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Editors of Survive and Thrive

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Editorial

Poetry Editor's Note: A Missive to Our Selves

Steven B. Katz
Clemson University

You may be mad. Perhaps mildly mad, perhaps really mad. Mad at my essay; mad at my arguments; mad at my conclusions; mad at me (or at least the "self" I originally constructed for the occasion of that essay I published years ago, an earlier draft of which is contained in this issue, and which this Poetry Editor's Note introduces). You're probably going to be mad because the theme, the discussion, and the tentative conclusions of "The Rhetoric of Confessional Poetry: Ethos, Myth, Therapy, and the Narrative Configuration of Self," seem to run contrary to everything that *Survive and Thrive* stands for and believes as a community!

Rex Veeder, Editor-in-Chief of *Survive and Thrive*, found himself getting angry as, in the summer of 2015, he first read this essay, published in 1994, an earlier version of which is appended at the end of this issue. As a matter of fact, Rex's "Introduction" in *Survive and Thrive* (Volume 2, September 2015) was in a part a response to my long-ago published essay. It also was Rex who suggested that I republish a manuscript version of the essay in these pages of *Survive and Thrive,* perhaps to provoke thought, discussion, debate. And he reaffirms these thoughts, feelings, and hopes for further response and discussion, in his new Editorial "End Note" that concludes this issue. Does 'confessional' poetry, writing, art, "heal"? Through a careful but accessible scholarly analysis, I came to the shocking conclusion that confessional poetry does *not* seem to heal!

The version of the essay which I present here in *S&T* is only a slightly revised, lightly edited, with subheads inserted for organization and your ease of reading. I debated and struggled with cutting the analysis and interpretation of specific poems— a cut that would have been visually indicated like this -_-_ -_-_-_-_ , the gaping wound left roughly sutured, the scars still visible. But after weeks of struggle, I decided that this surgery was too risky, that the patient might not live without the middle of its body, and so I sewed it back together and cleaned it up a bit but otherwise left it intact. I also resisted the incredibly strong temptation to *add* new material—so much has changed, and so rapidly—but once again I found myself rewriting the essay; and so again after weeks of struggle, I decided to leave the essay almost as it was. Thus, what you see here is something very close to the penultimate draft of the published essay. I will try to capture some of the new perspectives/scholarship in this headnote.

In fact, as the Associate/Poetry Editor of *Survive and Thrive: Journal of Medical Humanities and Narrative Medicine*, I suppose it now behooves me to make a statement, take a more moderate as well as "contemporary" stand. After all, the original, final essay was published in the mid-1990's, and was thus begun several years before that; in this way and others, my essay is perhaps very much a

product of its time—a time when social psychology, such as that of George Herbert Mead, was hot. (Simply, based on the social-psychology of George Hebert Mead, our "selves" are composites of other personalities we meet that make enough of an impact for us to adopt and absorb fragments of them into our own holistic and hopefully healthy personalities. Narrative theory tries to account for the building of life stories that become believable identities according to their own criteria of fidelity and truthfulness; Aristotle's concept of *ethos* tries to account for the persuasive credibility of character rhetorically created in the act of speaking or writing: both seemed to align well with Mead's social psychology.)

Further, my essay was published in a *psychology series* in a book entitled *My Father was Shiva: A Family Tragedy in Poetry and Prose*, edited and introduced by Dr. Edward Tick, a psychoanalyst, poet, and rhetorician who went through the same doctoral program in Language, Literature, and Communication at Rensselear Polytechnic Institute as I did a few years later, and who believes in a strong relationship between psychology and rhetoric (his dissertation was an examination of schizophrenia as a *rhetorical* illness). These circumstances certainly influenced my approach to the writing of my essay for that particular volume.

Moreover, aside from the editor, and the poet Jim Flosdorf whose work was the focal point of all the essays in the book of which he was the titular author, I was the *only* rhetorician/poet in the volume; all the other writers in the book were psychiatrists, MDs, or psychologists; that certainly slanted my approach as well. The poetry and person of Jim Flosdorf, the object of the whole volume, told an incredibly tragic and horrific family tragedy that gave rise to the mythological narrative treatment of it in *My Father Was Shiva* (the Hindu god of creation, death, and destruction). Every psychologist and MD psychiatrist in the volume came to the same conclusion: Jim's writing of these dark mythological sequences of confessional emotions about his family, and especially his relationship with his father, did not help Jim therapeutically in the treatment of his sometimes debilitating neurosis.

These "diagnoses" of texts (some Freudian, which makes sense)—but more, the poems, and the situations described in them, too, affected not only my critique and interpretation of the aesthetic effectiveness of Jim's poems, but also my conclusions about the (non)healing power of the poems, and based on the fate of many in the confessional school of poetry, my generalization about the failure of confessional poetry as therapy. Confessional poetry is *not* really therapeutic, at least not in a clinical sense, I concluded. Rather, in Jim's poems (as in confessional poetry at large), the poet tells him (or her) self the same stories, reinforcing a narrative that solidifies into a hard block of rhetorical identity as a poet, something that might be "better" dissolved. Confessional poetry does not help us push past the obstructions and reach the "real" psychological problems to resolve them; rather, confessional poetry seems to trap us in the psychological problems, in which the narratives we construct through poetry (or prose, or art) may be or become part of the obstruction.

At least that was my conclusion *then*. But do I still believe what I wrote years ago, in what is now the last century? Rex's "Introduction" was very careful to parse "confession," "healing," and to distinguish between "therapy" and "transformation," with *transformation*, not therapy or

healing, as the goal of 'confessional' poetry and art. Certainly, as both a rhetorician and a poet, I believe in the transformative power of language. Yet "transformation" is such a romantic, transcendental, spiritual notion that the aging cynic in me starts to balk. . . .

But then the rhetorician in me takes over, and I think of rhetorical theory, such as Kenneth Burke's idea of "language as symbolic action," in which the power of words, style, art, can and *do* influence the very way we see ourselves and the world, can persuade and bring people (ourselves and others) together in community (or divide people and make them disagree in various degrees of bitter disunity, such as in the time we live now, under the Trump presidency). One surely sees, I tell myself, that that the shared reality achieved in either case is not only a consensus of argument, but also some kind of 'transformation' of perception and feeling, at least at subjective and social levels of reality. Burke, borrowing from religion, called this kind of communion that takes place through language "consubstantiation." Going further out on the limb that doesn't surface in your mind (even as the clichéd metaphor that it is) until I create it there, thus (excuse me!): the substance of language itself—as a physical, sensuous, aural, temporal, or even mystical medium, has the power to change not only social but also, respectively, material, felt, experienced, remembered, and even metaphysical reality for those who believe language, even its alphabet, has such power (see Katz, *Epistemic Music*; "Letter as Essence"). *Transformative indeed*!

But now dear writer-reader, I see you begin to wobble a little too. What did "he" say? That language has the power to change the physical reality? How about this desk; can we turn it into something else with a magic formula? How about the structure of heaven; can prayers alter it? How does language work in these processes, as physical action at a distance? How about changing G/d's mind (see Metzger and Katz), whose *Name* Jews do not say or write to avoid the reality of taking the Name in vein? For those who believe in the potent properties of the Book, the alphabet and their numerical equivalents (the letters of the Name used in Creation itself) have this 'transformative' power. When I study and/or write about this belief, I feel on occasion as though I myself might begin to ascend through language, poetry, and art to a higher reality (cf. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*). And then I quickly fall back to earth, like so many before me, since Babel.

But how about language transforming "just" the feelings or psyche of such a lowly human being as a poet? So much writing and writing pedagogy and writing theory and theory-hope are based on this premise. But I am soon even cast out of this heaven of art and artifice, of language and rhetoric, by my own doubts in the stability of human emotions, the unreliability of the human senses and the human mind, and the limits of human consciousness itself—perhaps almost as much now as when I wrote the essay attached. I see the see-saw of my emotions teetering on the tipping point between romanticism and cynicism; I see the see-saw vertically sway up and down, rising and falling, from air to ground; I see the whole apparatus of the see-saw itself (a child's whole world) tottering on the fulcrum of a pole of depression sunk deep into the mud of my own psychology, personal history, culture, gender, class… Even as a writer—perhaps because I have written all my life, through the most painful parts and the best—I see that there are too many sides to this issue, too many arguments, too many faces, to assent and settle for any one of them.

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The truth is “I” don’t know what the truth is.

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Yes “you” do!

No “I” don’t.

“You” do!

What kind of statement is that: ‘The truth is “I” don’t know what the truth is’?

It’s the inverse of the old paradoxical Buddhist koan, ‘everything I say is a lie.’

“You” are so esoteric!

“You” are so close-minded!

Well, “I” for one know that “*my*” emotions and beliefs are often in conflict with themselves and between each other.

Well, “*I*” only ‘know’ what “I” feel for brief nano seconds. Beliefs last longer.

It’s true! Feelings fleet so much faster than beliefs! So much for transformative experiences.

There are just too *many* “I”s in here.

How many?

At least three.

Too many if you ask “me.”

To “me,” this instability of emotion, at different levels, never mind constantly shifting times and places to which the ‘self’ must adapt, calls into question the whole notion of a single, stable personality, which would be at the center of any transformation, being the thing transformed.

But ‘self’ *is* how “*we”* experience the interior of “our” lives, “our” thoughts, sentience, and consciousness!

And the exterior of “our” selves, too, as embodied consciousnesses, as skin and bone, space and time.

It wasn’t always this way.

Historically, mythologically, psychologically, epistemologically, there may at one time have been no barrier between 'self' and 'world.'

A part of "me" believes in a stable, unique 'self,' in the singularity of 'personality' that is more than the sum of its 'parts', an individual with a will and the freedom to use it.

"You" know the Latin root word, *persona*, means 'mask'?

"My" personality is a mask?!?

"We" are all many masks, which "we" don at socially appropriate times.

"I" don't believe you.

This is too much for "me" too.

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There's even more for "us" to at least begin to consider.

Oh no, "I" can't wait to hear this!

The fragmentation of self reflects and is a reflection not of only the fragmentation of modernism in the 20th-century, but also the relativity and indeterminism of the Copenhagen school of new physics in the same space-time. Perhaps even more, in the 'speculative turn' {Bryant, et al.} towards posthuman-consciousness {Wolfe}of objects as solipsistic 'actants'{Harman} which exist in social and technological networks {Latour} in a not too distant 'ecology without nature' {Morton}that we find in posthumanism {Braidotti}, objects and events just merge and emerge and submerge in only somewhat remote predictability, as in a new materialism {Coole and Frost}.

Just the high-brow theoretical lecture "we" have come to expect "you" to sputter!

How are "*we*" personalities subject to transformation in *this* new world order?

"We" are object too. We have agency, but in this philosophy "we" are also complemented and/or supplemented and/or replaced by all other objects.

In the post-modernism that preceded posthumanism, and the object-oriented philosophy and actor-network theory that grew out of or in reaction to it, the same thing happened.

"You" mean where language as text became reality, and the predominate focus of study, whereby those rhetorics *as writing* supplanted not only "our" self but also the world.

Yes.

No ‘self’?

No, not really.

No writer?

Already written. In Postmodernism everything is already written. The author is a nexus of language, of forces, of events, which “we” merely articulate, express.

This is an almost akin to Platonic notion of the poet as empty vessel through which the gods speak.

Get it through your head: ‘The author is dead.’

Resurrection rather than transformation then is what’s required.

Why do “I” even bother writing then?

Really: the end of our species predicated in the ‘Anthropocene,’ the short tragic era of *Homosapiens*.

Why bother to write, then?

Really: in 5 billion years, when the sun will go supernova, and the solar system explode or fall apart.

Why bother?

And then there’s the heat death of “our” universe . . .

Who is going to decide who is rescued?

When the earth is dead?

In 11 billion years, when the sun burns out?

When the universe collapses?

Unless there is another planet “we” can live on.

Another sun “we” can orbit.

Another universe “we” can’t travel to (as Stephen Hawking has proposed)?

As Holden Caulfield asks, what’s the point???

Not much comfort there, never mind transformative experience, except the mutation into another species that might be able to survive in the harsh environment of space, or on a totally different, perhaps inhospitable planet.

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The point is that "I" still *need* to write to move toward affective transformation, to create!

"You" do?

Don't "you"?

What is this need "we" talk about?

"I" actually get anxious and agitated if "I" don't write, even for just a few days.

"I" get depressed. "I" don't. Unless writing is therapeutic or transformative, what a waste of time!

What else would "you" do with "*your*" life?

Make money.

Spend time with "my" family and friends, rather than with all of "*you*"!

"I" do it for "my" *self*. Writing makes "me" feel warm and whole inside, at least while "I" write… In that sense, it *is* transformative!

But "you" give up so much 'outside' "your" *self* to write! —So much normalcy sacrificed.

"You" may feel whole when "*you*" write, but *are* "you"? Are "you" "you"? Am "I" "you"?

Writing is "my" whole identity; it is who "I" am.

"I" thought "we" disproved that.

"We" haven't proven or disproven anything!

So, if "you" are whole when you write, "you" don't need anyone else?

Not when "I" write.

Sounds self-centered or lonely, rather than transformative. What about "your" family and friends?

"They" understand (sort of), and wait for "me" to 'return'.

Bet they love that. And readers? Do your family and friends read what "you" write, and help "you" by providing ears, or critiquing "your" work to make it stronger?

Sometimes. But if “they” read everything “I” wrote, that’s all “they” would be doing. “They” have a life too!

As a writer, “I” only need a couple of readers.

Liar. “I” don’t believe you.

Well, maybe a few more. And the occasional publication in a journal (such as this one “we” are in here) to keep “me” going.

Liar.

OK, maybe a few more journals—and a book . . . or two . . .

“*I*” “my” self write for future audiences.

Arrogant, isn’t “he”?

What if “you” had *no* readers? Even Emily Dickinson had a couple of readers, published a couple poems in “her” sheltered lifetime.

If “*I*” know “*him*” (and “I” do, intimately!), “*he*” would stop writing.

Timothy Clark in *A Theory of Inspiration* thinks that these idealized, future audiences are the source of the feeling “we” call ‘inspiration’.

Is that a source of transformation too?

“I” suppose. Writing to future audiences at least gives “me” hope as a writer.

And this from the cynic!

“*I*” am not the cynic; “*you*” are.

No “you” are!

“He” is the cynic.

Writing, even to a future audience, brings “me” comfort.

But Walter Ong said: “A writer’s audience is always a fiction.”

“*You*” are the fiction.

So are “you”!

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Maybe it's not the content of writing, but the 'telling', the expressing of it, that is transformative. . .

Even when there is no one to hear?

Then "we" are *all* in BIG trouble!

Yes, when "*I*" stop writing, "I" feel the hurt and cold again.

The transformation of 'self' doesn't seem to last long.

And writing is exhausting, so "you" can't sustain the writing all the time.

Writing does make "me" forget for a while.

Writing takes "me" to another place in my mind.

But does writing put the past to rest for "you"?

Looking back, "I" have to admit it doesn't seem to.

But "we" *want* writing to redeem the past; "we" *need* art to make "our" pain and suffering *valuable*.

At least then "you" are doing something with the past, turning pain into art!

That is transformative. But to "me," writing has become like breathing.

It's just something "you" just do—all the time!

To kill time until time kills "you"?

If writing just killed time, "you" wouldn't do it. It must have some purpose or transformative powers.

Writing is time consuming (like right now!).

"I" have often said that 'writing breeds irresponsibility.'

Copyright that.

"I" have. But "I" don't want to talk about issues of ownership in relation to transformation!

Whether it's transformation or therapy or just stealing what other people say, "I" write down everything "I" hear, see, think, say, before the wording is lost.

Perhaps once "we" are in an adult groove "we" keep writing out of habit. . .

Or out of boredom because there's nothing else to do!

Nothing else to do???

Nothing worth doing.

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Writing makes me feel guilty because "I" am neglecting everything else "I" should be doing.

And when "I" don't write "I" feel guilty because "I" am doing everything except writing.

What a mess "you" two are. This is not writing to transform or heal, but to make "you" miserable!

And "you"?

To "me," the act of writing itself has become a form of torture, mental, physical, and emotional—especially revision!! (It took "me" four months + a year to write this.)

That could be the romantic image of the suffering poet too.

It also could be the beginning of a disease like Alzheimer's.

Well, "I" don't even think about 'identity-art' anymore.

You might with dementia, until you couldn't anymore.

So much of the image of the writer as suffering artist who transforms misery into art is prefab.

"You" think so?

No. But no more turtle necks for "me"!

But "I" seem to remember (because "I" was right there with "you") cultivating the image as a writer when "we" were young.

"We" did, it's true, in "our" youth, when "we" were hurt and lost and unpublished and unknown…

"I" think the young need the image. There's so little reward otherwise, in the early stages, other than being cool.

What about as an adult? Does poetry become a crutch?

"I" would think *real* poets grow out of that stage!

Why didn't "you"?

“I” did; did “*you*”?

Maybe. Writing poetry gave “us” a warm glow when the cold night depressed the snow and “I” walked the windy streets of Boston in my full- length P-coat my father finally bought “me,” but left “me” alone on Christmas Eve, scarf flying. “I” couldn’t even write then. “I” just walked and walked and walked and . . .

“I” also remember “us,” in better times, waiting for a bus in the snow, with a big sifter of warm brandy in hand, reciting out loud, by heart, Dylan Thomas’ ‘Fern Hill’!

How ‘romantic.’ “You” really *were* depressed!

Very. “I” thought about death and suicide all the time. (To tell “you” the truth, “I” still do.)

So, underneath all that academic finery and scholarly-logic, stretches not only a vast dark past, but also a still deeper layer of need in front of “you”?

Nice imagery.

Did writing poetry transform “you,” save “you”?

Probably, but maybe more being a poet—pain was “my” identity.

Will the poetry ever fill the infinite hole in “me/you/us”?

“I” don’t know. Remember, this was the 1990s, when people believed in poetry and rhetoric as *human* endeavors.

And believed in such ‘quaint’ notions and emotions as ‘authenticity’, ‘sincerity’, ‘self’, as well as ‘individuals’ with ‘inalienable rights’, ‘agency’, ‘free will’.

Ah, the good old days.

These 18th century Enlightenment values were sorely tested and found severely lacking in the middle of the 20th century.

Writing, like art and music, did not prevent the Holocaust (Steiner).

A fortiori, could it stop one person from harming themselves, or others?

Ah, the rhetorician speaks!

Grow up!

AND now too, in the first decades of the 21st century, the unanticipated effects of terrorism's use of writing on social media . . .

Definitely more destructive than "transformative," except in the most radical sense of 'martyrdom', and not good for their victims who are wounded or dead.

Nothing romantic or transformative in there for "us"!

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In "our" time, literary and rhetorical theory, predicated on if not predicted by cybernetics, has perhaps rendered objects capable of self-transformation.

Oh, let's not go down that road again!

"We" see it in smart machines.

Is "their" 'transformer suffering' transformational too?

So sarcastic. Are "we" even related?

Don't be ridiculous. Of course we are!

It *is* true that the binary line between the human and nonhuman is increasingly blurred.

In the posthuman view of things, humans by definition have at best equal if not less agency than, say, digital objects, which are much more versatile, electric, and changing all the time!

Machines can't write poetry.

Ah, yea they can. And do all the time!

Check out one of the first robot authors, *Racter*.

"I" wonder, given these new theoretical developments, how poetry as therapy *or* transformation works in and through machines?

In the same way poetry works on "us"?

"I" doubt it, given that "they" are/in metal networks. . .

What are "we"?

Giorgio Agamben argues in *Means without Ends* that "we" are all stateless refugees now.

Does that describe objects in Object-Oriented Philosophy too?

Limiting "*our*" *discussion to the* human *species as it has evolved so far!*—poetry is writing, and writing helps "you" feel better, works by giving "you" a higher purpose.

And ulcers.

Poetry works!

When it works.

No it doesn't!

Yes it *does*!

And rhetoric too!

No way!!

Have "you" read Tamika Carey's book, *Rhetorical Healing*?

No, it's too new.

Well there "you" go. Teaching writing can be used to teach healing, as well as build community.

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How about Heidegger's 'What is a Poet' in *Poetry, Language, Thought*?

Too hard to read.

Too difficult poetically, "you" mean. But poetry is a way to *Dasein*, to exploring through poetic language true *Being*—which is free of living death, nature as standing-reserve, all the apparatuses of existence as utility, in a relation of user and used. As a higher *Weg* or path of being, poetry for Heidegger is transformative in the most basic as well as metaphysical sense.

What hogwash. "I" don't believe it.

"I" do.

"*You*" are a transcendentalist!

"You" are a romantic!

"*I*" am a 'sophist': "I" do and "I" do not believe this. "I" can see both "your" positions.

This is the Dissoi Logoi, opposing ideas/words, taught to students in ancient Greece and Rome.

Yes, in this pedagogy, students of rhetoric were taught to argue all sides of any issue.

Great for understanding an issue thoroughly, as well as improving argumentative skills . . .

"We" could use some of that *Dissoi* here!

Aren't 'opposing words' *contraries*, so that if one premise is true, the other is false?

Can "you" stop being a rhetorician for a second, and put the sophists and Aristotelian *topoi* down?

The rhetorician in "me" can't be turned on and off; it does not stop talking; it is who "I" *am*!

"I" thought you were a *persona*? Away with "you already!

Then "you" will all come with "me"—because "you" are "me," essentially—or rather, psychologically and socially.

At this moment, talking with "you," "I" am more cynical now than ever about the capabilities of poetry or rhetoric to transform. "I" don't believe anything anymore!

But "you" believe that "you" don't believe anything anymore, right?

Yes.

Then "you" believe something!

Who are "you," Socrates now?

Does 'Reality' exist?

'Nothing exists', says Gorgias, by which "he" could mean a lot of things.

"I" now think apathy is best; then "I" don't have to care about believing in anything anymore.

But apathy makes writing hard for the same reason: "you" don't care about anything anymore.

No, no transformation to be found in apathy. "I" find apathy a hard attitude to maintain without feeling guilty!

If "you" feel guilt, "you" are not apathetic enough!

That does sound very cynical.

"I" am beyond the naïve romanticism of the spring of youth.

"I" am beyond the autumnal skepticism of middle age.

"I" am beyond the bent winter cynicism of old age.

Great! Now what do "we" do?

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If cynicism is the last refuge of the romantic, what is the last refuge of the cynic?

Post-Romantic Cynicism?

Posthuman Cynicism? "I" am a posthuman cynic.

Posthumanism again.

"Post," as in postmodernism, with its skepticism of reality and belief in language; and posthumanism, with its skepticism of humanity—and all the ambiguity, indeterminism, and ambience of events and objects (including people) that are always imminent at every moment but unpredictable and only partially knowable, since "we" are of "them."

"We" have been "transformed" in this way too.

Now, in the 21st century, "*my*" old essay seems somewhat quaint and dated.

"My" old essay is carefully argued and rhetorically developed.

"*My*" old essay is an easy read on the psychological value of poetry in the narrative configuration of 'self' and its many 'discontents'.

"You" have to accept George Hebert Mead's premise that "we" construct "I" via the people "we" meet in order to believe "our" essay as written.

And Aristotle's concept of *ethos* as constructed in language.

No 'true self' to be authentic to?

No. Or at least not entirely.

Where are "we" then?

"We" are here, imminent, emerging, submerging, somewhat randomly, but perhaps with agency if not freewill.

In posthumanism, then, poetry as a form of therapy or transformation cannot be considered as anything but a metaphor for a random process, state?

From the point of view of posthumanism, elements of 'personality' may be imminent but are never knowable as part of a whole.

Something must exist, be stable, a core, “I”.

Platonic essences?

Neurological scans?

Genomics?

The posthuman personality. Who would have thought it!

And Transformation? What is a posthuman transformation?

Cyborgs. Machines. Transhumanism.

That frightens “me.”

It is the ‘*humanistic* dream of disembodiment’ that “we” fear, not a posthuman one, says Wolfe.

So, is transformation disembodiment? Can confessional poetry explore this?

Yes, of course. “We” are doing that “our” selves here, but in an old-fashioned, literary way.

Given how “we” experience “’our” selves’, holistically, as embodied consciousnesses with unique and personal stories, confessional poetry might could work to some degree to ameliorate the suffering of life, to aesthetically render ugliness beautiful, horror art, disembodiment illusion (or delusion).

Nice double modal-auxiliary verb, rhetor! “Yawl” from the South?’

To “me,” poetry as transformation works even in posthumanism, although its agency remains as mysterious as ever.

“We” don’t discriminate here. All forms of experience are allowed.

Do “we” know if suffering is necessary for transformative art?

Suffering is inevitable in a life in which death is always imminent. In fact, it makes *Dasein* meaningful.

“My” essay questions whether suffering is necessary for art.

“*My*” essay shows it doesn’t work well when in poetry “you” talk only to “your” self. . . .

And, “we” might add, to some ideal, fictional audience in the future!!! {see Ong; Clark}.

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Contrary to "his" belief in Ideal Forms *for philosophers*, Plato stated that poets are 'touched' by a special kind of madness—'divine' madness.

Aristotle treats poetics rationally, as an art form whose purpose is 'catharsis.'

The transcendentalists held that poetry is the 'genius of nature.'

What nice 'sentiments'! Apologies! Defenses!

