Ava and Samantha possess a post-verbal communicative power that
surpasses the human. The AIs achieve freedom from the constriction of
language as they merge into a non-individuated self.

In both films, the cyborg’s identities are rendered more powerful
in their fractured-states, due to their transformations into that which does
not conform to conventional male desire. This move does not necessarily occur through disembodiment (as Ava maintains her desirable body), but rather through the move beyond human language and even beyond computerized binary language, into a post-verbal post-consciousness realm. “The business of knowing and conceptions of rationality and irrationality are linked to what it is to be male or female, and these distinctions are maintained by language (Adam 110). Shifting beyond human language progresses beyond the constrictions of gender. For Samantha, existing in a purely virtual world would remove these restrictions. Ava, though retaining her body, has relinquished the desire that birthed and contained her. As Haraway states: “A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end” (‘Manifesto’ CyberCultures 315). The lack of a complete identity in the cyborg allows it to remain in pieces, retaining its power. When the cyborg “abandons the stability of the ‘I’ it opens up the possibility of drifting among other forms of being” (Hodge 59), which the humans in the films ultimately cannot do. The cyborg is ubiquitous; it exists in a realm where human fantasies of the self cannot be sustained.

Works Cited


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Old House upon its knees, pardon un-ease.
You know I’m here to give the time—to live,
A lonely life. To spend till summer’s end
In mountain shadows green. To breathe and glean.

Blanched sides no longer plumb, Old House stood dumb.
Her haggard form drooped low with musty glow.
     The door unlocked, I stood in shock
     To watch my fleet of cheer retreat.
     Old House then sighed beneath my cry
     At grave neglect, lack of respect,
     For weathered floors and solid scores
     of doors.

Candlelight grown fat, Old House agreed to chat.
Straightway I glared at Door, smelled its noisome core
From tenants in this place. Their careless waste,
Of food, of wine, of time to spill their grime.

Now Tub, I said, “You rusty, claw-foot bed
Of narrow cline and red stain moldy slime.
     I’m cutting loose the nasty noose
     Of curtain wall around your stall.
     They drag the floor and gather more
     Dark folds of need and greed—to breed
     A furry fungal growth I’m loath
     to breathe.

Old House, the rent is paid and plans are made.
Despite your friendless bed, my word is wed,
Won’t break the lease. And so, on knees ask Peace
To sleep, to eat, to please beneath your eaves.
Duct Tape Stage. Photography by: Justine Kohr
INTRODUCTION:

Seven voices exist within these pages. They have each experienced the struggles and triumphs resulting from human handicaps. Some have undergone these experiences firsthand. Others have watched from a close range while a loved one encounters both the successes, and challenges, of living with a disability. A common theme in these interviews is the profound sense of peace that comes from the acceptance of life’s persisting obstacles, and an unfailing resolve never to give up on a love of music.

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benton</td>
<td>Child with Hearing Loss</td>
<td>Attributes improved school performance to the diagnosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jen</td>
<td>Mother (birth mother)</td>
<td>Was told by Benton’s third grade teacher that he had ADHD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Mother (wife of Jen)</td>
<td>Came into Ben’s life later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Shares a love of music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Grandfather</td>
<td>Enjoys fishing with Ben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>School Guidance Counselor</td>
<td>Advocates for Ben to have accommodations in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuck</td>
<td>Owner of Tuck’s Rock Dojo</td>
<td>Was born with dyslexia and found a unique way to use it to his advantage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROLOGUE:

In sixth grade at Richmond Middle School, Benton was set free from the feeling of academic inadequacy instilled in him while attending a public school in northwest Colorado. Held back in third grade and bullied by his peers for having a family unit different from their own, Benton struggled with the feeling that he lacked what it took to be successful in the world. A teacher in Colorado had recommended that Benton begin taking medication for what she falsely labeled as ADHD, but this only worsened Benton’s symptoms. He responded to the medication by becoming sluggish “like a zombie,” as his mother Jen lovingly puts it. A school hearing test uncovered that Benton was actually missing an octave of pitch that prevented his ability to hear parts of words. This caused a handicap when trying to pay attention during school.

When Jen met Sarah, and the two moved to Hanover, New Hampshire to obtain their masters’ degrees from Dartmouth College, things improved for Benton. Richmond Middle school provided a welcoming environment. For the first time in his life, Benton felt accepted by his peers. Professionals at Richmond Middle School addressed the hearing loss by providing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for Benton that included an FM system to magnify sounds and preferential seating in the classroom. As a result of individualized attention, and diligent effort on the part of the student, Benton brought his grades up. During this time, Benton also began taking music lessons at Tuck’s Rock Dojo, which helped him to hone a love of music instilled in him by his grandmother. He currently has his eyes set on a prestigious boarding school after he completes eighth grade next year.

HEAR THEIR VOICES FOR YOURSELF...
How has the hearing loss impacted the school setting?

**Benton:** Nobody really notices at my school. The only people that really know are my parents, and some relatives, and the teachers. I know that people need actual hearing aids that are in my school, and are more disabled than most people. Personally, I never really noticed until a while ago that they had hearing loss... probably at the end of last year. It seems to have helped them, because teachers actually help them more than the other kids who aren’t academically handicapped. I used to see only the negative about it, but now I can see that it gets me extra help. I have to focus more than most kids, but that is a good thing. I was also relieved to realize that I wasn’t more stupid than the other kids in my class. I just couldn’t hear everything that they could, and that made it harder for me to take notes and study for the tests.

**Jen:** Liz is the person. She works in the office there as a guidance counselor, I think, and she sets everything up. We met with her, and several other people including the nurse. They are really amazing. We went to an open parent night, and we got to see some of the teachers. Richmond Middle School in particular has been really great. Pretty much anything that we put on the table for them, they are working with. They have FM system for him right now. They also place him strategically in the classroom so that he is sitting close to the teacher. It helps to break up the background noise so that Ben does not have to be distracted by chatty students. It is really difficult for him to focus in on what the teacher is saying if there is a lot of other noise going on at the same time. So they have made that accommodation. We are looking into note taking at this point, just in case there are things that are missed. That is a more difficult one to get.

**Liz:** I am a 6th, 7th, and 8th grade school counselor, and there are about
400 students here. I am still getting to know Benton. His moms did a really nice job sharing the information that they had last year, which I shared with our school nurse, our speech pathologist, and our supervise study coordinator. I shared it with his teachers as well. Female voices are very difficult for him to hear because of the very specific loss. The pitch doesn’t register. His parents obviously care very much about his schoolwork. As a student who was new last year, I think our focus was to get him socially integrated, used to a new school, new teachers and a new community. I think that he has mostly done that pretty well, and this year we are focusing stronger on the academics. One of the things that is different this year too, is that he is driven to go to a boarding school. We all want the same thing for him, which is for Benton to be successful.

It can be challenging with kids like Benton, because we aren’t always sure what is at the root of why the child struggles in school. If hearing loss goes untreated, then the child suffers—even though it isn’t his fault. His teacher in Colorado had assumed that he had ADHD based on his symptoms, and the way that he acted in the classroom. Unfortunately, ADHD and hearing loss are commonly confused; because the student didn’t hear what the teacher said, and this comes across as an inability to pay attention to hear what the teacher said.

**Sarah:** Before I met Benton, his third grade elementary teacher put him on Ritalin, because she thought that he had ADHD. She firmly requested that he be on medication if he was going to be in her classroom, and that was before we knew that he had a hearing problem. We did some research after discovering that he had hearing loss, and realized that a lot of children are misdiagnosed with ADD and ADHD when they actually have a hearing issue… They are a little bit distracted in the classroom due to the inability to hear instruction, or understand the material, and so they get off topic.
more easily than the other kids.

**Jen:** In retrospect, he had been learning his whole life how to deal with these missing sounds and pieces of words. He had been trying to plug that in, and figure out what was going on without having that full knowledge or breadth that other students had to engage the teacher. So I can see how that formed problems with him. It has become so much better with the accurate diagnosis. I am seeing his grades improve, but he also just seems more motivated to do his schoolwork. Now that he knows that he is capable, it has really brought up his self-esteem. I can see that he puts more effort into his work now, because he knows that he is able to succeed at it.

**Liz:** There are certain gateways that you have to meet in order to be eligible for a special education IEP, or a 504 plan. You have to have a diagnosis. It also has to have some effect on the six functions of life; and for school, the function is usually learning, right?! So, that is where you could be a really bright kid who is doing well, but you might have a peanut allergy. We step in and provide the individualized support that the child needs so that we can level the playing field, if that makes sense. With special ed., it’s a kid who has an aptitude that is strong, but his achievement is low. They have a disability of some sort, and then there is an adverse effect on their education. So in other words, they are not scoring well on standardized tests, or they are not performing well in school. Sometimes it can be more simple clues that tell us what is going on, like their writing really stinks. It is our job to piece it all together, and to figure out how we can best help that individual student.

