

# CEAMAGAZINE

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For My Father  
**MELISSA GREEN-MOORE**

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Unhappily Ever After: Male/Female  
Relationships in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*  
**AMY HAGENRATER-GOODING**

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Following the Light: Integrating Mindfulness in  
the Composition Classroom and  
Extending Core Values  
**MONIFA LOVE ASANTE**

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Teaching Community, Teaching the Self:  
Meditation and Writing  
**C. JENISE WILLIAMSON**

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Contemplating the "Bond of a Common  
Humanity" with Imagination and Emotions in  
"Bartleby, the Scrivener"  
**S. SELINA JAMIL**

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*CEAMAGazine*, the peer-reviewed journal of the College English Association-Middle Atlantic Group, appears once a year and publishes studies based on writing research, discussions of pedagogy, literary criticism, cultural criticism, and personal essays concerned with the teaching of English. We will also consider for publication book reviews and poems and short fiction related to literature or teaching. Submissions, preferably limited to between 3000 and 5000 words (except book reviews, which should be limited to 2500 words or fewer) and prepared in accordance with the most recent MLA style manual, should be emailed as a Word document to David Kaloustian, Department of English and Modern Languages, Bowie State University, at [dkaloustian@bowiestate.edu](mailto:dkaloustian@bowiestate.edu). The annual deadline for submissions for March publication is October 15.

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ISSN: 1067-7429

Website: [www.umes.edu/ceamag](http://www.umes.edu/ceamag)

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## For My Father

by Melissa Green-Moore

Grief always begins and ends with water,  
a fluid connection.

Watching the leaves skirting the surface of the lake,  
my thoughts swirl and spiral.

Memories ebb and flow—distinct images imprinted  
A father's calloused, capable hands  
teaching how to build a fire,  
to test the tension in a crabbing line,  
to shoot a gun,  
molding a daughter.

We are cleaning fish together in the backyard.  
The water of the hose interrupts the calculated strokes  
of the carving knife.  
The dark blood stains the wet grass—pools of crimson  
hiding shimmering scales.  
I swallow my fear.  
My hands are too small, fumbling, the knife too slick.  
I have fish as pets; I weep for these because I do not  
understand.  
Yet, I learn to stomach survival  
to separate human from other, man from woman  
father from daughter.

Knowing there were other lessons  
now, lost like water.  
Buried under the earth  
where the hands lie still.

## Unhappily Ever After: Male/Female Relationships in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*

By Amy Hagenrater-Gooding

In Willa Cather's novel *My Ántonia*, the reader sees several instances in which men and women are linked, usually in a romantic, marital, or sexual way. Instead of these relationships serving to enhance the lives of the characters, these bonds ultimately result in a loss of either sanity or self. While Cather herself "denounced heterosexual passion and marriage," feeling that "Art is a more satisfying and faithful lover than romance," her characters are examples of what happens when this passion dominates (Boutry 188). In the following relationships—Ántonia and Cuzak, Wick and Mrs. Cutter, Ole Benson and Mary, Mr. and Mrs. Harding, and Lena Lingard and Jim Burden—the reader sees how these characters yield to their overriding feelings, losing their mental stability in flights of fancy or passion. While characters such as Mr. and Mrs. Shimerda and Jim's grandparents, Josiah and Emmaline, seem to have a functioning, cohesive relationship, the reader senses that unity works because it is rooted in either age or another world. Mr. and Mrs. Shimerda exemplify the old world ways while Jim's grandparents seemingly serve as representations of the past. Both character sets function as examples of nostalgia. The younger couples exhibit "the unintellectual abandon to physical passion and life which is always destructive to the interests of art" (Boutry 188). For Cather, the tie that binds in a relationship seems to be the tie that ultimately breaks the spirit of her male/female characters in *My Ántonia*.

Toward the end of the novel, after Jim has engaged in conversation with Cuzak, he wonders "whether the life that was right for one was ever right for two" (Book V, Chapter II). Jim's question is also one the reader is left to ponder throughout the novel. In this context, we see Ántonia and Cuzak, who are

happily married, but Cuzak fantasizes about city life. When he returns from the city and the children rush upon him, he's described as surprised that all of them belong to him. He tells Jim, "Sometimes when I read the papers from the old country, I pretty near run away . . . I never did think how I would be a settled man like this" (Book V, Chapter II). Cuzak dwells on a farm, yet is described by *Ántonia* as a "city man" (Book V, Chapter II). The reader learns, "He liked to live day by day and night by night, sharing in the excitement of the crowd.—Yet *his wife* had managed to hold him here on a farm, in one of the loneliest countries in the world" (Book V, Chapter II, italics mine). Cuzak has lost a part of himself due to his marital bond. *Ántonia*, too, has suffered. As Mellanee Kvasnicka queries, "While her relationship with Cuzak is a comfortable and satisfying one, we wonder what happened to the passionate woman's passion" (115). In the beginning of the novel, we see *Ántonia* assert, "Oh, better I like to work out of doors than in a house! . . . I like to be like a man" (Book I, Chapter XIX). When the reader sees her at novel's end, she is a mother to a brood of children. Is *Ántonia* truly happy as a maternal woman, implicitly housebound? Jim observes that, even though so much time has passed, "[H]er identity [was] stronger," and "She was there, in the full vigor of her personality, battered but not diminished . . ." (Book V, Chapter I). If we trust Jim's narration, assuming his need for nostalgia has been halted in depicting *Ántonia*, it would seem her selfhood is intact. However, it seems as though *Ántonia* "has been reduced to a figure of the greatest conventionality; she has become the stereotypical earth mother . . ." (Lambert 687-88). Although *Ántonia* can assert her will, her youth and experience with men set her up for this passive submission. As Deborah G. Lambert observes, *Ántonia*'s relationships with Ambrosch, Jim, and Charley Harling all implicitly teach her to sacrifice self to the masculine imperative (685). By reducing *Ántonia* to clichéd mother-woman, *Ántonia*'s selfhood is ignored. Jim then relegates *Ántonia* to icon status. He notes:

She lent herself to immemorial human attitudes which we recognize by instinct as universal and true. . . . She had only to stand in the orchard, to put her hand on a little crab tree and look up at the apples, to make you feel the goodness of planting and tending and harvesting at last. (Book V, Chapter I)

Jim's praise of Ántonia's cultivating skills has more to do with the land; Jim inherently praises her as the mother-woman, and he reverses the nurturing and cultivating qualities implicit in such a role. When she becomes Mrs. Cuzak, she becomes a different creature than Ántonia. Cather "abandons Ántonia's selfhood along with her sexuality; as Mrs. Cuzak, Ántonia is 'a battered woman' and 'a rich mine of life, like the founders of early races'" (Lambert 684). Ántonia and Cuzak are both diminished versions of their original selves.

Although Ántonia's relationship with Larry Donovan does not make a substantial contribution to the narrative, it is important to examine their relationship in light of this idea of impossible male/female relationships. I mentioned earlier the desire Ántonia expresses to work out of doors as opposed to inside, and before she even marries Cuzak, this desire is repressed in her impending union with Larry Donovan. The reader learns through the narration of Mrs. Steavens that Ántonia's chief employment the summer before she was to be married involves sewing. Widow Steavens tells Jim, "She used to sit there at that machine by the window, pedaling the life out of it . . . like she was the happiest thing in the world" (Book IV, Chapter III). Although the widow comments on her happiness, the reader knows something is amiss from the end result of Ántonia's marriage. From what the reader has seen of Ántonia, it is difficult to imagine this sense of happiness is genuine. We also learn that Larry Donovan has written to Ántonia, telling her they will most likely need to dwell in Denver. Ántonia is skeptical, though: "I'm a country girl, she said, and I doubt if I'll be able to manage so well for him in a city. I was counting on keeping chickens, and maybe a cow. She soon cheered up though" (Book IV, Chapter III). Ántonia, we learn from the widow's recollections, rides a roller coaster of ups and downs, but ultimately ends up coming home after Larry Donovan takes all her money and runs away from her. Ántonia loses her happiness by making someone else responsible for it. She sacrifices her identity, sense of self, and self-worth, and comes back a bit broken. Although Larry and Ántonia's relationship never truly gets off the ground, so to speak, there still is that loss of identity for Ántonia.

