2013 Writing Program Awards
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2013 Writing Program Awards

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Is Our Character Natural?

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Author Note:

This paper was prepared for Principles of Composition taught by Instructor Blankenship
Is Our Character Natural?

Is nature essential to a person’s character? Character is not natural it just does not come out of nowhere and give itself up to just anybody. Character is built as we grow and learn. It is something that has to be earned by the actions and decisions we make. A person must learn to be good at what he or she does best because people are not just given the talent by nature. For nature to be essential to a person’s character the person has to be born with the knowledge to do what they do best.

We as people start to learn how to do things as soon as we come out of our mother’s womb. It is the cycle of life. As a baby we learn right and wrong and as we get older we add on to that. We learn our do’s and don’t as if they were our ABC’s. We learn how to do the things that make us happiest. For example, if we liked basketball and wanted to play we would learn the rules and then learn how to play until finally we excelled at it. We learn these things.

I remember when I was in the fifth grade and we had to learn about Shakespeare and poetry. I loved how Shakespeare spoke and wrote his poetry that I decided to try a hand at it. I wrote a couple of poems at first, not any good ones at least. But after I met with my English teacher, Mrs. Roof, she helped me learn how to write in free verse. Free verse is a type of poetry in which you can write without having to rhyme or follow a specific pattern.

I like writing so much that I continued to do it. I worked hard at it. I studied all different types of poets and their poetry. I studied Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Emily Dickenson, and Robert Frost and so on. Studying these poets gave me an idea of what type of poems I wanted to write. I wrote poems about my feelings and poems about what went on in my life. I wrote constantly just to write. It was a way for me to vent how I felt. Some poems were depressing, others were happy.

I also remember liking tennis and watching it on TV. I liked watching the Wimbledon tournament every year on TV. It was as if I was watching a special dance that no one else knew. In my senior year of high school I decided to learn how to play and join the tennis team at school. It was fun. I had no experience except for what I played in Physical Exercise class and even then I was bad at it. I worked hard over the course of the year to get ready for the spring matches. I remember asking my fellow senior team mates for pointers and how to keep score. My friend Bri gave me the best advice. She told me to practice serving on an empty court and each time I would serve to just repeat the scores. It sounded kind of funny to be making up fake score and to be talking to myself but it did work. I could remember that 0-0 Love All meant that the set had just started and the score was 0-0. I practiced this and serving for the whole year even when the
season started. I did not win any of my matches but that was because I did not work hard enough to my goal. Even though I never won a match I still played my heart out for the team. I still work hard at mastering the sport of tennis every day. I have to work at what I do best to stay the best at it. If I give up then the talent goes away.

I do not understand why people tend to connect a person’s talent with nature because I have always seen nature as something connected to the Earth. I mean nature to me is the land and animals that inhabit it. Character however, is what a person works to build. For example, my character can be described as a quiet, but outgoing person. To get to the person I am today though I had to go through life changes and learn from my mistakes. I had to work hard to be the person I am today.

I remember when I was in the fourth grade and I was a good kid that had fallen into the wrong crowd of people. I began to change from a kind child to a bad one. I remember getting in trouble for bringing a pocket knife to school just to be cool and fit in. I was afraid of being myself and so it got me in trouble. After so many times of being in trouble I won myself a trip to the county jail with worse trouble makers than myself. It was so awful being in jail and having nothing to do. I remember how bad it smelt and how bad the food was that just thinking about it makes me want to vomit. It smelt like pee and the food tasted like vomit itself. This one trip changed me and my character.

After my trip to the county jail I had to work hard to gain the trust of my friends, family, and peers. My teachers did not trust me for the longest though. I had to do nice things like helping my teachers and volunteering on the safety patrol. I also had to participate in SADD. SADD is a club that stands for Students Against Destructive Decisions. SADD was originally Students Against Drunk Driving but people thought it would be better that instead of attacking one bad decision why not attack all bad decisions made by minors. It was good for me to be in SADD though because it taught me to remember to learn from my mistakes and try to work to be a better person.