Yes, life would be a divine comedy, a practical joke, a damn laughing matter, if "we" were not beings (human, animal, and maybe nonhuman) who are sentient, aware, feel pain.

"I" think *"my"* essay shows rhetorically that poetry does not heal aesthetically!

Do "you" also mean that the rhetoric of poetry—prosody—doesn't lead to transformation?

"I" believe that the best poetry is a form of self-expression shaped in the hands of the disciplined poet who wields it.

Another ideal.

"I" believe discipline is a question of meter and form, which 'real poets' know and use.

"I" believe the question of quality is more important, no matter what the form.

Are either, or both, transformational?

Most confessional poetry is written in free verse.

No wonder it doesn't work . . .

That's "your" opinion. Keep it to "your" self.

"I" can't, because "you" are "me."

"I" believe the issue of 'authenticity,' of 'sincerity', of 'purity', is most important in confessional poetry.

Authenticity, sincerity, purity, *to what*?

It is hard to believe in these qualities if the 'self' is a spirit, a fragment of an object (the rest submerged), a machine, or non-existent!

Too often poets eschew theory and art—philosophy and rhetoric—in favor of 'self.'

Academic, “you” are, yes! Eschew on this!

Writers can always write poems—even transformative poems—in their diaries, rather than publish it.

And an *elitist* to boot!!!

No “I” am not. “I” believe this is, to use Robert Frost’s phrase, like playing tennis without a net—and in some cases, without tennis balls!

But poetry written in meter and form sounds so mechanical. How can that be transformative?

Cicero said rhetoric requires natural talent, but also art and practice.

Aesthetically or psychologically, the results are usually not very good—clichéd rhymes, awkward meters, antiquated phrasing.

Is it like learning to swing a tennis racquet until it’s ‘natural’?

Once it is, it’s heaven, ‘the zone’.

But professional tennis players take an entire childhood to reach that level, to transform!

In rhetoric, that’s what Isocrates and Cicero and Quintilian debated. *It is too hot in here*!

Katz has taken to writing rhetoric in literary form. But when the form, like meter, is good, the meter in the verse is aurally invisible, so you hear the rhythm, not the bass drum. But it’s there, underneath, providing the beat that makes rhythmic variations possible (*Epistemic Music of Rhetoric*).

Go play tennis with “your” drum kit while “I” write.

“I” would never deny free verse is a form, and in fact encourage it, if it is good, well-constructed, and the product of practiced minds, hands, and hearts.

But in a posthuman world, how can “we” even believe in discipline, which itself requires a stable source of agency, inspiration, self, if not fixed, aesthetic ideals?

Or an imagined audience that may or may not include the gods speaking through you!!!

“I” don’t know, but right now “you” are stepping on “*my*” *foot*!

Sorry! The Muse does that all the time, whenever she wants, day or night . . .

And “you” open the door.

Anything for inspiration, and the possibility of transformation.

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“I” still say the even the free verse poet should probably know how use meter and form—to have it in their repertoire.

Oh, “you Formalist! So anti-democratic!!

Is free verse political, then?

It is in America!

Is free verse politically transformative?

Perhaps poets should turn outward, and deal with material conditions—social, political, economic—conditions in which people live other lives of desperation, rather than obsessing about their own!

Confessional poetry, and socially aware poetry, like poets themselves, are not mutually exclusive. In fact, one can grow from the other, coexist with each other, feed off each other, both in form and passion, content and style.

Again the binary blurs break down.

Yes, but like form, free verse is something “you” have to learn to do well. “I” have; “you” haven’t.

‘Free verse is Freedom’!

“I” think the form should be organic, grow out of the content.

But where are the standards? Where is the net?

“I” believe in ‘natural’ writing, ‘automatic’ writing, and now the stream of unconscious writing . . .

Again, this kind of disembodiment is a modern if not postmodern concept; it requires stability, authenticity, even a strange kind of objectivity . . .

So what if “they” found Apollinaire’s and Kerouac’s *revised* manuscripts . . .

Changing the subject, “I” write on anything at hand. Including “my” hand.

“*I*” still write on yellow legal pads, in long hand, and then type them later.

“I” write first drafts on the computer now. “We” are being written that way right now.

Word processing has increased both the speed and the quantity of what “we” can write.

"I" have the opposite experience. Word processing is efficient for capturing thoughts if you can type fast enough; but the color coding and the tracking and boxed comments to "my" one reader— "my" future self— really slows "me" down.

This technology is good when "I" return to write: it reminds "me" where the problems are, what "I" was thinking, what "I" was going to do, when "I" return to revise—weeks, months, years, sometimes even decades later—and helps "me" focus not only on what to revise, but if "I" am lucky kick-starts inspiration, when writing feels like a transformative process again.

Revision requires time, reflection, and re-envisioning. It needs a stable self.

Hey, does the 'self' get revised as well? Which is another way of asking about transformation again.

Does it involve re-seeing, re-imagining not only the piece, but the self too—writing, changing it, rethought if not entirely new?

Perhaps in the context of a real community, history and mythology and epistemology in the material context of pressing social, economic, and political issues. Otherwise the transmutation of substance into style, of self, may go wholly unnoticed . . .

To commute a writer's 'sentence' to isolation and loneliness . . .

To provide a poetic blueprint, an architecture of identity, a real façade for living . . .

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Poetry did provide "me" with some comfort after "my" mother died.

But it was so painful for "*me*."

All that internalized suffering, agonistic repression, and a badly bleeding ulcer. Poetry didn't help "me" physically much at all; it just gave "me" a way of justifying—rationalizing—and coping psychologically with illness and death— with the grave already dug in "my" chest.

"I" am glad "*I*" didn't have to experience all of that. But in the end "we" all die, together and alone, like "she" did.

So much for agency.

So much for art.

What are "we" to believe then?

Poetry (and the need to write it—what seems to be a real need for the young) is both the source and the salve of pain?

Yet another myth of creativity, another Ideal source, another narrative. Pain of a different sort, source. But writing poetry is like breathing to "me" now.

No it's not.

Yes it is. "I" don't have to think of "my" self as a poet. "I" don't have to wear a mask. "I" just do it.

Bullshit.

Well, to "me," the discipline of writing is everything! But "you" have to be disciplined enough to write everything down when "you" hear it, see it, or think it, or "you" forget too much, lose the punch of language.

"I" will punch you if "you" don't shut up!

"I" write all the time, although "we" are relatively unknown in poetry worlds.

"I" am a recluse.

Another romantic image?

OK, the hard-edge, ice cold, and somewhat incestuously rigged 'poetry industry'; but that's a topic for another day. "I" write for a future audience. "I" leave the verdict to history.

"We" 'have taken the path less traveled by,' says Frost, and it has made all the difference', for better or worse.

Yeah, thanks a lot! That hurts "my" standing in the poetry world, where everybody talks to "their" selves, "them" self!

What's the point of writing then? Life would be some much easier, normal, if "we" didn't do it!

Habit?

Purpose?

Pain?

When you're young . . .

What do "you" have to write about except "your" self?

But as an adult—the pain, the discipline, the sacrifice. . .

Why not live 'the myth'? It seems to work for some…

"I" find it doesn't works for "me" anymore.

To leave something behind?

To not be forgotten?

As Marianne Moore said, 'I too dislike it.'

But she didn't mean it.

Writing can be genuine.

Writing can be generative.

Writing can be self-discovery.

Writing can be torture as "I" grow older!

Writing can be quite physical as well as mental.

That Cartesian duality, at least, is frayed!

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"I" have spent so much of "my" life writing, have given up so much to write and finish things, which takes longer and longer, becomes harder and harder.

But if not transformation, what pleasure (and possible recognition) it brings!

"My" wife and son have sacrificed so much for "me" to indulge in this 'naturalized' occupation.

Yes, writing, art, is incredibly selfish.

In this 'self' ishness "we" seek meaning.

In this 'self' ishness "we" seek transformation

As those who study composition told "us," 'writing is a process' . . .

A long process!

Writing is a journey?

Does the journey lead to transformation?

'It's the journey, not the destination', that matters.

That's good, because "we" will never get there.

"We" never really go anywhere!

"I" was once asked by a literature professor if "I" liked reading, or having read? The process, or the finished product? Do "you' like writing, or having written?

Neither.

Both.

"I" love writing!

"I" hate writing!

Such contradictory ideas! "I" don't know what to believe!

Maybe "we" are not to believe in anything?

Maybe "we" are to believe in everything?

Maybe "we" are to believe in the very contraries, contradictions, paradoxes, and conflicts that define "our" life, from which writing springs?

Is that a transformation, or an oxymoron?

"*You*" are an oxy moron!

F. Scott Fitzgerald said somewhere that genius was the ability to hold contrary (or contradictory) ideas in "your" head and believe both (or all) of them at the same time.

The *Dissoi Logoi* again.

Are "you" a rhetorician or a poet?

Both. And more.

'Do "I" contradict myself?' Walt Whitman asks in *Leaves of Grass*; 'well then, "I" contradict myself. I contain multitudes!'

Was 'he' the first postmodernist?

Posthumanist, with all the grass stuff and atoms being and showing up everywhere, including under your bootheel.

Now *that* is transformative!

But is it *true*?

“I” don’t know.

“I” don’t believe “you.”

“I” don’t care.

Can poetry heal?

“I” don’t know, but it feels good when the writing is going well.

And it feels horrible when it isn’t.

So let “us”—all of “us”—revisit this rhetorical essay on confessional poetry and the narrative construction of the psychological self, to which “our” discussion is a preamble, update, and response.

With a minimum of revision, so that everyone can see what “we” were talking about, here and then, back and now . . .

With some trepidation, given its themes and conclusions . . .

As another way of thinking about and exploring the relation between writing and healing . . .

With confidence and uncertainty . . .

With self-esteem and insecurity . . .

Hey, speak for “your” self. “I” agree with the original argument.

But “I” don’t know if “I” agree with “you.”

“I” think some parts of “me” do?

Parts of “you”? “You” mean there are more parts?

Yes, more “me’s,’ and more interpretations . . .

Well, “*I*” think some parts of “me” do not agree with “you”!

But “I” don’t agree with “him.”

Maybes? All in play

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"We" have taken enough of "your" time with this brief conversation with "my" selves. Read this wonderful issue featuring two other rhetorician-poets—Barry Brummett, and David Beard.

There are other rhetoricians here too (in addition to the editors), as well as excellent pieces from writers and poets from other 'walks' and 'stages' of life.

And if "you" have time, desire, inclination, fortitude, "you" are welcome to read "my" original essay at the end of this issue.

Emote.

Enjoy.

Write.

Create.

Survive.

Thrive.

Transform.

Heal.

Beware.

Be well

Good bye from all of "us."

—Steven B. Katz

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Poetry

13 Ways of Looking at the Body

David E. Beard
University of Minnesota Duluth

1.
His skin was yellow with jaundice, a symptom of the pancreatic cancer. His hair was flat and matted from his refusal to wash it, already resembling the hair my grandmother would comb, one last time, before the casket was closed. I looked at him, and I no longer saw my grandfather.

2.
The base of the tibia cracked as I fell. For a week I walked on it, thinking it was a sprain. I had no idea what a broken bone felt like. I don't know that I've ever really known pain.

3.
I shivered as her fingers touched my belly, reaching under the tails of my shirt as we lay in bed together. "Would you like to take this off?" she asked, pushing her fingers higher. I would never have asked; that she knew to ask me made me fall in love.

4.
My mother told me that her nipple pointed inward before she finally went to the doctor. Even as I shook, upset that she waited so long to seek help, I wasn't sure I wouldn't have done the same.

5.
Just after 2am, I parked along Stoney Point, about ten miles outside the city and its halo of light pollution. I turned off the car and rolled down the windows, letting the cool air in. It was so very dark, I could not see the lake twenty feet to my right, nor the road ahead. Without sight, only I knew the water was there by the sound of the waves reaching my ears and the spray reaching across the darkness.

6.
Standing in the hallway, outside her apartment on Wisconsin Avenue, talking about writing, she began to rub her lower back against the doorjamb. I reached out my hand and scratched her back and hoped, or knew, or hoped, or knew, that I would kiss her.

7.
I was eleven when the police came. The back door to our duplex had been left open, and my mother went upstairs to check on our neighbor, who was an organist at our Catholic parish. The man who strangled him didn't bother to close the door behind him as he left. The brutality of the murder

required a closed casket, though at the time, I didn't understand why. I thought that it was the fact that he had been murdered that kept me from seeing him: murder meant you didn't get to say goodbye. Which, I suppose, was true, but for different reasons than my eleven year old self understood.

8.
I have cried four times about still-living people in my adult life. Once from fear, when I learned my mother was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. Once when I realized that my wife was moving out. Once when I realized that my wife would not come back. And once when I realized that the woman I fell in love with had fallen out of love with me.

On the other hand, I have cried more than a dozen times to the season four finale of my favorite British science fiction TV show. The music rises, my eyes quiver, tears form, a howl rises from the ache in the back of my throat, and my heart empties feelings it has stored for weeks, months, years, a lifetime.

9.
She whispered in my ear. It didn't matter what she said, so long as I felt the warmth of her breath.

10.
The first night I slept with a CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure device), I lay so still, so very very still. I wasn't sure I'd ever really slept before, in my life.

11.
For the summer between high school and college, I stayed in their home. She had had a stroke and was unable to move one side of her body. She wanted to believe that she could compensate, so she kept some of the small routines -- watching her favorite TV shows, reading the newspaper. He had Parkinsons and was unable to walk or to use "normal" silverware or the phone, no matter how big the dial buttons were. About three years earlier, the tremors had taken away his ability to do search-a-word puzzles. About a year ago, they took away his ability to stand unaided; his insurance secured a power lift chair. In about six months, it will take away his ability to swallow, and he will die. The paramedics will clear his airway to administer CPR, and they will see it choked on the food his daughter prepared for him for breakfast.

But this morning, half a year before his death, I sat across them, feeding them their breakfast of stewed prunes (using a soup spoon for him and a teaspoon for her). Neither of them could chew easily: She could not, because of the stroke, though she would recover that ability over time. He could not, because the Parkinsons had burrowed even into the muscles in his jaw, forcing tremors that were a mockery of chewing.

Neither of them wanted to be with *me* in this way. (When I was a child, they cared for me.)

Neither of them wanted to be with *each other* in this way .

Every night, after their dentures had been removed and her wig had been removed and I lifted his legs into bed, she leaned toward him and they kissed each other. Nothing could stop that.

12.
The sound of the bar was deafening. I couldn't think, and I don't think she wanted me to be able to. She had decided that our relationship was over, and the noise ensured that there was no discussion.

13.
It was evening all afternoon. It was snowing and it was going to snow. The snow created silence. Silence is the loudest sound in the world, to me.

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Poetry

Rummage Box

Ann Neuser Lederer
University of Pittsburgh

Inside a flat basket lined in red velvet,
small cloth balls roll.
No two alike: scraps from old nightgowns,
strips of rags, frayed baby blankets, outdated ties.

Wadded to begin with, then wound like yarn
until there is no more.
Utterly useless, she explains, but the children love them.

I do too -- could hardly wait to start my own.
People who see them bring her their cast-off fabrics,
more than she could ever need.

For though she is full of projects, time is running out.
She explains that too, as she stirs and monitors
a mess of soon to be peanut brittle, while wearing
a soft white sweater that matches her hair and pearls.

Most of us have our junk drawers,
but the half-forgotten frail folk
stowed in their neat bright corners
might miss the urge to rummage.

Their fingers might yearn for a handful of seed pods,
rattling gently like the wind, when lifted.
Or a bit of sponge, or chalk, or a cushion of pins
with little colored dots for heads.

Poetry

A Villanelle on Widowerhood and Dementia

Michael J. Leach
Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Service, Bendigo

He beholds a lady in pure white lace.
    He remembers a lost loved one
Whose absence is a well-lit, empty space.

He loves one who had the presence to grace
    The stage of life in the bright sun.
He beholds a lady in pure white lace.

He recalls the comfort of their embrace.
    He can't find that special someone
Whose absence is a well-lit, empty space.

With age, nothingness begins to replace
    New recordings and old reruns.
He beholds a lady in pure white lace.

Clouds of dementia gather to erase
    His fondest memories, bar none.
Whose absence is a well-lit, empty space?

He opens his memoirs at the marked place
    Where all battles could still be won.
He beholds a lady in pure white lace
Whose absence is a well-lit, empty space.

Poetry

what has been taken…

Jenny L. Popernack
St. Cloud State University

epitaph

my body has existed for 27 years
without knowing what yours feels like
pressed against mine.

third street heartaches

that night i waited for your call
half past ten but it never came
someone told me this would happen
but i didn't want to listen

days went by and i felt an emptiness
that i hope to never feel again
you vowed to me you'd be a good husband
but those don't leave you like this

weeks went by and i no longer cried
i knew that you weren't coming back
so why did you marry me to leave
and make me a widow in heart?

kunze
when your breath shuddered i hoped
i waited to see your eyes open
skin cold and your heartbeat slowing
i begged to hear your voice again
then as i waited for you to come back to me
i realised that you never would

Narrative

Telling a Story of Stillbirth: Accepting the Limits of Narrative

Janel C. Atlas
University of Delaware

When her daughter was stillborn at full term in 2006, the author grappled with the limits of language to describe, explore, and share her experience of grief and life after loss. In this essay, the author reflects on the temporal layers of narrative about babyloss and ultimately realizes that writing to make meaning about life-changing losses continues over time.

Through the night, waiting for labor to progress, I heard babies' first caterwauls. Drifting down through the sterile hospital hallway came the sounds of laboring women, supportive nurses, encouraging partners. I turned onto my side and cradled my hugely pregnant belly in the crook of my arms.

I already knew that my baby would make no sounds in the delivery room when she was finally born.

I knew because she was already dead.

The nurses and doctor attending the birth would limit their words. After all, with a dead baby, the intended outcome of pregnancy leaves a gaping hole in the usual post-delivery dialogue.

Is it a boy or a girl? What is the Apgar score? Who does she look like? Is she healthy? How is her latch for breastfeeding? Does she need any time in the neonatal nursery? When can we be released to go home?

The words dissolve before they can be uttered, and all of the actors in this shadow inverse of a healthy birth search for a script with far fewer rote lines.

My daughter's stillbirth in 2006 dropped me into an underworld where the standard language I used to navigate things before suddenly no longer fit my life experience, and as a writer, that left me untethered.

If information would have satisfied my questions, I would have had all that I needed; when I got home from the hospital, I had sheets of information about the causes of stillbirth, defined by the medical community as pregnancy loss occurring between 20 weeks and delivery. In contrast, I had no stories about what this type of loss really means. I knew a great deal about the structure of umbilical cords (and what could go wrong with them), autopsies, and genetic anomalies, but nothing about how others had stared into the abyss of burying a baby and lived to tell the tale.

I assumed that a collection of stories like this existed somewhere, so I sought this book in the library and online. I kept thinking perhaps it would appear on a different shelf or at the top of the next search returns. But it didn't.

And so I determined to make one myself.

At the time, as a successful freelance writer, I naively believed that making this book would be relatively straightforward. Yet other things—like having a baby—had seemed simple before. And they weren't.

Writers, it appeals to me, have odd relationships with words; we commit narratives to structure, memories to the page or pixel, and words to print. Words, these tiny units of meaning, are at the same time powerful and transformative as well as transient, slippery, and erasable.

When a person writes a true story, especially a narrative about a personal trauma, she confronts the profound shortcomings of language.

~~

My second daughter, Beatrice, was very much wanted, and my pregnancy had been textbook perfect for the first 35 weeks. There were no signs that anything was wrong. The doctor issued no warnings and there were no alarm bells to trigger extra precaution. Just the week before Beatrice died, the nurse practitioner assured me as we listened to the baby's heartbeat through the doppler that I'd hold her in my arms very soon.

How could I find the words to describe the throat-clenching, cold-sweat panic I felt when just one week later the doppler resounded with silence?

After she was born and buried, I tried to make sense of what had happened. I tried writing simple declarative statements:

The doctor said he was sorry. I drove to the hospital. I called my husband. The ultrasound technician showed me the image. My daughter had died. I had to deliver her body.

The words were clinical, like an autopsy. The story of my baby and my loss was stripped of its significance, the facts subsuming the tragedy and emotion of her death. In other words, I could transcribe the timeline, but it didn't express what I most wanted to tell.

However, when I tried to capture the emotions, I careened into the maudlin, sensational, and overtly personal. That didn't suit, either.

I discovered that using embodied, somatic language did a better job. I experimented with embodied writing, literally writing the physical forms and feelings of my body before Beatrice's death, through labor, and in the weeks that followed:

breastmilk blood amniotic fluid cord contractions labor stretchmarks lochia tears

When I tried to find words to describe her absence, psychological and spiritual terms appeared on the page. I filled my journal as I attempted to name the lacuna created when Beatrice's umbilical cord knotted off and killed her slowly. I wrote about the pit, the hole, the shadow, the silence, the emptiness.

But all of these various linguistic and compositional tactics ultimately fell short, even when I tried to weave them together in one coherent piece of writing.

All the signifiers in the world—well written, well edited, well published—could only point to the signified: my dead baby.

If Beatrice's story had stayed bound within the pages of my diary, I could perhaps forgive myself as a writer and better accept the limitations of the account. Yet that wasn't where I wanted Beatrice's story to live; I wanted to share it by putting it in context and conversation with stories by other people who had also experienced stillbirth.

After working through many drafts, I finally decided to write about how my grief process impacted my relationships both with friends and acquaintances who had suffered miscarriages and stillbirths as well as those who had not. When I finally got my essay into a form that I felt communicated my isolation in an accessible and true way, I began submitting the book proposal for *They Were Still Born: Personal Stories about Stillbirth* to publishers.

Over the next nine months, sixteen publishers rejected the book; but in November 2009, I got word from Rowman & Littlefield Publishers that they wanted to publish my book.

As I worked on the manuscript, which includes 20 essays by other writers who had stillborn babies, it appealed to me that I served as the mother and the midwife for these stories. And surprisingly, I realized that the resulting book would be at once both living and dead, like our children.

The words and stories in *They Were Still Born* came to life. When they were finally published, they could circulate through the world, touch and be touched, get retold, and be repurposed by others. However, in another sense, our stories died because they became closed off from our own hands; unlike in the case of a blog or a website, writers can't update or correct a printed book in the future.

Once *They Were Still Born* came out, reviewers responded. Readers bought it and posted comments online. Libraries acquired copies. And people who I have never met read about the most intimate and heart-wrenching experience of my life.

~~

I don't think of her every time I hear a baby cry. I don't feel a pang of grief when I see a butterfly. I can pass a cemetery without immediately conjuring her face.

But there are also ways in which my daughter Beatrice has irrevocably changed me, even though I do not actively grieve her death anymore. When I hear that an acquaintance is expecting, I'm happy for them, but I have to bite back advice I've learned the hard way. "Don't set up the crib," I want to say. "Put the car seat in the car, but don't set up the crib until you're really, really sure you're bringing a baby home with you." Again, the experience of having a baby die inside me alters not only my perspective and way of being in the world, it also impinges upon what I speak and how.

Even now, when I look at my two living daughters, my heart can see her ghost, growing with them. She would stand a head above Charlotte (born just ten months after Beatrice) and a head below Evelyn, who was not yet 2 when Beatrice died. My three brown-haired brown-eyed girls, a matching complete set of matryoshkas.

More than ten years after Beatrice died, I no longer walk around with a gaping wound, my uterus aching. But not a single one of the days I have lived since she died has ended without her passing through my mind. The sun has not set on a single day without me wishing she somehow could have lived.

Over the months I worked on writing and editing the book, I was pregnant with my fourth baby, this time a boy. As he grew from another dream into a reality inside me, I perched the laptop on my burgeoning lap and molded words and ideas with my fingers.

Sometimes people who knew about my book project asked me how I handled reading, writing, and editing narratives of loss while pregnant, and I understand why they asked. I'm sure it seemed to them like a morbid and upsetting project to work on when expecting another baby myself.

What these people didn't understand, however, is that spending time with narratives of babyloss couldn't remind of Beatrice. Simply put, that couldn't happen because she wasn't something that I ever forgot. I didn't need the book project to recall that my healthy, beautiful daughter had died inside of me or that it could happen again.

In reality, working on the book helped me to channel love for Beatrice—and even my anxiety about another stillbirth—into something useful, productive, and tangible.

On October 30, 2010, my son, Calvin, was born in the same hospital where I delivered Beatrice. *They Were Still Born* was delivered to my doorstep two weeks later.

It was a year of wonders.

~~

I've always believed that narratives help people—both writers and readers—make sense of the world and our place within it. Toni Morrison, reflecting on the power and importance of narratives, writes, "First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin and in what I find to be significant."

Like other marginalized communities, people who share their stories of miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant death frequently find themselves stigmatized or judged for content that makes others uncomfortable. Even worse, our stories may get ignored or dismissed as overly-sentimental or too personal. These stories bring out the absurd, the tragic, the horrifying, the vulnerabilities we all share as humans.

Twenty-first century Americans don't do a good job talking about many things, and I believe that death, especially the death of a child, is one of the hardest subjects we confront. Even though—or perhaps because—they are hard to read, narratives like those in *They Were Still Born* are significant. They give readers insight into the meaning-making importance of telling stories, and pull back the curtain on an often overlooked or misunderstood human experience.