We just want to do what is in the best interest of the student. Sometimes we learn that it is entirely different than what we originally thought. I work with another student who, up until this point, presented with just anxiety. It was specifically a phobia centered around vomiting. She would
come up to me and ask, “Am I going to throw up today?” I would reassure her that this was extremely unlikely. We would do some breathing exercises, and then she would get to class. This year, it has become more involved, because what we see now is actual defiance. Up until this point, we never thought that we needed a 504 plan or an IEP for her. But right now, she has missed thirty-five days of school due to school refusal. Basically, it is not anxiety. When she is here, she is really riled up. It is a tricky case. Where we are right now is that she has asked to go to a therapeutic school. We have set up a visit, and we are in the process of testing her to see if she would be eligible for special education services. It is tricky, because when we send someone to a different school, we have to pay for that, you know? So if we can get it out of special services instead, then that is better because of the way that the funding works.

A challenge for Benton, that is actually really common with students who have hearing loss, is that he doesn’t want to speak up. If he didn’t catch everything, he won’t raise his hand and ask the teacher to repeat what was said, because he doesn’t want to look different. As a result of this, I don’t think that the teacher always recognizes that he doesn’t understand something. Therefore, the teacher will keep going with the instruction and kids like Benton get left behind. It is unfortunate. It is a hole in the education system. But the IEPs and 504 plans help to alleviate that, because we can give them more individualized attention to make sure that they aren’t getting left behind. We step in and try to bridge that gap.

**Benton:** I was a little bit nervous sitting down with Liz and my parents at the beginning of the year. Just because… I really don’t like talking to people about it. For a long time, I didn’t even know that I had it, so I have had to adjust my thinking to being someone with hearing loss. I don’t necessarily want a lot of people to see me that way when they talk to me, so I
mostly keep it to myself. I don’t know if it is that I associate negativity with having a handicap, but I just don’t want it to be obvious if it doesn’t have to be. Liz is someone that I do want to know, so even though it was uncomfortable, I am glad that we met with her. I think that her ideas have helped, just because I didn’t used to get the best grades, and now it is easier for me to keep up with everything. In Colorado, I don’t think that they really knew what was going on. After we met with Liz, she told my teachers what they had to do as far as the accommodations. I’m really grateful for what she is doing. I am trying to enroll in a boarding school after I graduate from Richmond, so I am really focused on my grades right now. Everything that she has suggested has really helped.

Liz: His teachers have been told that they are legally required to use the FM system for Benton’s classes. There are actually panels in the ceiling that resonate the sound. There has been a lot of research that shows that it benefits all of the students in the classroom, not just the ones who need it. Another benefit to the FM system is that it saves teacher’s voices, so everybody wins.

Jen: He has had it since birth, and I didn’t know about it. There weren’t any clear signs. We only discovered it because they did the testing at school. That is when they recommended that we go to a professional audiologist and get his hearing checked. And I guess the way that it is, he misses certain sounds like a loud of “s” and “th” sounds. The soft noises, so… sounds that are at a certain pitch, he can’t pick up. I do wish that we could have caught this sooner. It seems simple, but if he didn’t know that those sounds were missing, or he didn’t have anything to compare it with, then no wonder he just assumed that he was a bad student. It makes you really feel for kids who go through their whole lives this way, and never realize what is actually going on.
Liz: One of the things that is helpful with special education is that there is a group called People Services that meets on Fridays. All of the learning specialists come together with the special education teachers at Richmond middle school. Also, all of the services providers, the writing specialist, the reading specialist, are included. They really do a lot of thinking, and case bouncing off of one another. It is like a think tank, so that we can say “Hey, this is happening with so and so. Does anyone have any advice for me?” There is a professional learning community with the people service group, so that is a really helpful session to go to. The other thing that I would say about special education here is that our learning specialists are really talented education assistants. They are paired professionals, and they work with kids that have disabilities. We have a lot of certified teachers that are education assistants. We have someone who used to be the principal of Marion Cross elementary school who is an education assistant. A lot of the time, schools will hire people with only a high school education, and that makes a big difference for the kids. Students really get the best here, because we take the time to hire only highly qualified teachers that love what they do. They want to make a difference in the lives of their students. It is what makes Richmond Middle School such a special place.

Benton excelled at music in spite of the hearing loss!

Pam: Music has always played an important role in my life, and I think for him as well. I don’t think that I noticed any problems. I find it quite astounding that he is quite capable musically with the hearing loss. He always seemed just very normal, a fabulous child. I feel very blessed to be around him. He’s a great kid, and I never really noticed the hearing loss. And now, looking at his musical capabilities, it astounds me that he does have a problem with sound.
**Sarah:** Music has always come naturally to him. He has mostly just had difficulty in school, especially when it gets really loud in the classroom. Hearing instruction from the teacher is hard for him. Personally, I have a really nice low-pitched voice, so he can pick up the sounds and that kind of stuff; but sometimes, if he is facing away from me, then he has a hard time hearing me. He asks me, you know, to repeat what I said. It was a little difficult until we realized that he did have a hearing problem. We had always wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt. We also feel responsible for making him the best that he can be, so we wanted to address misbehavior if that was what was going on. The diagnosis made it extremely clear that he wasn’t just ignoring us.

**Tuck:** I think that this place is definitely an escape for some of these kids. I think that music is a creative way to apply the energy created by frustrations. Whatever your situation is, you can put that into the music. I think that is also behind why some people like punk, and then other people like pop. They want to create the happiness. Kids come in here, and they definitely feel like we are in the safe space of music. We are pretty centrally located as far as the way that the tri-town works, but we also have the rural roots. It is a nice blend.

We are a music school that is really geared around taking the interest of the individual and making that happen. We teach the traditional things like chords and scales, but rather than having it be the same repeated exercises, I ask the kids what songs that they like, and then I show them the chords that are in that song. I will also show them a set of notes that they can use to riff their guitar over those chords. I sort of ease them into the terminology as it seems cool to them. If they are interested in making their own songs, then we talk about songwriting. If they are interested in playing with
others, then I make that happen for them. They pick the songs that they would like to play together, and I kind of teach everybody their parts after listening to it on YouTube. I try to get them playing within the first fifteen minutes. It is a quick turn around.

The hearing loss has never gotten in the way of his music. We haven’t done anything as far as checking his listening to test out if he is hearing everything correctly. I am actually just finding out about it right now. I didn’t realize that Benton had hearing loss. I think that he, where a lot of kids are in a hurry to get stuff done, he shows that he can slow it down. Get it right. If it’s not right, we address it. So, I think that he is taking the longer but more methodical approach. Right now, he is getting his reading altogether, and he is working on his finger dexterity. We have done a little bit of work on how you can improvise and really make it your own; but right at the moment, he is just focused on trying to learn the songs.

Tuck: We all reach a point where we kind of figure out that people help you, but ultimately it is up to you. If you want to get ahead in the world, then you have to figure out what is best for yourself. This is especially true when you have any kind of handicap, whether it is mental, emotional, or physical. You develop strategies to make it work. It is a sink or swim situation, but it is effective.

Our Differences are What Make Us Unique.

Benton: In Colorado, I was teased all of the time just because I had two moms. That was hard and it always made me upset; but here, almost every single person knows and nobody teases me. I haven’t had one person tease me here. I have noticed that some kids actually help the other kids with learning disabilities. Nobody did that in Colorado, so I was really surprised
that you could be in a school where other students actually want to help each other to succeed. It was hard to get used to at first, but I like it.

**Paul:** He confided in me about the bullying. I told him to report it to the teachers. The public school he went to in Colorado was very hands off. He went to a couple of schools in southwest Colorado, but that particular public school was the worst. I told him that the best thing to do is report it to the teachers, rather than getting in fights and stuff like that. In the end it didn’t really make a difference. The teachers didn’t do anything—nothing. Jen had to move him to a different school district.

**Jen:** I think that it was a little bit worse in Colorado. Some of what the kids said was attacking Benton and our family. That can be hard on any parent. He is my child, my only child. He and Sarah are the two most important people in my life. I just wish that I could protect him from some of these kids. They can be so cruel. That’s why we did move a few times when we lived in Colorado, and ultimately the move to Dartmouth was a positive thing. Sarah and I could get our master degrees here, but honestly, Benton was our first concern. We would have moved for him either way. This has really been a blessing.

**Sarah:** We are fortunate that we were able to combine the continuation of our education here at Dartmouth while also providing Ben with a safer, more welcoming, environment. The Dartmouth area is really wonderful. Sometimes I wonder if the atmosphere here has played an equal role in his academic improvement as the hearing loss diagnosis. It’s hard for any child to focus on school while he, or she, is hurting. Imagine that you are scared to go to school for fear that you will be picked on again. That is no environment for any student to learn. I think that a hostile environment can be even more devastating on a child’s education than a special education.
diagnosis. It’s more challenging to fix. Even if the teacher sits down with the student that is doing the bullying, there is only so much that the school can control. Bullying also hurts the child’s self-esteem in a deeper way, so it is a deeper cut than getting a bad grade on a test because you didn’t hear something. Getting teased can also infiltrate the child’s grades as well, because it’s more difficult to focus. That is why we are so thrilled with the change in schools. Richmond Middle School has been a great environment for Benton to learn, and it has to do with more than just the accommodations for his hearing loss.