My point is that I had to work hard to be who I am today. My gifts and talents were not born with me, they were taught to me. If I hadn’t learned about Shakespeare and poetry in grade school then I probably would not be the poet I am today. I would not be the person I am today. Just like if Tiger Woods did not practice Golf since he was two, he would probably be doing something else with his life.

Nature is not a person’s essential character born with them because a person first has to establish character to develop an identity and then learn how to apply it to themselves. We are who we learn to be; we are what our parents, teachers, and society teaches us to be. Whether or not we have talent depends on how well we apply our skills in life. If I want to be a tennis player/poet I am going to put a lot of practice into it. I will work hard at whatever I do.
and that is how I develop talent, character, and my natural instincts. I have been taught to apply
who I am to what I want to be. This is not something I was born with, it is something I have been
taught. It does not come natural and is something I have to work hard at every day of my life.
Watchers:
Power to the People
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This paper was prepared for Elementary Composition I, taught by
Instructor Blankenship.
Watchers:

Power to the People

As Americans, we take for granted the fact we have a right to privacy and freedom. However, ever since the events of 9/11, many Americans believe their freedoms and rights are being invaded, especially when it comes to government use of technology. Many wonder if the technology even works, or if the government is just using it to spy on them. There have been reports of abuse of power, but there are also reports of where this small ‘invasion of privacy’ has saved lives – many lives, not just one. As Americans, we feel our privacy should never be violated, especially without our knowing so. Of course, the government has limitations too, and they are not supposed to just spy on people without first having reason to do so. As some have asked: Why would one care about this small invasion, if they had nothing to hide in the first place? Privacy versus security is a rising debate across the nation, but perhaps, somehow, Americans will be able to find a middle ground.

The word ‘privacy’ is not expressly written in the Fourth Amendment, even though people add the word there when talking about their rights. Though not mentioned by name, exactly, it is implied pretty heavily through other words. According to Lee Humphreys (2011), the word privacy is defined as “the ability to control what information about oneself is available to others” (p. 576). With all the technology and surveillance equipment given to the US government, how can people keep their information to themselves? For things to truly be ‘private’, one must tread carefully around anything electronic, especially cell phones, new cars, and the internet (Price, 2012). ISP, or internet service provider, “knows when you’re online” (Price, p. 390). This happens every time one gets online.

As if that was not bad enough, a lot of America’s ISPs are told to “hold onto these records for two years” (Price, p. 390). Holding onto these records would be okay if they were secure and safe, but according to Price (2012), “127 million sensitive electronic and paper records were hacked or lost” in 2009 (p. 387). Data breaches are happening more often, capturing information from the details kept by ISPs. Also a growing concern among conspiracy theorists are the growing amounts of RFID, or radio-frequency identification. RFID use “radio waves” so they can “identify objects and people” (Price, p. 393). This allows people to track others without their knowing so. Soon these chips, or tags, will be too small to notice, but will be there all the same (Price, p. 393).

After the events of 9/11, many Americans were not just devastated, but terrified as well. If terrorists attacked once, and with such brutal force, they would surely do so again. This fear led to the government creating new and better equipment to help identify potential threats.
Facial recognition software has been used at airports to detect the body language and microexpressions of those in line to capture hints of anger, fear, or something more deadly (Kaminer, 2012). While it sounds okay in theory, it does not work quite as well as one would hope. Many innocents were caught, too – those who were just annoyed because of delayed flights, or nervous because after 9/11, everyone is more than a bit cautious in airports, especially if one is a minority. Why would anyone trust such trial and error equipment when it does not work anywhere else? Senator Ted Kennedy was put on a do-not-fly list simply because his name was once that of an alias (Price, 2012). This is one of the many ways our national security has failed us. Selling ‘lemons’, or bad cars, to people at a car dealership is not socially acceptable in the minds of most Americans. Why are we buying lemons when it is not acceptable on cars, but when it comes to a matter of our safety, it is suddenly okay?