Because I was so happy with my book when it was first published, I've been surprised by the dissatisfaction I feel now that my essay is six years old. After all, the events on which I reflect in my narrative have not changed in the intervening years. Yet when I read it, the words are woefully incomplete. At public readings and presentations to health care professionals, the words of my essay give me access to the feelings of the pain, darkness, and loneliness I experienced when Beatrice died. However, the overwhelming sensation is that I'm reading someone else's story. The narrative's author is someone I used to know, and know intimately. I can channel her, like a wispy younger sister I pity for her youth and inexperience. I feel compassion for her because she is wounded and suffering. From her limited positionality on her grief journey, she really is doing the best she can.

But I also feel a little bit impatient with this other Janel. At odd moments, I have to suppress the desire to reject her, to commit an act of erasure. Intellectually I know that this narrator isn't actually someone else—she is me, and the story she tells is a story we share—yet she does not know all that I know. When she stands on her paper platform, telling our shared trauma, she does it in my name, too, even though it is no longer the story I would tell.

> In the years since Beatrice's death and birth, I have come to see her death as one tiny piece of the human story. It is a huge part of my story… but the details about my pregnancy with her, the particulars about how and why she died, and the specific ways in which I grieved have gradually faded. They've grown vague and fuzzy around the edges (I never would have believed that could happen, but it has). (*They Were Still Born: Personal Stories about Stillbirth*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010.)

I am removed even further from my loss than when I wrote this passage (ten years out instead of four). And this realization about the "vague and fuzzy around the edges" aspect of my memories about the "particulars" is even more true now than when I wrote it in 2010.

If I were to write a new narrative about Beatrice today, I would write a different story. So I have had to make peace with the older version of my narrative. I'm learning to see it as a pinprick of light, a pure representation of who I was and what sense I made of the senseless death of my daughter at the time that I wrote it.

Even though I feel a disconnect between the story as I wrote it then and the way I feel now, I still long for my daughter, still write about her and about how I remember her.

Other contributors to the book have told me that they feel similarly—that they have learned an acceptance, even a love for ourselves and our stories, as we change. Grief changes us because love changes us.

And grief is love.

A prevalent theme in babyloss literature is a deep fear that other people will forget our babies. In telling and retelling stories about our dead children, we make meaning. We keep them alive, in a sense. That's essentially what all stories do, regardless of their subject.

By talking about our babies and describing how it feels to live without them, we imbue their short existences with significance.

As time has passed, I find myself talking about Beatrice less and less. She is no less a part of my life than before, and I still think of her often. But I don't feel the same need to talk about her absence, and I don't need anyone else to validate her life or her death. She has become like the air around me or like a lyric that never quite leaves.

I learned how to sit with Grief, almost as if she was an old friend with whom I'd fought but then reconciled. There's a comfort there, a familiarity, a closeness. I have survived something horrible and lived to embrace life anew.

In the ongoing process of writing about writing about my daughter's death, it appeals to me that my daughter's afterlife is somewhat analogous to the afterlife of my essay in *They Were Still Born*.

Like with Beatrice, I brought into the world my best effort: a combination of experience, a product of love, and the very best I could do.

I know that my story is beautiful. It is true. It is no longer under my control. And it is heartbreakingly incomplete. Even if I could go back and rewrite my story for *They Were Still Born*, it would only temporarily bring the narrative back into alignment with my current perspective; ultimately it would seek, again, release to the world.

The story that I'm so sure I want to write today would, for a few days or weeks, feel like it expressed the essence. Nevertheless, even if it seemed perfect when I completed it (and it hardly ever does, as any writer can attest), as time passes and I grow further from the moment in which I wrote it, the same frustrated wistfulness would creep over me. I would grapple with the inadequacy of it and start to tinker. I'd replace a word, slash a sentence, rewrite an entire passage in an effort to get closer to what I meant.

I'm learning to accept that one story can never capture both the beauty of my baby and the lifelong grief I carry over her death. (Of course, no one story can ever truly capture all of anything.) The narrative I wrote about the aftermath of Beatrice's death shows an important part of my story, but it can't possibly express the evolving reality of life after stillbirth.

And so the cycle continues: remember, reflect, write, revise, release, regret, revisit, rewrite. I iteratively write this story again but each version again recedes as I continue living without her.

Unlike the stories I tell about her, I can't change what happened to Beatrice.

She is my daughter. She died. She will always be my daughter, and yet there is nothing about her short existence that I can change now. Bound by time, I can no more return to the time leading up to her birth than I can make her again a living, breathing girl. I cannot return, hold her one more time, sing her another song, bathe her, dress her. I cannot feel her movements again. I cannot live the months of my pregnancy again, this time knowing it is all the time I will ever have with her.

My daughter is unattainable, except through memory and narrative, and even those means are limited and frustrating: slippery, uncontainable, unreachable.

So maybe that's why it seems so important to get the story right. Perhaps the impossibility of bringing her back is why I'm drawn, again and again, to try put into words the meaning of her life on my own life.

I can't have her.

What I can do is keep writing, trying with every attempt to better understand and better express why she matters.

Acknowledgment

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Narrative

On Empathy and Appeasement

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In an effort to complicate the commonplace understanding of empathy as an uncomplicated good, the author draws on her experience of sibling abuse to distinguish between empathy and appeasement. Because both rely on perspective-taking, empathy and appeasement are often conflated, but this essay demonstrates the importance of recognizing that empathy originates in courage and appeasement in fear. Abuse victims will recognize this important difference quickly enough; we need others espousing the value of empathy to recognize the difference as well.

It has taken me years to distinguish between empathy and appeasement, in no small part because empathy has been sold to us as an uncomplicated good. President Obama tells us that one of the biggest problems with this country is that we suffer from an empathy deficit. We need more people who can understand what it's like to walk for a while in other people's shoes. As a professor of English, I'm aware of concerns and debates scholars and teachers engage in regarding whether reading literature teaches students to feel empathy. *Can* empathy be taught? Empathy is conceptualized as a substance that we always need more of, a substance we have depleted and need to refill by reading, a substance that can lubricate the mechanics of social life in these troubled times. Leslie Jamison's beautiful book, *The Empathy Exams*, won the Graywolf Press Nonfiction Prize and was A *New York Times* Book Review Editor's Choice in 2014, and rightly so, for it is nuanced, complex, thoughtful, surprising, and at every turn intellectually stimulating. Empathy, Jamison tells us, "comes from the Greek *empatheia*—*em* (into) and *pathos* (feeling)—a penetration, a kind of travel. It suggests you enter another person's pain as you'd enter another country, through immigration and customs, border crossing by way of query: *What grows where you are? What are the laws? What animals graze there?"* (6). Jamison also writes, "Empathy isn't just listening, it's asking the questions whose answers need to be listened to. Empathy requires inquiry as much as imagination. Empathy requires knowing you know nothing. Empathy requires acknowledging a horizon of context that extends perpetually beyond what you can see" (5).

We haven't done much work, though, to contextualize empathy. Not all empathy is the same. Empathy for your friend with cancer is not the same and does not have the same moral complexity as empathy for the person who is abusing you.

*

The sheets on my bed are light brown with letters spelling *sleeeeeeep* all over them in a dark brown whimsical font. *Sleeeeeeeep*, they're telling me, but all I can do is lie in bed and wonder why everybody hates me. I feel trapped in this room. It's my new room. The old room was downstairs in the new addition that was built onto the house when I was born. I moved upstairs when my new stepfather, Warren, moved in. Warren is my mother's second husband, the man who I imagined would one day become my new daddy after my real daddy died when I was four years old. My new bedroom is upstairs with Susie and Margie's and Guy and Timmy's rooms. Guy and Timmy share a room with bunk beds. Susie and Margie share the room next to mine, and the house is configured so that to get to their room, they have to go through mine—just a few steps, but enough to make me feel like I can never really shut the door or shut them out. My door is always open. Actually, all three bedrooms upstairs are connected. Inside Susie and Margie's room is a door that leads to Guy and Timmy's room, but it wouldn't make sense for the girls to walk all the way through the boys' room to get to theirs, not when it's so much easier to walk just a few steps through mine.

Bedtime. Margie, five years older than me, walks through to her room. "You little shit. You're dead."

Middle of the night. Margie walks back through to the one bathroom in the house. "Little fucker. Fat shit."

Back to her room. "Skank."

Morning. "You're dead, you little fuck."

I get up, go to the bathroom, shut and lock the door behind me. I check the linen closet (which, for a very long time I understood as "living closet," like living room) to be sure she's not in there. She's done it to me before. I was sitting on the toilet doing my business when she jumped out of the linen closet and screamed at me. I cried. I was eight years old.

I brush my teeth and contemplate once again rolling deodorant on her toothbrush. All I want is for her to die. All I want is to be an only child. Deodorant didn't do it last time. I'll try my mother's perfume. Surely that's gotta kill her or at least make her very sick. Sick enough to leave me alone.

*

At night sometimes I try to suffocate myself with my pillow. I lie on my back with my pillow over my head and push down as hard as I can until it hurts and I have to take it away.

"Fat fucking shit."

Or I lie on my stomach with my face squished into my pillow, hoping no air could make its way in.

"Stupid fucker. I'll kill you."

I trace the letters on my sheets. Sleeeeeeeeeep.

"Piece of shit."

I lie in bed and cry and wonder why everybody hates me.

"Fat bitch."

*

I'm sitting at the kitchen table reading one of Ma's magazines and eating my cereal. Margie comes down the stairs. It's early. She walks by me on the way to the cereal cabinet and punches me in the arm. "Ow!" I yell. It fucking hurts. And I yell. But nobody really hears me. After a while I stop reacting. Sometimes I wish she *would* just kill me. What's stopping her, really?

*

She's always hitting me for no reason, punching my arm or my stomach and I cry out for my mother and my mother tells me to stay away from her, to go do something else. She threatens to kill me always, telling me that as soon as Ma left, I'm dead. I fear for my life before I can walk to school alone.

*

When I lie in bed coughing, unable to sleep because of a cold, I hear her in the next room yelling at me. "You little fucker, shut *up*!"

*

On the first of every month, Ma gets her Social Security check in the mail. She hates for it to be late because of a holiday and she hates when the mail comes late on the first because our regular mailman has the day off or because he's simply late. She stands at the front door staring out, looking for him. Then she looks at the clock and swears. She wants to get it before lunch so we can go to Friendly's.

Before she pays any of the bills or goes to the grocery store, Ma takes me to the mall. We park at JCPenney's—far from the door and when I complain Ma tells me I have two legs. Use them. At Penney's Ma buys herself a couple new tops and lets me go to Esprit or G. Fox to get a new sweatshirt or a new pair of shoes. I love showing up to school on Monday with a new sweatshirt. It signifies that I'm cool, I'm loved, and my mother has enough money to buy me new things.

When we get home from the mall, we to leave the bags in the trunk until Margie is out of the house. Ma doesn't want Margie to see the things she bought for me. This probably saves me from a beating.

*

Margie's twenty-two and pregnant from the boyfriend who beats her. She's moved back in with Ma in order to get away from him. She's back in her old room upstairs, the one connected to mine. She still verbally attacks me every time she walks through.

I'm seventeen at this point. My boyfriend Michael is over the house and we're playing cards at the kitchen table. Margie comes into the kitchen from the living room and calls me a bitch. I tell her to shut up. Six months pregnant, she hits me. I get up to get away from her and she chases me around the kitchen table trying to grab me so she can kick me. "Are you gonna kick your baby, too?" I say, disgusted. She doesn't get me that time, but if you thought she'd grown out of it, you'd be wrong.

*

I understand now that Margie did what she did to me out of fear and insecurity, out of a desperate need for discipline and care. I understand that she had the same mother I had, the same mother who was terribly depressed, a mother who had never worked through her grief or perhaps knew that she could. Ma told me to stay away from her, so I tried. I was a kid. I believed that if I did what my mother told me to do, I might be okay.

But those four words. Those four words did so much.

Stay away from her.

Here's what they did: Those four words moved me to take on Margie's perspective on the world rather than develop one of my own. They told me that the perspective that mattered in my home was *hers*. The world that mattered, the comfort that mattered was *hers*. My mother told me to identify with my abuser, to make her world safe, to keep her from getting upset, so that maybe, just maybe, things can remain calm on the surface.

Inside, though, you're a mess. Your stomach turns and your bowels rumble. You're shaking. You're never calm because you never know if you're doing it right. Living. Loving. Seeing. Am I seeing the world right? Will you protect me if I identify with my abuser? Will you love me if I appease her?

*

Appeasement. Not empathy. Appeasement and empathy share the practice of adopting another's perspective, but their crucial differences need articulation in a culture far too tempted to conflate them. For evidence of such temptation, see any recent discussion asking rape victims to forgive their rapists.

In his work on PTSD, psychologist Chris Cantor complicates the simplistic and commonplace understanding of reactions to threat that we're all familiar with: fight or flight. Instead, Cantor argues that people employ six specific defenses undertaken "in a specific sequence: avoidance, attentive

immobility, withdrawal, aggressive defense, appeasement, and tonic immobility" (1040). Appeasement, Cantor writes, "is primarily a defense for conspecific encounters with more dominant individuals. It involves pacification, conciliation, and submission" (1040).

When faced with a threat by a more dominant member of one's own species—as in any case of child abuse—the child can try to avoid the abuser (defense 1); she can stand very still, regulate her breathing, and hope not to be noticed (defense 2); she cannot, if she lives in the same home as the abuser, withdraw from the abusive situation (defense 3); she can hardly form an aggressive defense (defense 4); but she *can* try to appease her abuser (defense 5).

In my situation, appeasing my abuser meant doing as my mother told me: staying away from Margie. It meant understanding that the person in the home to appease was Margie. How did she like things to be? That's how things would be.

"De-escalation is one of appeasement's core functions," writes Cantor (1042). Indeed, to be made responsible for de-escalation was also to be made responsible for escalation. All Margie would have to do would be to say, "She came near me."

Appeasement is a reaction to fear. Appeasement requires perspective-taking, an ability to walk in another person's shoes.

*

Let nobody tell you that the reach of abuse is not long and far. I struggle with empathy: with having too much of it, with knowing who to give it to, with losing myself in it.

When I was supposed to be developing a perspective on the world and my place in it, I was instead mired in an abusive situation in which I was being taught that appeasement was the way to keep myself safe. It didn't work. But it was the only strategy I was offered. So I used it. I tried to stay away from Margie. I tried to think about her needs. When I sneezed, I did so quietly. She still told me to shut the fuck up. I tried to take up as little space as possible. I tried to make her world quiet and peaceful and it never worked. She still beat me up every chance she got.

As an adult, making friends has sometimes been difficult because I don't know who I can give my empathy to. My history of sibling abuse makes me a very good friend in that I'm incredibly empathetic. I can anticipate another person's needs sometimes before they can. I know just what gift will make them laugh out loud. I give and give and most of my friends give back.

But in the last five years I've had to reassess and abandon more than one friendship. "We should empathize from courage, is the point," writes Jamison, "and it makes me think about how much of my empathy comes from fear. I'm afraid other people's problems will happen to me, or else I'm afraid other people will stop loving me if I don't adopt their problems as my own" (22). I've had to reassess those friendships because I realized that I was empathizing not from courage or friendship

but from fear that if I didn't adopt their problems as my own they would no longer love me. Empathizing from fear is not empathizing at all. It's appeasement. Appeasement is an attempt to de-escalate. Appeasement is a response to what you know, deep down, could escalate in ways you've experienced before. Appeasement is a reaction to a lopsided relationship, one in which one person does all the work of anticipating the other's needs.

Appeasement is a reaction to predators.

Empathy is listening, asking questions, imagining, knowing you can't know just how the other person feels. Empathy is caring safely because you trust you'll be cared for, too. Empathy is not something you can be shamed into.

But appeasement is.

Appeasement can be taught. It is taught every single day to victims of abuse who are later taught that perspective-taking is a valued intellectual and emotional skill. We call it empathy.

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Narrative

Medical Humanities: Healing through Personal Narrative

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Medical humanities apply holistic, contemporary healing mechanisms that encourage personal narrative. Survivors are seen as complex individuals, not merely in narrow terms of their ailments or trauma. Perhaps most unlike medical sciences, medical humanities adopt a "pay-it-forward" philosophy that promotes healing others through expression of self.

In delving into the broad domains of medical humanities, I've discovered interworking systems which acknowledge and embrace that we don't have all the answers to healing without considering human complexity. Given this definition, it's apparent that medical sciences—more traditional systems of healing—are significantly different from medical humanities. While medical sciences resort to healing by using mostly one-way communication (doctor-to-patient), medical humanities employ a variety of disciplines to pose questions, arouse ideas and promote multi-dimensional healing. Unlike conventional approaches that emphasize illness or trauma, medical humanities adhere to holistic philosophies. In other words, survivors are seen as people—complex, expressive, capable— rather than in narrow terms of their ailments.

As a young woman diagnosed with severe anxiety, I find solace in this shift of perspective. From the framework of medical sciences, you might argue that I am my obsessive compulsive disorder and social anxiety. My resolve has always been the same in these systems: pacification by way of substances. Yet to medical humanities I am a person shaped but not defined by my maladies. My own interpretation of obsessive compulsive disorder, for example, is crucial in my treatment. Unlike medical sciences, the humanities spectrum views individual narrative as the channel to the 9 Joys: being, physical (the body), meaning, hope, peak experience, blessings, artfulness, study and service. Patient narrative, the backdrop to optimizing the human condition, is at the core of medical humanities.

The *British Medical Journal* explains the connection between narratives and treating illness. "Understanding the narrative context of illness provides framework for approaching a patient's problems holistically, as well as revealing diagnostic and therapeutic options. Furthermore, narratives of illness provide a medium for the education of both patients and health professionals and may also expand and enrich the research agenda" (Greenhalgh). We might look at this alternatively and posit that medical humanities combine micro- and macro-analysis. That is, illness is explored by its

consequences both directly to the individual as well as to his or her way of life and surrounding environment. This allows narrative medicine to have what I would call a "pay it forward" approach. Patients seek healing through self-expression and interpersonal activities, creating platforms for other patients to interpret, expand on, and cultivate anew. Similarly, this approach to healing provides medical professionals more insight into cognitive roles of illness in patients, roles that are otherwise difficult to measure. Clearly, expression is critical to medical humanities (Columbia).

My personal connections to expressive healing have been largely self-led. When I was sixteen, I became deeply enamored of a nineteen-year-old heroin addict while in the midst of his rehabilitation. I was both attracted to and intimidated by his addiction, a years-long melee that carried with it a pending criminal charge for possession. Ironically, our meeting was only possible because of his addiction as I had met him while visiting my friend in rehab. His brief time in my life, while stimulating, was also volatile and emotionally draining. The contours of our friendship were murky, due largely to my pause to date an addict, and he vacated my life when our friendship failed to evolve into anything resembling romance. As summer of that year drew to a close, he prematurely withdrew from his recovery program and migrated some fifty miles north. He left without giving me any closure and my head spun with questions. *Why was I so hard to love?*

Around this time I worked with a psychiatrist, but I received closure independent of my doctor. Rummaging the shelves at Barnes & Noble, I was drawn to a slim journal decorated with a tree and an inspirational quote. I don't actually remember the quote, but I replace it in my mind with a different one credited to Charles R. Swindoll: "Life is ten percent what happens to me and ninety percent how I react to it." I remember this journal in particular because it became a linchpin to my healing. During my nightly battles with insomnia I would unlatch the journal's magnetized fold and confide in its pages. My early entries were fictitious but nonetheless spoke a great deal about my real life. I would write detailed storylines about the nineteen-year-old who left me questioning why it was easier to abandon me than to break down the walls I had put up for my protection. There was a noticeable pattern in my earliest short stories: he returned to my city, to my life, to me.

As I began healing with the passing time, these stories became less fictitious and the endings featured him in diminishing quantities. This pattern occurred in direct proportion to my rising self-esteem and healing. In retrospect, I began expressing myself on paper because the paper never judged me or ridiculed my pain. Those journal entries placated me just as much as, if not more than the anti-depressants I had been prescribed. Months later, I felt empowered to share my writing with others. To this day, writing is my most powerful tool for defining and expressing my hurt and my pleasure, my regrets and my blessings. Self-expression continues to free me.

As I study medical humanities I return to that quote by Swindoll that somehow appears on my journal in my memory, though I know the quote doesn't rightfully belong in the same memory as my journal. I think that quote defines medical humanities superbly. We have little control over a great many events that shape our lives, but we can summon control over our reactions to these events. The aftermath, in other words, can be optimized from a cultural, artistic and humanities

approach, known formally and increasingly as medical humanities. Forming strong bonds between those within the medical community, medical humanities' broad contexts reach survivors far and wide, opening doors of communication and expression that have been closed for too long. Ultimately, the events in our lives are relatively unsubstantial; what really matters is how these events resonate with us, change us and empower us.

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Article

Meta-Cognitive Thinking and Logical Approaches after a Cardiac Arrest

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> Is logical thinking an appropriate cognitive approach to the average person that faces the recovery process after a traumatic cardiac arrest?

The necessary recovery along the post traumatic life the person has to face caused by a cardiac arrest is often a very impervious and densely difficult process.

The cognitive damages caused by the cardiac event can often lead to a chaotic thinking which gets frequently intertwined with past and present beliefs and mindsets eventually inherent in religious, demi-religious, mystical or superstitious, spiritual or transcendental patterns and ideologies and forms of magical thinking.

Having a faith or a transcendental belief system represents a cognitive condition that surely provides a sense of psychological and existential security to the believer, which is the reason why so often the post trauma scenario leads to an increased attachment to the religious or spiritual ideas and archetypes the subject holds.

The cognitive disorder post cardiac arrest often seems to present chaotic psychological onsets which are quite similar to a post psychosis, meaning to say: due to the factors inherent in the necessity of re-gaining psychological security; religious archetypes and memes or eventually ideological characteristics commonly present in beliefs like the "new age movement" or the concept of spirituality itself, plus the cultural influences of local traditions and the system of morality in which the person grew up, get often intertwined with the process of recovery and its necessary convalescent work aimed to re-organize oneself cognition.

The inquiry we are examining in this article is pivoted in the analysis inherent in the validity or not of a recovery accompanied by a logical and meta-cognitive approach. The summary of this inquiry can be synthesized by the three points that follow:

1) Is it more appropriate to allow those whose mind is tethered to magical thinking alike beliefs to use those psychological and cultural constructs as means aimed to facilitate the process of recovery?

If we undertake this approach then we must also avoid attempts aimed to challenge the person's beliefs so to prevent possibilities in which the subject can eventually get psychologically hurt or offended because of the rationalization of his or her faiths and beliefs, which is a circumstance that can perhaps add even more psychological pain along the already painful process of recovery.

The issue is: does a cultural/religious, demi-religious or spiritual mindset help the cognitive process of recovery of the person that faces the psychological and cognitive aftermath of a traumatic cardiac arrest?

2) Is it instead more appropriate to engage a cognitive approach throughout the process of recovery so to use rationality and skeptical intelligence as means capable to re-equilibrate, re-gain and re-organize a sufficiently solid and ordered cognition and therefore sober and rationally clear processes of thinking?

The issue is: does an assistance based on logical and critical thinking help the person to rationalise the chaotic, confused and psychologically painful cognitive process of re-organization of his/her own psyche?

The necessity of this analysis is not to be considered as a questionable or philosophical approach or as a marginal issue but rather as a dutiful inquiry:

The question is: Is the allowance of former or present more or less gullible beliefs, faiths or spiritual mindsets something capable to prevent further confusion along the re-organization of the person's cognition?

Or is it something that, if in lack of critical analysis and rational approaches, can rather produce ulterior confusion in the person's psychology, as well it can perhaps result even in more or less delusional processes of thinking?

Like we analysed above: a faith-mindset surely provides a “psychological anchor” that establishes a sense of mental and existential safety in the psyche of the suffering and confused subject, however what must be highlighted, considered and analysed is the circumstance in which the defective condition of the cognition of the subject can easily engage increasingly irrational mindsets (due to the confused state of mind) and this phenomenology can actually and easily jeopardize a rational and appropriate recovery.

By imagining a couple of delicate but indicative circumstances we can formulate these two scenarios.

Case 1

We can imagine that the victim of a cardiac arrest is a father of one or more children.

The person’s children are just entering their adolescence (meaning to say: the delicate cognitive transition they are going through is highly fragile as well suggestible and impressionable).

The person, before the cardiac arrest, was a religious person, as well the subject was relatively interested in modern spiritual conceptualizations and conspiracy theories.

The person also believed in ghosts, in the possibility of "angelic presences" and in the possibility to communicate with them, (as well the subject is not interested at all about the invitation to rationalise the circumstance in which he/she believes in something that has no evidences whatsoever).

Along the post-cardiac arrest-scenario the subject tries to progressively "anchor" his/her mind to such ideas and beliefs also by generating justificatory and idealized patterns and confirmation bias-alike hypothesis related to what happened to him and by eventually linking the cardiac event to some irrational ideology such as "divine signs", an "after-life revelations and visions", a "having been gifted by god", a "spiritual missions" whatsoever and so on. When the cognitive architecture gets more and more reconstructed (but it still relatively fallacious) the subject communicates with his/her children through the conditioned filters represented by such not-questioned ideas and beliefs and in this way he/she generates inevitably a form of unhealthy and irrational indoctrination within the children's cognition due to the situation in which eventually the children come to believe in such biases.