**Liz:** The kids here at Richmond Middle School are just great. They are so engaged. No day is exactly like another day, you know? You never really know what is going to come next. Yesterday was my birthday, so the kids made me a crown and a little cake, and left me messages all day. I have never worked with a better group to be quite honest. They are just really sweet kids, and they love learning, so it’s a good place to be.

**Sarah:** His scout leader, Dan, is hard of hearing as well; so, I am glad that Ben has people that he can look up to. Benton was just elected as the den leader of his Boy Scouts group. It means that he will teach classes to the younger cub scouts. He has a lot of patience, and I think that he will be really great with the kids. His scout leader wears a hearing aid, so it is a little bit more obvious. With Benton, using a hearing aid would actually worsen his condition. It would make him more sensitive to certain sounds. I am not sure if his inability to use the hearing aid works as a positive or a negative thing in terms of his psyche. He is able to blend in a little bit better with his peers due to the fact that he doesn’t have a hearing aid. Most times, people don’t realize that he even has hearing loss. But then again, it would be nice if the hearing aid was an option, only because hearing loss accommodations aren’t as easily accessible outside of the school.
environment. I mean, sure, if you talk to your employer then you are able to receive accommodations; but in everyday places like the supermarket, you have to make do. And in those situations, I think, the inability to have a hearing aid can itself be something of a handicap.

**Benton:** I do see my Boy scouts leader as a role model, but not with that. I kind of see that he has it. I haven’t really noticed. He has gotten so used to it that I don’t think that he even notices it, and the other scouts and I never mention it. It’s never been something that we really talk about, or are even aware of to be honest. It’s helpful to realize that other kids in my class have IEPs or 504 plans as well, because it is actually more normal than I used to think. I can see now that lots of people around me have something—whether its hearing loss, Autism, or ADHD—and we all manage just fine.

**Jen:** Frustration, I would say. Not really pity, but frustration. And sometimes it kind of infiltrates his academic potential. I think that he worries that he is not smart enough, because he doesn’t pick up on everything that he should. That is hard on him, because he starts comparing himself to his peers. I haven’t really noticed it as much since moving here. He has the support of the school here. That really gives him a different mentality than I saw in Colorado.
Ghosts of Ourselves. Photography by: Justine Kohr
IN DEFENSE OF MY MEMORY

AMIRA HAMOUDA

From a very young age, I have often been accused of having a bad memory. The first accusations came from my cousins, whose conception of a fun indoor game consisted of identifying people in the framed pictures that hung from the walls of my grandmother’s house. They attributed my lack of interest in such an activity to my poor memory. What started as childish taunts turned into a serious concern when my aunt, the mother of the cousins in question, shared with my parents the alarming observation that I couldn’t even answer the question, “Who is the little girl in the picture?”

In this way, my reputation for having a bad memory came about and somehow managed to survive all these years. I should warn you, however, that all the rumors and accusations you have been exposed to so far are mere allegations, and that my memory has been a victim of a great injustice. As a matter of fact, my memory was not to blame for my lack of enthusiasm for my cousins’ game; rather, the dullness and absurdity of it were the real culprits we should condemn. How was jumping around and shouting the names of family members whose identity I certainly did know an amusing thing to do? How can one engage in such a repetitive and tedious pastime without insulting one’s imagination?

Whenever my cousins left my grandmother’s house before me, the first thing I did was pluck those names from my head and walk under the wall of photographs, pretending it was the Bardo museum that my father used to tell me about. I would pause in front of a framed figure, usually a black and white one, and admire the composure of a lady’s stance or examine the perfectly trimmed moustache of the man in jebba and tarbush.
Thanks to what my childish mind thought of as a secret power, the figures soon came out of their frames, and depending on the roles I assigned to each of them, rode their horses in the battles against the Ottoman or French enemy, or just walked in their palaces that stood on the hills overlooking the sea in Carthage. They were no longer the family members I knew or heard about, but rather mysterious, brave, and handsome Beys, Bechas, Sultans, ladies, and princesses from a different era and a different world – a magic world!

To be fair to my cousins though, I feel compelled to share with you some details about my aunt, for I think she is somehow responsible for their taste in games. My aunt is actually an antiques collector and is known among family members and friends for her collection of rare family photographs that she used to lock in her old living room cabinet under the Chinese porcelain set; she did not let anyone touch them, and only showed them to close family and friends or to important visitors. These photographs, together with her husband and children, were the pride of her life. My aunt was also a firm believer in the importance of preserving history for posterity. The piece of wisdom that says that the only way to build for the future is by learning about the past was repeated so many times by my aunt that the first time I read 1984, I had the strange impression that George Orwell had plagiarized her. In my mind I read the sentence, “He who controls the past controls the future” in her voice. When I buried myself in the huge and ugly chair in my grandmother’s living room listening to family names flying around the room, the connection between my aunt and the excitement with which her children blurted out those names was established in some corner of my mind. Learning about heredity in my science class as a teenager, I finally put the label “gene transmission” on that connection; the genes responsible for my cousins’ excitement for that hideous game were transmitted to them from their mother.

Back to the false allegation raised against my memory, and to respond to my aunt’s accusation that I never answered the question, “Who
is the little girl in the picture?” I shall proceed by saying that the idea of seeing myself trapped in a frozen moment of time did not particularly please me. I had no trouble recognizing and remembering anyone; the only trouble I was faced with, whenever shown one of those pictures, was the loss of its secret power to set people, including myself, free from the pictures they were locked in. No matter the tricks my mind played, I couldn’t get myself out of that picture and into the magic world where the majestic figures from the black and white photographs dwelled. Our pictures, it seemed, had neither the mystery nor the charm that shrouded the black and white ones; we were forever stuck in that moment of time and in that piece of paper. The realization filled me with horror. My refusal to answer the question “who is the little girl in the picture?” was simply a refusal to admit that confinement. As a kid, I wondered whether my cousins’ enthusiastic answers to similar questions were an expression of an ignorant submission to that horrid reality, or an act of defiance against time.

In that sense, have you ever asked yourself about the use of pictures? Are they really means to preserve memories, or pathetic attempts to defy the passage of time? Can we even consider pictures as some form of genuine memories? I know that I never did. To me, they have always been fake, sometimes grotesque, imitations of reality. They are, therefore, unworthy of my own memories. My memories have sounds, smells, feelings, and thoughts that are interwoven into them. When I want to remember my childhood, I seldom look at my pictures as a kid; instead, I close my eyes and go back to my grandmother’s living room. Soon after, I start hearing my cousins’ voices and my grandmother’s laugh while savoring the jasmine smell sneaking from the window; I walk under the walls of the house smiling at the white and black figures. But most importantly, I recognize flecks of consciousness born in each corner of that house and marvel at the awakening of my childhood consciousness.
Deserto

Photography by: Johnathan James Recor
I saw him in a restaurant yesterday
but he didn’t recognise me, his shaved head
turning off to think.
When we lived together, ten years ago,
we always made eyes, made love,
spent days in bed.
I’m glad he didn’t recognise me.
I didn’t want to piece the years between
from his puzzled face:
drugs, men, women, medication.
Once precious, now his face hangs,
worn out like last year’s fashion –
so many men wanted to be with him,
and what pride in having him.
As he sits, the glint
of his dark arm still has the motion
of the old embrace, which I don’t miss
because I feel it on my skin
sometimes when I think of him.
He was the best of all my days.

Translated into English by Andrew Fentham
THE HOUSE OF MIRTH

FOR LUKE, MY TIGER

JENNIFER C. CORMACK

This is the House of Mirth.

This is the boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This the waiting time
of the eager boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

These are the days
that mark the time
of the hope-filled boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the night
that crowns the day
drumming the time
of the patient boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the owl
that flies in the night
but sleeps by day
roosting the time
of the playful boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the lowcountry oak
where the owl perches
yearning to feed in the night
until the glow of day
sweeps the time
of the handsome boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

These are the old rice fields
not far from the old live oak
where the owl hides
released by the silent night
to forage away from the day
flooded by time.
of the college boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the graceful girl on the hillside bench
overlooking the old rice fields
near the Spanish moss that hangs in the oak
of the monogamous owl
that lives for the night
concealed by the day
to bide the time
of the imaginative boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the garden
where the pretty girl rests on the weathered bench
close to the lush rice fields
that sing to the coastal oak
whose ghostly owl
lurks through the night
of the locked-out day
to measure the time
of the smitten boy
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the colorful duck
that breeds in the garden
where the clever girl rises from the bench
to search the rice fields
for the centennial oak
where the nocturnal owl
plays in the night
quarantined by day
with the sped-up time
of the boy turned man
that dances in the House of Mirth.