In the case of Kyllo vs. the United States, authorities heard that Kyllo was growing marijuana and selling it. After his wife was arrested for possession of a “controlled substance”, and Kyllo told a police informant he could “supply marijuana”, the authorities got thermal imaging equipment and analyzed the amount of heat emitting from Kyllo’s house (Colbridge, p. 378). Kyllo later stated there was no search warrant so he moved to “suppress the evidence” (Colbridge, p. 378). While it was true the police did not get a search warrant before investigating, they were not actually looking at the contents inside his house with the equipment. They also were not really even on his property – they just scanned the heat coming from the house. After several trials, Kyllo was convicted only to later appeal his way up to the Supreme Court. The court overturned his conviction and set him free in the end. Some people argue he was wrongly convicted because the police did not have a search warrant to use the technology against him, especially without his knowledge. However, others argue it was not an invasion of privacy because the technology and police did not pierce the walls to see what was happening inside (Colbridge, 2012).

There are, of course, pros and cons of the technology used by police and the government. Global Positional System (GPS), for example, is a great tool to have if someone crashes into a ditch and is not sure where they are. There are GPS systems on cars and cell phones. The downside of GPS is that advertisers hope to use the GPS on cell phones to “send text-message coupons” so they can “lure you into stores as you pass by” (Price, p. 389). While many Americans find the security at the airports annoying, like metal detectors and other devices, it does serve a purpose. No one can sneak a gun or anything onto a plane these days. While some of the equipment has not been known to work all the time, they are still fixing the technology so it is more accurate. It is not perfect, but nothing is. At least the government is trying.

While not all the technology is used to save lives, some of it does serve to make life
easier for us. ISP and other internet technologies help gather our likes and dislikes by keep track of how often we visit a certain site, and then give us little ads to show us things we like so we might buy them. While more of an advertising ploy than anything else, it does help people find what they like rather than stuff they do not like. The tracking technologies in phones and cars these days serve to help us if a car is stolen, or if we get into a serious wreck. Some technology even alerts paramedics when one is in an accident because it sends a signal out when the airbag deploys. This can be used to save a lot of lives.

All the cameras in place come in handy when a crime is committed. It is not the cameras one sees they have to worry about – it is the ones they do not. Hidden cameras serve to help the police find robbers of stores, or murderers. The footage on the cameras helps the police track these people down, or at least get a detail from a vehicle or an image of the person in question. Of course, there have been reports of abuse on security cameras. Security guards have been reported using the cameras to watch or stalk girls. Other law enforcement officials have thrown their weight around and all but harassed citizens with their technological advances (Kaminer, 2012).

If officers have already abused their power, who is to say they will not continue to do so? It is hard to prove this abuse of power, especially when it involves the authorities. To the average American, it looks as though the police and government can get away with anything, while the normal Americans are left with rules and restrictions on their activities. Some say no one watches the government, and therefore the government can do whatever it wants. Others say the government is watched over with a crucial eye, especially when it comes to their use of technology.

Since 9/11, Americans have been torn between their desire for privacy and their need to be protected. Maybe there is a middle ground where these two sides meet, but perhaps this is a self-destructive game of tug-of-war, and it will all come to a head in a final confrontation between citizens and government officials. Perhaps these arguments will be our downfall, if other countries catch wind of our misgivings. As a nation, we are going to have to decide which we value more: our privacy, or our safety.
References


Observing the Follies of Overprotective Parenting through the Lens of “Rapunzel”

The story of “Rapunzel” is a timeless fairy tale which contains many underlying themes. The predominant theme of protection through isolation in “Rapunzel” occurs in both acts of the story. This illusionary veil of protection is eventually breached by an outsider, effectively negating its utility. In the real world, overprotective parents engage in the practice of isolating their children from the perceived risks outside of the home (Ungar 258). As such, the story of “Rapunzel” serves as a metaphor for the follies of this method of parenting, particularly in regard to parents who advocate the use of an abstinence-only sexual education program in public schools.