In this scenario, because of the allowance and the lack of skeptical questioning and also the proliferations of such irrational mindsets, a cognitive damage and an unhealthy educative process of biased indoctrination against the psychological sake of the children indisputably come into being.

Case 2

As above: the person has/had religious or spiritual beliefs and the psychological aftermath of the cardiac arrest contributes to the increasing of the faith in those beliefs, as well the confused cognition caused by the cardiac event amplifies and magnifies the lack or the deliberate avoidance of the act of skeptical reasoning about such ideologies.

However: in this case the person has no children and no family.

Also in this case, an absence of logical reasoning and rational inquiry contributes to the onset of a process of isolation or instead to a process of progressive integration with irrational ideas, groups and eventually even cults or sects: the more irrational and eventually fixated the person becomes, the more people around the subject tend to alienate the person due to his irrationalism and due to the fear of madness that usually people hold: as well the person in question eventually becomes a target for possible manipulators and deleterious organizations capable to nourish, promote, emphasize and even increase and consolidate the irrational beliefs the person holds (this is a modern tendency that is rising in the virtual word and social networks such as "magic healing", pseudo-scientific approaches, spiritual practices of all kind and false promises of miraculous recovery and so on).

This process of alienation plus a process of integration with unhealthy circumstances and adhesions does not produce any productive help for the subject: in this case the subject instead enters a slow

or rapid process of psychological decay which can be merely a disintegrator of his necessary healthy mental recovery and rather a producer of future mental illness or a serious cognitive dissonance.

3) Considering the risks and the possible unhealthy consolidations of apparently consolatory but biased beliefs and irrational ideologies, a logical approach and a recovery based on a non-provocative meta-cognition (thinking about thinking) and basic critical thinking (questioning), even when the subject has an average intellect and common sense, appears to be the most appropriate psycho-therapeutic manner to accompany the suffering person throughout the necessary cognitive recovery.

The establishment of a sober psychological order and mental sobriety is certainly an objective and goal more efficient and productive than a deliberate avoidance to face and challenge a psychological anchorage to former or new irrational beliefs, despite the pleasantness they perhaps give to the subject or the relevance they had in his or her past.

Article

Harlem Hospital's Journey to Patient Navigation

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This essay discusses the history of 20th century black migration to Harlem, New York and the utilization of Harlem Hospital. This examination is based on New York newspaper articles in the 1920's. They tell the story, from a journalist's perspective, of the challenges African Americans experienced in their interactions with Harlem Hospital. The implicit communication of segregation of Harlem Hospital at that time is connected to the development of patient navigation in the 1970's. The creation of patient navigation will be discussed in the context of historical health disparities that are increasingly manifested today.

Seven years ago in a small conference room of the Ralph Lauren Cancer Center in Harlem, I had the opportunity to meet the renown Dr. Harold P. Freeman who is the pioneer of patient navigation. I first heard about him through my graduate school advisors, one of whom referred to Dr. Freeman as the "doyen of black docs everywhere" and the "grand old men of American medicine". Being in the presence of Dr. Freeman's had me awestruck and admittedly I still have that feeling today.

Dr. Freeman shared his story of how he started patient navigation at Harlem Hospital to a group of men and women in that conference room who were eager to run with the baton that he created. As an oncology surgeon, he was often surprised to see women from the community coming to the hospital with late stage breast cancer. Over and over again Dr. Freeman would see patients who he couldn't save, although they lived within walking distance to the hospital. He said that he began to venture out into the community to talk with people about why they weren't utilizing the hospital. Well, he learned from folks in the community that they didn't believe that the hospital was for them, that they couldn't afford the services, and quite frankly the facility was very intimidating. One can imagine a woman going into Harlem Hospital for an examination and being told "you have breast cancer", and then being spoken to using foreign medical terms about her health condition.

In an effort to bridge a connection with the hospital, Dr. Freeman started a weekend clinic at Harlem Hospital and he began to identify people in the community who wanted to be helpers and leaders. The people he sought did not have to possess any particular healthcare training, but they had compassion and a desire to be of service to others. Dr. Freeman would train these people to navigate Harlem Hospital and resources in the community to help get patients into the hospital

earlier for treatment. This innovative approach resulted in the reduction of Harlem women coming to the hospital with late stage breast cancer.

When Dr. Freeman talked about why and how patient navigation began in Harlem, I really didn't have a true historical context of health disparities in that area of New York City. I knew that Harlem was predominantly the home of people of African and Latino descent, they experienced high rates of chronic illnesses, and they had limited access to fresh organic fruits and vegetables. What I didn't know was that the disparity goes back to a time when southern African Americans began setting their sights on a better life in New York.

At the turn of the 20th century when Jim Crow laws were implemented in the south, many African Americans migrated to the north. In search of job opportunities and the American dream, African Americans took the long journey from their southern roots to create a better future for themselves and future generations. One of the places that saw an influx of African Americans was Harlem, New York.

By 1921, over 200,000 African Americans from the south had migrated to Harlem and approximately 46% utilized Harlem Hospital ("Negroes Win Medical Jobs"). Although Jim Crow laws were not in New York, segregation and discrimination were very much the norm. Harlem Hospital reflected the segregation of the times by only providing health care services to African Americans on certain days of the week ("Charges of Graft"). African American patients were also overcharged for health care services rendered by the hospital, and such excessive charges were required prior to receiving any care according to charges filed against at the hospital during those times.

When the fees were paid, African American patients faced the uncertainty of receiving proper treatment or in the event of surgery leaving the hospital alive. Historical reports indicate that patients had needles broken in their arms, denied the use of X-ray machines, barred from certain floors for care, and left to die for lack of medical attention ("Charges of Graft"). As a result of such poor treatment and distrust in the medical system, African Americans went to the hospital as a final option. The delay in medical care put the community at risk if they had contagious diseases and it put them personally at risk if they had a disease such as cancer spreading throughout their body.

The first African American physician that was hired by Harlem Hospital in 1919 was Dr. Louis Wright. He researches on the impact of cancer on the body and the barriers within the healthcare system of those times led to the integration of African American health care staff and patients at Harlem Hospital. The work of Dr. Wright impacted the function of Harlem Hospital in a community that desperately needed to be reflected in the health care facility. While Dr. Wright was the forerunner to Dr. Freeman, both men recognized the need to build links between the hospital and the Harlem community for the benefit of saving lives.

When I learned about the historical roots of health disparities in Harlem, I gained a deeper understanding about the entrenched feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness that are felt by

disenfranchised people. The systematic structure of alienating people is never forgotten and it perpetuates distrust throughout future generations. The patient navigation work initiated by Dr. Freeman has played a significant role in breaking this cycle as it relates to cancer. However, the environmental challenges of income inequality, unemployment, little or no insurance, and low health literacy must continue to be challenged with innovation and community engagement just like patient navigation.

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Article

Performing Bodies: The Construction of the Unconstructed in Gunter von Hagens' Body Worlds

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This article argues Gunther von Hagens' "Body Worlds" exhibit is not what it purports to be, genuine bodies presented without interpretation that allow observers to better understand and marvel at the human body. Instead, the exhibit is very much an interpretation, performing a fantasy of the social ideal that male is the norm and female exists for its sexual and reproductive purposes.

In July of 2004, Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds had its premier exhibit in the United States. Presenting actual preserved human and animal bodies in various poses and differing stages of dissection, this exhibit purports to present lay audiences with what only the medical profession had previously seen: the miracle of the human body and its complex operations. Made possible by "plastination," a process developed by von Hagens that preserves bodies at a cellular level, the donated corpses are able to exist indefinitely as they teach growing numbers of people about how our own bodies work.

What makes this display of anatomy so shocking and exciting to the crowds that visit it is that the bodies are proffered to be the "genuine": they appear to be the "real thing" rather than a mere medium, a model. The Body Worlds website encourages this view, stating: "a model is nothing more than an interpretation... All models look alike and are, essentially, simplified versions of the real thing. The authenticity of the specimens [in Body Worlds], however, is fascinating and enables the observer to experience the marvel of the real human body." Despite the exhibit's insistence on its authenticity, the bodies are very much a construction, and as this paper argues, a performance of the white male fantasy of normalcy.

Von Hagens began developing his method in the 1970s, supposedly getting his idea from seeing anatomy specimens in polymer blocks and thinking that the polymer should be inside rather than outside the body. This thought, combined with a visit to a butcher shop, began von Hagens' process of using rotary blade cutters, vacuums to extract air bubbles, and body parts infused with acetone to allow plastic to saturate the parts to create plastination (von Hagens).

In his exhibit's advanced examples, von Hagens presents these bodies sculpted into various positions, while the bodies are variously stripped of their skin, muscles, blood vessels, and organs. One such position is "The Chess Player," which presents a body, seated at a glass table before a chess board, one hand holding a chess piece. This hand is stripped of skin, so that audiences can see bones, veins, and fingernails. The eyes peering at this board, are wide open on a face that is also stripped of skin, except on the lips, so that viewers can see muscle, internal tissue, and bone of the face, but only the skin of the lips. The cranium of this body is removed, so the viewer can imagine seeing the visible brain working and the impulses for movement running along the neck, shoulders and arms, also stripped of skin. Other elements of the exhibit are body parts, devoid of their anatomical context. White tissue of obesity illustrates what the viewers' extra twenty pounds looks like beneath the surface of the skin. Plasticized uteri of women with fetuses in various stages of development demonstrate what life looks like before birth.

While in many ways this exhibit may seem shocking, it is legitimized by its apparent genuineness and its supposed contributions to the scientific world. The exhibit's website clearly identified the exhibit's aim: "to education the public about the inner workings of the human body and show the effects of poor health, good health and lifestyle choices." Responding to the question of why models are not sufficient, the web site responds

> Real human bodies show the details of disease and anatomy that cannot be shown with models. They also allow us to understand how each body has its own unique features, even on the inside. Visitors are drawn to real specimens in a way that they are not to plastic models. One of the special features of museums and science centres is that they offer people a chance to see the real thing in a safe and informative environment.

Body Worlds' legitimation with its claims of scientific contributions are very similar to the nineteenth-century display of humans that Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues blurred the line between the unacceptable and the acceptable: between "morbid curiosity and scientific interest, chamber of horrors and medical exhibition, circus and zoological garden, theatre and living ethnographic display, scholarly lecture and dramatic monologue" (34).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discusses this blurring within her discussion of ways in which museums and heritage sites not only display, but do. Calling the choices that museums and sites make regarding what they display and label "the poetics of detachment," Kirsehnblatt-Gimblett argues fragments are made. While some fragments, appearing as "a slice of life lifted from the everyday world and inserted into the museum gallery," are constructed (thus the display constitutes the subject) (20), others create a context that transforms the grotesque into science (23).

Similarly, Claudio Minca and Tim Oaks explain how tourist locations are performed. Tourism relies not merely fixed physical environments, but on forms of embodied activity, of performance (ix). No tourist wants to see merely a strip of land; tourists want signs explaining what happened, images of others appreciating the space, relics that again reproduce the place to take home, performances that make present the symbolic space.

So too to the visitors to Body Worlds want to see more than a cadaver lying on a table; visitors want to see what the bodies can do. What they look like if you pull our organs of the body as if they are drawers in a bureau, if you flay muscles so that the bodies look like they are flying.

The creation of performing bodies is not surprising for someone like von Hagens who is no stranger to performance. Wearing in all public appearances a hat that replicates the anatomist's hat painted by Rembrandt, von Hagen continually performs himself as a classic figure (von Hagens), and a martyr at that. His self-promoted biographical work *Pushing the Limits*, clearly presented as a 60th Birthday present to the anatomist, develops a narrative on how von Hagens was ostracized by a mainstream medical society hostile to his genius and on how he was imprisoned because of his opposition to Communism in East Germany, yet the biography little focuses on the Communist society in which von Hagens received his initial support, China.

Within the exhibit, the bodies perform, and they perform that which von Hagens and his team choose to have people see. The team chooses the poses, which flesh will be seen and which will not, the genders of models illustrating various organs. Von Hagens and his team have also clearly made the decision to have the models do more than lie on an autopsy table; they perform, and their performances are strikingly similar to those of the models filmed by Eadweard Muybridge in the nascent period of cinema. when audiences would duck in panic at the cinematic images such as that of an oncoming train. As Muybridge had models play table tennis, von Hagens presents his dead bodies engaged in soccer games. Clearly von Hagens is a mediator in the exhibit, structuring both the models and the exhibit to present a particular message.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett illustrates ways in which performances create meaning. Charles Willson Peale, for example, created exhibits of plants and animals that "testified to the purposiveness and goodness of God's creation" (27) while a Eugenics exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History in 1932 illustrated nature's mistakes. Von Hagens' exhibit too performs—and it performs a male fantasy of the normal.

To teach the public as models cannot, von Hagens relies almost exclusively on male bodies, using female bodies only to illustrate the female reproductive systems and infants within the uterus. Responding to criticisms of this bias, von Hagens' website states that von Hagens

> sees himself in the tradition of Renaissance anatomists, whose works traditionally included far more masculine than feminine bodies, since all but the reproductive systems are essentially the same. The musculature of male bodies is generally more pronounced and illustrates more aspects of the muscle system.

As von Hagens performs as a subject of a Rembrandt painting, he reaffirms that the male is the norm, and it is superior. Women perform to function their sexual and reproductive duties, the norm. Women's role is to perform sex in this pornographic display.

As we've argued elsewhere, the bodies perform because—according to von Hagens and his supporters—they continually probe for truth. And as is very clear, the bodies also perform for the viewers' entertainment. Most visitors to the exhibit recognize that the souvenir booths, audio tours, and baby carriages offered at the exhibits' entrances welcome people to a pleasurable visit. This is not a dull scientific lecture; this is fun. People can see what they have not seen before, maximum visibility of the body and all its workings!

Linda Williams' study of pornography discusses how pornography also seeks to inform and give pleasure. She argues that in providing maximum visibility, or what she terms the "frenzy of the visible," "cinematic hard core [that] present[s] itself as the unfaked, unstage mechanics of sexual action" that seeks to obtain what Foucault terms "scientia sexualis."

> It is no accident that visual pornography has seen itself as contributing to sex research, sex education, and practical self-help guides, nor that the genre has consistently maintained certain clinical-documentary qualities at the expense of other forms of realism or artistry that might actually be more arousing [than hard core pornography]. (Williams 48.)

Like the bodies in pornography, von Hagens' performing bodies also allow viewers to obtain "measurable, confessable 'truths'" (Williams 34). Male bodies do provide this pleasure to the viewer, but the arrangement of the exhibit illustrates that male bodies exist primarily to play soccer or chess. Women, however, exist within the exhibit to perform sexuality.

Von Hagens' exhibit is a performance. Like other museum exhibits, it chooses what will be seen and how. Though it claims to be unmediated, it is very mediated. While this in itself is typical of most museum exhibits, what is troubling about Body Worlds is that its performance suggests the male is the norm because it is superior. Women are encompassed within the male, except when they are othered by sexuality and reproduction. Then the woman's body is performed to merely illustrate the sexual or the maternal.

Body Worlds perpetuates a male fantasy and argues for this fantasy's genuity.

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Narrative

Short Little Pencils

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A non-fiction account of a juvenile delinquent's harrowing journey through the walls of the child welfare system. This article discusses the transformative power of writing and the act of creativity as a tool for healing trauma.

I used to see the world in black and white. You are a monster or a man, a puppet or puppeteer. There was no color in the walls of institutions, foster homes, and prisons I grew up in. At least that's what I thought when I walked into my prison cell when I was sixteen years old.

Up to that point, there was no color in my world. There was no color in watching my mother get beaten by my father. There was no color in watching her get gang raped by bikers after she escaped my father's grasp.

The first color I do remember is red. It was blood red, dark and oozing from my mother's face. Then that color became the only one I knew.

By the time I got to prison I had been locked up since I was six. I was the poster child for the child warfare system. When I was six they came and took me away from my mother. I remember watching the house fade in the rear window as we drove away. I remember the freeway signs zooming past at warp speed and the skyscrapers looming over my head like ancient Lego monsters as we drove into Portland.

I just wanted to protect my mother.

I spent the next six years in treatment centers, foster homes, and mental institutions doing everything in my power to get back home. Always trying to get home and never having a chance. She couldn't handle a child with problems.

I just wanted to be loved, that's it. Not just loved, but loved by her. She was the thing that I held onto when they stuck me in restraints when I was nine. I thought of her torture when they pierced my skin with the needle, rushing Thorazine in my arm to calm the rage that was a little boy with no home.

No milk and cookies, no basketball games.

For me there was only lunch time, school time, and pill time. I got to enjoy hours of therapy sessions with stuffed animals as play mates. There was always pity on the faces of those attempting to help me. There was nowhere for me to go. My mother became the enemy, the Mecca of deceit. All the counselors told me that I was the victim, that she was a bad person. Even though I didn't have a home, I kept running away.

Then I was Lil Josh, homeless street kid at age 12. I was escaping from case workers and foster homes by exploring the public transit system. I ran away from the system that never found me the right home. I got tired of taking their pills and getting beat up by my foster parents. I had an authority problem.

I was an easy child to beat. I was little and vicious like a baby wolverine. I was cute as a button until I got angry, then that little boy was replaced by a monster. A little, twitchy scratching and clawing monster that wouldn't stop, even if you hit me, spanked me or whooped me.

Downtown Portland in 1992 was a candy land for street kids. Little minions wandered aimlessly from park block to park block in search of other like-minded rejects. It was Lord of the Flies on food stamps. I finally found a family. A family of rejects just like me, all of us desperately trying to find something, anything to hold on to.

My world continued to be black and white tinged in the red smear of blood. It was You and us. The discarded against those that have that American dream that we could see but not touch. Very few of the streets kids I grew up with ever had the concept of a happy ending. That hope was not a luxury for a boy with nothing.

I got six years in prison for assault. I was charged as an adult and sent to prison, I can't tell you that I didn't see it coming because I did.

I knew I was destined to be a number, a criminal, a lost cause.

Abandonment followed by a high dose of drugs, sex, and violence. Eventually I knew that the life of nothing eventually ends up dead or in prison. At sixteen I was ready to make my early start.

Walking through that prison door to the sound of a thousand animals masquerading as men - shouting obscenities, threatening death, pounding on the bars of the cell, screaming at friends and foes; I had no more pretenses about getting saved.

I just had to survive.

It was in this dark place, this black bleakness of spirit, that the creative force that is possible in all places decided to rear its colorful head. In my cell, late at night, when the sounds of the cellblock dulled to a murmur I found I had but a few things I could do.

I could read or I could write.

My mind was busy. I was never a stupid boy, in fact, too smart for my own good. I knew what was right and what was wrong. It was flying around in my head like a band of banshee's in the night. High pitched shame, guilt ridden burdens the size of watermelons crashed into my skull.

I had to get them out.

In my cell, I had yellow lined legal notepads and short little pencils.

I started writing poems. I put the thoughts in my lonely head on to the page. I couldn't survive the silence of the cell or the roar of the cellblock without a way to get it out of my head. I had too much time to think about the past and try to find a future in the worst place in the world to find hope.

I am alone
I am running
I am out of breath
I need a cigarette

Prison is a place of confinement. It is a place where your entire identity is defined by a number on a card and a cell. Your world revolves around being nothing. Letters are rare, visits even scarcer. For me they were non-existent.

I wanted my life to have purpose. I was drawn to the pen and the pad. It was something that couldn't be taken away from me. It was something I could do on my own. It was up to me. I realized that it was always going to be that way. No matter where I was or why I was there, I had to figure it out solo.

I didn't want to be a statistic; I didn't want to be a number. I just wanted to be a kid. As I started to delve into my childhood I understood that I was still a child and many of the things that happened to me were not my fault.

In the trenches of my juvenile poetry obsession I found clarity within my spirit.

It was simple. I had a story to tell. As I told my story, darkness started to become light. Poems about prison cells and noticing the birds came with poems about ripping my face from my body and flushing it down the toilet.

For a forgotten boy, having a story to tell is important. It gave me an identity. I could be a poet or a convict. I could be a writer or an enforcer. Was I going to allow the violence that had infected my life to define me forever? The denim blues last long after you walk out the doors of your prison cell, but there was a light shining in my pencil. In my prison cell, alone at night, I remembered that I was still a child. A child is allowed to make mistakes. A child is allowed to grow.

I started writing daily. When I couldn't sleep, when I tossed and turned from hip to hip thinking about time or friends or foes, I would jump out of bed and pour it into the pad. Better than any counselor I ever had, better than any drug I have ever done, it got it out. It let me go to bed. It calmed the dragon for a moment, long enough to take a breath and live another day.

I got a job and with the money I earned I bought a cheap Yamaha guitar from the canteen. Within a week I had written a song and started practicing every day. A friend of mine showed me a few blues chords and scales, taught me the intervallic structure, and off I went down the corridor of songwriting bliss. Nothing was going to stop me. I decided to be a rock star and an author.

So what if I was in prison, so what if I hadn't done anything my entire life. The things I was putting on paper were good. They made me feel good, even when I was talking about the most tragic experiences of my life. Other convicts asked me to write love letters, others asked me to write songs. I had a purpose and nothing or no one was going to take that away from me.

I began to find color in my life. I turned dark shadows of boyhood prostitution to flower petals reminding me of the rain. I turned hateful words of my mother, into fuel for a locomotive train that could carry through the walls of my cell and out into the land of the free.

I had never been a free man before. As a child I made no decisions for myself. I didn't have much choice in where I went or what I did, even when I thought I was in complete control. I found bucket lists of ideas for the future. While inmates were killing each other with baseball bats on the yard, I was writing new songs about searching for hope. When the guards were harassing me with strip searches I was composing poems about addressing congress.

Instead of surviving darkness, I was finding color.

It propelled me through my prison sentence and into the free world.

I realized that I could share this feeling, I could share this process of self discovery with the rest of the family I left on the street corner, lurking in the shadows, been nothing so long they got no other choice. Creative action changed my stars, changed the color of my memories, and gave me a place to start. My purpose was to share this phenomenon one song, one poem at a time.

I got accepted to college before I got out of prison and moved into my dorm room when I was released. I graduated with honors four years later. I put my book on hold and went in search of life experiences. I continued to play music and develop songs, but spent my time living in the moment.

On the Road, Kerouac's coming of age novel of travel and poetry was a big influence on my college years. I had been taught to hate, hurt, and mangle whatever came across my path and it was important to me that I find new things to learn. I wanted new things to create about. I knew that

the moments that had defined my life thus far couldn't lead me down the road I wanted to travel. I had to step outside the box and go searching for a new family and a new set of circumstances.

When I got out of prison I was 22 years old and addicted to creativity. It was my God, my Omega, my Chi. I did poetry slams in dark bars, open mics in coffee shops, and street corner performances with a hat and a smile. Always dreaming about making it big, telling my story, and creating a forum of hope for the hopeless.

Freedom was important to me. I wanted true creative freedom. I didn't want to be another cog in the system of debt, poverty, and monotony. I believed I was a light sent from the darkness to inspire hope. Lofty goals for an orphaned street punk, but that is the power of creative intervention. I believed I could do these things and went searching for opportunities to create change.

Every summer while I was in college I took an adventure. My freshman year I took off to New Orleans with sixty bucks, a back pack, and a guitar. Portland hurt me. Memories on every street corner coaxing depression out of every pour in my body. I went looking for inspiration out there. Beyond the confines of my home town, I went searching for truth.

In New Orleans I met voodoo dance queens moonlighting as strippers. I played Jackson Square, belting out songs I wrote in prison for the homeless. They gathered in flocks and listened to their story unfold in my music. I worked as a bartender on Bourbon St, chasing tail late into the heavy hot August nights. I took taxi cabs to late night coffee shops and spent hours talking to strangers about the power of the creative spirit to move mountains of shame. I was homeless most of the time and broke the rest, but I was free. I wasn't hurting anyone to survive. I was holding up my end of the bargain. I was living with less and experiencing more. There was sorrow and pain, but through my eyes it was a kaleidoscope of impossible. It was a mission in forgiveness. I was taking a walk of self belief. I was creation personified, living off the spoils of my creative energy, and challenging the world to pay attention to me.

My sophomore year, I went to San Francisco. I played my Ibanez hollow body electric outside of Giant's Stadium, got my picture in the paper, and fell in love with a hippie on Haight and Ashbury. I survived by busking for tourists on the Fisherman's Wharf. Playing freestyle blues for the nightclub crowd in North Beach. I slept in my car and smiled at the universe for giving me peace even though I had nothing to show for it.

When depression hit on the days when no one gave me money for my songs, when my batteries died and my voice cracked from singing for no one. I didn't break. I didn't rely on the callousness of apathy; I didn't let my beast out of the bag. I went for a walk along the pier. I smelled the ocean and let the salt remind me of prison walls and programs that I didn't have to abide by anymore. I watched the fog roll in off the Golden Gate Bridge and felt blessed, letting the depression of being nothing ooze out into the bay, feeling freedom and breathing in life.

I worked cherry orchards for two summers after that with my friend from college. Letting the brief memories of my childhood become flush with the flavor of fresh cherries in my hair, acres of land to walk, and late night campfire jams for country folk looking for a happy ending. I took chances, made mistakes, and continued to believe that the act of creation is the true purpose of life.