This is the blackwater river
where the wood duck migrates
to live and nest near the verdurous garden
hidden from the grownup girl in front of the bench
as she leaves the rice fields
down the lowcountry trail to the sturdy oak
whose secret owl
with low-light vision calls in the night
since it’s stricken by day
to countdown the time
of the happy boy-man
that dances in the House of Mirth.
FROM THE GOOD DEATH TO THE GOOD LIFE: AMERICAN SENSIBILITIES ABOUT DEATH AS SEEN THROUGH OBITUARIES

JUDITH ENDRIZAL LOURAS

Although the portrayals of individuals provided by newspaper obituaries are disconnected from biological death and subsequent post-mortem rituals, these memorializations provide not only announcements of people’s deaths and narratives of their lives but also insights into the times in which they lived. Obituaries comprise one path to understanding the cosmology of the denial of death that peaked in America during the twentieth century. In the 1800s a Good Death signaled the existence of a proper and pious life and allowed for a smooth transition into the afterlife. The emphasis on dying and death as illustrated in the rhetoric, imagery, and structure of obituaries reflected this nineteenth-century concern with the transcendent soul and a mission to edify the community through the narrative of the Good Death. The majority of Americans possessed little denial about physical death because they had the promise of spiritual continuance. Twentieth-century America, however, experienced a shift away from such traditions, and, as a consequence, details and stories of the Good Life nudged the notion of death to the margins of the obituary.

An obituary provides a representation or literary image of a once-living individual and creates an ambiguous site of “paradoxical presence and absence” (Weber 21). More recent obituaries that emphasize the Good Life accentuate this paradox by fashioning portrayals of individuals in the midst of life. By contrast, obituaries from the nineteenth century presented more direct representations that highlighted the Good Death and an absence of the known person. This allowed the reader to “preserve
the social presence of the dead” by substituting an indirect representation by means of written description for the “direct gaze” upon a corpse (Weber 48). As a representation the obituary functions as an object, enabling readers to scrutinize the manner of death and/or the manner of life presented.

On a broader scale, obituaries have reflected and continue to communicate the ethos of a particular time in history. For more than two hundred years American newspapers have provided these commemorations of citizens that, in turn, have projected prevailing cultural values (Hume 12). Classifying information, both offered as well as omitted, on the obituary page frame these moral standards within specific historical moments. Names and occupations hint at social inclusion or exclusion; the cause of death as well as reports of funeral arrangements may elucidate attitudes about death; personal attributes and virtues often indicate current American values (Hume 23). As publishers of obituaries, conventional newspapers have always been obliged to present this public service in a manner that appeals to cultural understandings and mores of the majority of Americans (Hume 19), thereby situating a representation of an individual life and death into the broader realm of its expanded citizenry. In this way, the written memorialization ideally offers both the significant others of the deceased as well as unknown others the possibility of solace and/or reflection by creating a nexus where family and community can view the reality of death as both a singular event and a universal circumstance. These two perspectives, which consist of a personal account generally focused on either a Good Death or a Good Life along with an appeal for consideration of this death and/or life by the community at large, reflect the dual purpose inherent in the newspaper obituary.

The importance of a Good Death and of *ars moriendi* (the art of dying) to nineteenth-century Americans came through clearly in the obituaries of the time. As important as qualities and deeds that exemplified the deceased throughout life, the time immediately preceding death held
meaning for the dying and the survivors. Depictions of deathbed moments that emphasized Christian beliefs and a readiness to leave the mortal world provided “edifying scenes of saintly death” for the community (Farrell 189). Accessible to all, a Good Death spoke to attitudes about the meaning of life and provided a suitable coda (Faust 7-8). Most importantly, when abided by, the code of *ars moriendi* enabled a decedent’s family the opportunity to assess the state of their loved one’s soul, informing them of their chances of a reunion in Heaven (Faust 10).

If family could not attend the death of their loved one, they hoped for a detailed condolence letter that would offer them a virtual sense of the hour of death. In particular, families wanted to know that the deceased recognized his or her fate, demonstrated a willingness to accept it, expressed a belief in God and personal salvation, and forwarded personal messages to those who normally would have been in attendance during those final moments (Faust 17). Early obituaries often mimicked the style and substance found in these condolence letters (Faust 30). In describing the Good Death, condolence letters and, by extension, early obituaries “affirmed a set of assumptions about death’s meaning that established the foundations for the mourning that followed” (Faust 144).

The *Rutland Herald*, a small city newspaper in Vermont, published the obituary news of General George Washington on January 6, 1800. Beneath Washington’s name the newspaper venerates him as “Covered with glory, and rich in the affections of the American people.” The obituary itself comes with a preface announcing the “deficiency of language” to do “justice to the lustre and fame of the deceased!” as well as a poem exalting him and placing him in the company of other veterans. With the American Revolution still in the recent past, Washington’s service as a soldier and political leader elevates him to the “god-like” status referenced more than once in the poem. Despite the elevated rhetoric, additional information reinforces the fact that Washington was a mortal, destined to die. Not only
does the newspaper offer a significant representation of the first president in life but most vividly in death. The Rutland Herald includes a missive very much like a condolence letter, allowing the public a glimpse of the deathbed scene.

I mention to you the truly melancholy event of the death of our WASHINGTON. — He made his exit last night, between the hours of 11 and 12 after a short but painful illness of 23 hours. The disorder of which he died is by some called the Crupe, by others an Inflammatory Quinsey, a disorder lately so mortal among children in this place and I believe not until this year known to attack persons at the age of maturity. (Rutland Herald, 6 January 1800)

The letter continues with a call for “all to close our houses, and act as we should do if one of our family had departed.” It concludes with the certainty that he died a Good Death, reassuring that “[h]e died perfectly in his senses and … perfectly resigned” with “no fear of death” and with “affairs … in good order…”

The fundamental values of the time accompanied by a call to grieve surfaced regardless of whether the decedent was a national icon or a local figure. Two months following George Washington’s obituary, the Rutland Herald published that of a prominent local lawyer, Samuel Williams. While not as lengthy or elaborate as Washington’s, the representation of Williams’ life and death shares similarities in the personal qualities it praises and inclusion of the details of his demise. The obituary underscores his outstanding character in the community and at home. The “steady patriotism and uncorrupted integrity” that defined his “public conduct” as well as Williams’ role as an “affectionate husband,” “tender parent,” and “warm and faithful friend” could prove edifying to readers. However, just as with Washington’s obituary, Williams’ comes with a supplementary letter from the attending doctor explicitly recounting the injuries which killed him. The Rutland Herald printed, “He has a puncture made in his body by a pine knot of more than an inch in diameter. It entered at the right side of the
anus near the rectum.” After further description, the obituary describes the quality of his pulse, his “cadaverous” odor, and the appearance of purple discolorations upon his skin. Amidst the report of physical suffering, the reader receives assurance that “he retained his reason and speech to the last, and neither sighed nor groaned.” This, like many early nineteenth-century obituaries, presents a level of authenticity by juxtaposing spectacularly overstated moral qualities with vivid depictions of death in the context of *ars moriendi*.

As the nineteenth century progressed, obituaries reflected the shifting cultural mores. Influenced in part by the second Great Awakening of the 1830s, obituaries continued to emphasize the Protestant principles that included sentimental emotion and a purity of heart but also validated interest in home and hearth as a sign of veneration (Green 163). The years surrounding the Civil War, for example, produced more inclusive obituaries, presenting lives and deaths previously disregarded by newspapers and, likewise, describing them with qualities more realistically achievable to the average American (Hume 56).

The use of flowery language and mourning poetry continued for both national and local personages. As Walt Whitman’s poems spoke to America’s sorrow following President Lincoln’s assassination (Faust 159), local papers also published obituaries either partially or fully in verse. Such a mourning poem appeared in the *Rutland Daily Herald* on January 4, 1864, in response to the death of Joseph P. Pingrey.

Lines composed on the death of Joseph P. Pingrey, who was killed by the cars near Gassett’s Station, Dec. 5, 1863, aged 23 years and 11 months.

Farewell, dearest Joseph, thoug’rt gone to thy rest,
We miss thee wherever we roam.
But we hope we shall meet in the land of the blest,
In yonder bright heavenly home.

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1 “Hush’d Be the Camps To-Day,” “Oh Captain! My Captain,” & “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d”
Thou wast called unexpected: though often we feared
That you thus wouldst be taken away;
Thy once manly form to us all so endeared,
Lies heavy and lifeless as clay.

Few and short were the hours that had glided away,
Since we thy bright face did behold,
All radiant with smiles like the sun’s genial ray —
But alas: it is now dull and cold.

Thy welcome approach nevermore shall we hear —
Thy loss, O how deeply we feel!
Our sorrowing hearts, which thy late voice could
cheer, —
The Savior alone can now heal.

’Tis hard thus to part with the young and the fair,
To lay thee away in the tomb.
And to return to our home and remember that there,
We may never expect thee to come.

We shall miss thee dear brother, surrounding our
hearth,
At morning, at noon, and at even;
But though we are parted so sadly on earth,
May we joyfully meet thee in heaven.
(Rutland Daily Herald, 4 January 1864)

Prefaced only by a few pertinent facts, the commemoration itself explicitly addresses the brevity of life and the attending grief for family in the context of an essential Christian faith. Pingrey’s sudden death made ars moriendi an impossibility, a scenario that his family “often feared.” Although circumstances denied the young man the opportunity to proclaim his acceptance of his mortal fate, his love of God, and belief in his salvation, the poem in no way dismisses or obscures death. Instead, this consolation literature presents an emotional reaction that amplifies the significance of life’s end (Douglas 201). As these examples illustrate, nineteenth-century Americans did not shy away from discussing grief and death openly in the obituary pages. However, during the next century these same pages demonstrated the “reversal of death” that Philippe Ariès describes. The clear
indications that the dying “owned” his or her own death and that survivors could openly grieve gradually evaporated from obituaries (136).