The first act of “Rapunzel” begins in the home of a couple hoping to conceive their first child. The couple’s house is located in close proximity to a walled garden owned by an enchantress. One day, the wife notices some rapunzel growing in the garden and develops an increasingly insatiable desire to eat the plant. The husband scales the garden wall to fetch some of the rapunzel for his wife upon her request. After consuming the rapunzel the wife’s desire for the plant only increases. The husband returns to the garden and encounters the enchantress. Under the influence of his fear, the husband barges the couple’s to be born child for the rapunzel and his freedom (Grimm and Grimm 56-58).

The first act of “Rapunzel” establishes the rapunzel plant as an object of desire coveted by an outside force. The enchantress’s walled garden serves as a sanctuary for the plant, as the garden’s physical walls and fear of the enchantress deter any would-be trespassers. This sanctuary is violated once an outsider with enough motivation (in this case, the husband believes his wife will waste away because of her incessant hungering for the rapunzel) penetrates its physical and psychological defenses.

Once actually tested, the defenses of the isolated sanctum are proven to be inadequate. The rapunzel is quite easily pilfered from the place in which the enchantress felt it would be the most protected. This situation directly parallels the home run by one or more overprotective parents. The parenting method of shielding through isolation overlooks the statistical fact that “children are most at risk when they are with their families or at their place of residence” (Ungar 264).
The motif of a coveted object sequestered from the world continues into the second act of “Rapunzel.” After taking possession of the couple’s newborn child, the enchantress names the baby girl Rapunzel and raises her like a daughter. Upon reaching the age of twelve, Rapunzel is confined in a tower deep in the forest by the enchantress. The tower, which had no doors, could only be entered by calling up to Rapunzel to let down her hair and then climbing Rapunzel’s hair up to the small, solitary window. After some years pass, a prince wanders into the forest and heard Rapunzel’s voice coming from the tower. Finding no doors on the tower, the prince rides home. He later returns to see the enchantress call up to Rapunzel and scale the tower using Rapunzel’s hair. The next day, the prince emulates the enchantress and calls up to Rapunzel. Rapunzel is first shocked to see a man enter her tower, but after talking with the prince agrees to marry him. The two meet nightly, and the prince brings silk each time so that Rapunzel might weave a ladder to escape. Rapunzel accidently speaks of the prince to the enchantress, and the enchantress becomes outraged. She cuts off Rapunzel’s hair and banishes her into the forest (Grimm and Grimm 58-61).

The imagery of the first act of “Rapunzel” is repeated in the second act. Instead of the rapunzel plant, the girl named Rapunzel is isolated from the rest of the world. Rapunzel’s lonely tower functions in the same way as the enchantress’s garden in the beginning of the story. The outside influence in the second act is the wandering prince, who is seen by the enchantress as an intruder, much like the husband from the first act. In both cases, the enchantress hastily relinquishes control of the very thing she staunchly protected after it has been contaminated by the external force.

However, there is one significant difference between the imagery in the two acts. Although the outside influence in both acts is represented by a human (both of which happen to be male), the coveted objects are two very different things that happen to share the same name. The rapunzel plant and the girl called Rapunzel may serve the same purpose in a thematic sense, but the human Rapunzel is capable of her own desires.

The more overt imagery in the second act can be readily applied to the metaphor of overprotective parenting. In the second act, the enchantress serves as a guardian for Rapunzel. The method of isolation the enchantress employs makes it impossible for Rapunzel to experience the outside world or to take any risk associated with being outside her tower. Rapunzel must suppress any desires to explore the world freely or to be exposed to risky situations. This imagery can be compared to one response to overprotective parenting in the real world, where a child accepts his or her situation and withdraws from the world (Ungar 264).