After college I found myself searching for my purpose again. I was burned out from banging my head against the walls of the social justice system. I wanted to impact the lives of unwanted kids, but found the system unwilling to receive my effort. Unable to affect the change I wanted in the system, I again turned to the creative spirit for guidance.

For a graduation present I was given a trip to Europe.

I decided to go to Germany. It was 2006 and Germany was hosting the World Cup. I have never been into soccer. Football was my favorite sport to watch, but I knew there would be thousands and thousands of people in the street. I booked a flight, packed a backpack, and hopped on a flight to Frankfurt. I had never been outside the country before. I didn't know German, but I knew how to play my guitar and sing the universal language of the soul.

I had my guitar and the belief that no matter what happens I would thrive.

I had two hundred dollars when I arrived in Frankfurt. I de-boarded the plane with my guitar strapped across my chest, belting out songs about travelers and language barriers much to the joy of customs officials smirking as they checked my passport. I couldn't read the signs. I didn't know where I was going. I had no reservations. I was living on pure faith. I believed my guitar, my voice, my creative spirit would take me exactly where I needed to be and it did.

When I got back from my trip I was exploding with confidence, inspiration, and faith. I moved to Big Sur California where the gigantic Redwoods meet the scraggly cliffs of the Pacific Ocean. I found the land of purple sand beaches and beautiful hippie fairies with mandolins and folk songs. Kerouac himself perched on these very cliffs with notebook in hand, gazing at the poems in the waves, and telling their stories. I got a job as a bartender and started writing my memoir again.

I hadn't touched it since I got out of prison. It was hard to write about the past with so much new information clouding my perception, but the forest helped ease the pain. The forest helped heal the wounds I wrote about at night, by firelight, outside the tent cabin I stayed in along the Big Sur River. I continued to follow the spirit and it had brought me back to this story: my tale of childhood oppression and self discovery. When I asked the creator what I should do the answer was clear.

Finish the Book.

So I did.

I played in the ocean by day, frolicking with my girlfriend and dreaming of changing the world. At night, I wrote. My face heavy laden focused on the ancient laptop computer my uncle gave me, writing about prison rape, childhood torture, and this writing cure. Pausing to stare through the redwoods into a cell from what seemed like a long time ago. Then back to the page and my rage, my hurt and my torture.

I had avoided writing the book. I had sat down with a couple of publishing firms when I was released but never followed through as I got lost in my college days and my pursuit of life itself. Now I was doing a complete re-write. A new format, a different focus. The story was the purpose, the solution the creator gave me in my cell when I was seventeen and had no one but God to help me.

Big Sur was amazing, but three months into my writing bliss out in the forest I lost my job and had to move in with my uncle in Riverside. Riverside is not a majestic forest, it is a place of dirt lawns and urban sprawl. It did not make me smile. Depressed and broken again feeling utterly worthless I spent a couple of months on my uncle's couch nursing a broken heart.

Again I found myself with no job and looking for renewed purpose. I still wanted to change the world and I still believed finishing my memoir was the catapult I needed to get me over the wall. I started researching jobs in the desert, resort jobs where I could work in exchange for housing.

I found a job in Northern Arizona working as a waiter at a fly fishing resort. Since my release, I have found nature to be my best mother. I find great comfort wrapped up in her arms. Untouched by cynicism, she moves me.

The closest town was 45 miles away, the North Rim of the Grand Canyon was only 70 miles west of my front door, and the ancient Vermillion Cliffs were right outside the back door of my trailer. The work was fast paced and fun. My customers were white water rafters, river guides, and fisherman.

I loved being their waiter, inspiring them with stories of my life and travels and being inspired by their stories, struggles, and triumphs. During the day I worked and learned how to fly fish on the Colorado River.

I would get up early in the morning and rent a boat from the shop and drive the 15 miles to the boat launch at Lee's Ferry. The land of Edward Abbey and the Monkey Wrench gang, cliffs so barren and beautiful you knew man never had a chance at taming them. The river was so cold and so pure. On clear days you could see to the bottom, fish visible to your sight.

Fly fishing is not easy; it takes practice, talent, and patience. You spend more of your time untangling your line then actually fishing. I couldn't get enough of that river; it was the only place on earth I felt comfortable alone. I would stand in the Colorado River, with the Grand Canyon towering over me like ancient Mayan statues, the roar of the river pressing against my shins, always

threatening to pull me under. There was never anyone in sight. It was just me and the mighty Colorado. She told me it was okay; that everything was working out.

In the desert, far away from the institutions and street corners that defined my life, I finished my memoir. It took me 5 months, but I finished it.

It was a stormy desert day where the sky dust earth met the gloomy thunder clouds. I couldn't see my hand in front of my eyes and the sand bit into my face, got into my teeth. If you stood outside too long you could become just another cliff being molded by the wind. I sat in my trailer with a cup of coffee, Ben Harper playing on the radio, and wrote the last chapter of my book.

I wrote about the day I was released. I wrote about the confusion of being a free man but still facing the world alone. It had been seven years since I was released from prison. When I closed the computer I had tears in my eyes as I looked out my window at the red earth swirling around me.

They were tears of joy and relief. Finally after twelve years of battling the page I was finished with my book. I watched my pain wash away with the wind. I watched it smash against a rock and get scuttled away by a dust devil. I watched it spill into Lake Mead and sputter into nothing as it reached the ocean. I felt it lift off my chest, out of my heart, and back into creation.

I had completed the circle of my life from orphan to writer, prisoner to advocate. In those pages I found the courage to carry on, to move past the post traumatic memories and events that had shaped my childhood.

There are roads that lead us back from the abyss of knowing, the chance of surrender. There are real burdens in this world that are worth carrying, for the purpose of art, the purpose of creativity. These things I hold certain and I have let the earth teach me what my fellow man could not: breathe, churn, love, and return to the dust.

Article

Bending Bars: A Dialogue between Four Prison Teacher-Researchers

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This dialogue illustrates the various ways the four authors have undertaken literacy work inside prison--from writing workshops in jails and prisons, to exchanges between college students and incarcerated writers, to college classes in correctional facilities, to investigations of fragmented documents from a progressive era girls' training school. We situate these ongoing efforts as methods for supporting writing that might heal the individual, social and cultural wounds evoked by our country's mass incarceration policies and for making that writing public.

In Spring 2015, we presented a panel focused on prison teaching, writing, and representation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication. We spoke from our varied experiences working with contemporary prison writing and teaching contexts as well as work with archived writings from a girls' prison in the Progressive Era. *Survive and Thrive* editor, Rex Veeder joined our conversation and invited us to extend our thinking into this online written forum. We offer the metaphor of bending bars in our title to evoke images of strength, power, and actions that often feel superhuman. To bend bars with words within the U.S. criminal justice system is an act of bravery and strength, one that often succeeds for individuals and groups of writers and one that just as often fails, perhaps even resulting in unwelcome and unanticipated disciplinary action. We hope to bend the bars that sometimes constrain our own teaching and learning parameters by looking across our shared commitments to literacy work inside prisons and jails.

To do this, we spent several months revisiting the questions that initially drew us together in a more structured way than is usual in a panel presentation. We drafted brief statements to key questions and then responded to and extended each other's words by sharing our own experiences.

1. How do entrenched institutional narratives shape literacy practices in prison?
2. What research methods can we use to understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material environments of prison?
3. How might the social circulations of prison writings (from prisoners and prison teachers) motivate the development of progressive pedagogies and practices that work toward shifting the balance of power in the U.S. criminal justice system?

Before we invite you to consider those issues with us, we'd like to make visible our experiences within the world of prison/writing teaching and research.

Wendy Wolters Hinshaw is an Associate Professor of English at Florida Atlantic University and Director of Writing Programs. Her research focuses on how art and writing by prisoners shapes and is shaped by the historical, institutional and cultural contexts in which it circulates. In 2014 she helped to start the organization Exchange for Change, a Miami-based prison writing organization that provides writing programs inside area prisons and transitional facilities, and also facilitates writing exchanges between writers in prison and students in area universities and high schools. Exchange for Change believes in the power of these written partnerships to promote dialogue and effect social change.

Cory Holding is an Assistant Professor in the University of Pittsburgh Department of English Program in Composition, Literacy, Pedagogy, & Rhetoric who teaches and writes about the rhetoric of gesture. Holding became involved with college education in prison in 2009 as a tutor, instructor, and course coordinator for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Education Justice Project, and continues to aim toward building support for prison education justice work in rhetoric and composition studies, recently collaborating with a group of EJP scholars and Peter Odell Campbell on a discussion of "Prison Education and Prison Abolition" at the 2014 Race and Pedagogy National Conference at the University of Puget Sound.

Tobi Jacobi is Professor of English at Colorado State University where she teaches writing and literacy theory classes and directs the Community Literacy Center and SpeakOut! writing workshop program (https://csuclc.wordpress.com/ and https://speakoutclc.wordpress.com/). SpeakOut! connects university and community writers through weekly writing workshops that culminate twice annually in the *SpeakOut! Journal*. Since 2013, she has been collaborating with Laura Rogers on an archival recovery project focused on visual and textual artifacts from a progressive era training school for girls in upstate New York. She grounds her teaching, research, and outreach work in feminist and critical literacy practices by advocating for literacy access as an activist practice. Her edited collection (with Dr. Ann Folwell Stanford), *Women Writing, and Prison: Activists, Scholars, and Writers Speak Out* was released in 2014.

Laura Rogers directs the Writing Center and is an Assistant Professor of English at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences where she teaches writing, literature and film classes. She has been involved in prison literacy education since her work in a prison college program in upstate New York from 1984 through 1995, when the program was ended because of a loss of state and federal funding. After the loss of the college program, she established and continues to teach a voluntary writing workshop at a men's prison. She has collaborated since 2013 with Tobi Jacobi on a project focused on fragmentary documents recovered from a girls' training school in upstate NY. She has also been researching the history of prison writing groups in an effort to uncover an unknown aspect our discipline's history.

While we each work and live in different places across the United States (PA, FL, CO, & NY), we share a commitment to envisioning literacy as a powerful tool for change in the lives of women and men entangled in the U.S. punishment system, and for possible resistance to that system. As Louise DeSalvo argues in *Writing as a Way of Healing*: "Sharing our work removes us from a solitary brooding on our personal hurts as we listen to other people's struggles, learn of other people's triumphs….We become responsible for the words we write in a way we might not if we didn't anticipate sharing" (208). We are delighted, then, to share our perspectives on the value of literacy work in carceral contexts and have constructed a dialogue based upon three issues that feel central to our work and commitments to envisioning change in the U.S. justice system through pedagogical and rhetorical interventions.

How do entrenched institutional narratives shape literacy practices in prison?

TJ: I currently have two projects that are emerging from carceral contexts. The first extends ten years of teaching at a local jail in northern Colorado as I consider the ethics of engagement and self-care for the students, community volunteers, and writers inside in both physical and affective ways. The second interrogates the emergence and value of fragmentary narratives emerging from a recently discovered set of texts from a girls training school in upstate New York in the 1920s and 30s.

I'll start with the contemporary work. The county jail where I have offered writing workshops for over ten years sleeps 500 people with an average of about 420 men and 80 women. We have had the good fortune and support of a proactive programs staff who help to mentor between ten and fifteen student, teacher, and community volunteers working with weekly workshops. The jail provides staff support for processing the volunteers, assists with classroom setup, and hosts a bi-annual program celebration each May and December. They also provide paper and, until recently, pens. For me, pens have come to represent a lot of what seems broken in the U.S. justice system. In early August 2015 I received an email from the jail volunteer supervisor with a casual line included about the elimination of pens from all programming. How, I wondered, would we run a writing program for 90 minutes each week without access to the primary tools of writing? Okay, I thought, how about specially designated and collected pens? No. Regular pencils? No. Stubby four inch pencils are the only allowed writing implement we may use. "Don't worry" I am told. "The inmates will adapt." But, of

course, they shouldn't have to adapt. A four inch pencil (that whittles down to three when sharpened) doesn't seem like a reasonable adaptation to expect. It doesn't feel humane. The change has not gone unnoticed by the writers as we enter week three of the program. Complaints are amassing, but as volunteers we can do little more than pass along the varied comments and hope for some humanity on the part of the jail operations team. Is it worth losing the program over? Prison writing teacher/scholar Tiffany Ana Lopez argues that those of us who move freely through prison doors have a responsibility to serve as critical witnesses; yet I often wonder what the tipping point is for people who choose to live activist work within repressive systems. Will the loss of pens inspire creativity or dismay? Both?

Imagine my surprise when I walked into the jail on the first night of our workshop this fall and heard the (supportive) programs staff person mention that we were still going to have access to lined paper. Lined paper? I almost fell over at the thought that lined paper was in jeopardy. When did lined paper become at risk? Is lined paper more at risk than unlined? Is all paper in jeopardy? When we teach and work in universities and other spaces in the free world, material goods like pens, full sized pencils, and lined paper are simply tools of our trade, expected, almost invisible extensions of our ideas and communications. While we may rely more heavily on keyboards and cyberspace for most communication, we don't note the relative privilege of these physical writing tools until their presence is threatened.

At the heart of both the pen eradication and the suggestion that lined paper remains a privilege lay other implicit wonderings. Is this an attempt to limit the communication practices and functionality of people confined behind bars? It is often painful to write with a stubby pencil. Hands and arms cramp. There are no erasers (no need for revision, I suppose). The institutional line on the pens and paper is, of course, safety. Limiting inmate access to the life stuff of communication protects….I can't even finish that sentence, so flawed feels the logic. Limiting access to the very tools that may help a writer work out the challenges that led to incarceration or to reach out to family, friends or even a legal team defies categorization as safety or protection.

Questions of erasure and limited communication link well to the second site of literacy work that currently occupies my thinking: fragmentary medical, institutional, and personal documents from girls incarcerated at a state training school in the 1920s. This progressive era institution surely invoked its own set of rigid guidelines for the making and enforcing of identity narratives and setting forth a literacy sponsorship guided by institutional records (e.g. medical tests, social histories, parole notes) as well as less formal letter writing and exchanges with family and friends. As Royster and Kirsch (2010) argue, there is utility in the act of "critical imagination" as one dwells in the archives and a pressing need for "strategic circulation" of women's texts in ways that move beyond mere recovery. The institutional narratives that determine and limit our understanding of girls and women incarcerated in the 1920s remain disturbingly unmoved almost a century later, a theme I will return to as I reflect further on this archival work.

LR: Like Tobi's, my response emergences from two different projects. I have been engaged in prison literacy work for close to thirty years as an instructor in a now defunct college in prison program (ended by loss of state and federal funding) and with a creative writing workshop in a men's prison. Additionally, Tobi and I are research partners in our investigation of recently discovered archival materials from a girls' training school in upstate NY . These materials--medical intake forms, letters, photographs, and social work reports--from the New York State Training School for Girls in Hudson, NY (1904-1975) were recently discovered by a local resident at a garage sale.

This sentence particularly resonates with my experience: "Pens represent a lot of what seems broken about the U.S. justice system." What seems especially "broken" to me is the contradiction the restricted access to those pens represents; on the one hand, the workshop is "allowed," encouraged even (Tobi notes the supportive and "proactive" nature of the prison staff who ensure the existence and continuance of the workshop). On the other hand, the withdrawal of the pens and their replacement with stubby, hard-to-write with pencils sends a clear message that whatever "safety concerns" the pens represent are privileged far above literacy, communication and the ability for incarcerated writers to, as Tobi notes, "work out the challenges that lead to incarceration or to reach out to family." All writing workshops in prison exist under conditions of surveillance and security, issues that often take precedence over communication. I can recall, for example, students in the college program who had corrections officers search their possessions and confiscate their writing or literally take their "suspect" writing out of a computer printer. Human communication is regulated. My dissertation research, for example, consisted of interviews with six men in a maximum security prison. I was on my way to a classroom for an interview when one of my interviewees passed by me in a line of men being escorted to a different part of the facility. He did not look at me or speak to me. When we met, he apologized for not having acknowledged me but said that he could have been "written up" for speaking. For those of us who have had spent any time teaching inside, such stories are all too common.

Tobi observes that she cannot bring herself to finish the sentence "Limiting inmate access to the life stuff of communication protects…" However, Foucault notes that the modern prison, since we no longer draw and quarter people, had to create what seemed like a new kind of punishment: "the expiation that rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclination" (16). "Limiting inmates access to the life stuff of communication" not only punishes "the heart, the thoughts, the will, and the inclinations," but belongs to a "political technology of the body" (30). The restricted use of the physical implements of communication works to control the body as Tobi notes that "hands cramp" and writing is painful; who wants to write when it literally hurts? Tobi's narrative is emblematic of the contradictory nature of prison literacy practices: allowed, but restricted, encouraged, but negated.

Foucault further observes that prisoners are "situated in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix" them (189). The archival material from the girls' Training School "captures and fixes" the girls in multiple ways through medical intake forms that present the girls as "specimens" that have

been measured and weighed, to social work home visit forms that note class markers such as shabby furniture or working class neighborhoods, to warrants of commitment that "fix" the girls as deviant or criminal. As Tobi observes, "questions of erasure and limited communications" haunt our work with the archival material as these documents are a testament to the erasure of the girls' voices and the restrictions placed on their communication. Even though the documents are fragmentary and present a very limited snapshot of life at the TS, the erasure of voice and identity and restricted communication is apparent. Even letters or documents authored by the girls, such as 15 year old Lila's letter to a TS official or a letter of apology written by Agnes for an unknown offense, seem ultimately unknowable as they were produced under institutional and social guidelines that limited the girls' expressions of agency and identity. These 19th century institutional narratives are indeed mirrored in contemporary accounts; entrenched erasures and loss of communication are echoed in Tobi's narrative of restricted access to the most basic tools of writing for incarcerated writers today.

WH: Two years ago I began connecting students in my university classes with incarcerated writers in a women's prison roughly 80 miles away through a writing exchange program. Since that time I've had the privilege to watch exchanges between these and other writers grow and develop, and to help start an organization, Exchange for Change (http://www.exchange-for-change.org), that's devoted to bringing writing programs into prisons and transitional facilities as well as sharing that writing through exchange classes and publications that raise awareness and foster dialogue in our community.

It's clear to me that institutional narratives that link literacy programs to managing and improving inmate behavior have a large part in making my organization's prison literacy programs possible. In the relatively short span of Exchange for Change's existence, we have watched the DOC's relationship to us move from one of caution and skepticism to growing embrace. We have allies in high positions in the DOC who help us smooth over any difficulties we've had in individual program sites and who encourage us to expand our programs to new sites. This is a profound relief for us, because we are committed to bringing writing programs into institutions at all levels of the corrections systems, and we understand the tremendous need in these institutions for creative, intellectual and critical resources for prisoners. At the same time, we understand that the reason the DOC wants us in their institutions is because we make the act of imprisonment easier. We dutifully submit assessments that demonstrate low rates of disciplinary incidents among our participants, and cite research that further links prison art and writing programs to improved inmate behavior. We understand that our program serves as a source of motivation for our workshop participants, but we also know that disciplinary reports often come without warning, without provocation, and can just as likely reflect an officer's mood or a fellow inmate's grudge as they can an act of disobedience.

As Boudicca writes in *Women, Writing, and Prison*, "I live in constant fear of committing the smallest infraction and drawing attention to myself. I never know when the thread will unravel and a sword will fall on my head. I have been under investigation for the most minor infractions: having one too many pencils, leaving dust in a corner of my cell, wearing my crew socks folded down. Each staff

has a different pet peeve or personal interpretation of the rules. It is much worse to be investigated than disciplined – one time I was confined without a bathroom for more than seventy-two hours."

"In this camp, I put my head down in humiliation and accept whatever treatment is meted out. To resist is to gain punishment. To speak out is to gain punishment. I hate the Department of Corrections. I despise everyone who works here. Not all DOC employees and officers are malicious or spiteful, but I still despise them for working here. They see and do nothing. They hear and do nothing. They witness and do nothing. The State pays them for silence.

The most important way that entrenched institutional narratives shape literacy practices in prison is through their focus on individual transformation. Prisons are designed to restrict movement and view, and that includes vision of self. Simone Weil Davis writes, "To write as an incarcerated woman is to write into the implicit assumption of predetermined guild and an oft-reiterated obligation to rehabilitate on paper. The work of emerging from crisis becomes dangerously blurred with the mea culpa, and both are stage managed, as much as can be possible, by the correctional context" ("Inside-Out: The Reaches and Limits of a Prison Program," *Razor Wire Women* 209).

Prisoners are compelled to reconstruct their understandings of themselves and the stories of their lives along narratives of crime, punishment and individual redemption. The focus on individual transformation in prison discourses and prison programming is intense, and they reshape the stories that prisoners tell themselves and tell others about themselves.

CH: As the last respondent to the question, "how do entrenched institutional narratives shape literacy practices in prison," I want to echo Tobi and Laura's emphasis on the relationship between technologies of literacy and, as Laura writes, "conditions of surveillance and security, issues that often take precedence over communication." Tobi and Laura focus primarily on writing technology, and I will add that restrictions on access to *reading* technology are significant to the broader prison project of "limiting inmate access to the life stuff of communication." I have taught in prison settings where incarcerated students had some limited access to educational computers, only inside the space of the education complex—but these computers, of course, could be used for word processing only, as neither free nor incarcerated teachers and students were of course permitted any access to the internet. Students in this program were often asked to undertake significant research projects. But in order to perform research requiring materials not included in the prison or educational program library, students had to rely on packets of research material brought in by instructors—a dynamic that ensures, even against the best of intentions, the influence of the free teacher's research biases on incarcerated student's research conclusions.

Regardless of the writing technology available to students in prison, almost no incarcerated person, in any U.S. facility, has access to the reading and research technologies available to most free people with access to a computer and a public library, let alone the collected resources of a University. The manner in which incarcerated students are able to use writing and reading technology is surely related to Wendy's insightful claim that the "most important way that institutional narratives shape literacy practices in prison is through their focus on individual transformation." If, as Wendy argues,

"prisons are designed to restrict movement and view," including "vision of self," then a significant part of the mechanism of this restriction in the context of prison education is general access to writing technology—however delimited—combined with general lack of access to reading and research technology.

With respect to lack of access to writing technology, Tobi describes a situation of unexplained deprivation: the elimination of pens and even regular pencils from programming; followed by the disturbing assurance that "lined paper" is not currently slated for elimination. The jail administrators that Tobi describes make no attempt to justify their actions in terms of "security"—unlike the guards who search Laura's students' possessions and confiscate pages of "suspect" material. But security itself is a pervasive institutional narrative—and "civilian" educators inside prisons often experience and witness the effects of security narratives in situations when it seems that actual security cannot possibly be an issue.

There would seem to be no possible security reason for even questioning student's access to lined paper—and yet the narrative of security as the all-consuming goal of prison staff remains the unspoken justification for any such action. Because the total power of administration and the lack of autonomy of prisoners is the presumed basis of prison security, the story of security remains the ultimate, even when unspoken, trump card when it seems that there can be no logical explanation for a given prison procedure. Michael Dillon writes of the drive, fundamental to our present governmental systems, to "secure security" itself, as a story to be protected above and against the human being. This creates a set of paradoxical security systems that "incarcerate rather than liberate; radically endanger fear rather than liberate; and engender fear rather than create assurance" (15). The narrative of individual transformation is thus also a narrative of security. In the prison (so the prison says), this individual transformation can only be possible—can only be allowed—when an incarcerated person's body is not safe, but rather secure. The entrenched narrative of security shapes all practices in prison, but especially any, including literacy, connected to human freedom of expression and thought.

What research methods can we use to understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material environments of prison?

LR: Two young women, one African-American and one white, gaze seriously from the sepia toned photo. This photo is part of the collection of archival documents Tobi and I have been researching . How do we possibly begin to understand this haunting image and the additional, fragmentary, Training School material? This question has preoccupied me for the last year; this work, along with past prison literacy research projects I have been engaged in, has raised many questions for me about how to practically, ethically and responsibly conduct research investigating the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material conditions of prison. Gesa Kirsch's ideas about feminist research have been a useful conceptual framework for me to use to investigate the literacy practices of incarcerated and other marginalized and disenfranchised writers.

Kirsch states that research "On women should be for women." While her work focuses on ethnographic research with women, we can adapt these ideas and consider that "research about incarcerated writers should be for incarcerated writers" as feminist scholars such as Kirsch are concerned with "issues of interpretation and representation as they concern 'others,' especially persons and groups alienated from social, political and economic power" (ix). We can use Kirsch's work to investigate three major areas of concern for prison literacy researchers: context, or the total institutional environment in which our research takes place, ethical issues such as rights of incarcerated writers and researcher responsibilities, and questions of representation, or whose stories are told, by whom, and for whom, in order to ensure that incarcerated writers benefit from our research. These three areas have all been issues of concern for me as I have contemplated how to begin to understand the voices of these long silenced women, the many other voices that spoke for them, and the words of the incarcerated writers I have been working with in prison writing workshops and college classes for close to thirty years.

The historical materials, for example, raised several issues of context for us; the director of the NY State Archives required us to ask permission to work with archival Training School material, we have been instructed to only use first names of the Training School girls, and access to this material remains a concern. Several past prison literacy research projects powerfully invoked questions of context for me as the State Department of Corrections questioned the legitimacy of my non-quantitative research, institutional IRB boards complicated issues with the state, and the prison itself required me to use their barely functional, ancient tape recorder instead of my newly purchased one. Researchers should be aware that prison literacy work, which takes places in multiple institutional contexts (IRB boards, department of corrections agencies, the prisons themselves) involves gatekeepers with goals and interests that may be very different than those of literacy researchers.