Another instance of this loss of self can be seen in the relationship between Wick and Mrs. Cutter. The reader learns

that “Cutter lived in a state of perpetual warfare with his wife, and yet, apparently, they never thought of separating” (Book II, Chapter XI). While he likes to fool around and worries about her family inheriting his fortune, he devotes most of his time to outwitting her. She is characterized as almost mad, even in physical description. She is “almost a giantess in height” with “hysterical eyes” with a “gleam of something akin to insanity in her full, intense eyes” (Book II, Chapter XI). For Mrs. Cutter, pleasure resides in painting china and pointing out Mr. Cutter’s indiscretions. Cather writes, “Mrs. Cutter had several times cut paragraphs about unfaithful husbands out of the newspapers and mailed them to Cutter in disguised handwriting” (Book II, Chapter XI). Wick Cutter lives to philander. He even goes so far as to put his wife on a train to Kansas City so that he can sneak back to Black Hawk. While the relationship for Mrs. Cutter seems to cause a deterioration of sanity, the relationship for Cutter functions as a sort of entertainment. The reader is told:

Certainly Cutter liked to have his wife think him a devil. In some ways he depended upon the excitement he could arouse in her hysterical nature. . . . His zest in debauchery might wane, but never Mrs. Cutter’s belief in it. . . . The one excitement he really couldn’t do without was quarreling with Mrs. Cutter! (Book II, Chapter XV)

In the end, he kills her, shooting her through the heart, and then himself, surviving just long enough to assert his competency and tell folks where his will is located, ensuring his family will get his fortune. While Mrs. Cutter is never described as overtly crazy, the language used to characterize her indicates such. Her loss of sanity, and self, is due in part to her convoluted relations with Mr. Cutter. Wick Cutter, on the other hand, seems to have married her more for sport, essentially to have someone to aggravate. Both characters, although it is said they never thought of separating, would have done better on their own. As it stands, both Wick and Mrs. Cutter ultimately lose themselves, their sanity, and then their lives as a result of this relationship.

The marriage between Ole Benson and Mary shows the deterioration of sanity for the woman and the dwindling of the self for the man. Ole Benson develops a fondness for Lena Lingard, and she is accused of “making Ole Benson lose the little sense he had—and that at an age when she should still have been in pinafores” (Book II, Chapter IV). Even Ole’s sense of sanity

is questioned. An anonymous young Dane who is helping the boys thrash hay says that Lena “put Ole Benson out of his head, until he had no more sense than his crazy wife” (Book II, Chapter IV). Ole is bound to “Crazy Mary,” his wife who is sent to the asylum after setting a neighbor’s barn on fire.

She escapes, though, walking two hundred miles home, but promises to be good. Mary, however, “still ran around barefooted through the snow, telling her domestic troubles to her neighbors” (Book II, Chapter IV). The two are quite a pair, forsaking self and sanity to stay within the confines of their union. When Lena comes to church and Benson lifts Lena onto her horse, Mary stops being “good.” She chases Lena repeatedly across the prairie with a corn-knife, promising to trim some of her shape off her. Later in the novel, we learn that no indiscretion takes place between Lena and Benson. Lena, referring to the tattoos Ole would often show her, says, “He was like a picture-book” (Book III, Chapter IV). People mistakenly thought he was glum and that he didn’t talk, but Lena knows differently. We learn from Lena the history of Ole Benson’s and Mary’s union. Cather writes:

[H]e married Mary because he thought she was strong-minded and would keep him straight. . . . He worked his way to this country on a little passenger boat. Mary was a stewardess, and she tried to convert him on the way over. He thought she was just the one to keep him steady. (Book III, Chapter IV)

Although we don’t know why Mary is now “Crazy Mary,” we do know that she wasn’t always that way. Mary has obviously left a life of her own choosing to be with Benson. She even tries to “convert him” and make him something he’s not. Benson doesn’t marry Mary so much for companionship or love, but simply to have someone to “keep him straight.” Benson, too, is neglecting his responsibility to his own selfhood by thrusting the responsibility onto someone else, his intended bride. Because of the skewed motivations of these people, their union results in the loss of self and, ultimately, the loss of sanity for both parties.

The Harlings don’t represent a positive union either. While Mr. Harling is gone, Mrs. Harling is head of the household and seemingly delights in being the audience for the children’s antics and running the home, but, upon Mr. Harling’s return, “[He] not only demanded a quiet house, but demanded all his wife’s attention” (Book II, Chapter III). We are told she

“paid no heed to any one else if he was there,” and she “made coffee for him at any hour of the night he happened to want it” (Book II, Chapter III). This relationship is obviously stifling to the assertion of Mrs. Harling’s self. The reader, however, is also told that Mrs. Harling has an identity outside of her marriage and her function as wife and mother. The narrator notes:

Mrs. Harling had studied the piano under a good teacher, and somehow she managed to practice every day. I soon learned that if I were sent over on an errand and found Mrs. Harling at the piano, I must sit down and wait quietly until she turned to me. (Book II, Chapter III)

While Mrs. Harling isn’t about to usurp her husband’s rule, she does allot some time for herself, making sure those around her know that this solitary time is sacred. Because she tries to carve time for self, Mrs. Harling’s character could be read as subversive. We also learn, “Except when the father was home, the Harling house was never quiet” (Book II, Chapter III). Mrs. Harling runs a different home than that “imperial” and “autocratic” Christian Harling. Although he “walked, talked, put on his gloves, shook hands, like a man who felt that he had power,” Mrs. Harling, too, exerts powerful influence in the home and can be read as a character who still maintains a fraction of her identity, despite the role of doting, subservient wife she plays when Mr. Harling is home (Book II, Chapter III).

Although the relationship between Christian Harling and his daughter, Frances, is not one of marital, sexual, or romantic nature, it is important to recognize it as a contrast to the other male/female relationships observed thus far. We learn that Frances is her father’s chief clerk and also runs his office when he’s away. Frances does not get treated in a diminutive manner by her father, but, rather, we learn, “[H]e was stern and exacting with her” (Book II, Chapter II). Although Mr. Harling does have a son, Charley, it is Frances who has a head for business. The reader learns that, in many ways, Frances not only acts and thinks as her father does, but she also dresses and looks like Christian Harling. Cather writes: “Frances was dark, like her father, and quite as tall. In winter she wore a sealskin coat and cap, and she and Mr. Harling used to walk home together in the evening, talking about grain-cars and cattle, *like two men*” (Book II, Chapter II, italics mine). In this relationship, because it escapes the bounds of heterosexual romantic love, we find

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WILLA CATHER'S *MY ÁNTONIA***

success although it is important to note that Frances is given masculine qualities and even characterized to be like a man. Her gender is subverted. Because of these two factors, a successful relationship is presented.

The most interesting confining relationship occurs between Lena Lingard and Jim Burden. Lena is a strong character, and an even stronger woman. One critic notes, "Lena particularly understands and values the single self" (Lambert 688). Lena states early on that she wants no part of married life. She asserts, "I don't want to marry Nick, or any other man. . . . I've seen a good deal of married life, and I don't care for it. I want to be so I can help my mother and the children at home, and not have to ask life of anybody" (Book II, Chapter IV). She later reaffirms this by saying,

Men are all right for friends, but as soon as you marry them they turn into cranky old fathers, even the wild ones. They begin to tell you what's sensible and what's foolish, and want you to stick home all the time. I prefer to be foolish when I feel like it, and be accountable to nobody. (Book III, Chapter IV)

Although Lena and Jim foster a relationship that hints at more than friendship, "For Lena, being independent is worth being alone" (Kvasnicka 113). When Jim continues to hint around that she will one day marry, Lena adamantly refuses. The reader is told, "She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man, and work piling up around a sick woman" (Book III, Chapter IV). Although Jim tries to move her beyond her somewhat hasty generalization, Lena asserts, "[It's] near enough. It's all being under somebody's thumb" (Book III, Chapter IV). Lena recognizes uniting her life with someone else's is not something she would choose to do, but she also sees the complexity in choosing to do so. When Lena and her brother, Chris, are Christmas shopping for their mother, Lena advises him in his dilemma with the handkerchiefs. Chris can't decide whether to get B for Berthe, or M for Mother. Cather writes, "Lena patted his bristly head. 'I'd get B, Chrissy. It will please her for you to think about her name. Nobody ever calls her by that now'" (Book II, Chapter V). Although trading in her name for Mom might seem a small sacrifice, Lena recognizes that part of her mother's identity has changed, and that, in the eyes of the world, she is no longer a mother and a woman, but a mother-

woman. Her identity is marginalized. Lena, in asserting that the gift reflect her mother's individual person, appreciates the importance of individual worth. As Mellanee Kvasnicka observes, "Lena surely speaks for all women who believe that home and family should always be matters of choice, rather than inevitabilities of biology" (114).