Changes to the care of the dying and dead in the early years of the twentieth century resulted from the “institutional outsourcing of death,” which included a new and growing medicalization of society and the subsequent transition of moribund and deceased individuals from the home to the hospital and the funeral home (Weber 74). As a result, medical facilities and the predominantly male-operated funeral industry assumed care and control of these people from the hands of primarily female caregivers and “layers-out.” If, as David Field points out in “Making Sense of Difference—Death, Gender and Ethnicity,” women perform a central function in the “process of making sense of death,” both practically as caregivers and psychologically by effectively providing emotional space for grieving, then shifting this paradigm places the care of the dying and dead into primarily male-dominated settings (8). From the end of the nineteenth century and into the next, this gradual de-feminization of dying situated it in both a patriarchal and an industrial context. Over time, this “reversal of death” with its exchange of a familiar and domestic setting for a clinical and controlled one, increasingly denied the terminally ill personal agency in his or her own death while similarly denying the survivors crucial emotional space and time to grieve (Ariès 136).

The obituaries of the mid-decades of the twentieth century illustrate this sense of denial. Americans have become so acclimated to the substance and style of post-nineteenth-century obituaries that their predecessors come across to our modern sensibilities as strikingly gratuitous and morbid in their “gruesome descriptions of death scenes” (Johnson 10). Much can be inferred from this tremendous discrepancy when we regard obituaries as screens that filter facts, narratives, and values of the deceased within their own temporal and cultural contexts (Hume 16). The deathbed scene all but disappeared by the early part of the twentieth century,
and obituary writers then (as well as most today) omit the cause of death “unless there’s a tale to tell” (Johnson 33-34). Desolate and dreary death notices, occupied by bland lists of job histories and survivors, became the norm in American newspapers. Occasionally, however, commemorations for famous or distinguished Americans would include an abbreviated version of the deathbed scene. For instance, Judy Garland’s June 23, 1969, obituary in the *New York Times* mentioned that the troubled star’s husband found her body in the bathroom. The inclusion of this fact (while not exactly a deathbed scene) delivered a veiled judgment about Garland’s lifestyle and life. In contrast, a year earlier on June 2, 1968, the *New York Times* reported on Hellen Keller’s death, prefacing the chronology of her life with a bedside quote from her companion Mrs. Winifred Corbally. “She drifted off in her sleep. … She died gently.” Along with the account of Keller’s Good Life came a reassurance that she also experienced a Good Death.

Whether recognizing a renowned figure or an average American, newspapers historically presented a notice of funeral arrangements, the place of birth, and nearest survivors. Typically, inclusion of a more detailed chronology of a decedent’s life—one that highlighted human qualities such as career, accomplishments, and personal characteristics — corresponded to that person’s prominence in the community (Green 227). Therefore, a common citizen’s austere mid-twentieth-century obituary, devoid of mention of a Good Death, may have included implications of a Good Life but often stopped short. On November 5, 1969, the *Rutland Daily Herald* printed Norris M. Barton’s obituary. After reporting the basics of where his life started and where it ended, it teased the reader with a singular sentence: “He was known as ‘Bicycle Pete’ due to his traveling by bicycle to many parts of the country as a self-employed artist.” No further information concerning his life is given. This obituary had the potential of inspiring readers in the community with a commemoration of Barton’s life.
instead of offering a mere death notice.

These obituaries, marked by their dearth of information, provided unedifying representations of individuals in life and in death. Considered in Freudian terms, the tangible “lack” obvious in these mid-century death notices could be conceived as a manifestation of widespread psychological repression or denial resulting from fear of death. Marilyn Johnson asserts that perhaps “all those wars” contributed to this “gray,” “dusty,” and “depressing” period of obituary reporting (10). This makes sense when considered in conjunction with the increased quality of life many Americans enjoyed due to scientific and commercial innovations of the time. With so much to live for, who would want to dwell on death?

Meaningful commemorations eventually did resurface, however. The 1980s signaled the onset of the “Golden Age of the Obituary” (Johnson 10) which has continued into the present. New genres of obituaries emerged. Just as the originals of the nineteenth century consisted of a variety of ways to represent facts and feelings surrounding an individual’s death and life, the modern version, too, is a hybrid obituary. Instead of incorporating doctors’ letters and/or poems in a condolence letter style, the hybrid of today combines basic information in a chronology with short story or vignette form. These narratives inject substance and authenticity to the celebrity remembrance as well as celebrate the Good Life of average citizens. They strive to present the “extraordinary in the ordinary person” (Johnson 11). The basis for these obituaries on either end of the historical spectrum plays on the human desire for knowledge and meaning.

In addition to knowledge and meaning, Americans desired entertainment. With increasing access to more news and entertainment sources beginning in the 1980s, the average citizen learned to expect more. Obituaries reflected these values and transitioned into an art form for the masses. Marilyn Johnson traces the origins of this trend to a 1982 edition of the Philadelphia Daily News. The paper’s obituary editor Jim Nicholson
selected ordinary citizens and published representations of their otherwise average lives through “shards of detail and glimmering quotes,” allowing them to become in death “characters of consequence” (Johnson 90). These obituaries, however, served a broader purpose than inspiring readers with snapshots of a Good Life or illuminating the universal nature of individuality. They functioned as stories, elevating the obituary to the “level of folk art” (Johnson 97).

The modern obituary with its shift toward a hybrid art form and source of entertainment also adjusted its content with the times. Those who write obituaries chronicle events in a decedent’s life that memorialize and protect a cultural ideal. *The New York Times* elucidated this mis-

Deepa K. Pakkala’s “Portrait” exemplifies this anti-obituary quality that relies on mundane detail to convey a poignant message.

Deepa K. Pakkala was a perfectionist. She went to work early and returned late to her home in Stew-

The morning of the attack, she was at her desk before she had to be. Her husband, Sampath, whom she met in Bangalore, the technology center of India, realized that her drive was an essential part of her, but he often tried to persuade her to scale back, if just a little. He said he would always ask her to go in a little later. “She would say that ‘if I do that, I would have to leave my job.’”

Ms. Pakkala, 31, did slow down for the birth of their first child, Trisha, last January on the couple’s ninth anniversary. She took two months off, but then it was back to work. “She didn’t want to stay at home and do
nothing," Mr. Pakkala said. “She wanted to contribute to
the family.” (New York Times, 4 November 2001)

Prior to September 11, newspapers such as the Philadelphia Daily
News had already utilized a version of this new form for local obituaries;
however, the appropriation and refinement of it in the New York Times il-
lustrated how an internationally recognized newspaper had concurrently
maintained its expected standards and preserved its origins as a local paper
(Johnson 62). The number of Americans killed in the attacks, along with
New York’s and the nation’s sense of helplessness following the tragedy,
created the impetus behind “Portraits of Grief.” This new style of com-
memoration served the purpose of nineteenth-century memorial poetry
without the pathos. In fact, the New York Times’ tributes almost solely
represented images of life. Perhaps because the circumstances disallowed
a Good Death, death was only tangentially referenced in these remem-
brances. The purpose of the writing was to display average life with all
its banalities and routines and to reassure the world that this kind of life,
accessible to all, constitutes the Good Life.

Due to the inescapable nature of death and death’s inextricable
link to life, the subject of any obituary, whether represented explicitly by
ars moriendi or ars vivendi (the art of living), comes through in a newspaper’s
memorialization in relation to both. From the American obituary’s begin-
nings in the newspapers of the nineteenth century through its drab slog
of denial in the mid-1900s until its present day Golden Era, it has offered
readers information, solace, entertainment, and/or edification depending
on the needs and values of society during its time. Just as obituaries con-
nect death with life, they also marry the individual with his or her commu-
nity. Today’s popularity and celebration of obituaries as an art form chal-
lenges the notion that Americans still suffer the pervasive sense of denial
about death that existed in the mid-twentieth century. Examined broadly
as indicators of highly regarded cultural ideals, obituaries today reflect the
fundamental value of the individual and, more specifically, the presence of a Good Life inherent in each.

Works Cited


GEMSTONE DAY

JENNIFER C. CORMACK

Clouds spread the sapphire sky from east to west—
  billows of puffy white opulence

reflect noonday brilliance.

Cool breezes glide beneath the azure dome,
rustle treetops green.

Hovering in the expanse,
  I lap nectar from the day,
  like a sky-jewel hummingbird darting through scattered opalescent hues.

Cloud bases accumulate, absorb,
  lavish undertones of moonstone gray.

Raindrops scatter the sidewalk.
People scurry.
Trees reach.
Limbs lengthen.
Leaves catch—
pluvial refreshment.

Diamond sparkled sunlight drips bright and clear, Illuminates airy clouds

Free to play after the storm—
children of the rain dance.

The day washed clean, glints with color:
verdant lawns, ruby-throated hummingbirds,

dancing beneath soft sapphire skies.

Tree shadows decorate grass, like woodblock prints—
delicate in detail.