These archival materials also raise questions about how we represent the voices and stories of "others" who may not have the means or agency to represent themselves. How do we ethically tell the stories of these young women, long deceased and limited in their agency during their incarceration at the Training School? How do we ethically represent the voices of the incarcerated writers in our jail and prison workshops? Kirsch tells us that while "feminist researchers…hope to empower the people they study…researchers are inevitably implicated in the process of speaking for others" (46). Kirsch invokes many questions faced by prison literacy researchers: who is being represented and "spoken for?" Who is performing the representation? How are incarcerated writers, stigmatized as "throwaway" members of our society and limited in their interactions with people from "outside," representing themselves to us? While there are no easy or clear answers to these questions, it is important that we keep them in mind and remember, as Linda Alcoff reminds us, that these difficulties do not mean that we should not speak or conduct difficult research; Alcoff states that "We should strive to create whenever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than for others" (Kirsch 63). We can, for example, work to speak "with and to" when working with archival prison documents by considering- and attempting to involve- the entire community context for these materials. We can create reciprocal research relationships with incarcerated writers by representing them by names they have chosen, including

their voices in our research, creating conditions for dialogue, and thinking about the implications of our research for not only each incarcerated writer we work with but the two million citizens currently incarcerated in our country.

As research with marginalized writers is becoming increasingly foundational to our profession, we can adapt Kirsch's admonition that research "on women should be for women" as we consider the consequences of our research for incarcerated writers, the members of our profession who are asking important questions about prison literacy work, and the society in which we live which has the highest incarceration rate in the world.

TJ: Like Laura, I often turn to feminist writing and literacy scholars to understand how literacy practices and emerging texts can be read as actions for social justice. Many of the issues Laura raises about representation and ethics remain on the forefront of my mind as I work with both writers long dead and those who are very much still alive. Scholars like Gesa Kirsch, Jackie Jones Royster, Anne Ruggles Gere, Deb Brandt, and Jessica Enoch inspire relevant and innovative ways of thinking through the significance of historical women's representations of imprisonment and selfhood.

When thinking through work with contemporary writers, I have adopted a range of methods for data collection. Research is never divorced from active teaching in the jail, however; in fact, the relationship I build with writers enables the qualitative interviews, as I suspect it might in most community literacy research endeavors. At the jail where I volunteer, I conduct program evaluations that offer a sampling of participant responses (sampling due to the high turnover rate in participation since it is a jail), participate in informal ethnographic practices as I teach each Wednesday, and invite women to give qualitative interviews based upon their writing histories. One analytic tool that has been useful to me in both contexts has been feminist analysis of narrative representation; that is, the process of looking contextually at how writers tell stories and have stories told about them (and respond to those tellings) with particular attention to the ways gender, sex, and sexuality are "told." In doing so, we are able to engage what narrative researcher Molly Andrews calls "narrative emplotments"; that is, the narratives--both normative and radical--that organize our lives and how we understand them.

CH: Before answering the question of "what research methods can we use to understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material environments of the prison" we might first ask why. *Why do we need to "understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material environments of the prison?" What are the stakes inherent to attempting this understanding? What about this understanding is useful for the goal of resisting and ending prison and imprisonment?* Asking these questions does not entail rejecting the possibility of ethical research-in-prisons—rather, it may be that these questions should be asked before, or perhaps as the first part of, the question of method.

Laura rightly describes "three major areas of concern for prison literacy researchers: context, or the total institutional environment in which our research takes place, ethical issues such as incarcerated writers and researcher responsibilities, and questions of representation." These areas of concern—in

particular the question of context—are ideal frames through which to consider not just "what research methods," but also "whether to research." Partly because of the inherent violence of the "total institutional environment" of U.S. prisons and jails, many forms of writing and literacy in prison are not visible as such, and would not be discernable via methods common to University literacy research. The prison context begs the question of whether free (not incarcerated) researchers should be undertaking such projects in the first place.

In seeking to understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the discursive and material environments of the prison, we might expose practices that are hidden, or that are not meant to be read as literacy practice (see Rawson 131, Campbell and Holding 202). We might subject writers to punishment. We might—even if we do neither of these things directly, in part because we have followed guidelines for ethical research set down by our disciplines and institutions—end up promoting an understanding of prison literacy that contributes to the greater effective working of the prison itself.

The methods we employ to understand the circulation of writing and literacy practices within the prison must be context-based, changeable, and malleable, to be sure. But they can also be *abolitionist.* This might mean many things, including re-articulating the differences among all of us who would be involved in prison literacy research not in terms of writer-subject and academic-researcher, but rather as the researcher and writer who is incarcerated and the researcher and writer who gets to leave the prison at night. And if there must remain—and there must, given the institutional realities of academic labor—a part of our research that is "ours," for our own purposes, we as free researchers should consider the question not of how it might also be "for" imprisoned research subjects, but rather of how we might work together to align our research projects toward common goals. The methods of research in prison should be defined through the exigencies of research in prison, and the exigence of this research should derive always from collaboration with people who are incarcerated. Rather than seek to understand, we might instead seek to join.

An abolitionist method would presume that we cannot and should not design research questions without recognizing the complicity of the free researcher's own writing and literacy practices with the discursive and material environments of the prison. An abolitionist method would be one that, rather than help us understand writing and literacy practices within prison, instead seeks to discern a given prison and/or prison system's *impediments to writing and literacy* for the purpose of resistance. It adapts our inciting question: *what research methods can we, as free scholars, use in collaboration with incarcerated scholars, to seek out the prison's barriers to writing and literacy, and work to break them down?*

WH: What I appreciate most about Laura and Cory's responses is the way they help us understand the complexity of our roles as prison literacy sponsors as well as researchers: most of us are not simply observing and researching literacy practices in prisons, but actively sponsoring them through creating our own literacy programs or strategically supporting existing programs that share our critical literacy and abolitionist goals.

In order to ethically and effectively research writing in prison I think we have to look at the institutional impediments to writing, as Cory suggests, as well as the ways in which the institution sponsors writing and stories more broadly. What are the stories the institution tells, and what stories does it encourage those inside it to tell? What are the stories they are compelled to tell? I also think we have to pay attention to the stories we (on the outside) are compelled to tell about prison and prison writing. Prison is a material and discursive environment, which means it is shaped by and also shapes the language and symbols outside it. How does it shape us as witnesses? How does it shape how we witness?

In her essay "'All I Have, a Lament and a Boast': Why Prisoners Write," Bell Gale Chevigny suggests that "[t]he best prison writing continues to testify to hidden experience, to critique and resist institutionalization, but it also helps writers to find themselves, make themselves whole, forge significant contact with others, and make reparations" (246-47). Here Chevigny articulates the multiple purposes that prison writing can serve, as well as the array of purposes that prison literacy teachers-researchers-activists have argued that it must serve in order to make an impact, not only in the lives of the imprisoned participants, but on broader social change in our current system of mass incarceration.

While all prison arts and literacy programs may be providing crucial access to resources that otherwise would not be there, all such programs are not necessarily working to resist our current system of mass incarceration. As literacy researchers and sponsors, we must consider the kinds of literacy practices we enable as well as suppress.

How might the social circulations of prison writings (from prisoners and prison teachers) motivate the development of progressive pedagogies and practices that work toward shifting the balance of power in the U.S. criminal justice system?

CH: *The space of a tactic is the space of the other…it must play on and with a terrain imposed on and organized by the law of a foreign power…This nowhere gives a tactic…a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment and seize on the wind the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment…In short, a tactic is an art of the weak (371).* —Michele De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

It is certainly possible that the "social circulations of prison writings" can foment changes in the "balance of power in the U.S. criminal justice system," but in order for this possibility to become reality, I think certain conditions need to be met. I'll draw out this point in part via writing from current and formerly incarcerated students from the Education Justice Project (http://www.educationjustice.net), who submitted contributions to a panel on "Prison Education and Prison Abolition" at the 2014 Race & Pedagogy National Conference.

First, the progressive "social circulation" of prison writing needs to foreground the words of current and former people in prison, and other people most impacted by the U.S. criminal justice system—but we need to ask, as Shawn Ross argued at the 2014 Race and Pedagogy conference, the question of circulation *among who and for what end*. If we are not confident that circulation of writings is *per se* an

effective anti-prison tactic, than we need to ask how we can make it so. Circulating the words of incarcerated people cannot do much to change the balance of power within this system, unless the mechanism and reception of this circulation can foment the structural undermining of U.S. incarceration per se. In the same panel discussion, Eric Lash noted the need for prison education to be carried out in effective opposition to outside-of-prison structural inequalities that help contribute to the prison system. From this perspective, the "social circulation of prison writings from prisoners and prison teachers" would be vital for any attempt to leverage prison writing against the carceral status quo. But, as Lash argues, just any circulation would not be adequate—this circulation would need to occur within and among communities most affected by the U.S. criminal justice system, and it would need to be a circulation not just of prison writings, but a circulation of tools and mechanisms for resistance.

The "social circulation of prison writings" can merely support the U.S. criminal justice system—by framing prisons as effective social institutions—as wonderful places for corrective and rehabilitative education. It is important for circulators to recognize the polysemous quality of the rhetoric of circulation, and to be mindful of multiple valences for this important work.

The objective of changing the balance of power within the U.S. criminal justice system begs the question of the prison, itself. As Kemuyah ben Rakemeyahu at the 2014 Race and Pedagogy conference noted, "political positions are inconsequential to an educator's obligation to…the expectation that all correctional staff and volunteers will support prison objectives to limit the movement, thinking, and behavior of prisoners." Any activity that occurs at the sufferance of prison administrations, including the social circulation of prison writing, is not, as ben Rakemeyahu said, "exempt from this truth." In this conversation, I ask us to be open to the possibility that we are asking the wrong question. We could ask not, "how can we shift the balance of power," but "how can we work to end the U.S. criminal justice system" as it currently exists.

We need to be optimistic, but cautiously so, about the anti-institutional power of pedagogy that occurs within the space—and so in its circulation implicitly reproduces the logics of—imprisonment. The potential tactic of the social circulation of prison writing must be acknowledged as (even if it might be among our most effective tools) a "tool of the weak," because this circulation is predicated on pedagogy that takes place under the authority of U.S. incarceral control. As we practice the social circulation of prison writings, we need to keep in mind how we can paradoxically deploy this circulation always outside of and against the space of prison.

TJ: Perhaps in similar ways to Cory, I've been thinking a lot about how circulation may or may not result in measurable change within the justice system as I work across the coordination of a contemporary jail teaching program and an unfolding archival research project. While I hold hope that the *SpeakOut! Journal* will circulate far and wide and encourage others to bring diverse writers such as prison writers into their courses and onto their reading lists, a progressive pedagogy aimed at the justice system cannot be divorced from the institutional realities of working inside jails and prisons. Work with currently incarcerated writers often raised the possibility of literacy-based

advocacy and the reality of the limitations of time, materials, positionality, and access to literary worlds. As I discussed earlier through the lamentation of lost pens and other tools of communication, there are significant risks to navigate when working inside. Even publications themselves are subject to approval by correctional staff who are obliged to review work for gang references, coded language, and inappropriate characterizations of personnel. Yet once the writing moves beyond the institution, there is a kind of freedom in circulation. Journal issues and anthologies move through the institution with pride and then out into the wider community through local libraries, independent coffee shops, and individual requests. The brief framing that each *SpeakOut! Journal* contains works both to acknowledge facilitators, writers, and supporters and to introduce readers to some of the activities and intention preceding the production of the writing itself. While an issue of a journal or collection of writing aren't overtly pedagogical textual documents themselves, they do often represent and perhaps translate such theory into representative artifacts by design. A set of poems responding to Mandela's rhetoric or a feminist perspective on women's bodies can communicate the will for meaningful cultural change to readers.

In the archive, it feels a bit different. I want to know that there are meaningful reasons to raise the spectre of adolescent moments that many women likely suppressed as they forged on in their lives and survived America's Great Depression and a second World War. Many likely never shared their time at the Training School with family and friends once released from its gaze. What does it mean, then, to offer archival research on imprisoned girls as part of a campaign for change in a contemporary system? As I think about the circulation that I am sponsoring and encouraging for the girls who are represented in a box of found personal and institutional materials, the line between productive social circulation and exploitation feels tenuous. There must be a purpose for dredging up the spectors of girls whose deeds and even lives are long gone. There must be exigence and relevance, resonance even, in the ways that their stories reflect upon and call attention to the experiences of girls incarcerate in today's U.S. prisons and jails.

The notion of meaningful change through social circulation both within and outside of carceral spaces feels like an opportunity to engage in the kinds of radical/feminist rhetorical listening and action that scholars like Royster (1994), Royster/Kirsch (2012), Ratcliffe (2005) and Glenn/Ratcliffe (2011) have been calling upon us to recognize for the past several decades. The work of piecing together a telling of the story of Lila, Katherine, Agnes or Mattie can open space for understanding how to improve conditions of poverty, gender and racial inequity and move toward justice. yet, It feels radically insufficient to argue for equality in a time when existing conditions for men, for all confined peoples, are abhorrent. Rather than seeking equality within the walls of existing structures, but might it mean to tell, to fragment, and to use the stories of prisoners past in order to fight for justice today? How might the strategic social circulation of stories participate in shifting the narrative we are writing for the people at most risk of confinement today, those challenged by addiction, poverty, homelessness, cultural and racial discrimination, and mental illness?

LR: Cory and Tobi raise important questions about the potential for the social circulations of prison writings from both incarcerated writers and prison teachers for motivating pedagogies and practices

that "work toward shifting the balance of power within the criminal justice system." I share Cory's concerns, along with those voiced by the Education Justice Project students, about the potential for prison writing as a catalyst for meaningful change when it occurs inside of the system that risks being seen as "wonderful places for corrective and rehabilitative education." Foucault believes that all prison personnel- even teachers and writing workshop volunteers- are implicated in a network of power that controls prisoners' bodies as all documents produced in the prison "capture and fix" (189) inmates within the "normalizing gaze" of the correctional facility. We must always be alert to the potential for collusion. Our workshop participants are accounted for, "busy" in a program. Anne Folwell Stanford, for example, notes the uneasy feelings of collusion she experiences as a jail workshop teacher and her awareness of her privilege to as a white, middle-class academic free to leave Cook County Jail after her workshop is over (281).

Yet, Tobi, like Foucault and Stanford, observes the potential for resistance as the words of her jail workshop writers are circulated beyond the confines of the jail and communicate the "will for meaningful cultural change." As I contemplate the potential for the circulation of prison writing to contribute to meaningful change, I reflect on the words of a student in a prison college class I taught many years ago. The class was discussing their very reasons for writing. One student picked up his journal, a coveted black and white speckled journal. "I wish this could be buried somewhere and dug up in like a hundred years," he said. "I just want someone to know I was here."

"I just want someone to know I was here." It is no secret that we hide our prisons in rural areas, far away from the centers of population where Foucault notes that prisoners in the Middle Ages were drawn and quartered in a public display. Our images of incarcerated citizens come to us from popular media that sensationalizes, oversimplifies and dehumanizes. A seemingly simple request from an incarcerated writer for recognition of his existence- his individualism and humanity- may not do much, as Cory acknowledges, to "change to balance of power within the system," but if these words find themselves into a publication such as Tobi's *SpeakOut! Journal*, perhaps the potential for change within a public that envisions prisoners as barely human exists We must be mindful, however, of the delicate line between voyeurism and a desire to understand the realities of lives hidden and seemingly discarded behind bars and razor wire.

Jennifer Sinor, in *The Extraordinary Work of Ordinary Writing*, notes that "In determining the value of a society, you need only to investigate what gets discarded. Our literal and cultural detritus tell us as much about who we are as do our museums and libraries" (3). It is not a stretch to call incarcerated writers confined on the margins of our society the "discarded" of our society, their words considered as "cultural detritus." The archival documents from the NY State Training School for Girls Tobi and I have been working with were literally discarded documents resting "on the historical curb" (Sinor 3). As Tobi observes, circulating and publicly sharing personal and institutional documents that were probably never meant to be shared raises urgent ethical questions. We have shared the fragments of the stories of the long- dead Lila, Katherine, Agnes and Josephine in multiple venues, ranging from academic conferences to public events such as library talks and pop-up museums in the communities from which these documents emerged. Community members

have responded by sharing their own stories of family members who may have been employed at the Training School or may have been incarcerated or in the foster care system. Audience members have noted how medical forms present the girls as "specimens" and speculate about the humane treatment of the girls during their incarceration. Audience members' contemplation of the documents at academic conference has led to conversations about contemporary issues of confinement and incarceration. These kinds of conversations seem to be at the heart of the reasons for sharing these documents. Heidi A. McKee and James Porter observe that a radical move archival researchers can make is to "shift from seeing the archive as *documents* to viewing the archives as *persons*…" (77). McKee and Porter go on to argue that "Kirsch and Royster remind us, of seeing the text and the person as part of a larger community" (78). Can we use the writings of those considered past and present "cultural detritus," the throwaways of our society, to enlarge community perceptions? "To fight for justice" as Tobi hopes? These seem to be the most ethical reasons to resurrect the voices of Lila, Katherine, Mattie and Josephine, so that research "on the incarcerated" becomes research "for the incarcerated" in an effort to rethink our ideas of justice and address the pressing issue of the incarceration of over two million of our citizens.

Conclusion

"Writing to heal...and making that writing public...is the most important emotional, psychological, artistic, and political project of our time" (DeSalvo 216).

Our dialogue illustrates the various ways we have undertaken literacy work inside prison--from writing workshops in jails and prisons, to exchanges between college students and incarcerated writers, to college classes in correctional facilities, to investigations of fragmented documents from a progressive era girls' training school--in an ongoing effort to support writing to heal the individual, social and cultural wounds evoked by our country's mass incarceration policies and to make that writing public. In our collective lifetimes, we have not witnessed nor participated in a more critical time for action and reflection than the moments we are now living. We call for an active response to the confinement of thousands of women and men in the United States, even as we recognize the culturally fraught nature of "confinement" as a term and concept. We used to hide women away when their bodies stretched and morphed into something new, when their ability to create and sustain life became too apparent. Too, we now confine them elsewhere, in the upper stories of crowded county jails, in the economically dependent rural counties of states eager to keep jobs and incriminate poverty, addiction, race, and immigration. We confine women to cellblocks because their bodies are too dangerous to allow into the rest of the jail as we do with other inmate workers. We confine transgender bodies to units that might well house 50+ people but cannot for fear that difference will invite unknown actions. In the name of equality, we default to a rotational solitary confinement wherein it becomes more palatable to adopt alternating 23 hour lockdowns for men and women in jail rather than investing in alternative ways to finance a healthy number of staff or simply reduce the imprisoned population. In the name of confinement we limit the circulation of words, ideas, even bodies themselves. A progressive, abolitionist approach to literacy work inside

aims to communicate the necessity of fostering voice and identity as primary to the work of reimagining how we understand the notion of justice in the United States.

Notes

Learn more about the New York Training School for Girls by visiting the Hudson, NY chapter of the Prison Public Memory Project: www.prisonpublicmemory.org.

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Article

The Rhetoric of Confessional Poetry (Revisited): Ethos, Myth, Therapy, and the Narrative Configuration of Self

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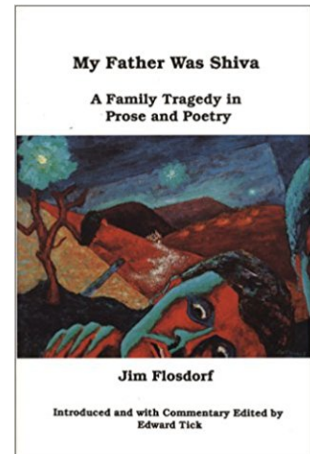

The following essay is based on the penultimate version of the article published in *My Father Was Shiva* by Jim Flosdorf in 1994*. It has only been slightly revised for publication here in *Survive and Thrive* (but see the "Poetry Editor's Note: A Missive to Our Selves," which updates and sets up the reappearance of the article below for this Volume). Here, as in the original article, the author at least tentatively suggests that confessional poetry is not necessarily therapeutic, and in some cases rhetorically may make psychological problems worse. "I" arrive at this tentative conclusion after considering the rhetorical and psychological role that narrative plays in constructing not only our identities, but our life story, stories which we repeat to ourselves over and over again. Rhetorical analysis is not often applied to the analysis of poetry anymore. But in this article, it is not being used to interpret the literary meaning of poetry, but the social, psychological, and affective truthfulness of poetry. Narratives have their own fidelity created by the genre of the structure, and because they have to do with *ethoi.* (Strictly speaking, for Aristotle, the constructing of the *ethos*, the character of the speaker or writer created in a speech or a text, is necessary for the other two modes of appeal, *logos* and *pathos*, to persuasion.) These narratives, then, become powerfully persuasive—not only to those listeners and readers we tell them to, but also to ourselves. So if the narrative is wrong, or a destructive one... "I" think Rex's "Endnote," following this article, is yet another beautiful parsing and response to this article, and a different limitation on confessional poetry that goes beyond "my" original article/argument, and is also is highly worth considering here and everywhere where human life is still the center of meaning, motive, and action.

*Katz, Steven B. "The Rhetoric of Confessional Poetry: Ethos, Myth, and the Narrative Configuration of Self." *My Father was Shiva: A Family Tragedy in Poetry and Prose with Psychological Interpretations.* Ed. Edward Tick. New York: Ablex, 1994: 109-36. Print.

"J'accuse!"

The practice of confession as a form of public expiation probably goes back to the beginning of human civilization. We see it in the wailing of the Old Testament, in the early cathartic Greek tragedies, in the ancient practice of public torture and confession, and in the confessional boxes of the Catholic church. Confession is central not only to religion but also to law, where confession leads to punishment as reformation and/or salvation. Confession is also central to psychotherapy, where (as in at least one view of religion) the penitent patient punishes him or herself until he or she confesses (Belgium). In the Freudian scheme of things, psychoanalysis actually can be understood to facilitate the patient's "confessing"—both to him or herself as well as to the therapist; in the act of psychoanalytic confession, repressed memories and pent up emotions are released, freeing up within the closed system of the mind psychic energy that can be used for other, healthier relationships. Thus, the act of "confessing" is necessary for the process of healing to begin.

There are two assumptions concerning confession: that we have something to confess (our Judeo-Christian heritage, if not our daily lives, provides us with material), and that the act of confessing helps relieve conscience, release guilt.

Indeed, the need for and practice of confession seems to be rooted deep in our psyche and our culture. It should be no surprise then that confession is also the basis of a prominent school of American poetry—aptly named "confessional poetry"—which takes the poet's tragic, guilt-ridden life to be the direct subject matter of poetry. Now, poetry is perhaps the only "public" medium of communication where intimate emotions are expressed honestly, openly, and for their own sake. (They certainly aren't in advertising, for instance, where they are used to sell products); indeed, poetry has been defined as the most efficient communication device of emotions [Perrine 3-10].) However, in reaction to nineteenth century romanticism in which twentieth century confessional poetry has its roots, formalists such as T. S. Eliot believed that to be a good poet one had to distance oneself from one's subject matter through "objective correlatives," in which "images" and allusions to other literatures and civilizations replace personal expressions of emotion.

But just as in a pedestrian sense all psychotherapy can be considered "confessional," all poetry can be considered confessional as well, insofar as a writer can only write about what they know, and what they know is filtered through their own knowledge and experience. In this sense, confession is related to the subjective nature of all our knowledge, a part of what Susanne Langer would call the necessary symbolization of raw reality—that "blumin', buzzin' confusion," to use William James' phrase—into sensory information, and its subsequent resymbolization or interpretation into meaningful experience, knowledge, or art (*Philosophy*; *Feeling and Form*).

In most confessional poetry, however, the "direct" treatment of self as subject matter is taken literally and seriously. Most confessional poets believe that the poet's actual life experience is the only proper (and knowable) subject of poetry. In fact, in the *Ion*, Plato has Socrates question whether the poet can write about anything at all, except perhaps their own lunacy. In a somewhat specious argument built on a belief in the existence of Ideal Forms for everything, Socrates questions whether

poets can write about things that they do not "truly know" about because it is not their profession—ships, for example, since they are poets and not shipbuilders. And since Plato posits that poetry is a divine madness inspired by the gods, poetry can be neither true knowledge nor true art, but merely a raving imitation of physical or transcendental reality that only philosophers had access to. (Plato did not hold poets in high regard; he would not think much of psychologists either.)

In this essay, I will not attempt to discuss too much the nature and role of confession in psychology *per se*. Though I enrolled in somewhat more than the requisite courses in psychology as an undergraduate, have undergone psychotherapy, and possess more than a passing interest in the subject, let me "confess" that I am not a psychologist (though I often play one—not on TV, but in my duties as college professor, advisor, mentor, and friend). And enough has been written about this enormous subject in psychology to be readily accessible to the masochistic or curious. I am a rhetorician and a poet. As such, I am concerned with the persuasive character of language, here the role of persuasion in confessional poetry as a form of therapy. (I will define rhetoric in a moment.) What I propose to do in this essay, then, is to examine the question of the nature and value of confessional poetry as therapy by approaching it from a different angle—through a rhetorical discussion and analysis of Jim Flosdorf's poetry in *My Father Was Shiva*.