Jim recognizes what is at stake for him regarding his personhood and identity as well. Gaston Cleric encourages Jim to come to Boston as his focus has become Lena instead of school. Gaston advises Jim:

You won't do anything here now. You should either quit school and go to work, or change your college and begin again in earnest. You won't recover yourself while you are playing about with this handsome Norwegian. Yes, I've seen her with you at the theater. She's very pretty, and perfectly irresponsible, I should judge. (Book III, Chapter IV)

Jim does take Cleric's advice and confronts Lena, saying, "I don't think about much else while I'm with you. I'll never settle down and grind if I stay here. You know that" (Book III, Chapter IV). Jim is enthralled with Lena and neglects his studies. Instead of studying and reading Virgil and *The Aeneid*, Jim attends plays with Lena and converses with her eccentric neighbors, like Mr. Ordinsky. Although Jim and Lena don't unite in a relationship like the other examples, Jim and Lena see the pitfalls that the other relationships exhibit.

Jim's relationship with Lena serves as a stumbling block to his betterment, but his final relationship, that with his unnamed wife, serves as an even better illustration of the disconnectedness male/female relationships can cause within the self. The only information we glean about Jim's wife is that she is "handsome, energetic, executive . . . [and] seems unimpressible and temperamentally incapable of enthusiasm" (Introduction). We learn, "Her husband's quiet tastes irritate her, I think, and she finds it worthwhile to play the patroness to a group of young poets and painters of advanced ideas and mediocre ability. She has her own fortune and lives *her own life*" (Introduction, italics mine). Ironically, although his wife seems to enjoy the arts, Jim doesn't share his narrative of Antonia with her. Instead, he passes it along to the woman who writes the introduction to the book. Even though they are united, they maintain separate spheres, but because of, or in spite of, their

matrimonial ties, they still have a non-functioning relationship. We never find out who she really is. Jim certainly never mentions her. We know only, "For some reason, she wishes to remain Mrs. Jim Burden" (Introduction). Her only name is his.

Since I am discussing Jim's relationships, it is important to mention the central relationship of the novel, the bond between Ántonia and Jim. Although Jim and Ántonia don't operate under the marital confines of a heterosexual relationship, there are distinct overtones of romantic and sexual emotions throughout the course of their connection. Jim takes an opportunity one evening to kiss Ántonia after one of the dances. Ántonia responds, "Why, Jim! You know you ain't right to kiss me like that" (Book II, Chapter XII). Jim asserts that Lena lets him kiss her that way, but, he continues, "I don't care anything about any of them but you, . . . and you'll always treat me like a kid" (Book II, Chapter XII). Ántonia tells him that she probably will, gives him a hug, and asserts she's fond of him anyhow. The fondness Ántonia has for Jim never goes beyond that. While Jim romanticizes her and idealizes her, his feelings are never fulfilled. He dreams sexually provocative dreams about Lena repeatedly, but states, "I used to wish I could have this flattering dream about Ántonia, but I never did" (Book II, Chapter XII). Even Jim's unconscious mind won't let Ántonia be tainted with the earthly feelings he truly has for her. She stays up there on her pedestal, captured within his narrative, preserved as "*My Ántonia*." The reason Jim and Ántonia are not an example of a failed male/female relationship is due to the fact their relationship never comes to marital, sexual, or romantic fulfillment.

Ultimately, these characters all end up losing a part of themselves, or their sanity is forsaken, as they engage in these male/female relationships. One critic observes, "Identity is always at the heart of choices, and knowing oneself is the first step toward becoming free" (Kvasnicka 115). While characters like Lena and Mrs. Harling seem to find a way of sorting out an independent identity, the other male and female characters seem to pay with their sanity, or their identity, for coupling. Even marginal characters like Johnnie Gardener and Molly Gardener seem to have a little tension, despite our being told that "Johnnie thought his wife a wonderful woman" (Book II, Chapter VII). Molly is the assertive and active one, running the hotel in town.

Johnnie is unable to join the boys for a drink, incapable of making his own decision, as he says: "If I take a drink in Black Hawk, Molly knows it in Omaha!" (Book II, Chapter VII). While this does not carry the same loss of sanity or self that we have seen in the prior examples, Cather weaves this tension throughout her narrative. Is she advocating more choice for women? After all, it has been noted that "Cather believed as demonstrated in her masterwork that women must have choices" (Kvasnicka 111). Is she filtering in her own homosexual biases/preferences? Cather did feel that "in order to create independent and heroic women, women who are like herself, the woman writer must avoid male identification" (Lambert 690). Perhaps Cather ultimately extends this definition beyond the female writer and on to the female subject. Could she be commenting on the fallibility of heterosexual unions? Another critic has observed, "Cather also denounced heterosexual passion and marriage" (Boutry 188). I would argue, however, that Cather is commenting on the stifling role of marriage, not just for women, but for men as well. Regardless of the gender, Cather seems to be asking us to take stock of the conventional. Not only does she give us a complex portrait of immigrants and the Nebraska prairie, but she also challenges readers of *My Ántonia* to consider the cost of romantic, sexual, and marital heterosexual unions. What choices do those leave out? What do they occlude? Cather doesn't provide any hard and fast answers, but she does leave us with this: We must have "options which are unlimited by time, place or gender" (Kvasnicka 110). For Cather, choice is key. While heterosexual unions do not seem positive in this work, what is important is the retention of the individual self. That choice, the choice of asserting individual self-will at any cost, seems to be, for Cather, the one worth making.

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## **Following the Light: Integrating Mindfulness in the Composition Classroom and Extending Core Values**

**By Monifa Love Asante**

In eighth grade, my young religious studies teacher closed the curtains in the classroom, struck a match, lit a candle, cut out the lights, and told us to watch the flame. “We are going to meditate,” she whispered excitedly, and we did, or at least we tried. After some shifting in our seats, we settled into the darkness and studied the small teardrop of light.

I thought I knew what meditation was. At Sunday school at All Souls Unitarian Church, Dr. Winston McAllister talked about Howard Thurman, meditation, and connecting to the luminous darkness. He had told us that meditation was the gateway to hope and the fortification of faith. When we sat with our parents at the eleven o’clock service, we repeated, “May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart always be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.” Then the organist, Karl Halvorson, would fill that church with mighty sounds, and we would sit together with our heads lifted towards the light streaming in the windows. What I knew from church did not seem to be what my schoolteacher had in mind.

It was mid-April in 1968, and Dr. King’s life and murder were vibrant in my imagination and in my desire for something that I could not name. I had seen Dr. King preach only a few weeks before in the Washington Cathedral. His assassination had made me grieve as if he were a relative.

After her directive, my teacher said nothing more. Although I was confused, I was grateful for time in the dark when I did not need to speak or listen to anyone. I felt myself transported after some candle-gazing, but my fledgling attempt at meditation disturbed me; there was no peace in it.

On the crosstown bus later that afternoon, I was full to the point of sobbing. I bit my lip to keep silent. Part of my dissonance was school itself. I was having a difficult time processing what was expected of me, particularly in light of

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everything going on around me. Playmates I had had only a few years before decided I had abandoned them, and they treated me with disdain when our paths crossed. It was more than alienation from my neighborhood that overwhelmed me; it was the sense that the world was meaner than I could bear. It was hard for me to see how going to an elite school could prepare me to meet suffering and injustice with some kind of solution, and I didn't see how it was going to answer my own heartache.

During the 40-minute trip home, I slipped into my own world. I thought about King and the light that he was. I wondered how Helen Keller, a recent addition to my pantheon of heroes, persisted in the darkness. I couldn't get "This Little Light of Mine" by Leontyne Price out of my mind—my mother loved it so, but I also kept returning to the sound of a match striking. I remember alighting from the bus feeling as if I had gotten off a ride at an amusement park. I went into the house and went to sleep.

After dinner, I tried the meditation again. We didn't have any candles in the house other than birthday candles and the ones my mother brought out for company, so I got my father's flashlight from the toolbox and set it on the bathroom counter. I sat on the toilet seat and watched the light in the darkness until my brother knocked on the door asking what was I doing in there.

When I came out, I felt calmer than before, and I felt fascinated by the idea of light in darkness. My grandfather was an inventor, and my father was a scientist. Both often put hypotheses to me expecting me to come up with something to test their speculations. That night I put a what-if to myself. What if I really could be a candle in the darkness?

My religion teacher kept us meditating for the remainder of the school year. I don't remember doing anything else in her class other than focusing on the candle. She never spoke about why we were meditating, and she did not explain exactly what we were doing. When we returned in the fall, my teacher had resigned, and there was no more meditation, but I practiced at home. One day, I closed my eyes, and I could see the flame burning.