The intrusion of the prince into the tower during the second act is another example of powerful, overt imagery. The prince is an embodiment of the outside world which, in turn, is an
embodiment of risk. Although Rapunzel is at first understandably shocked upon meeting the prince (she had never seen a man before), she quickly becomes comfortable around him, accepts his marriage proposal, and agrees to meet him nightly. The implication of sexual activity occurring during these nightly visits is much more subtle than the Grimm’s first version of Rapunzel or in the French version “Persinette” (Grimm and Grimm p. 60), but the implication is still there. Rapunzel’s willingness to expose herself to this intruder on a nightly basis reflects another real world response to overprotective parenting. Some children who are isolated from the risks of society by their parents actively seek out other risks to replace the risks they are shielded from (Ungar 264).

The second act also serves another metaphoric purpose. Although the lonely tower initially shields Rapunzel from the risks and responsibilities of the outside world, its defenses prove to be inadequate over time, much like the garden walls from the first act. Rapunzel’s ignorance of the outside world does not protect her from the invading risk nor stop her from succumbing to her own desires. Overprotective parents in the real world often attempt to shield their children from the perceived dangers of adolescent sexual intercourse. However, studies have shown parenting styles that employ “moderate levels of strictness are associated with lower levels of sexual activity” (qtd. in Gorman and Kapinus 694). In a similar fashion, overprotective parents who advocate abstinence-only sexual education are not truly protecting their children. Statistically, states that do not expose children to contraception in lieu of focusing on abstinence have higher rates of teen pregnancy (DeJoy and Perrin 452).

The closing of “Rapunzel” ends with the enchantress confronting the prince as he arrives to visit Rapunzel. The prince is distraught and inadvertently blinds himself after jumping from the tower into the brush. Eventually, he comes across Rapunzel who has given birth to their twins after being banished to the forest. Rapunzel weeps with tears of joy upon their reunion, and the tears fall into the prince’s eyes, curing his blindness. The couple lives in happiness thereafter (Grimm and Grimm 62).

The ending of the story shows Rapunzel and her children in a survival state before the prince arrives in the forest. This presents a scenario where Rapunzel is barely able to weather the world of risk after her isolated upbringing. This is a metaphor for the negative impacts overprotective parenting methods can have upon the healthy development of children (Ungar 259, 262).

Although the themes in “Rapunzel” highlight the negative aspects of overprotective parenting, the story ends in a positive light. Exposure to risk has both negative and positive consequences, but ultimately Rapunzel’s exposure to risk helped her grow and achieve freedom. If overprotective parents embraced exposing their children to reasonable amounts of risk, they
foster a healthy environment for child development. If these parents embraced a more open attitude to sexual education, their parenting style becomes much more pragmatic instead of being based on an illusion of safety.
Works Cited


The Two Sisters Award for Literary Analysis

Teresa Price
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ENG-L 225
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Canto I: A Mirror of Dante’s Internal Struggle

“At one point midway on our path in life,
I came around and found myself now searching
through a dark wood, the right way blurred and lost.”

Dante’s Inferno, Canto I, lines 1 - 3

Canto I of Dante’s Inferno begins as most journeys do – by getting lost and looking for the way out. This first passage, quoted above, is described by Robin Kirkpatrick as “a condition of isolation and lonely effort” (316) and these visual images can be looked in two ways; literally or allegorically. Superficially, Canto I of Dante’s Inferno describes a moment in the life of one man – Dante – who loses his way in a dark forest, finally realizing that the way out of the darkness it through it, not around it. However, if the reader examines Canto I from an allegorical perspective, there is much more to be learned about Dante, his guide Virgil, and their surroundings. Jeff Vamos explains in his blog, Inferno Canto 1: I Found Myself... Lost that Dante’s struggle in the woods was something “that needed to be examined and experienced, and not just gotten past.” I would argue that one can see a mirror of personal, internal struggle in the allegory contained in Canto I of Dante’s Inferno that is relatable to everyday life in journey, narrative, and the life of the awakening mind (Kirkpatrick 316).