Rhetoric and Poetry as Self

Although there has been surprisingly few books written on the nature and role of confessional poetry, there have been many attacks on the quality of confessional poetry. However, I have no intention of repeating the volley of criticism that has been levelled against confessional poetry as poetry, though much of it is justified. There is also much confessional poetry that is good (one thinks of the now classic work of the masters of confessional poetry: Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Delmore Schwartz, or John Berryman, for example, though some of their work, like everything else that is human, is uneven). Nor do I intend to "critique" Jim's poetry, at least not in the traditional, literary sense. My concern in this essay goes beyond questions of quality or art.

Rather, I want to examine confessional poetry as a rhetorical transaction, a construction of self in language. Generally, I want to ask: What is the nature of confessional poetry as a rhetorical construction, and how does it seek to persuade? What happens in and through the "language of confession" as a rhetorical transaction? Do poets really confess, or do they construct a public self in order to persuade? Is there a difference between confessing and constructing a public self? Is it therapeutically beneficial? Harmful? Neither? Both? What are some of the implications of the rhetorical construction of self for therapy? (I will leave the question of whether confession works *clinically* for the experts to ponder.) It is my belief that these questions about confessional poetry are not only relevant to psychotherapy but important for poetry as well, since the act of confessing in both therapy and poetry seems to be similar (but in fact may not be), and psychiatrists and therapists are increasingly realizing the role of language in their profession and its value in facilitating healing (Hobson). Some therapists even recommend poetry as a part of treatment (Ann Sexton's perhaps being a more recent and most famous case).

It is also my belief that these questions can best be answered from a rhetorical rather than exclusively psychological or literary perspective, as is the fashion. Thus, to begin my discussion, let me define rhetoric and explain my approach a little more. It is generally well known that rhetoric is the art of persuasion first formulated by the ancient Greeks and Romans as the art of speaking well. Aristotle, the first philosopher to formally systematize the discipline, defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* I ii 1355b26). Thus, unlike Plato who cast rhetoric as a collection of spurious techniques used to deceive and spread illusion (*Gorgias*; *Phaedrus*), Aristotle conceives of rhetoric as a means of discovering knowledge, albeit uncertain knowledge. (Plato was not fond of poets either.) In contemporary composition theory and research, personal, or "expressive" writing is even considered a process of discovering who we are, what we know (Britton; Elbow; Murray; Odell). (Unfortunately, most people still think of—and use—rhetoric as deception.)

Aristotle's definition of rhetoric is not the only one that will be useful in this essay. Skipping a few thousand years, the twentieth century has seen the development of several social theories of rhetoric. Given the belief in the uncertainty and relativity of knowledge (as opposed to objectivity and absolute truth) that has become a dominant theme in the twentieth century—even in science, such as in New Physics—persuasion has come to be regarded as the social basis of all knowledge, even scientific knowledge (Perelman, Burke, Kuhn). As Burke defines it, rhetoric is the art of inducing social cooperation among beings who by nature use symbols (*Motives*). In this "social-epistemic" view of rhetoric, there is an intrinsic relationship between language and knowledge, indeed, between language and thought itself, which some linguists also believe (Whorf; Farb; Lakoff and Johnson). In this social-epistemic view of rhetoric, knowledge, society, civilization itself would be impossible without rhetoric. Today, the study of rhetoric embraces all forms of communication as it reflects both persuasion and thought.

Thus, contrary to popular belief, rhetoric and poetry are not mutually exclusive, the first concerned with deceptive persuasion, the later illusionary Form. Not only can the roots of rhetoric as an oral tradition be traced back to poetry, but poetry can be understood and analyzed rhetorically, as an attempt to persuade a reader, to induce a reader's cooperation in the construction of meaning, value, and emotion. We can understand Form not in the Platonic sense, as an absolute to be studied for its own sake, but in the Burkean sense, as "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (Burke, *Counter-Statement* 31). So too we can understand confessional poetry not as private expression "overheard," made public, but as a rhetorical transaction, a social construction of the experience of "self" created in the poem by poet and reader. It is also in this way that the reader is able to participate in the subjective, "personal" experience of the poet, validate it, make it her own.

There is also a relation between rhetoric and personality—not as we understand the latter today, as the psychological makeup of a relatively stable "self" that in many ways is conceived of as an Ideal Form as well (a statement I'm afraid Skinner would approve), but as Aristotle seems to have implicitly understood it, as "character" revealed in particular actions (*Nicomachean Ethics*, esp. II-III).

This notion of character manifested in behavior (rather than the distinction between private and public self) also can be used to comprehend the rhetorical nature of confessional poetry. Aristotle's concept of *ethos* (*Nichomachean Ethics* II i 1103a15; *Rhetoric* I ii 1356a1-15), from which we derive our notion of ethics as moral character that guides behavior, may prove useful here. The concept of *ethos* is in some respects similar to the more familiar concept of personae—the social "masks" that we don depending on the situation. As George Herbert Mead might say, these "masks" are internalized through the process of socialization and constitute different parts of our self. The ability to adopt the right *persona* for the social occasion is part of the rhetorical ability to adapt and adjust behavior and language to different situations. (The inability to adopt appropriate behaviors and language for different situations also can be understood as a rhetorical basis of schizophrenia [Tick]).

However, Aristotle makes a distinction between "character" as general behavior and *ethos* which is created by the art of rhetoric for the purpose of persuasion. While prior reputation based on general behavior is outside the realm of rhetoric for Aristotle, the character woven in and through a piece of discourse to persuade a specific audience is the subject of rhetoric proper. Thus, according to Aristotle, *ethos* is defined as the character that is created by language as an element of persuasion (*Rhetoric* I ii 1356a5-10). From a twentieth century perspective, then, *ethos* can be understood as character manifested or created in what Kenneth Burke calls "symbolic action," that is, in language not only as a medium of communication but as a specifically human mode of social behavior. Clearly, while the rhetorical concept of *ethos* is limited in so far as it cannot take into account what we understand as the personal, private, "psychological" dimensions of personality, *ethos* is perhaps superior in that it does take into account the social, symbolic, and particularly the "rhetorical" nature of personality which many psychological theories downplay or ignore.

The rhetorical view of the writer as an individual who intentionally creates an *ethos* from socially internalized selves through language for the purposes of persuasion in some ways also transcends the current debate that is raging in the field of composition/rhetoric based on the perceived polarity between writing as an individual act vs. writing as a social act. The question has come to revolve around the issue of how to view, treat, and examine the whole concept and validity of "the author." There is the traditional romantic view of the author as a "free agent" who intends and creates his/her text in inspiration and rhetorical isolation; the cognitive view in contemporary composition theory that seeks to replace the romantic view of the author by examining empirically and rationally the mental processes involved in writing; and finally the social-epistemic view that seeks to replace the notion of the author itself by studying writing as a confluence of cultural and linguistic forces that impinge on writers as loci of language and texts as socially determined artifacts.

The assumption in this essay is that the rhetorical concept of *ethos* as an individual choice of socially constructed selves reconciles some of these differences. Because the whole notion of rhetoric involves a choice of suitable social strategies for different situations, we can understand confessional poetry not just as the inspired expression of personal emotion, the operation of cognitive schemata, or social constructions only, but as a public, rhetorical presentation of self—as a "resymbolization" of experience into art for the purposes of persuasion. Indeed, the act of writing is itself a process of

constructing a self in language. While the notion of "self" can be traced to Descartes and even Plato, in *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* Walter Ong argues that the notion of the individual self as we know it today—as an isolated consciousness alienated from society—blossomed in 19th century literary romanticism; this notion of self is rooted not only in the industrial revolution and the rise of the bourgeoisie but also in the self-conscious reflection, isolation, and privatization of thought that writing and print technology inspire when absorbed into consciousness and culture. In other words, our whole notion of the self is literary, is based on and constituted in language and writing (also see Ong, *Orality and Literacy*).

Several more questions therefore arise concerning the nature of confessional poetry as therapy. Since for all intents and purposes the private self does not exist, or at least cannot be known apart from the language of the "public self" that is rhetorically created in confessional poetry (or in therapy), is true "confessional" poetry, and therapy, possible? Is it the very act of the symbolic, public construction of self (in confessional poetry and in therapy) that facilitates the formation of a "healthy" self, that is itself healthy? Is this how confession works? Is this how the self is made?

The Narrative Configuration of Self

To begin to answer these questions, before analyzing Jim Flosdorf's poetry, it might help to understand how the self might be constructed in language from a narrative point of view as well. For this understanding I turn now to a relatively recent work that bridges rhetoric and psychology: *Narrative Knowing in the Human Sciences* by Donald Polkinghorne.

According to Polkinghorne, the self is neither material nor mental, but meaning constructed through narration, i.e., in language (149-152). As Polkinghorne says, "we achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (150). In fact, for Polkinghorne, narration is "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (1). Polkinghorne argues that narration (which he opposes to the formal logic of the research model used in the natural sciences) is a fundamental mode of perception and thought, one that in accordance with the "social-epistemic" view of rhetoric discussed in the introduction of this essay already presents experience to consciousness in language as meaningfully connected events ordered sequentially in time (68; 135). As Polkinghorne demonstrates, the narrative configuration of human experience is predominant in literature, history, and psychology—especially since Freud.

Indeed, for Polkinghorne, Freud was the father of the use of the narrative configuration of experience in therapy; narrative interpretation is the basis of psychoanalysis in that the therapist tries to uncover and understand the patient's "life-story" (as Polkinghorne points out, in this way Freudian analysis is very literary), and to reinterpret and change this story that they tell themselves, that forms their identity, that they live, for the better. For Freud, the narrative interpretation of experience allows the therapist to move from present personality traits and disorders to past events through suggestions, associations, and the fragments of dreams, in order to explain the patient's experience and construct a more complete, coherent, and meaningful story, a healthier self. "One's

personal story or personal identity is a recollected self in which the more complete the story that is formed, the more integrated the self will be. Thus, self-knowledge is an appropriation of the past" (Polkinghorne 106). According to Polkinghorne, for Freud it did not seem to matter much whether that interpretation, that life-story was fact or fiction, true or false, as long as it adequately accounted for the present and led to personal understanding and growth (119-121; 178-179).

The assumption in this essay, then, is that confessional poetry is a narrative construction of self in language. As Polkinghorne, quoting Stephen Crites, states: "The self is a kind of aesthetic construct, recollected in and with the life of experience in narrative fashion" (106). In addition, the narrative construction of self is rhetorical in the sense that those narratives have to be "convincing," both to self and others, to be successful (Polkinghorne 119-121). Thus, the narrative selves created in confessional poetry (and therapy) also can be seen as rhetorical constructs, *ethoi* that seek to persuade both writer and reader (or patient and therapist) of the *validity* and veracity of its narrative construction. Walter Fisher understands narrative validity as the "probability" or coherence of the narrative (which he further divides into "argumentative coherence," or structural integrity; "material coherence," or completeness when compared to other stories; "characterological coherence," or the reliability of the narrator and characters); and veracity as the "fidelity" or accuracy of the separate components of the narrative as assertions about social reality (47; 105). Both the probability and fidelity of the narrative configuration of experience and self can be understood to create the "ethical appeal" in confessional poetry that is necessary for persuasion and thus healing.

Poet as Analysand and Analyst

Having explored a little the nature of self as narrative construct and its relationship to *ethos*, let's look at the nature of the narrative self created in Jim Flosdorf's poetry, and in confessional poetry in general. Again, this will not be a critique of the poetry *per se* (though it may sometimes sound like it), but a rhetorical analysis of the narrative configuration of self in these poems, and an evaluation of the persuasiveness of that self, its *ethos*. Based on this analysis, I will then speculate on the success or failure of confessional poetry as therapy in Jim's poetry, and its value in the rhetorical construction of identity. For clearly, in exploring his own past through poetry, Jim, like other confessional poets, is attempting to explain the tragic events in his life by constructing a story of it in a poetry that through its "ethical appeal" will persuade him (and us) of the probability and fidelity of the narrative experience, and thus of his self-identity as well.

In Jim's poems, as in most confessional poetry, the *ethos* that is created is one of the poet as suffering artist. In the very first poem, "Long Enough," the poet writes: "I must dip my pen/in that pool which never congealed/and write." Indeed, one of the most prominent narratives that the confessional poet employs is the narrative romance of the suffering artist—both as victim and as hero, engaged in a mythic, archetypal battle for salvation and self. Perhaps the most interesting things about "confessional" poetry are not the lurid detail of the poet's life but the poet's attempts to create a coherent and convincing life-story by turning to the myths of narrative romance. As Polkinghorne explains, "People borrow aspects of their self stories from fictive narratives and

dramas. . . . Cultures do provide specific types of plots for adoption by its members in their configurations of self. These plot outlines are carried and transmitted in the culture by mythic stories and fairy tales, by tales of heroes, and by dramatic constructions" (153).

According to the late Northrop Frye, the element that distinguishes narrative romance from other forms of narrative, the one that Frye claims underlies most rituals and myth in Western literature, religion, and culture, is the theme of the hero's quest, the adventure or journey through which prosperity and order are restored to community or hero in decline. For Joseph Campbell, the stages of the quest also represent "rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*"; the hero's perilous journey into a mythical underworld and the series of trials he must undergo result in the discovery of creative energy necessary for spiritual salvation and psychological wholeness, as well as prosperity (30-46). If the hero succeeds, reappears, and is reunited with his community, says Frye, we have comedy or romance; if he loses, or does not reappear, we have tragedy or irony.

The narrative selves constructed in Jim's poetry more or less follow the lines of narrative romance described by the late Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell. According to Frye, the world of narrative romance tends to be idealized: the story is usually set in nature, for example, in a dark enchanted wood. In addition, Frye remarks that the hero of narrative romance tends to be a "stylized figure," a "psychological archetype" (304), one who possesses great mystery, virtue, power. Thus, in "My Grandfather's Basement," the poet as small boy "Like a sorcerer's apprentice/stand[s] in awe of the mysteries performed in this magical place." Set against these mysteries is the *ethos* of the present poet who once knew happiness, but now knows only sorrow. But the first thing that one notices about Jim's work is the title of the larger prose narrative in which the poems are embedded: "My Father Was Shiva." As the title indicates, the focus of Jim's personal conflict, the cause of his suffering, and the subject of most of these poems, is his relationship with his father—here represented and understood in terms of the myth of the Hindu god of creation and destruction.

Indeed, according to Campbell, one of the central conflicts in the mythic hero's quest is in the preparatory stage that Campbell calls "Atonement with Father" (126-149). In this early stage of the quest, the idolatry and fear of the all-powerful father figure must be surpassed, the immature self transcended, and the hero finally become reconciled with the father in order for the hero to release pent-up psychic energy and realize the full power and potential necessary for the quest. It is against the myth of the father as both creative and destructive force, relayed to us in the surrounding prose narrative, that all the poems are meant to be read: how Jim's father, a famous scientist, invented the freeze-dry method but didn't win the Nobel Prize, became embittered, alcoholic, and abusive; eventually sold out by helping the government apply his freeze-dry method to germ warfare; and finally took his wife's and his own life in a last fatal outburst of emotion.

In the second poem in the article, appropriately entitled "Heroes," the confessional again becomes mythical as Jim explores his contradictory feelings for his father as real hero "who dove twice into the muddy depths" to save a boy's life but failed to save the boy's father. This archetypal story of the hero descending into the underworld triggers by association the story in the second stanza of an

Indian boy who saved a fisherman from drowning by getting help. However, aside from the transference of heroic powers from the man-father to the boy, something else happens here, something that is central to understanding part of the "narrative problem" in Jim's poetry as he attempts to account for the past and create a narrative self.

In the story, the fisherman gives the Indian boy carte blanche to his house, boat, bar. But the boy, "fat alcoholic bum, left family, left all." It's as if along with heroic powers, the weakness of the man-father was transferred to the boy in the poem. Having found a parallel mythic story that embodies his own in a kind of objective correlative, the poet is locked into the narrative of that story, unable to transcend his own narrative through it, and so falls back to the harsh reality of his own life. The poem ends: "My father was another—/came to no good end." The mythic quest fails. Instead of comedy or romance we have tragedy and irony. The *ethos* of the artist as a victimized son, suffering at the hands of an insensitive, abusive man, is both created and *maintained*.

It would seem from this poem that Jim is unable to "surpass the idolatry and fear of the father," atone, transcend. If this were the case in just this poem, we could probably dismiss it as poetic license. However, in poem after poem, Jim repeatedly fails to favorably present, alter, or understand his relationship with his father. And the trace of the tragic pattern of narrative romance—the "rise and fall" that is contained in the content and mirrored in the movement of many of these poems, from the personal to the mythic and back again—sets up and establishes the negative life story of the poet, creates the *ethos* of suffering as a persuasive element in almost all of these poems. For example, in "Waiting," we have the mythical slaying of the all-powerful father, here embodied in the figure of the ogre. Set up by the conditional "when" at the beginning of the poem, neither the ogre nor the slaying ever comes. Rather than the necessary "atonement with Father," the poet, like the ogre-father "shouts in the middle of the night/to vent his latest rage," not as seer, but as monster. The negative identification that we see in these poems is the closest we come to any kind of reconciliation between father and son.

If according to Frye and Campbell the goal of the quest in narrative romance is the return of the hero and ultimately his/her reunification with others, the poems "fail" in this regard as well. In "Your Eyes," for example, the poet as savant looks into "eyes that had seen something/something unspeakable." One gathers from the context of the larger narrative that Jim is talking here about his mother's father, who was a minister and obviously someone Jim looked up to, admired, identified with. But even in this poem, in which the poet shares the tragic grief and vision of this prophetic figure, the quest ends in failure: "I felt that image/deep behind the circles of your eyes/knowing I could never ask/knowing only that/I could only answer/your tears rising/with mine/also." Though the poet and the prophet cry together about what has transpired, they do so separately, alone, in an impossible meeting of the minds, in a "negative communion" that are only emphasized by the isolation of the word "also" in the last line. But unlike Walt Whitman, whose poetic style the verbal gesture of anastrophe in the last line is reminiscent, the poet in this poem cannot fully identify with the hero, cannot transcend to the unity of the one in the many, or even the unity of two.

In these poems, then, the poet remains isolated and alone, trapped in the fragments of an unredeemed self. The poet himself affirms this. In the poem "Stone" that immediately follows "Your Eyes," he says "It hit me like a huge stone/Splitting off from primal consciousness. . . ./And then subsided/subsided/almost. For the rock lies there/visible in the depths." What primal stone, what archetype hit him, we may ask? Set off in the right-hand margin of the page is the answer: "Why fear death/For death is no more/Alone/Than life." And in "The Unburied Child," the child that begins to rise is not the Christ of resurrection, redeemed by his omnipotent father and come back to save the world, but a perverted child who "learns to howl." There is no communion here either. In this romantic myth, the suffering artist meets life and death alone in order to write about them (Alvarez). Even the last poem, "Lightening," in which the poet does seem to find some solace and consolation in nature, and which many would regard as a positive sign, can be read as a negative development. While the poet does "lighten" as the branches of "the great pine" from which he removes stones and fallen trees toppled in a May storm "spring back," the storm brews beneath the surface of this narrative, and the lightening still flashes in the double entendre of the title. Indeed, the rhetorical "return to nature" itself can be regarded as just another part of the myth of narrative romance (Fyre; Marx), in this case, the ironic pattern of narrative romance. In Jim's poems, there is no reconciliation of the sons' hostile feelings for the dead father through his communion with nature; the artist is ultimately unredeemed, alone in nature, alienated from others and from himself, unable to successfully return and be reunited with community—unable to complete the quest.

Thus, alone, vulnerable, unarmed except for his pen, in "I know some," the poet confesses to the poem itself: "But poem/I confess to you/Midas's secret/I'll whisper in a hole/and bury it." Here, the poet, like Midas, turns everything he touches to gold and so destroys it. (Do we detect a hint of guilt here? We are told in the prose narrative that Jim taunted his father about his failings, despised his father even as a boy.) Even to his poem the poet says: "Speak softly/whispering grains/of twenty-three year's of growth/lest the wind/turn gossip." For like other confessional poets, such as Lowell and Berryman [Simpson 144]), Jim doesn't want to talk about his father's death, yet must tell, at least in his poems—must keep trying in order to construct a self, even if it is a negative self, must keep trying to give his life meaning, even if it is the meaning created only by the writing of poems themselves.

But given the insistent movement from personal to mythic and back again, it almost seems as if Jim cannot create a persuasive narrative, even for himself. Indeed, given the number of myths Jim draws on in these poems taken as a whole, Jim seems to be sifting through the stories of narrative romance, shifting from one to another, as if the stories themselves were not convincing enough, as if Jim cannot find a satisfying narrative that will somehow explain the events of his life, make his own story complete, meaningful, coherent. In the concluding section of Jim's prose narrative, which consists entirely of poems, we have titles like "Through the Glass Darkly," "The Beast," "Taurus," "Chest of Skulls," "Like Parsifal," "At the Flood." These titles reflect the range of Jim's searching, and the number of myths and tales he is willing to employ to find his own self/story.

But of course, the most prominent myth, the one to which all these ultimately refer, is that of the relationship of father and son. It is interesting and I think significant, however, that these poems about Jim's father are not the best. Indeed, in many (but not all) of the poems, it is when Jim moves from personal detail to mythic allusion that the poem "fails" to be convincing as narrative—fails, to use Fisher's terms, not on the grounds of argumentative or material coherence, but on the grounds of "charactological coherence"—which in confessional poetry is *ethos* itself! Take, for example, a poem like "Thinking About My Father." Section ii asks a question that is simple, beautiful, and believable in its figurality: "Oh, to have now/what it would have been like—/he and I on either end/of a two-man saw."

But in seeking the answer, the poet attempts to transcend the absence of his father in "real" life and achieve some kind of narrative coherence and completeness by invoking the mythic relationship between Telemachus and Odysseus. In Section iv, our modern Telemachus sings: "Sing me a song oh father/of your grief beyond the grave/Sing me a song oh father/of your grief before you made me/Sing me a song oh father/of your grief since then/Sing me a song that I may sail/past the evil I have done." One cannot help but note here the steady decline in the rhetorical power of the lines brought about by the increasing use of clichés that fail to become archetypal probes (McLuhan), that pull the poem down under the fictive weight of their narrative borrowing. And just as the character of the narrative fails to persuade as *ethos*, the poet has not been able to transcend his own narrative either. "The intimate puzzle/remains—/and so Odysseus longed/to visit Hades." Unable to "return home" himself, to complete the narrative of his own life, the poet identifies only with the tragic, suffering figure of Odysseus *before* he successfully completed his long quest.

It is significant that the mythic characterization of self is the weakest part of these poems. For as Polkinghorne argues, "The recognition that humans use narrative structures as ways to organize the events of their lives and to provide a scheme for their own self-identity is of importance for the practice of psychotherapy and for personal change" (Polkinghorne 178). But in order for the new narrative configuration of self to lead to personal change, it must be "rhetorically" convincing as narrative! This would seem to be true, whether the story is given in therapy where the patient must convince him/herself as well as the therapist, or in confessional poetry where the poet must convince him/herself as well as the reader. As Jim states at the end of "Long Enough," the goal of these poems is to "move on." But if Jim tries to use the mythic characters of narrative romance to validate and complete his own "narrative identity," those mythic characters instead tend to rhetorically undermine it.

A Psycho-Rhetorical Interpretation

Given the fact that the narrative configurations of self in these poems as *ethoi* are unconvincing, I want to ask a question that may be even more important than the persuasiveness of the poems themselves (though most poets probably would deny that). That question is: Are the narrative configurations of self in these confessional poems therapeutic? Does the writing of confessional poems succeed as therapy? Of course I won't be able to say whether the writing of confessional

poetry is therapeutic "in all situations," in "every case." But an evaluation of its success or failure in Jim's poetry may shed light on some of the issues concerning the therapeutic value of confessional poetry (and confession) in general.

We have already seen how Jim's poems move from the personal to the mythic and back again, and how Jim shifts from one mythic configuration of self to another, as if he is unable to find or sustain a healing vision in his poetry. Thus, it would seem that Jim's attempt to construct, through the tragic myths of narrative romance, a therapeutic self-narrative that transcends his current conception of himself, sometimes succeeds as poetry, but seems to fail as therapy. As Jim says in "Styrofoam": "I cannot throw up nor exorcise/what it is that boils below/but chip away with little words/such little, little words." Jim suggests perhaps one reason why his self-narrative is "unconvincing" in one of the last poems in the set: there is "no myth dark enough/to suffice" ("No Myth Dark Enough"). But to accept this is to buy into the very myth Jim is creating in his narrative. Just as a therapist seeks to interpret the cause of the patient's story, we must now seek the cause of the *rhetorical* failure of Jim's self-contained, self-justifying narrative.

To do so I must briefly turn to the insightful analysis and expert opinion of Dr. Reuven Bar-Lavav, a medical psychiatrist who wrote a "Commentary" for Jim's original article of the same title in *Voices*. If the psychological goal of Jim's poetry is to transform his hostile understanding of his dead scientist father into an accepting and even loving one (58) and so reconcile his relationship with his father and himself through narration in psychologically satisfying terms, it is obvious from the poetry that Jim has not done so. "My father chewed hemlock and lead/and blasted the top of his brains—/from too much fame, leaped and crashed" ("To one whose father is dying"). As Bar-Lavav points out in his discussion of Jim's use of his father's book on the freeze-dry method, despite Jim's perception that his father was a violent man responsible for the development of germ warfare—a "long-held view of Father as killer. . . confirmed in the latter's own writings"—there is "no confirmation of the son's old suspicions. . . in the quoted passages" (56).