From that difficult April day in 1968 to today, I have explored various kinds of meditation, seeking to find the balance between striking the match and lighting the candle. I have had

fine meditation teachers and exemplars, and meditation has been one of the anchors in my quest for the thing I now call liberation.

In 2011, I met Professor Magin LaSov Gregg. We were both new hires at Bowie State University, and we had adjacent offices. Bowie State University was founded in 1865, and it is among the 10 oldest HBCUs in the nation. Bowie State is located about halfway between Baltimore and the District of Columbia. We serve approximately 5,500 students, about 1,200 of which are graduate students. The gender breakdown is about 40% male to 60% female. The university offers 23 undergraduate programs and 35 graduate programs. Like many historically Black colleges and universities, Bowie State educates a significant number of first-generation college students and graduate students. Half of the undergraduate population is a commuter population, and most of our students come from the state of Maryland—although that is changing. Economist Mickey Burnim is Bowie State's ninth president, and he has been leading the institution for almost 10 years.

Magin Gregg and I are both creative writers, and we share many things in common. Shortly after we met, we discovered that we each had a meditation practice. Magin had extensive experience leading meditation and mindfulness activities in a religious setting on a weekly basis. I had long personal practice. I had conducted a meditation group at a previous institution, and I had a 15-year history of leading meditation in rites of passage programs for girls and women. Magin and I often discussed our appreciation of several leading figures in mindfulness including Jon Kabat Zinn and Tara Brach.

During our first year, Magin and I encountered some overwrought and anxious students whose stress made success in the classroom very challenging. Over the course of our teaching careers, we had found that highly stressed students negatively affected their classmates. The complaints and fears of one student could multiply and cause the learning community to shift out of balance. Even after 20 years of teaching, it is fascinating to see how one student's discomfort can alter the attitude of other learners and influence the cohesiveness of the class. In addition to the regular stressors of college life, many students felt anxious about what it meant for them to be in college. They worried about meeting the expectations of their families, and

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they worried about how they would gain entry into a world that was not welcoming. I recognized that distress.

In May of our first year, Magin developed a grant proposal entitled, “Moving Toward Mindfulness: Insight Meditation and the Composing Process.” She proposed a secular adaptation of mindfulness meditation to see if it might heighten capacities for attentiveness and reflection among first-year writers and assist them in developing stronger research and composition skills. She was interested to see if meditation and mindfulness practices would help students relax, focus, and positively influence their academic pursuits. She was particularly interested to see if mindfulness would have a positive impact on initial writing, peer review, revision, and how well students received instructor feedback. The proposal asked the question, “What happens to student writing when we incorporate centering strategies within the composition classroom?”

We agreed to work as co-investigators. We would each have two sections of English 102: Argument and Research. We planned to conduct one section in accordance with the departmental syllabus and teach one section in which mindfulness meditation played a predominant role in our pedagogy and classroom activities.

Three studies influenced our work significantly. Kristie Fleckenstein’s “Creating a Center That Holds: Spirituality through Exploratory Pedagogy” was most meaningful to Magin. Fleckenstein coined the term “exploratory pedagogy” to describe a style of teaching that, at its core, evokes a spiritual center. She grounded her study in an allusion to William Butler Yeats’s “The Second Coming,” in which the poet describes the chaos of a world in which “things fall apart” because the world has lost its spiritual center; Fleckenstein suggests that things also fall apart in writing when writers are subject to pedagogies that rely exclusively on approaches that devalue emotion-based knowledge. She argues that centering strategies, such as meditation, are essential to students’ intellectual and emotional development.

Magin connected to Fleckenstein’s study through her practice of Judaism and her husband’s work as a Unitarian Universalist minister. I was attracted to Fleckenstein’s study because of its echoes of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Paulo Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Carter G. Woodson’s

*Miseducation of the Negro*, and Neil Postman's *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*.

Donald R. Gallehr's "Wait, and the Writing Will Come: Meditation and the Composing Process" was also useful in the beginning stages of study development. Gallehr had adapted a mindfulness meditation practice within a composition classroom at a traditionally White institution to improve his own writing and the writing of his students. He discovered that both he and his students were able, through meditation, to "move away from a rational identification with the writing to a detached intuition" (28) that lessened writing anxiety and enabled productive evaluation of student work. The idea of detached intuition was very important to me. As a creative writer, I understood being able to work deeply and with some distance from my authoring process. I wanted to see how mindfulness might enable me to help students be deeply engaged in their writing without anxiety or fear of "going *too* deep."

Britta Hölzel and a team of neuroscientists conducted a controlled longitudinal study to investigate pre-post changes in the brain attributable to participation in a Mindfulness-Based Stress-Reduction program. The results reported in "Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density" suggested that participation in MBSR is associated with positive changes involved in learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective taking. Although Magin focused on improving writing, I was eager to see if MBSR could improve overall learning, coping, and resilience in college students.

The more Magin and I talked about it, the more possibilities we saw. We expected that cognitive function would improve. We thought there would be greater anger management and greater non-reactionary responses to emotional disturbances. We hoped that it would enable students to write with greater ease, clarity, and authority because of increased confidence. We felt we would be better teachers from modeling and practicing mindfulness techniques with our students.

We proposed a two-year study that extended through Spring 2014. We adapted the techniques outlined in *Teaching Mindfulness: A Practical Guide for Clinicians and Educators* by Donald McCown, Diane Rieble, and Marc Micozzi. Bowie State University's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

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(CETL) granted us the funds to conduct the research, and we looked forward to launching our project in the Fall 2012 semester.

My outlook changed drastically when Magin's husband was transferred, and she moved from the area. I thought that the research would have to be set aside, but Dr. Eva Garin, Director of CETL, suggested that I go forward. My immediate concern related to methodology, but Dr. Garin felt that, even if I did not have a control group, I would still discover some important matters regarding mindfulness. She suggested that two years of observation would give me the tools and sufficient preliminary findings to pursue other research opportunities.

I wanted to go forward. Our study was among the first of this type at a historically Black college or university. I wanted to see what I could discover about how mindfulness techniques could help students gain more satisfaction from their studies. I had seen the benefits of teaching young women to filter anxiety and self-doubt in rites of passage. I was confident that there would be benefit in a college setting. I also hoped that meditation would be at least a partial answer for those students who, like me, struggled to find their way in a world beset by violence.

I began the mindfulness and meditation research in Fall 2012. I was given a small auditorium in which to conduct my first class. The class was composed of 26 students with 12 men and 14 women. I was concerned that the room would be too comfortable, and students would fall asleep. I explained the study, and I obtained their consent. Many were skeptical about what meditation or mindfulness had to do with writing essays.

Their pretest focused on meditation. We did a variety of techniques over the course of the semester: breathing, meditation, and awareness exercises. I recorded some guided meditations for them and posted them on Blackboard. We watched videos about mindfulness. They read interviews with celebrities who endorsed meditation. At least 20 minutes of each class was dedicated to mindful practice or exposure.

Initially, some students came late. It seemed they did so to avoid participation, but the third time that we meditated together was remarkable. First, no one snored. No one fell asleep. Of the students, 90% were on time. About seven minutes into the 20-minute meditation, the room became peaceful. There was such a dramatic shift that I realized most of the time I

experienced students, they were in a state of stress. At 14 minutes there was not the usual fidgeting. There was no coughing. There was a stillness that was profound. At the end of the 20 minutes, students commented how much better they felt. I didn't have to ask for feedback.

After that, if we didn't meditate right away, a student would ask when we were going to meditate. On several occasions, I entered the classroom to find students in lotus position with their hands in the heart *mudra*. I would meet students in the parking lot who told me that they were meditating. The meetings were casual, and I did not feel that they were currying favor by saying that meditation was working for them. Several students in the class had parents who were gravely ill, and those students reported at the end of the course that meditation helped them sit with their parents with greater optimism and quiet. They didn't experience the time at the hospital as being so tedious or frightening.

I conducted subsequent classes in a similar fashion, and students reported similar benefits. They felt calmer, more focused, better able to handle busy schedules, and the like. In 2013, I invited Professor Jenise Williamson, also a creative writing instructor, to join me in the research. Like Professor Gregg, Professor Williamson had a personal, mindful practice, and she was interested in forging new territory in composition pedagogy. It is impossible to explain why we did not join forces earlier; I can only think that there were things I needed to learn that were fostered by my solo exploration with students. In 2014, two students and I presented on the effects of meditation on their writing class at the College English Association meeting in Baltimore.