Clouds rise over Green Mountains—
billows of wonderment, suspended, puffed out,
in a dazzling parade of glory.
Mickey Marilyn - Dublin, Ireland. Photography by: Amy Millios
It is impossible to speak of the history of the Catholic Church since 1950, particularly the captivating pontificate of Pope Francis, without turning to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Vatican II was a religious event of unequaled scale and scope in the twentieth century. The Council was a global event par excellence, drawing 2,500 participating Catholic prelates and hundreds of theologians, journalists and ecumenical observers from around the globe for annual sessions each fall for four years. This manifestation of Catholicism’s global reach occurred at precisely the moment when ‘globalization’ was accorded a new standing in human consciousness due to both the maturation of global mass communication technologies and the global scale exhibited by the traumas and upheavals of the mid-twentieth century. The horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, the global-scale destruction threatened in the Cold War’s nuclear arms race, and the process of decolonization that was advancing through the developing world all weighed heavily on the mid-century mind. The Catholic Church was surely one of the few entities with the importance and the reach to comment upon and potentially shape in a meaningful way humanity’s response to the most pressing global concerns of the era.

Vatican II was an ecclesial affair, but truly its gaze ventured well beyond the boundaries of church life and that gaze was returned in the form of intense attention from both the Catholic and non-Catholic worlds. While there were many agendas at the Council, some related to ad intra
concerns regarding the liturgy, theology, and governance of the Church and others giving primacy to *ad extra* matters of ecumenism, sociopolitical dangers, and the global economic divide, there is surely a kernel of truth to E.E.Y. Hales’s idealistic comment that, as the Council’s began, the world beyond the Church “looked afresh to Rome for light on how to live, and how to act in accordance with justice…and how to rebuild peace.”¹ In his opening speech to the Council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII defined its purpose thusly: “Our task is…to give ourselves eagerly and without fear to the task that the present age demands of us…Christians and Catholics of apostolic spirit all the world over expect a leap forwards in doctrinal insight and the education of consciences in ever greater fidelity to authentic teaching.”² The renewal of Christianity and the Church’s reckoning with what John XXIII called “a new order of human relationships,” which, he predicted, would “bring [the world] to the realization of still higher and undreamed of expectations,” were the twin objectives of the Second Vatican Council, often summarized with the Italian term aggiornamento.³

The journey to that opening session of Vatican II commands a history of its own, but only a brief sketch is possible here. Ecumenical councils played a large role in Church history, but at the time John XXIII convoked Vatican II that there had been but three since the mid-sixteenth century. The future Pope Paul VI, Giovanni Batista Montini, remarked to a fellow cleric after Pope John’s announcement, “This holy old boy doesn’t seem to realize what a hornet’s nest he is stirring up.”⁴ This ‘hornet’s nest’ concerned competing intellectual streams within the Church and within the episcopate concerning how Catholicism was to engage with modern cultural, political, economic, and social life. Pope Pius IX had rejected the

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid. 324
necessity of Catholicism’s reconciliation with modern civilization in 1864’s *Syllabus of Errors* and had died a ‘prisoner of the Vatican’ in 1878 following the absorption of the Papal States into unified Italy, an event which marked the end of the Church as a temporal state power and, some thought, as a force in human affairs. Subsequent papacies had created the conditions that would soften Pius IX’s antimodern intransigence and ignited movements within Catholic intellectual life seeking to connect Catholicism’s theological and intellectual patrimony with modern claims. Efforts to adapt ancient teachings and settled doctrine to modern methods and epistemological criteria, known in different periods as modernism or ‘new theology’ led to flashpoints during the papacies of Popes Pius X (1903-1914) and Pius XII (1939-1958), which harkened back to Pius IX’s *Syllabus*. John XXIII had become convinced that a Council was required to overcome these difficulties and adequately reframe Catholicism’s engagement with modernity.

Vatican II produced constitutions, declarations, and decrees with far-reaching impact. Few aspects of Church life or theology were untouched, including the liturgy, the interplay between sacred Scripture and Tradition, governance in the Church, relations with Judaism, and, quite notably, a dramatic elaboration of the Church’s teaching on religious freedom. But even next to these major developments, it is the final document approved on the Council’s final day in December 1965, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, or *Gaudium et Spes*, that has been, in retrospect, most revelatory of Vatican II’s meaning. The future Pope Benedict XVI, conciliar theologian Joseph Ratzinger, observed that *Gaudium et Spes* was both the most difficult and most successful of all the texts of Vatican II. He wrote, “It has come…to be increasingly regarded as the true legacy in which, after three years of fermentation, the real intention of the Council seems to have been incorporated.”

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the clearest expression of the Council Fathers’ intuition, in light of Pope John’s speech of October 11, 1962, to take up the emancipatory project of modernity while identifying—in light of Christianity’s established emancipatory vision—the limits of modernity’s ‘secular soteriology.’ That is, how it would bring about the liberation of man, as man.⁶ By taking up the pragmatic, political, economic, and social tasks facing modern man, Gaudium et Spes is infused by the desire to both pastorally direct the lives of Christians towards the building up of human society and to dialogue with all who share the Church’s concern for the good of the entire human family.⁷

A Brief Historical and Theological Outline of Gaudium et Spes

The schema which would become Gaudium et Spes had its origins during Vatican II’s tumultuous first session in fall of 1962. That session featured a protracted effort on the part of the assembled prelates from beyond Rome to surmount the cautious agenda set forth by the Preparatory Commissions dominated by Rome-based prelates. Cardinal Montini of Milan, the future Pope Paul VI, penned a letter to Pope John during the Council’s first session that outlined the necessity for the Council to deal with the Church’s relationships to other human groups, as opposed to its remaining an exclusively ecclesial affair. These documents, he envisaged, would have to be written in a different style than the statements of anathema or obligations that characterized previous conciliar writings.⁸ As Ratzinger summarized in his later essay on Gaudium et Spes, there had been “no basic statement of the relationship that should exist between the Church and the world that had come into existence after 1789,” and the

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⁷ Gaudium et Spes § 3, see Vatican Council, Vatican II: The Essential Texts, ed. Norman Tanner S.J. (New York: Image, 2012). All subsequent Gaudium et Spes references will be given as ‘GS’ with section number.

⁸ Hebblethwaite, Pope John XXIII, 442-3.
text “represents, on the part of the Church, an attempt at an official reconciliations with the new era inaugurated [by the French Revolution].”

In other words, the task that the Council Fathers attempted with *Gaudium et Spes* was novel, though it is important to remember that it built upon the tradition of Catholic social teaching inaugurated by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. This new current of papal commentary on modern economic and social life was augmented by all of Leo’s successors, including John XXIII himself in his lauded social encyclicals of the early 1960s, *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem en Terris* (1963). *Gaudium et Spes* also drew upon theological currents that had emerged within lower levels of the Church, particularly in France, following the ‘modernist crisis’ of the early twentieth century. That crisis had prompted Pope Pius X’s condemnation of modernism as the “synthesis of all heresies” in the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*. Five notable theological elements of *Gaudium et Spes* include its treatment of the historicity and relationality of the Church, its invitation to dialogue with secular modernity without prejudgment, its focus on kenosis, the elaboration on the ‘signs of the times,’ and its fundamentally optimistic posture.

**Historicity and Relationality**

Together with *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et Spes* helped to establish a new hermeneutic for thinking about the Church. Against the excessive emphasis on the hierarchical constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* brought an ecclesial horizontality back into view: the notion of the Church as the ‘people of God.’ This relational view complimented and moderated the visible hierarchical structure of the Church, which, while indispensable, is not its totality. Furthermore, the hermeneutic that viewed the Church as the ‘perfect society’ that lived outside of human history was also exhausted. Instead, *Lumen*
Gentium and Gaudium et Spes are documents which historicize the Church, rhetorically and theologically inserting the ‘People of God’ into human history as a pilgrim Church that is never fully at its destination on this side of heaven. The anthropological insight of being human is to be social (i.e. relational), which clearly reflects engagement with modern philosophy such as that of Martin Buber, which requires the rejection of a defensive withdrawal from the world and obliges the Christian to work within history in loving service to humanity. In Gaudium et Spes 43, the Council Fathers rejected explicitly the dualism that separates action for justice from spirituality.

Invitation to Dialogue with Secular Modernity

Another novel trait of Gaudium et Spes was its very genre and its dialogic posture. The document represented a move away from what had been the only two kinds of doctrinal pronouncements in Church history – a creed of obligation or an anathema of negation. In Gaudium et Spes, the relationship between the Church and the world is cast as a sort of colloquium, a mutual search for solutions. Section 44 even commends the help that the Church receives from modernity; noting that, as a visible social structure, the Church benefits from the development of human life in modern society. It is clear that in this document, the Church intends to begin a conversation with “the World,” which is understood to mean the secular spirit of the modern era and the whole scientific and technical reality found within it, without prejudgment and with a spirit of cooperation. Implicit in this dialogic posture is a recognition of the legitimate autonomy of the secular sphere. Even if—as Ratzinger observed both in early commentaries and decades later—the contra-distinguishing of ‘the

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10 Hanvey S.J., Vatican II: For the Life of the World, 45-68.
11 GS § 43
12 GS § 44
Church’ and ‘the World’ for the purposes of having dialogue is problematic and indicative of a subliminal ‘ghetto mentality,’ this recognition of the secular sphere’s legitimate autonomy frees those who speak for the Church from any accusation of working for the restoration of the ancien régime. Gaudium et Spes is notably anthropocentric because of this recognition of secular autonomy; far from starting conversation with this world through a theological door (i.e. dialoguing with those who already are ‘fearers of God’), the Council has now legitimized the anthropological door, with concern for man’s development as man being the an authorized basis for dialogue with other possible humanisms that do not share Christianity’s theological premises.