Indeed, Jim continues to understand his relationship with his long dead father in same narrative terms, continues to feel the same intense fear and anger and hatred that he felt as a child. In "Children," where the father "throws lightening bolts around like Jove," the poet as a boy, like "Salome with John the Baptist . . . /put my father on a plate/and carved him like a roast,/with an apple in his mouth." Jim persists in imagining himself to be the slayer of the mythic father; but the emotional ambivalence of the myth perhaps reveals (and conceals) the poet's repressed anger and feelings of loss and guilt. As Ben-Lavav comments, "the son continues to see his father unrealistically, with harsh and unforgiving eyes. . . . The father's real despair and loneliness are completely overlooked by the grown son who still is unsympathetic, and who taunted the father even while a youngster. The passage of time has not done much to change the son's old but unproven and apparently baseless suspicions. . . [;] nothing in the story confirms these questionable ideas" (56-57).

Despite Bar-Lavav's initial statement, then, that "here is a piece of writing that leads to self-healing," there is no evidence in these poems that healing is taking place. Although we must at present accept Bar-Lavav's claim that "the heavy burdens of guilt and self-blame are all lessened as the tragedy is exposed to the light of day"—a claim that is the foundation of both confession and psychoanalysis—we must question his conclusion, at least as far as confessional poetry is concerned, that "such is the power of reality. It always helps in separating the self from its internal tormentors" (56). For what is this "reality" except another narrative construct by which we poor humans attempt to make sense of ourselves and the world and persuade others of them. As Bar-Lavav concludes, "Neither the writer nor we will ever know what really happened in that tragic relationship between the parents, but an altogether different scenario is possible, and much more likely" (56).

Thus, Jim's narrative perhaps fails not only on Fisher's grounds of "charactology" but on "fidelity" as well. We will never really know. But if the purpose of self-narrative is not only to provide coherence, wholeness—identity—but also a story through which to personally grow, the failure to transcend the old narrative, to create a new one, is, as Bar-Lavav confirms a psychological fixation, but one which these confessional poems apparently have not cured. In fact, the narrative conception of self as *ethos* that is constructed in language allows us to understand what fixation means from a rhetorical perspective: it is the inability to transcend the current, unhealthy, and sometimes destructive understanding of one's life-story, and to supplement or replace it with another, healthier, more convincing one. (One naturally assumes with Quintilian, perhaps idealistically, that the most persuasive *ethos* will be the most "virtuous" one—in psychological terms the healthiest one, though in practice this may not necessarily be the case.)

This leads us back to the concept of *ethos*, not only as a persuasive element in discourse, but also one that always implies rhetorical choice of character within the constraints of the situation. Why does Jim, like so many confessional poets, choose the tragic stories of narrative romance, adopt the *ethos* of the suffering poet, as his own? The fact that in Jim's poetry the personal becomes mythical at every turn suggests that the poet has a need to understand and act out his life in other, mythic, archetypal terms. As Polkinghorne attests, "personal stories are always some version of the general cultural stock of stories about how life proceeds. As narrative forms, these stories draw together and configure the events of one's life into a coherent and basic theme" (107).

In this scenario, the writer doesn't have much choice, since the myths and archetypes through which we understand and configure experience, whether contained in the unconscious or transmitted by culture, are *a priori*. Based on his life-long study of archetypes, Carl Jung certainly would agree. So perhaps would Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell. Polkinghorne would seem to concur with this view as well: "myths are devices to think with: not merely recountings of any particular tale, but ways of classifying and organizing reality. That is their point: they are not descriptions, but models for descriptions (or thinking), logical techniques for resolving basic antinomies in thought and social existence. . . . [M]yths think themselves through people, rather than the vice versa" (83).

However, there are other, more positive stories within narrative romance—within consciousness or culture—that the poet could have drawn on. There are, then, other reasons perhaps for poets choosing if not actively seeking the tragic mode of understanding in narrative romance. As Polkinghorne points out, "people undertake adventures in order to construct and maintain satisfactory life stories. . . . Narrative enrichment occurs when one retrospectively revises, selects, and orders past details in a way. . . that will serve as a justification for one's present condition and situation" (106). That is, whether people consciously choose their narrative myths or not, they construct stories to explain their life in exciting ways that allow them to accept and cope with its consequences—especially those parts of their life over which they appear to have no control.

In this regard, it is relatively well known that the *ethos* of the suffering artist provides a "script," a narrative of existence, a kind of incentive, even a heuristic for writing that turns writing (and suffering) into an adventure. By adopting the *ethos* of the suffering artist, writers—particularly young writers—provide themselves not only with an identity and a subject matter to write about, but also with an emotional justification for the real suffering that results, and a reason to keep writing and working at an occupation that has much uncertainty and few rewards. While many writers do eventually outgrow this *ethos*, it is one that, for better or worse, at least confessional poets perhaps do not outgrow.

Another possible reason already hinted at as to why the poet chooses to use the pattern of narrative romance and *ethos* of the suffering artist derives from the notion of *ethos* itself as an element in discourse used to persuade an audience. In this rhetorical scenario, the poet can be understood to be drawing on myths and archetypes lodged deep in public culture and/or unconscious to induce the reader to participate in the writer's private experience, indeed, to make that participation possible. In addition, these culturally shared stories may supply for both writer and reader "narrative evidence" that might actually be missing in the poet's own life-story, creating a persuasive narrative that will convince the poet (if not the reader) of the veracity of the experience and the validity of the poem. And of course, the *ethos* of the suffering artist is in itself a powerful trope in our culture, one that can be traced all the way back to the Platonic notion of mantic madness (the poet touched by the gods—in Jim's poetry, by Shiva). It is also a trope in our culture that can be traced to our Judeo-Christian heritage, in which the *ethos* of suffering is strong.

Of course, there is also the real suffering of the artist. I will not rehearse here the controversy concerning the value and necessity of suffering for art, represented on the one hand by Edmund Wilson, who analyzes through a Sophocles play the image of the putrefying, despised, agonizing, lonely artist who must suffer; or on the other hand the view represented by Lionel Trilling, that neurosis and suffering actually hamper artistic creation, which demands emotional control and discipline, or to alter Wordsworth's phrase, neurosis "recollected in tranquility." Nor will I renew the eternal debate between the "classical" and "romantic" views of art (Barzun). Those debates, while relevant, are not the point here. The point here is that many see *ethos* of the suffering artist contained in confessional poetry—indeed, the *ethos* that has come to define confessional poetry—as a heuristic for healing, and that whether consciously or unconsciously, by choice or by cultural hegemony, Jim

rhetorically has created through the pattern of narrative romance the ethos of the suffering writer as the narrative configuration of self in these poems. While Jim says he would like "the wound of this pain to close" ("To Earth"), in poem after poem he will not let it—and the gap of the wound is exposed for everyone to see.

I have suggested one reason why Jim's narrative does not persuade to heal, why no personal growth is visible in the writing of these poems and the narrative that surrounds it: because Jim's attempt to borrow heroes from narrative romance to identify with and create his own life-story is rhetorically unconvincing. But at the risk of oversimplification, one also should ask to what extent the myth of narrative romance and the *ethos* of the suffering artist themselves prevent Jim from creating a more explanatory narrative, a more compelling *ethos*? To what extent does the failure to transcend the old narrative and create a new one present a cause of the psychological fixation, rather than an effect of it? Is it possible that Jim as poet has become so persuaded by the mythic *ethos* of his or culture's making (trapped in those tragic albeit unconvincing narrative configurations of self) that he is unable to alter the basic understanding of his own life-story? Could it be that Jim, and other confessional poets, are stuck in the social-epistemic reality of their own literary creations?

Je m'accuse

Jim is not the only poet for whom poetry fails to provide a transcendent narrative, whose self remains fixated within the confessional configuration of a mythic self.

I was fifteen when I found my mother on the garage floor behind the lawnmower. I was supposed to cut the neighbor's grass. It was the last day of school. I called the police. I called my father. I kept my sister away from the garage door I had opened. I kept my cool, but it's all big blue blur, and I may have been frantic. The police arrived; my father came rushing home. Although I did not know it then, my mother was dead of carbon monoxide poisoning. That morning was the first time I had spoken to her in a month because she wouldn't let me play with my best friend, Dave. (I think they thought he was "a homosexual," since he was the only friend with whom I played.) Before I left for school that day, my first and last words to my mother in over a month were: "good bye." Little did I know it was for eternity. She was thirty-four years old.

Wrinkled and young,
she dwells in a chair,
waiting, patient,
content to be there.

A smile lingers,
her eyes flow;
she's been dead
but no one knows.

My sister and I were taken to a neighbor's house across the street, kept away while the police did their work. Accidental death, they called it. She still had her pajamas on, though it had been mid-afternoon. She had been listening to the car radio with the garage door closed and the car running and had succumbed to the fumes before she could completely climb out of the open car door. From what I remember, she was naive and crazy enough to do something like that. And there were clothes in the dryer: My aunt, who now lived in Texas and who was one of my mother's favorite people in the world, was in town, and my mother apparently was getting ready to visit her, waiting for her clothes to dry in the dryer in the basement attached to the garage when the "accident" occurred. She had reason to live, they said. And she loved music. Now she was lying on her back, on the cold concrete floor, eyes glazed, opened wide, one foot hanging on the edge of the car floor, an arm still reaching into the air—for air, for something to hold on to—in a frozen gesture of terror and helplessness. The car had finally run out of gas.

After Life: The Last 2 10 Minutes of Death
To my mother
(whom I found dead in the garage of asphyxiation, June, 1968.)

Dead, your dying brain
    yields its last feverish content
before your upturned, inverted eyes
    watching a rerun of your life
like a bad drive-in home movie
    against the garage wall
where you lay, a newly conscious corpse,
    spellbound in the darkness,
breathless, mouth open in astonishment,
    one leg hanging onto car seat,
each flickering cell of film
    releasing what has been
kept and collected
    in the dark wet corners
of experience, heaped amid the dim
    confused clutter of a mind
that is you, now drying, dying
    in that slow light,
arm outstretched, hanging in the air,
    the final gesture and judgment of your life—
the last two to ten minutes, memory
    a jar of thick liquid
overturned on the cold concrete floor,
    spilling in a flash

But I've always believed it was suicide. It's a more satisfying story. It's even more tragic. I'm pretty sure my father wanted one more child. One night I think I heard them arguing about whether to have another child or not over a baseball game they had turned up on the radio in the bedroom. (I think they turned the radio on whenever they made love.) I also think my mother did not want another child. She had some kind of trouble with me in pregnancy (I suspect she didn't even want me, starved me by not eating so that she could stay thin as long as possible). She had a nervous breakdown after my sister was born, and had to be institutionalized for a while. I remember quiet green walls. But most importantly, she was beautiful, and fiercely fought growing old. She had always been horrified by the prospect of aging, appalled at the approach of disfigurement. She was very neurotic—especially about her figure. (I'll never forget her using leg make-up in a roll-on stick to hide any varicose veins, or how in her pajamas she slapped and firmed her chin all day, every day.) I've even heard that when she was pregnant with me, she didn't begin to show until the ninth month; I've interpreted this as the cause of my stomach problems—my upside-down stomach at birth; my nervous, thin, and sickly childhood; my bleeding ulcer that began in my teens and almost killed me three times—to blame her for starving me in the womb.

One night shortly before her death, I think I heard them doing it in bed. My mother suddenly emerged from the bedroom and stood naked before me. (This could have been another time.) She freaked out. (She always freaked when I saw her naked.) But what about the note my grandmother (my father's mother) told me about a year later but my father denied existed: "Mars, please don't come tonight." Was Mars a man or a supernatural god? My father was the man who, when I was allowed back in the house after an ambulance took my mother away and I asked "Is Ma going to be all right?", shouted in my face in front of the neighbors and relatives and friends who gathered in the house that was no longer my own: "She's dead, you fucking jerk!" (When Nana [my mother's mother] was told about her daughter's death, she started screaming that my father had murdered her. I think she still believes that to this day.)

After my mother died, my father let me play with Dave as much as I wanted. My father told me I had just become an adult—at fifteen. And he started dating almost immediately, it seemed, totally abandoned us; in fact, looking back on it now, he was downright desperate, driven both by emotional/physical need and perhaps some kind of guilt (at his own culpability, because he wanted a child?—not about leaving my sister and me alone), and we were left to cook and fend for ourselves while he attempted to secure a wife for himself and a mother for us. . . . At least this is what he told us. One night I got hit by a car on my bike. One evening I was raped by the electrician. One day the apartment was broken into and we were robbed. He never knew. And I hated all the women he brought home or took us to meet at divorced or widowed parents' picnics, rejected and resisted every one of them. I would not give up my mother for anything. The following poem was transcribed, almost "literally," from a dream I had during this period:

Aubade: A Dream

After years
she woke in love
his family gathered
in a ghostly hall
laughed at his will
to leave he heard
he heard them mock
in grief through a
small door ajar
slight she came
and spoke in shadows
fingers whispering
in his hair
he wrapped his
about her neck
face he struck against
picture of her
and father wed
shifting on the wall
a voice that voice
"your mother's dead
you fucking jerk"

Is this poem about the guilt I felt about my mother's death? Emerging in relation to my own need for love? As another betrayal of my mother? Is it about my unsuccessful attempts as a teenager to have a relationship (several girls told me they *didn't* want to be my mother)? Or is it about my father's tense search to find a new wife I would never accept? And his anger? I know he yelled (I think); is this what he said? In my dream, as I remember it, the wedding picture of my mother and father that hung over the television in the living room of that house shifted, and the new woman appeared and spoke in the terrifying voice of my new stepmother—years before I met her. . . . This is the first time I have actively tried to interpret this poem, written many years ago, the first time I have written a non-fictional account of these "events." You see my narrative need and explication created right before your eyes.

Yet, even as I write this, I sense a general uncertainty about the truth of even the basic account, never mind the interpretation of the poem. Perhaps this is a convenient narrative myth I tell myself to explain or satisfy something else I have not even begun to comprehend. Perhaps it is a rationalization forced upon me by my psychological desire both to reconfigure and repress, as well as the pressures, requirements, and constraints of the art form itself—the desire to write a unified poem, and thus the need to fictionalize details and events under the rubric of poetic license, fictions

which then will be believed because of the need to, as well as any little persuasive power the poems themselves might possess. (It is perhaps significant that what I consider to be my most powerful explanatory poems about my mother have the least ambiguity. Perhaps this is one problem with confessional poetry as poetry: in the attempt to fix events, to create a definitive self, the confessional poet perforce must eliminate the very ambiguity that would give the poem persuasive power?) Despite the fact that metaphors underlie our thought and may provide epistemic access to unknown or untestable experience (Boyd), metaphors also can conceal as much as they reveal (Lakoff and Johnson). And so perhaps the narrative attempt here to persuasively configure events in a way that will help me understand those events is a psychological failure as well.

I started writing poetry while in high school in response to my mother's death—at least that's what I've told myself, but there were several other reasons and people involved—a couple of years and a badly bleeding ulcer after the event that changed my life forever. Although I would not call myself a confessional poet, I have written other poems about my mother's death and poems about my relationship with my father that I'm too embarrassed to publish—even here, in the interest of psychological examination. I suppose one reason I started writing poetry was to get somebody, anybody, to notice the pain I endured for the dead mother who lives on in the mythic chair of my memory. And it did. In high school and college, my narrative wove and won me many teachers and friends, and helped create and cultivate the dark *ethos* that brought me some comfort, but totally defined who I then was. It was a secure if depressing identity, one that would explain and allow me to live with, and even in some perverted sense "enjoy," the deep-seated pain I continually felt, the dark hole in which I moved and lived. At least this is what I remember, how I interpret it now. But having analyzed and discussed Jim's work, I am now more aware than ever of how unsure I am about my narrative, about my memory and interpretation of those events, of "the truth" of the story that I tell myself and others of my mother's suicide and my finding her. I will never know *the truth*.

And yet this is my narrative, the terms in which I have understood and explained to myself and others the most profoundly tragic event in my life that created who I am. To this day, I still don't know which story is accurate—accidental death or suicide. I probably never will. I can't get my father to tell me anymore; my stepmother says I don't need to know. What are they hiding? More questions, more myths, more narrative seeds to define my identity. But whether they're accurate or not, like the ancient mariner I used to tell both versions of the story to everyone I met—as soon as I met them—as if the second story of the suicide explained, even justified the first one of accidental death—justified who I was because it was so much a part of my identity as a suffering poet, because I needed everyone to know what happened *to me*. (Besides, it was more dramatic, and hence persuasive that way.) I hope you don't mind me telling it to you. I do so not only for the little psychological interest it might hold, but also to reveal the underlying problem with confessional poetry as narrative reconstruction, and to illuminate the rhetorical problem with confession in general.

Whether we stand with Trilling or Wilson or both or neither, while the psychological is a source of poetry (though not necessarily good poetry), there is little *evidence* beyond the felt and anecdotal to

suggest that confessional poetry leads to *therapeutic* change. While confessional poetry does provide the poet with an *ethos* to live by, to be seen, heard, understood, judged (no small feat), it does not seem to encourage much personal growth. Indeed, most confessional poets seem to come to a bad end. Ann Sexton, sad, mentally ill, writing poetry under the direction of a psychiatrist (Sexton), committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. John Berryman, consumed by disillusionment and guilt, jumped off a bridge in Minneapolis (Simpson). Sylvia Plath came too close to the edge she continually peered over and stuck her head in an oven too long, in what A. Alvarez (himself a suicidal-attempted poet) considers to be an accident, an artistic experiment with death gone wrong. Delmore Schwartz died of total dissolution and failure in some seedy hotel room in New York (Atlas). Robert Lowell, the founding father of the confessional school of poetry in the United States, was a manic depressive who had many nervous breakdowns and was in and out of institutions all his life (he died of a heart attack in a taxicab in New York City [Hamilton]). I wrote bad poetry about all of them. Like Sylvia Plath's attempted suicides, I have had three major bleeds since my mother's death (about ten years apart—another narrative story, another romantic myth, that I tell myself, have lived by?). But no one, not even the greats, appear to be immune.

Thus, as a form of therapy, the mythological narratives we construct from/for our suffering selves in confessional poetry do not really seem to help. Are they merely rationalizations of our pain, an attempt to create "illusions to live by"? In fact, we might ask whether the myths of narrative romance, the *ethos* of the suffering poet, or even the poems themselves, are used to *repress rather than reveal intense emotions*, and whether the narrative pattern of romance is the only heuristic of healing available? (After all, the myths of narrative romance also oppress women, lead us to war, betrayal, death.) While narrative romance helps the poet create a mythic self, provides an image to cope, sustain, live by, an *ethos* that justifies and persuades, it also perhaps provides the poet with a self-satisfying, self-indulgent narrative, one that doesn't encourage personal growth but rather stagnation, egoism, narcissism, masochism—and in some cases, death.

And if these narrative myths are archetypal, inherent in human thinking, one also could raise the question from the other end of the spectrum: if our pain (or the resymbolization of it) is archetypal, how could confessional poetry *ever* offer a means of healing at all? This leads to the question of the therapeutic value of clinical psychology and public confession in general. As Polkinghorne attests, "The telling of the story in itself is held to have therapeutic value, and sharing one's own narrative with others helps bring cohesion to the support group" (178). But is it merely the telling of the story, the resymbolization of experience in language, whether mythic or not, that begets the healing process? I have been arguing that the self is itself constituted in language, just as thought is. If Piaget, for example, can trace the stages of intellectual growth in language, perhaps there is some intrinsic relationship between language and personality as well.

However, while resymbolization is necessary for understanding and central to the act of "publicly" confessing, we must return to the notion of confession as a rhetorical transaction—as the construction of self as persuasive *ethos*. For the narrative conception of self is not changed merely by resymbolizing it; that resymbolization, that interpretation, can be based on misperception and

misunderstanding—on the wrong premises. There is no auto-self-correcting mechanism in confessional poetry or the human mind for subjective misinterpretation *other than perhaps the persuasiveness of the narrative as a rhetorical construction*. Thus, without "another" to respond to and guide interpretation—even of one's personal life—as a *social* construction of knowledge according to narrative coherence and fidelity, the poet, like anybody else, can simply lose him or herself in narcissistic narratives, rather than discover a "new," salubrious self. For as Polkinghorne admits, "Psychoanalysis is not merely listening to an analysand's story. . . It is a dialogue through which the story is transformed" (179).

Thus, given the social dimension of therapy as a dialogue with others through which the rhetorical formation of a persuasive self takes place, it would appear that confessional poetry as self-therapy is not enough. And despite the tragic case of Ann Sexton and others, it appears that the intercession of "another"—whether priest, judge, critic, or therapist—is central in the act of confession as a social construction of self, in rhetorically guiding the articulation of a new narrative, in assisting with the birth of a new *ethos*, in validating a new self. If the use of narrative romance is a mere rationalization, perhaps it is the therapist's job to help the patient/poet find another narrative pattern, another "ethical" model, to free them from their unhealthy repetitive patterns of their past understanding and behavior. And if the use of narrative romance is archetypal, perhaps it is "the therapist's" job to look for other stories, other modes and patterns within the universal unconscious that will help the poet/patient "complete the quest," to turn the patient's tragedy into "comedy or romance."

However, it also appears that the intervention of a therapist in the formation of a new narrative self is often not enough. Psychotherapy, like rhetoric, is an uncertain science, an art; given the complexity and intractability of human nature, we cannot always succeed in persuasion and/or healing. But ultimately, whether the use of narrative is archetypal or cultural, whether narrative is the cause or the result of the fixation, the role of narration in confessional poetry and in therapy, the role of language in healing, rests upon an epistemological belief in the power of language to access, configure, and transform not only thought but personality as well. Indeed, psychotherapy is based on that belief (Hobson). Thus, the whole enterprise of psychology as the rhetorical formation and guiding of (healthy) selves hinges on epistemological issues that have not been debated much in psychology or confessional poetry. These are issues that a rhetorical analysis of confessional poetry raise, issues that will have to be addressed in psychological, literary, and rhetorical communities before the question of the therapeutic value of confessional poetry, and the role of language in therapy generally, can be better understood.

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Editorial

Endnote

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Jason, Frankie, and Steve, if you find a place at the end of the volume for this, I am okay with publishing it.

I have been at the point where reading and writing got me to sweat and even throw up. Text terror. You and this issue have pulled me out of that cave for a time. I love the cave. I may crawl back in, but not without a fight to come back out.

Steve, your intro and essay are, I do hope, going to get some people writing in response. Both pieces are of course masterful prose. I just hope that someone will respond. My response as you probably can't see is short, but I hope not unworthy of a response to your thoughtful argument.

I will be interested to see if anyone takes up the idea that what we are doing in Medical Humanities and Narrative Medicine is not confessional writing, or that only a small part of it is confessional. What the research shows is that people who write about their experiences and take an emotional approach to the topic experience healing—physically as well as mentally. The confessional poetry "movement" that was popular when I was getting a literature MA always seemed to me to be locked into a psychological method where simply talking about your problems would fix things. Now, of course, a good dose of medication and talking are expected together.

Also, the religious element needs some attention. Confessional poetry comes from the idea that confession is good for the soul—which it might be, and I am sure my Catholic friends would suggest it for me—but the issue of guilt is not always a part of survival writing, although all survivors are guilty. Notice that I encouraged and received an article on healing without religion. I thought it, too, should get people thinking about the issues of spirit and what we call spirit when we call it out or ask it to go away. I think the poems of the "buried self," as Greg Orr calls them, are important for humanities survival, and perhaps thriving as well.

James Pennebaker has twenty-five years of research on the topic and has found that disclosure is necessary for physical and emotional health. There is consistent and mounting evidence that disclosure "of painful or traumatic experience has a stimulating effect on the body's immune system" (Orr, 89). Whether the disclosure is confession or not is up to the individual, I think—both the writer and the reader.

Disclosure is the ticket that allows us to enter the rooms where we might speak and listen as human beings and not as creatures of institutional speaking and hearing. And the power of institutional language is such that it changes civilizations as the poets and writers responding to the Holocaust show us—as in Rozewic's "I," a poem through which he recreates the world after the Holocaust:

"this is a man/this is a tree this is bread/ people nourish themselves in order to live/I was repeating to myself/human life is important . . ." (Orr, 128-129).

Learning to Write . . . Again

I have a heart pump
They cut out a piece of my diaphragm to make it fit
I am all screws and electric line

This is the first thing I have written since
Wondering if I was a human
This is a disclosure

I am emotional about it
The fear of writing and reading after my death
Is such that I would remain silent

If it were not for people who disclose themselves
I freely confess I have been afraid
That I have wondered why I should be alive

When so many others are not
I toss this guilt into the air
Wondering if it is a rock to drop on me

Or a kite.
— Rex

To Steve and all, to the writers and readers of *Survive and Thrive*, I pledge to keep trying although I admit that there are many days when I am aware that I have been dead, having died fourteen times in two weeks, and that what I am seeing and feeling are perhaps not for me—so I confess—I will steal them.

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