Professor Williamson has had her own successes in exploring mindfulness in the classroom, and she has since shared her work with public school educators. I have joined Bowie State University's Scholar's Studio, the unit on campus that offers innovative, interdisciplinary learning communities for first-year students. This fall, we implemented "Mind Your Body," an exploration of individual and community-based mindfulness practices designed for nursing, pre-med, and psychology students. We have worked with Dr. Mario Martinez, founder of the Institute of Biocognitive Psychology and author of *The Mind-Body Code*, and we have partnered with Keith Mitchell

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from the Light It Up! Foundation to help students think more about mindfulness as a tool for personal success, community well-being, and social transformation. In a recent class, students told one another to be sure to meditate before an exam because meditation works, and they espouse the benefits of meditation to students outside the learning community.

The public discourse regarding whose life matters suggests that we have learned very little about coequality, social justice, and compassion since 1968. Despite the benefits I have gained from meditation and from teaching mindfulness in the classroom, I sometimes wonder if helping students to be the candle instead of the match delays or fosters social transformation.

The majority of my students believe that transforming the world is not possible until one has put things in proper perspective through the study of history, self-acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion. They believe that mindfulness fosters empowerment, and mastering power leads to self-realization and social justice. In my work with students regarding mindfulness and meditation, I have not given any sermons; they have discovered the efficacy of these practices themselves.

The students I am working with this fall have been especially open to mindful practices. Many of them have experienced trauma, and they find themselves angry, a little volatile, and anxious about their futures. Mindful practices literally help them breathe more easily and face the complexity of their lives with humor and more patience. When I feel dismayed by ongoing suffering, I take solace that our students suffer less because they are beginning to feel in control of themselves.

My inquiry regarding insight meditation and the composing process has shifted to exploring how we might create a greater university through extending our core values of integrity, excellence, diversity, accountability, and civility through compassion and mindful practice. My personal mission remains the same: to draw closer to my own liberation through daily practice.

Some days the candle I concentrate on seems to be a klieg light. Some days, it is a faraway light in the fog, but, more frequently, the light is my students, and, on those days, it is I, too.

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## Teaching Community, Teaching the Self: Meditation and Writing

By C. Jenise Williamson

As someone who meditates and teaches writing, I jumped at the opportunity that my colleague, Dr. Monifa Love Asante, presented when she invited me to participate in a grant-funded project at Bowie State University to learn how student writing would improve if students were given a 5-15-minute mindfulness meditation at the beginning of most class sessions. The corollary between meditation and writing was easier to predict than it was to prove because of the multiple, uncontrollable variables. The outcomes were not always concrete, but they did reveal the interplay between the self and community.

I led students in meditation for three semesters. The first two were with first-year composition students, and the third was with an introduction to creative writing class. Most often, we meditated for 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class, similar to the practice proposed by Sam Harris, a devout atheist, in his book *Waking Up*. After my general instruction to concentrate on breathing and to call the mind's attention back to breathing should the students find their attention wandering, we sat silently. Other times I saw that the students were lethargic, so I instructed them to stand next to their desks and to form the infinity symbol using as much of their bodies as possible by bending at the knees and following with their eyes their extended arms and hands to draw the symbol in the air in front of them. This latter exercise was perhaps more successful than sitting quietly and noticing breath and thoughts because the whole mind is engaged by movement and the awareness of more than breath as students made their sideways figure-8s. A third type of meditation was to have students choose an object that represented "writing" and to meditate on it while writing down observations of the tangible object and any metaphors that came of it.

The direct results of the practice were to be found in students' writing about the experience immediately following the practice. Students reported three immediate reactions: they were grateful for the quiet time to calm themselves after having rushed to class from across campus; they felt the meditation helped them to focus; and they felt more relaxed and calm.

So how are these results beneficial to students engaged in the writing process? The answer surprised me. The meditation gave them a better sense of self-awareness and self-confidence that they couldn't put into words but that aided them, nonetheless, in positioning themselves as writers in the real world. Because writing is reflective, a clear mind is more likely to create clear writing.

I have always believed that students who know who they are and are able to observe the world around them without judgment are positioned better than those who are not. As Paulo Freire states, "[T]his reading of the world, which is based on sensory experience, is not enough. But on the other hand, it must not be dismissed as inferior to the reading of the abstract world of concepts" (19). Making these observations of themselves and the external world is the "work" of meditation. The degree to which their writing is communicative is the degree to which they are aware of that position.

Like most teachers, I have become a patient observer of student behavior while the students themselves are just beginning to become more conscious and even self-conscious. I want to encourage both of those conditions. The resulting chrysalis of the self becomes possible through teaching not only writing but also meditation to facilitate a student's awareness of what Thomas Merton called one's "hidden wholeness." That wholeness, I would contend, is not only that of the self but also of the self in community.

Students are not sure how to negotiate their own unique thoughts in a world of writing where published texts can look so much the same to those who don't habitually read or who don't re-read difficult literature. I believe much plagiarism, while a complex phenomenon, can be a result of anxiety over the unfamiliar, including an unfamiliarity with one's self. To ask students who have not yet formed a stronger sense of self to write to a community of readers can cause even more anxiety.

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Thus, students conform to what they think the teacher wants at the expense of developing their unique voices.

I can't blame anyone for wanting to conform as it has a physiological benefit. As suggested by Patricia Churchland, conforming to a community activates the pleasure center of the brain (51). However, conforming isn't all that may be happening. Kristin Neff states that "Self-criticism is a type of safety behavior designed to ensure acceptance within the larger group" (24). So not only might anxious writers be conforming; they might very well be beating themselves up mentally when they have an original idea that would allow them to write in novel ways and from an individualistic point of view.

Being alone is striking as we live in a world that has become increasingly uncomfortable with just sitting and being and breathing. But what is even more striking than being alone is being self aware in community. With meditation, I want to draw students out to recognition beyond "places of fear inside of [themselves to] other places . . . with names like trust and hope and faith" so they can "lead from one of *those* places, to stand on ground that is not riddled with the fault lines of fear . . . [and] move toward others from a place of promise instead of anxiety" (Palmer 94).

For students in first-year composition and creative writing classes, the anxiety of producing acceptable work is exacerbated by a traditional teacher/student model when used with students accustomed to non-traditional learning paradigms. Practicing meditation, whether it is quiet reflection or active engagement, helps to break that model and offers a new tool for all writers. "In *The Courage to Write*, Ralph Keyes claims that writers use rituals to ease anxiety, pointing out that 'ritualized behavior is common among those who do dangerous work'" (Bane 136). And to the student who feels anxiety about writing and about learning who he or she is and what he or she has to say about content, writing can feel dangerous.

If it were to become ritual, meditation could alleviate the distress from the individual's negotiation between conformity and originality, between one knowing one's self and knowing how one, being unique as each of us is, fits into the whole. Before each session of writing my first novel manuscript, I ritualistically meditated. Part of that manuscript saw publication, but the initial benefit was that the words flowed, and I was made

keenly aware of my position on the terrifying topic of that story—violence among children.

If the paradox of meditation is to let go of the self by becoming acutely aware of what the self experiences, to embrace and then to let go of that embrace, the benefit to writers in community is to embrace then to let go of anxiety. I found in the first-semester composition class with whom I conducted meditation that there was no plagiarism at all. Five students followed me into the second-semester composition course and excelled beyond their peers who had no known training in meditation. One of those five students then became a research assistant in the English department, and another was hired as a tutor in the education department. Both students are in their first sophomore semester, and they have the discernment and focus of graduate students.

Meditation can reveal to us who we are, where we are, even why we are among the clamoring voices in blogs, wikis, texts, tweets, and all other forms of social media (and all media is social, after all). As writers, we know that, with our pens, we create a part of ourselves, and that part then joins community. Through writing, we each help to create what Parker Palmer says is “our common store” (107), creating an abundance in which we all can partake. Echoes of this community can be found in Ray Bradbury’s advice to writers, teaching us that “The material within you which makes you individual . . . [makes you] indispensable to others” (42). Meditation can help to find what makes us unique and to give us the courage to express it.

The golden bough to which we, as teachers, strive is to empower our students when writing classes improve upon conscience. As Baudelaire said, “Who of us . . . has not dreamed, in moments of ambition, of the miracle of a poetic prose . . . subtle and staccato enough to follow the lyric motions of the soul, the wavering outlines of meditation, the sudden starts of the conscience?” (viii). But *consciousness*, which meditation teaches through the awareness of the self, must come first.

Our conscience motivates us to write by the inner urging of what we find right and wrong, necessary and good. Prior to that, at a time when my students are engaged and simultaneously disengaged, I discovered that meditation helped them to quell the anxiety of distress as they negotiated between an isolated and private self and who they are in community with others.