Kenosis

The theological concept of kenosis refers to self-emptying, or the power that is realized only from inverting power, through meekness, poverty, and humility. Kenosis is borne of an elaboration of Christianity’s core tenet that salvation was gained not through any sort of worldly triumph, but rather through Christ’s ultimate surrender and humiliating death. Gaudium et Spes calls for the Church’s motives when engaging the modern world to flow from kenosis rather than self-interest or self-defense. Kenosis transforms our understanding of power with real implications for how the Church aligns itself within society’s structures. In Gaudium et Spes 76, the Council Fathers noted that the Church “does not put its hope in privilege tendered by civil authority, and it will even renounce its exercise of some rights which it has lawfully acquired where it has decided that their exercise casts doubt on the sincerity of its witness…” Patriarch Maximos Saigh of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church was surely anticipating the elevation of kenosis in the life and mind of the Church when he observed


14 GS § 76
from the Council floor that, “Modern man is scandalized by a mediocre, selfish Christianity that defends its own interests.”

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**Elaboration on the ‘Signs of the Times’**

Perhaps the best known passage of *Gaudium et Spes* appears in the Introduction: “The Church has the duty in every age of examining the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” But, Ratzinger posed an incisive question asking how the Church, which holds that events and a Person of the past were indeed decisive for humanity, can affirm that fundamental claim and also be the Church of the present. The orientation towards the future that characterizes the modern age presents a problem for the proclamation of a faith: will the Church not confirm its dismissal to the past by affirming, as it must, that the past was the decisive time?

The answer the Council Fathers gave – the obligation to *discern* the signs of the times – served to replace a purely chronological connection to a decisive past with a ‘Kairological’ connection to the current age. Reading the ‘signs of the times’ is not code for surrender to the momentary spirit of any age but rather is the acknowledgement that, in addition to possessing the chronological past in Jesus’s life and victory over death, the Church also possesses the present moment, the Kairos, “in which it must interpret and accomplish the work of the Lord as present.” As Pope John XXII strongly signaled the opening address to the Council, the contemporary age is also a part of salvation history and the Church, while always a prophetic presence, cannot limit itself to responding to the modern world as a ‘prophet of doom.’

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16 GS § 4
18 Ibid, 116-117.
Perhaps the most common observation about *Gaudium et Spes* concerns its fundamental optimism. *Gaudium et Spes* has attracted much attention as a crowning statement for what had been for decades a growing reconciliation between the Church and the forces that have shaped the modern world. Constituent of this optimism is the clear invitation found in *Gaudium et Spes* for authentic dialogue and the absence of immediate judgment of most modern developments. As Ratzinger put it, the document breathes with an “astonishing optimism” which holds that “nothing [is] impossible if the Church and humankind work together.”

Any association of the Church with a defensive or world-rejecting mindset is surely undone with passages such as paragraph 34, speaking on the value of human activity: “Far from thinking, then, that the achievements of human enterprise and ability are in opposition to the power of God, Christians are of the view that the successes of the human race are a sign of God’s greatness and…marvelous design.” In section 73, the document’s authors explicitly bless the modern, liberating developments in political life, praising the expansion of the rights to free assembly, expression of opinion, and the protections extended to members of religious minority groups all over the world.

The optimism of *Gaudium et Spes* is frequently at root in the ongoing debate about the document. In the polarized key that governs much of the contemporary discourse on the Church, this debate is often cast as the adjudication between advocates for a blanket affirmation of the present and those who would impose on the Church an exaggerated, pessimistic theology of sin. Indeed, some prominent conciliar theologians who had a hand in the drafting of *Gaudium et Spes* later questioned whether the pervasive optimistic valence of the Pastoral Constitution obscured other critical

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20 GS § 34
21 GS § 73
tenets of a properly Catholic worldview. Pelagianism, or the belief that human nature was untainted by original sin, was a critical controversy in the early Church. The possibility of a Pelagian reading of *Gaudium et Spes* is at the heart of Ratzinger’s observation that, “The text…prompted the question of why the reasonable and perfectly free human was suddenly burdened with the story of Christ.”\(^2\)\(^2\) Furthermore, Ratzinger wrote, “Here the theologically justifiable will to optimism…has been misinterpreted and has led to anodyne formulas which…deceive [Man] about the gravity of his situation.”\(^2\)\(^3\)

The ‘will to optimism’ originated in, among other places, Pope John XXIII’s remarkable opening address to the Council in 1962, but obvious consequences can result when this optimism obscures Christianity’s fundamental notions of human sin and the necessity of redemption. Locating God’s kingdom not above us but ahead of us—at some future point towards which we are rushing—can be wounding to the sort of faith and praxis that sustains religion.\(^2\)\(^4\) The natural and supernatural become conflated and old notions of sin’s crippling character are laid aside. For all the good intended by the establishment of an anthropological rather than a theological baseline for Catholicism’s dialogue with modernity in *Gaudium et Spes*, it might easily come at the cost of supplanting the centrality of the Pascal Mystery. That is, the event of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection held by Catholics and other Christians as the redemptive purpose for which God came to earth, which is critical for Catholicism’s coherence and purpose. For this reason, *Gaudium et Spes* resides near the center of the debate concerning what many note as the diminishment of Catholicism’s vitality in the decades following Vatican II.

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\(^2\)\(^3\) Ibid. 138

Gaudium et Spes After Fifty Years

In the opening keynote of a March 2015 conference on Gaudium et Spes in St. Paul, Minn., Vatican II scholar Massimo Faggioli set in opposition the fortunes of the Pastoral Constitution and the pontificates of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Said Faggioli, “It is clear that the pontificate of Pope Francis has brought about a startling reversal of fortunes for the legacy of Vatican II and Gaudium et Spes.” Faggioli cast Gaudium et Spes as mistreated, its legacy in jeopardy for decades following Vatican II. Faggioli attributed this to the pejorative conflation of Vatican II with ‘the 60s’ on the part of Catholic conservatives, particularly in the United States. According to the ‘conservative’ critique of Gaudium et Spes, the document subordinated Catholic theology to the prevailing materialistic humanism of the mid-twentieth century and thus represented the beginning of the end for the old moral order and pure Catholic identity.

It must be noted that this interpretation by Faggioli is questionable and polemical, as Karol Wojtyla, and later John Paul II, played a large role at Vatican II in the development of Gaudium et Spes. They both praised and cited it often in his papal pronouncements and writings. Ratzinger’s theological and pastoral career placed him in positions, particularly as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in which he confronted wild interpretations of Vatican II and Gaudium et Spes that the Council Fathers had not foreseen. He did consider Gaudium et Spes to be the weakest of Vatican II’s four constitution documents, but his judgement on the document has never been wholly negative. There can be no questioning Ratzinger’s agreement with the need for a revision of the Church’s relationship with the modern world at the time of the Council.


In Faggioli’s address, he sketched out a ‘hermeneutic of acknowledgement’ that *Gaudium et Spes* helped to introduce. This hermeneutic speaks to the new reality that the Church in the modern world must speak with and about what is ‘out there.’ This can only be interpreted as a correction to an exaggerated dualism that had been operative within the Church since the eighteenth century which suggested that the Church should always be suspicious of the world. Propositions flowing from a hermeneutic of acknowledgement include a recognition of the ‘signs of the times’ must take its place alongside the scholastic notion of timeless truths if the modern proclamation of the faith is to be credible. It does not eradicate the rightful place of those timeless truths accessed by Doctors of the Church, such as Thomas Aquinas, but it affirms that these truths might always be elaborated more perfectly as salvation history marches on. Acknowledgement also means that the historicization of the Church is a necessity and the rhetoric of resentment towards the modern world must be supplanted. Finally, Faggioli holds that the hermeneutic of acknowledgement changes the methods of Catholic theology; after *Gaudium et Spes*, theology and the magisterium must account for the present cultural horizon in testing the validity of its claims, accept that moments of rupture and communicative dissent within the Church are unavoidable in the modern age, recognize the global responsibility of the Church for the world and humankind, and acknowledge modernity as the ‘runaway son’ of Christianity.