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Quantifying and even qualifying the benefits of meditation on the writing process is a bit elusive. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that meditation addresses the whole person and validates the student's own thought process and even his or her very breath. Because students will have greater self-awareness, their self-esteem can rise to a level where scrutiny of texts and reflection become engaging prospects.

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## **Contemplating the “Bond of a Common Humanity” with Imagination and Emotions in “Bartleby, the Scrivener”**

**By S. Selina Jamil**

In Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street,” the narrator, who calls the “inscrutable” (62) Bartleby the “forlornest of mankind” (57-58), concludes by seeing in him the mystery that is inherent in human individuality and the alienation that is the consequence of this mystery, or the vulnerability that is inseparable from the alienation, to which he sees Bartleby as surrendering: “Ah, Bartleby! Ah humanity” (74). But as Melville uses structural irony, concluding his narrative with this emotional effusion and beginning it with the description of Bartleby as “the strangest” scrivener he has ever seen (39), the baffled narrator, who maintains his own “business” as a professional lawyer on Wall Street (40), surrenders to an inflexible sense of “gloom” (55). And this sense of “hopelessness” (56) with regard to this “strange[ness]” only highlights the nameless narrator’s obliviousness of individual identity. As his pleonastic reference to Bartleby’s “strange peculiarities” (53) suggests, the lawyer who looks for “[t]he reader of nice perceptions” (49) is increasingly frustrated at the ungraspable scrivener. For, as a reader, the only faculties he uses are rationality and memory and, at times, fancy. Despite mentioning his imagination and experiencing emotions, he never uses these faculties to read the fact of Bartleby’s “entirely isolate[d]” condition (46). Consequently, although he calls Bartleby and himself “sons of Adam,” as a frustrated interpreter, he fails to contemplate and respond to his instinctive sense of the complex “bond of a common humanity” (55).

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As the lawyer reads the “facts” about Bartleby, he shows that his rigid emphasis on rationality disables him from contemplating the fact of his alienation (70). Unable to fathom Bartleby’s resistance to examining his “own copies,” the lawyer futilely attempts “to reason with him” (48). Although he cannot make Bartleby do “perfectly reasonable” work (52), he attempts to probe the latter’s unfathomability by an inflexible insistence on rational speech: “But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me?” (57). When Bartleby refuses “the clerkship in a dry-goods store” because “[t]here is too much confinement about that,” with his rationality, the narrator accuses him of “confin[ing]” himself (69). Segmenting his employees from himself and alienating Bartleby within a narrow space that is walled in by “ground-glass” and a high “folding screen” where a window “command[s] . . . no view” because of “a wall” (46), he, who keeps the “entirely isolate[d]” Bartleby near him for “trivial occasions” (47) and whose focus is on the logic of his own “authority” (65), does not contemplate Bartleby’s confinement: He describes Bartleby as “a perpetual sentry” ensconced in his “hermitage” (50). His rationality makes him observe the fact of his isolating Bartleby and that of the latter’s alienation or the fact of Bartleby’s “beggarly traps” (61) and his refusal to request help, but he cannot connect them with his imagination and emotions. And, when he finds “eviden[ce]” of Bartleby’s “home” in his law office, with his rationality, he interprets this fact as “miserable friendlessness and loneliness” (55), and he is so overwhelmed by this fact that he laments Bartleby’s “horrible” solitude and thus surrenders to hopelessness (55). But as he flees from the complications of his failed attempt to help the alienated Bartleby, the “fearful” narrator, who is reduced to living in his “rockaway for the time,” only inflicts acute alienation on himself (70). Later, mentioning the “rumor” of “the Dead Letter Office” (73), as he deflects his own sense of “a pallid hopelessness” onto

the mysterious Bartleby to suggest a reason for this hopelessness (73), he, ironically, never realizes that his own “kind” offers to Bartleby in themselves constitute a dead letter that is always too late and too condescending (69). Also, despite the “suggestive interest” that the “rumor” has for him, he for whom the sound of “dead letters” is the sound of “dead men” (73), never contemplates the complex connection between “hope” and human vulnerability (74). Thus he fails to realize the alienated Bartleby’s potential “bond of a common humanity” with those disconnected, alienated individuals for whom the letters arrive belatedly—or never at all.

Further, the capitalist, who is comfortable in his segmented, stratified, and hierarchical world, fails to contemplate the flexibility with which the “penniless wight” (52) subtly but “triumph[antly]” exercises power (62). The lawyer does not see that, like Turkey, whose “small” income (44) forces him to continue working in his “old” age (42) and who thus learns how to make his employer decide “to let him stay” (43), or like Nippers, who attempts to “unwarrantabl[y] usurp[ ]” his employer’s jurisdiction (43), Bartleby, whose work “as a subordinate clerk” is “suddenly” terminated (73), learns to develop “wondrous ascendancy” (62). But, unlike Turkey, who tempers “insolen[ce]” with “submission” (42) and “deference” (44), or Nippers, who muffles his “unnecessary maledictions” (43), Bartleby, who does not have their “flighty” or “fiery” temper (47), shows that, despite the limitations of the power of his freedom of choice, he, from whom his employer expects “instant compliance” (47), has developed a uniquely subtle and effective exercise of power with his unexplained preferences: “Without moving from his privacy, Bartleby, in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, ‘I would prefer not to’” (47). Bartleby’s unexplained and idiosyncratic preferences, which evoke “sudden twinges of impotent rebellion” in his employer, stupefy the latter so thoroughly that they exemplify how the

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“subordinate” man overwhelms the hierarchical capitalist (54). For, with the force of his “mild effrontery” (54) and “passive resistance” (50), Bartleby “not only strangely disarms” his employer but also “touch[es] and “disconcert[s]” him (48). As Gilles Deleuze describes the mysterious Bartleby’s baffling exercise of power, “The formula I PREFER NOT TO excludes all alternatives, and devours what it claims to conserve no less than it distances itself from everything else” (73). Further, because Bartleby insists on saying “*prefer not*” instead of “*will not*” (52), and because he repeats that he is “not particular” (69), he exercises the power of uncertainty, and, thereby, despite his exclusion of alternatives and “change[s]” (69), indicates a sense of the flexibility of potential negotiations, exchanges, and modifications.

As Melville indicates, this sense of the flexibility of potential negotiations suggests a sense of a dynamic space for a fluid “bond of a common humanity.” Indeed, as Melville suggests through the symbolic “interval” of emptiness, which “resemble[s] a huge square cistern” between two walls (41), there is a flexible space of Deleuzoguattarian rhizomes that frustrates the arborescent culture of hierarchies, stratification, and segmentation and where unusual changes occur. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, a rhizome “transmits intensities” as it “ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (4, 7). As Melville also suggests, the prison yard, which is surrounded by thick walls but where “grass-seed” ruptures “through the clefts” by “some strange magic” (73), and where Bartleby “loiter[s]” (72), is a fluid space where “magic[al]” connections between “the sky” and “the grass” occur (71). Indeed, the “grass-platted yards,” where, much to the narrator’s chagrin at “murderers and thieves,” who “peer[] out” on Bartleby through “the narrow slits of the jail windows” (71), constitute a rhizomatous space of

“wondrous” and “strange” new and ambiguous connections between individuals. Hence the “[s]omething” that “prompt[s]” the narrator “to touch” the dead Bartleby in this rhizomatous space is the complex but instinctive “bond of a common humanity” that sends a “tingling shiver” up his arm and down to his feet (73). But, conscious only of an “exasperating connection” with Bartleby (69), he cannot identify this bond, just as he cannot identify it in the “something” that “upbraid[s]” him from “within” for abandoning Bartleby (67). As he does not read with his faculties of imagination and emotions, the prison yard’s “soft” grass is “imprisoned” (72), just as the cistern-like “interval” of flexibility, and hence of intensities, is barren. For this capitalist is the average reader who is territorialized and imprisoned in a traditional dependence on the cognitive faculty of rationality.

Indeed, as an average reader, our lawyer emphasizes “common sense” (49, 56) and “prudence” (40, 56, 59, 63), for they are the products of rationality and memory. In an attempt to probe into the “recesses” (55) of Bartleby’s hidden world, the narrator turns to his memory: “I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man” (55). But the consequence is only a “prudential feeling” (56). Thus, despite acknowledging Bartleby’s “wonderful mildness” (54) and having “an unbounded confidence” in his “honesty” (60), the “unambitious” lawyer, who has a relentlessly bourgeois eye on “profits” (40), and whose insistence on common sense provokes only “sudden spasmodic passions” in him (53), determines to “quit” Bartleby (66) not because the latter’s presence is slowing his “business,” which now is “driving fast” (65), but because he indulges in “absurd” fears about Bartleby’s “outliv[ing]” him and “claim[ing] possession of [his] office by right of his perpetual occupancy” (66). Such is the capitalist’s plight of mediocrity that, although he “instinctively” puts his hand in his “pocket” to “produce” money for a wager (62), he cannot appreciate his instinctive

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bond of humanity, which makes him suffer from an unresolved internal conflict, when he abandons Bartleby for the sake of common sense and prudence: "I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to be rid of" (67).

Conscious of the artificial bond of "money" (62), but oblivious to the instinctive "bond of a common humanity," the capitalist insists on common sense, which, ironically, only demonstrates "hopelessness" (56) and "nervous resentment" (63), and on prudence, which only exposes his determination to refrain from demonstrating his "passion" (53, 69).

Clearly, the narrator's charity, like his prudence, is cold. Ironically, the man who is inclined to "cool tranquility" (40), proves to be the man of "passion" who relates more easily to a murderer than to his victim as he recognizes a parallel between Bartleby and "the unfortunate Adams" and between himself and "the still more unfortunate Colt," who murders Adams in a fit of "wild excite[ment]" (63). As Deleuze argues, his "charity and philanthropy" are "masks of the paternal functions" (88). The patronizing lawyer, who is unnerved at Bartleby's "cadaverous triumph" (62), thus, calmly turns to charity, which "operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle" (64): "Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be enlisted, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy" (64). His calculating and condescending "charity and philanthropy," then, are so cold that, when Bartleby dies, "his head touch[es] the cold stones" of isolation and apathy (73). And as Melville ironically demonstrates the cold touch of the narrator's bourgeois "propriety" (66), the "highly respectable-looking coat" of "a most comfortable warmth" that this calculating capitalist donates to Turkey because the copyist's "money" goes "chiefly for red ink," symbolizes the empty façade of this "high-tempered" man's charity (44), which is in league with his reasoning: "I reasoned with [Turkey]; but with no effect" (44). This

hierarchical employer's "reason[ing]," like his charity, is so cold and artificial that he confuses an offering of charity with an offering of "prosperity" (44) and fails to comprehend why his quasi-destitute but "most valuable" employee becomes "insolent": as with the coat, so with the afternoon work (42).

Clearly, this lawyer, who wishes to be "a dispassionate thinker" (61), is so oblivious to the faculty of emotions in his attempts at supporting Bartleby that he resists any sense of a complex bond of sympathy. In his attempt to simplify his relations with his employee, the condescending lawyer, who practices charity, and who makes a dispassionate comparison of Bartleby that moves from the "pale plaster-of-Paris bust of Cicero" (47) through "old chairs" (65) to "an intolerable incubus" (66) to unmask an increasingly unsettling sense of dehumanization, acknowledges only the "emotions" of "pure melancholy" and "sincerest pity" at the thought of Bartleby's "forlornness," but even these emotions disappear, for his melancholy turns to "fear," and his "pity" to "repulsion" (56). Oblivious to the complex bond of sympathy, he refuses to acknowledge his "inherent selfishness," and he dispassionately tries to check his fear and repulsion of Bartleby and clinically analyzes those forcefully negative emotions as "proceed[ing] from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill" (56). Associating Bartleby with "excessive and organic ill," this lawyer, ironically, fails to comprehend the "excessive and organic ill" of his own "repulsion" towards and "hopelessness" regarding the scrivener. So disconnected is he from Bartleby that the patronizing man, who highlights rationality, fails to develop the complex bond of sympathy to read the complex bond of humanity: "His soul I could not reach" (56).

Thus, through the average reader's frustrated attempts at reading, Melville suggests that underscoring rationality only corresponds with the myopic emotional

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condition of self-absorption. The employer, who is overwhelmed by Bartleby's strangely mild and "flute-like" (48) but "violently unreasonable" resistance (49), is not simply reduced to conceding that "All the reason is on the other side" but also to confusing his own "reason" with "faith" (49). Clearly, this frustrated reader, who turns to his rationality and sees the fact of Bartleby's "incessant industry" (53) but is unable to interpret it, is the average reader who suffers from a "faltering mind" (49) because he is oblivious to the "bond of a common humanity."

Conversely, as Melville depicts the mysterious Bartleby about whom there is nothing "ordinarily human" (47), the scrivener symbolically establishes himself as an "extraordinary" reader (48): "At first Bartleby d[oes] an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if long famishing for something to copy, he seem[s] to gorge himself on my documents. There [i]s no pause for digestion. He r[uns] a day and a night line, copying by sunlight and by candlelight" (46). But, ironically, instead of rewarding the "useful" Bartleby (50) for his "unexampled diligence" (59), the self-absorbed capitalist indulges in the hegemonic perversity of "tyrann[ical]" (60) ingratitude towards "a valuable acquisition" (53): "I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wr[ites] silently, palely, mechanically" (46). Trapped in self-absorption, then, as he reads Bartleby's "extraordinary conduct" (48), the narrator, who habitually tries to protect his "conscience" with his rationality (66, 70), is struck by a "perverseness [that] seem[s] ungrateful" (57) in this mysterious scrivener, who refuses to "be a little reasonable" (58), and who thus turns away from rationality as a reader. Just as this average man, who self-absorbedly refuses to "indulge in dangerous indignation at wrongs and outrages" (40), does not read with his faculty of emotions, so he does not read with his faculty of imagination to relate to Bartleby to contemplate the mysterious scrivener's movement from vigorous

productivity to “looking” motionlessly upon “the dead brick wall” for “long periods” (55-56).

Indeed, as Melville suggests, because of unfathomable depths within individuals, one must turn to imagination to contemplate unknowable phenomena. The “hired clerk” (52), who is immured in the space of a metaphorical “nut-shell” (45) and within “easy call, in case any trifling thing was to be done,” but who “gorge[s] himself” on documents, has the scope to ponder the inflexibility of walls and the flexibility of streets in the “light” that comes from “a small side-window” (46). As Melville suggests, this “light” that enters the viewless “window” despite the wall is symbolic of the “strange magic” of imagination, for it enables his reader to envision the unfathomable Bartleby, who lacks a literal “view,” as pondering the oxymoron of Wall Street that highlights the inextricable interrelation of opposites (barriers and freedom or blockage and movement). Clearly, the scrivener is an avid reader who learns to read more texts than certain legal “documents” but whom the narrator “never” sees “reading” (55). Belittling “[i]magination” before concluding his narrative, however, the lawyer expects “the reader” to use it to comprehend the fact of the “meager recital of poor Bartleby’s interment” (73). Ironically, coupling the fact of a “meager” ceremony with the use of imagination to read the fact, he does not realize that if he cannot “gratify” the reader’s “awaken[ed] curiosity” regarding the mysterious Bartleby’s ungraspable individual identity, the reader needs to turn to imagination because of an awakened curiosity regarding the unreachable Bartleby (73). Indeed, as Melville suggests, curiosity, which is essential to learning, is integrally connected with imagination. Unable to contain his curiosity, in his attempts to tolerate the inscrutable Bartleby’s “passive resistance,” he, who cannot tolerate “insolence,” must “endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment” (50). Thus, to read Bartleby’s “unaccountabl[e]

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eccentric[ities,]” the narrator cannot help but turn to his imagination (71).

Clearly, Melville’s focus on eccentricities suggests his focus on the mystery surrounding human individuality. If Bartleby has his mysterious “eccentricities” (50) as a unique human individual, the other scriveners also have “their eccentricities” (45), effecting the complex “bond of a common humanity,” paradoxically, through the complexity of individuality. Although the narrator does not see that each individual’s idiosyncrasies exemplify the complex bond of “a common humanity,” he himself, who opens and closes the ground-glass folding doors according to his “humor,” has his own inexplicable peculiarities (46). Just as this average reader fails to contemplate the connection between individuality and eccentricities in his own case, so he fails to contemplate it in the case of the others. But, as the contemplative Melville suggests, the “folding-doors” that can be opened and closed but that the narrator uses to separate himself from his hired clerks and the “folding screen” that he uses to separate himself from Bartleby (46), and the “closed desk” in whose “recesses” there is a symbolic “saving’s bank” that can be “dragged” out and that Bartleby leaves unlocked (55) symbolize the flexibility of the barriers of inscrutability between individuals. As Melville suggests through this flexibility, then, the mystery surrounding individuals must be contemplated with the flexible faculties of imagination and emotions.