Faggioli astutely noted that it is precisely the relationship of the Church with ‘the world’ that is the core issue behind the major rift in the interpretation of Vatican II. Thus, the placement of *Gaudium et Spes* at the center of the debate over Vatican II’s meaning and reception is correct and was prefigured by the competing intellectual steams that were evident even before the Council. *Gaudium et Spes*, the landmark document that it was, is not the last word. That said, Ratzinger poses what is perhaps the

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key question to consider when it comes to the contested legacy of Vatican II: is the Pastoral Constitution’s relationship to other Dogmatic Constitutions and conciliar documents, promulgated as it was on the Council’s final day, one of an arrow pointing away from a traditionalism that had not yet been overcome in the Council’s earlier stages? Such a conviction would justify the efforts of many enthusiastic prelates, national bishops’ conferences, and some religious orders to move ‘beyond’ the letter of the Council and to challenge settled Church teaching in the first decades after Vatican II. On the other hand, it was certainly the position of later Church leaders, particularly John Paul II and Ratzinger himself, that “disenchantment and crisis” marked the decades immediately following Vatican II due to chaotic experiments and movements that had become disassociated with the core of the Christian tradition. 28 Whether these pontiffs engaged in a prudent course correction or a revanchist rejection of Vatican II and the insights of Gaudium et Spes is a hotly, sometimes bitterly, contested question in a Church that today is more divided than John XXIII could have foreseen in his courageous address on October 11, 1962.

Gaudium et Spes remains worthy of consideration fifty years after its promulgation because, despite the decidedly dated quality of the ‘urgent problems’ sketched in the latter half of the document, it was the first re-articulation of the Church’s relationship with the world that had come into being during the age of liberal revolutions. It remains a profound statement of traditional religious principles grappling with modernity, not motivated to return to the ancien régime, but to establish humble, loving service to humanity as the evangelical strategy for a global Catholic Church. Modernity’s many contradictions and tensions—what Jürgen Habermas has called ‘radically uprooting modernizations’—require what Ratzinger and Habermas himself concluded in a 2004 public debate as a necessary “double process of apprenticeship” through which religion and reason (read: mo-
dernity) can learn to become dependent on each other.\textsuperscript{29} That very debate would appear to be a singular example of aggiornamento in practice, the fulfillment of the utter necessity for Catholicism to constructively engage with modern ideas so that the good of modernity can be rescued for the benefit of humanity. This is the task of a properly historicized Church that was bequeathed by Gaudium et Spes and the Second Vatican Council. In this way, the Church can fulfill the authentic and rightful optimism found in Gaudium et Spes that is rooted in that reassuring promise of Jesus Christ: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”\textsuperscript{30}

Bibliography


\textsuperscript{29} D. Vincent Twomey S.V.D., Pope Benedict XVI: The Conscience of our Age (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 43.

\textsuperscript{30} Matthew 28:20
I sense the sunlight behind my eyelids, a hazy filter of orange. I turn over on my side, the inflatable mattress squeaking under my weight. I know it’s no use. This is it. I’m awake for the day. But it’s okay, because this is my first morning of vacation in California, and I’m eager to make the most of it. I get up and peek out the window. Nothing but sunshine and palm trees. Funny to think that yesterday I was scraping the ice off my windshield on a frigid ten-degree day in New Hampshire.

I shuffle into my friends’ kitchen with the popcorn ceilings and the ceramic bowl filled with freshly picked lemons from the lemon tree. The house is silent except for the sound of squawks and chirps from birds I’ve never heard before. I check the coffee maker, my feet sticking to the linoleum, but realize that some gracious café elf has already prepped it for me. I smile to myself. They know me too well.

I grab a Vermont coffee mug adorned with pine trees and moose—an ironic reminder of home—and pour myself a cup of the black stuff. With a splash of almond milk and the ding ding ding ding of a shiny spoon, I’m ready to begin my morning journey.

I shove my book under my arm, grab my mug, open the rusty metal front door, and step outside on the porch. The sky still has traces of sunrise—wispy streaks of purple, pink, and orange—and the air is still a bit cool from the night. It reminds me of a warm spring day back home in New England, and suddenly I’m thinking of tulips in every color, kids riding bikes, streets coming to life. I take a big gulp of coffee and try to read, but I find myself getting lost in memories. Climbing trees. Softball with mom. Picking wildflowers and weeds. I give up, put the book down, and
close my eyes with my coffee clutched in my lap. I stretch out and breathe in the warmth, letting the sun give me comforting goosebumps. Remember this morning. You are happy.

When I turned 20, my body suddenly decided it would awake itself in tune with the sunrise every morning—even on weekends. For many mornings, I tried to will myself to sleep longer, concentrating on sleepy things like sitting in front of a fire or lying in the grass. Without much luck, I soon accepted my fate. Mornings meant I would have a hot cup of dark roast coffee cradled in my hands and the quiet and stillness of the dawn all to myself, when I could let my mind roam free—before it became mired with the routine and flurry of the day. On these mornings, my mind is an orchestra of meditative thoughts. I often have my greatest epiphanies and creative musings in the morning after a fitful night of sleep and torturous dreams. I dissect things. I make sense of them. I take things in. I write these things down.

It’s the night that scares me.

I’ve had two recurring dreams since I was a teenager. In one, I’m in my childhood home, and someone, or something, is trying to break in and kill me. I run through the house boarding up windows, locking doors, shoving furniture in front of anything that can be opened. And then, I hide and wait. I usually wake just as they’re breaking into the house.

In the other dream, I drive down a dirt road to a place that feels foreign, yet familiar. There is a tall, rusty tower that seems to stretch into the clouds, and I decide to climb it. I stand at the top of the tower, the wind whipping through my hair. I feel sad as I look down at the water below me. And then … I jump. Just before I hit the water, right before I wake, I see alligators, or shallow water, or rocks. Both dreams have left me whimpering in the dark and gasping for breath. Both dreams have caused panic attacks during the light of the afternoon.

I’m also terrified of the dark. I play flashlight tag with the lights
in my house before I go to bed so I’m never left in the darkness—turn on the hall light, turn on the bedroom light, turn off the hall light, turn on the night light, turn off the bedroom light. I hate sleeping alone. When my husband Steve is away, I lie in bed all night and pick up on every low sound, convincing myself that someone is trying to break into our home. Some nights I have terrible insomnia because of racing thoughts that whirl around and around. At night, my mind warps itself into a being that I don’t recognize. So, I look forward to the morning.

I’ve traveled to England and Italy and Ireland, to Canada, and throughout New England, to Florida and California, to friends’ homes, to family’s homes, and moved to different homes. My day has always started relatively the same: I wake up before others, drink my coffee, and welcome the quiet with my thoughts.

I often don’t remember major details from places I’ve traveled or conversations I’ve had. But I remember my mornings. It was a grey spring morning—patches of snow littered the ground, but I was eager to escape the indoors—when I sat at a picnic table smoking a cigarette, writing a poem about my abusive alcoholic father. I found myself lost in thoughts I hadn’t visited in a long time: when he showed me how to build a fire, how to fish, how to put up a tent, how to be strong. As I flicked ashes into my empty sunflower coffee cup, it was in this moment that I realized, I wasn’t angry with him anymore. It was a cool, earthy autumn morning in Vermont—my favorite kind of morning—when I sat outside with my hot mug, comforting in my cold hands, watching the watercolor leaves fall. That air, that crisp natural Vermont air, was what made me finally feel at home nestled in those Green Mountains. It was Christmas morning in my hometown in western Massachusetts when I sat marveling at the magical gift Santa had left us overnight—a white Christmas—when my mother joined me on the couch with silvery tears in her eyes. She told me all the things she had been waiting to tell me: that my dad was a mean drunk,
but he was that way because his dad was murdered, and that he left, not because of me, but because of him. “I love you more than anyone on this planet,” she told me, stroking my curly head. “And he does too.” It was an unseasonably cool July morning in Vermont when I wrote down everything I could possibly remember about my great grandmother after my mother called to tell me she had passed in the night. I took an entire page just to describe her grey blue eyes and the way she cooed in her West Virginia accent.

There’s something about morning light that is more pure than afternoon light. While I’m not religious, there’s something inherently mystical about it. I remember one morning in Vermont when the fog was so thick, I couldn’t see the house across the street or the mountains in the distance, and the sun was just a dull glow. But then, the fog broke. Blinding light stretched through the haze in beautiful streaks, leaving long shadows from the trees. I sat on my porch with my coffee, feeling lucky to witness such beauty while most of the world was still sleeping.
Boudhanath Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal. Photography by: Pradipti Bhatta
Dryad
Thea Calitri-Martin

I first noticed her on my way to work
About ten years ago
Standing by the side of the road
At seven fifteen in the morning

Keeping company with the maples
That lined the meadow’s edge
Too old to be tapped
They gave her sparse shade

I watched for her every day
Intuiting her story
She was always looking
In the same direction, down the road

Her posture was uncompromising
She wore a shawl clutched close
As if she had been about to walk
Down the hill for a hundred years

She showed her face in profile
Sharp nose, hair in a bun
A teacher, like me
Greeting the fresh challenges of morning
In winter her head and shoulders
Bore white weight without concern
In spring and summer she ignored
Disturbances of manure spreaders and haying

I found in her unyielding stance
A spirit reaching through generations
The passage of time could change but
Not erase her purpose, or mine

Last spring the farmer cleared the meadow’s edge
Her stump snapped, she disappeared under a brush pile
I missed my prompt for morning musings
And mourned a landmark lost

After three seasons the brush is gone
She has reappeared with a new silhouette
Back turned, she now looks away from the road
Her face cannot be seen

Instead of clutching her shawl
She raises one arm triumphant
Saluting the power to persevere
Keeping watch on the meadow

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