For the self cannot turn to others to create meaning and pass it on. If the name Bartleby is a modified version of Bartholomew (son of the furrow), then Bartleby is ambiguously associated with the creative faculty of imagination in that, as Melville suggests through the symbolic “grass-seed” that grows “through the clefts,” Bartleby is associated with the furrow for a growth that happens only “by some strange magic.” Indeed, Bartleby, the inscrutable individual, whose name alone is not ignored and, thus, whose human identity is not suspended or

metonymically displaced in this narrative and who finds a unique and “strangely disarm[ing]” method of demonstrating his “resistance” to the employer who resists his scriveners’ professional growth and change in identity, challenges the narrator to create meaning for himself when he refuses to make it for him: “Do you not see the reason for yourself?” (59). If Bartleby withholds his reason for refusing to work, and if his question is suggestive of the narrator’s perceptual mediocrity, he challenges the individual, who seeks meaning, to use his imagination to create the truth that he experiences or feels with his emotions. Thus the narrator, who knows about Bartleby’s “incessant industry,” concludes that the latter’s “vision” is “temporarily impaired” (59). Thus, too, having repeatedly seen Bartleby’s honesty, he “imagine[s]” that Bartleby has a particularly “gentlemanly organization” (63). Indeed, he “imagine[s]” what he thinks because of what he feels with some “excitement” (62). But the narrator who “speak[s] less than the truth” when he “say[s] that, on his own account,” Bartleby “occasion[s]” him “uneasiness” (60), ironically, is so alienated from what his employee wants him to “see” that this seeker of “truth” does not realize that in the quest for “truth” that which “proves impossible to be solved by . . . judgment” has to be created with “imagination.” Thus “tru[th]” continues to elude him (73). Clearly, although the nonplussed narrator often mentions his imagination (56, 56, 62, 63), he is unresponsive to its call. Thus he resists his sense of Bartleby’s “forlornness” as it grows “and” grows “to” his “imagination” (56). As Melville subtly suggests, if the sense grows “to” and not *in* his imagination, the call of imagination is not spontaneous to the narrator. So resistant is he to the imaginative faculty that he resists the “ingenious” Nippers from engaging in any “original” work (43) in a suppressive environment where “no invention would answer” and where inventiveness is associated with “diseased ambition” (43): “The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the

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duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents” (43).

Failing to contemplate “inventi[veness],” however, the narrator fails to comprehend the way in which his employees cope with “the dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair” of copying documents (46). The lawyer does not see that Turkey, who makes “blots” upon the documents (41) or a “racket with his chair” (42), and Nippers, who attempts to communicate his displeasure and resistance by “audibly grind[ing] together” his teeth “over mistakes committed in copying,” and also by using “blotting paper” to vent his frustration at his table, appropriate their vulnerabilities to reveal their displeasure. Further, he does not see that in such a suppressive environment, where the copyists are expected to do repetitive and “mechanical[.]” work (46), the “mere” job of copying is adversely opposed to the “inventi[veness]” of the imaginative faculty (43). Indeed, not using his imagination to interpret why he does not have to deal with Turkey’s and Nippers’ “fits,” which “relieve[] each other, like guards” in a “natural arrangement” (45), the narrator does not see that Turkey and Nippers, who work together in a common space, and who experience the instinctive “bond of a common humanity,” instinctively enter the fluid space between them to “arrange[]” a “natural” connection between the self and the other to cope with the “dry” business of copying law papers (45). Oblivious to this instinctive “bond,” their employer, who cannot enter this fluid space, cannot see the uniquely subtle solution the two “very useful” men have invented to deal with their workload (43).

Clearly, although the narrator mentions “original” several times, he never reads the connection between imagination and originality. Hence, “bent over the original,” this average reader, who is symbolically burdened by an original text, does not comprehend that the mysterious Bartleby, who sits inside an enclosed space

within his employer's side of the partition, and distances himself from "copies" to go on "with his own writing," enters the fluid space wherein he invents a uniquely mystifying form of self-expression with his inexplicable preferences, despite his alienation. Further, although the narrator mentions the need for "great accuracy," through the resistant Bartleby, who prefers not to read copies, Melville suggests that the question of "verify[ing] the accuracy" of copies is irrelevant (46), for, unlike "original" work, copies cannot be authenticated (48). Furthermore, although the narrator fancifully "imagine[s]" the "mettlesome poet, Byron" (46) as a contrast to the "mild" and "calm" (47) Bartleby, the latter's distancing himself from the "mechanical[]" profusion of "copies" and his resistance to the "dull, wearisome, and lethargic affair" of examining the copies, ironically, only demonstrate an unequivocal connection between the English Romantic, Byron, and the American Romantic's Bartleby, whom the narrator associates with "original sources" (40).

Thus, as Melville draws attention to the narrator's perceptual mediocrity, the lawyer shows a reductive dependence on fancy. Clearly, if he indulgently associates fancy with "a sick and silly brain" (55), he dismissively associates imagination with "absent-mindedness" (62). And as he underestimates his imagination and turns to "fancy" (64), the narrator does not see the discrepancy between "original" and "copy." But as Melville illustrates, while imagination is associated with the original, fancy, like memory, is associated with copies. Indeed, as Melville subtly connects copying with "forger[y]" (72), the narrator, who thinks he is no "inferior genius" (61), emptily traces and reproduces images with his fancy. Thus he does not see the complex bond that connects him with the biblical Lot's disobedient, unmindful, and worldly wife, when he copies or borrows his metaphor from the Bible to illustrate his shock at Bartleby's refusal to examine the "copies": "I was turned into a pillar of salt" (48). Because, as Coleridge

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claims, "the passive fancy" is associated with "mechanical memory" (54), Melville's narrator blunderingly focuses on the rebell[ious]" (52) Bartleby's disobedience, only to admit his own "impotent rebellion." Hence the ironic Melville focuses on the "unmanned" (54) narrator's unmindfulness. For the narrator's mechanical accentuation of his masculinity displays his unawareness of his movement from emasculation to the disintegration of his human identity. Likewise, his comparison of himself with the "thunderstruck" pipe-smoking man shows that he turns mechanically but self-absorbedly to his memory to forge a simile (62). For the narrator, who is unmindful of his own alienation, does not read the complex bond of humanity that connects the man who dies at his "window" (62) with the "cadaverous" Bartleby (58, 62) who has his "dead-wall reveries" at "his window" (64), which connection is what the ironic Melville imaginatively creates as his response to his own sense of alienated individuals. Further, through the image of "Marius brooding among the ruins of Carthage," which image the narrator seems to borrow from John Vanderlyn's painting, Melville points out the connection as opposed to the opposition between Marius and Carthage (55).

But the narrator, whose fanciful images divulge the emptiness of pointless destruction, observes only fragmentation, alienation, and disconnection in Bartleby: The lonely Bartleby is a "bit of wreck in the mid-Atlantic" (60) or "like the last column of some ruined temple" (61). And while the narrator's image of "Petra" (which ancient city became known to westerners not too long before the setting of Melville's story) suggests that he makes associations between the "deserted" Wall Street and the "empt[y]" Petra with his memory, Melville's image of Petra ironically suggests the lawyer's imaginative barrenness that prevents him from appreciating the complex bond of a common humanity, which only draws him "irresistibly to gloom" (55). Hence his images only

suggest the inflexible hopelessness of a surrender to destruction and death: “The scrivener’s pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in a shivering winding-sheet” (55).

Thus the average reader, who surrenders to the fact of Bartleby’s isolation and, consequently, to the “gloom” of hopelessness (72), becomes the man of “stunned faculties” (47). For he fails to move beyond the traditional cognitive faculties to contemplate human individuality. As Robert T. Tally claims, the “profoundly *unknowable* and *unreadable* . . . Bartleby is an *original* character, and, as such, he is utterly alien and alienated” (9). But I would add that Melville, who underscores the faculties of imagination and emotions, does not stop with the alienated Bartleby’s unknowability. As an “ordinar[y]” reader, the narrator, who describes his “connection” with Bartleby as “exasperating,” never imagines that the mysterious reader, who “silently” reads multiple “original” texts in a tiny space, where he is completely isolated, and whose “glazed” eyes (59) are “open” even in death (73), may have imaginatively contemplated the “strange magic” of rhizomatous connections in a “grass-platted” yard (71). With his memory, the narrator has stored Bartleby’s final attempt to communicate with him: “‘I would prefer *not* to quit you,’ he replied, gently emphasizing the *not*” (63). And with his rationality the lawyer condescendingly interprets this response as an attempt to “cling” (66). The point is not that the mysterious Bartleby has articulated the instinctive “bond of a common humanity” but that, failing to use the faculties of imagination and emotions, the average reader fails to create meaning as a reader, and thus he fails to read in Bartleby’s response the individual’s attempt to singularly articulate or to collectively create the complex “bond of a common humanity.”

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