The journey represented in Canto I of Dante’s Inferno is depicted as Dante is “searching through a dark wood, the right way blurred and lost” (Alighieri and Kirkpatrick, 3) and Kirkpatrick explains that “The dark wood represents Dante’s involvement in sin” (Kirkpatrick 316) which is allegorical for the Biblical teaching of losing one’s way from Christ. This alienation from God is disorienting to Dante and darkens his mood, his ambition, and his path. Sin often creeps up on people, overtaking them in the smallest of decisions and Dante says
“I do not know. I cannot rightly say, how first I came to be here – so full of sleep, that moment, abandoning the true way on” (Alighieri 3).

In Dante’s attempt to work his own way out of the sin and darkness, he sees a hilltop bathed in sunlight and begins to climb, but what he finds there are the most intimidating and terrifying things his mind can comprehend who ultimately “impede Dante’s advance towards salvation” (Kirkpatrick lxiii). Vamos theorizes that these beasts represent the “things that have probably gotten [Dante] lost in the first place. The things that prevent [him] from getting to where [he’s] going.” These three beasts – a leopard, a lion, and a wolf – also correspond to the three divisions of Hell that Dante has laid out where the sins of incontinence, bestiality, and fraud are punished;

Allegorically, the leopard has been taken to represent false (and possibly sexual) pleasure, which fascinates but also irritates the mind. The lion may stand for pride, haughty but in reality, a dangerous void. The wolf may be taken as avarice and is of particular importance, being the only beast of the three to which Dante refers in his appeal to Virgil. (Kirkpatrick 318).

It is interesting that Dante seeks safe-haven from the she-wolf that represents fraud, signifying perhaps, that this is the sin that Dante fears and despises the most. It is, perhaps, also that Dante has already faced or partaken in the sins of false pleasure as well as the sin of pride; therefore, those two beasts do not incite the fear that the sin of fraud does. Whatever the case may be, these beasts compel Dante back into the darkness, forcing him to reckon with his sin and walk “where the sun is mute” (Alighieri 5). This narrative reminds the reader that the sin can force us into darker and darker places, keeping us from the light and presence of God.

Guy Raffa writes in his online blog, Dark Wood, Cantos 1-2 that it “is perhaps best, at this early stage, to take note of the salient characteristics of the animals – the leopard’s spotted hide, the lion’s intimidating presence, the she-wolf’s insatiable hunger…” The leopard’s spotted hide may refer to camouflage, as sin hides in wait; while the lion intimidates, oftentimes causing poor decisions out of fear; and the she-wolf is insatiable in her appetite for the human soul, ready to devour those around them. These beastly sins challenge us – sometimes pushing us forward and at other times, causing us to “read backwards,” (Raffa) looking at past events to gain a “fuller understanding” (Raffa) of our current position. Dante himself is telling his tale as an afterthought – he’s already walked through the forest, he’s already experienced Hell, and now from the other side, he’s able to look back and examine his journey; yet the mere thought of the woods “renews” Dante’s fear (Alighieri 3). Vamos agrees that “the only way to see that – the meaning of one’s suffering – is on the other side of it;” therefore, Dante must find his way through hell, instead of circumventing it.
Dante is lost—literally and figuratively—and the only way to be “saved” is to be set on the path of righteousness; however, Kirkpatrick reminds us that Dante will not find this path alone (Kirkpatrick 316) and must put his faith in another to guide his way along this journey. Thus enters Virgil whom Dante refers to as “the light and glory of all poets. ... You are my teacher. You, my lord and law” (Alighieri 7). Virgil questions why Dante has not simply climbed “that lovely hill” which is the “cause and origin of joy” (Alighieri 7); however, Dante’s fear of facing his own temptations and sin prevent him from scaling the hill towards the sun. In sensing this apprehension, Virgil finally offers Dante an alternative to facing the three beasts who block his way and simply says, “There is another road” (Alighieri 7). He cautions Dante that this road will be filled with “shriill cries of desperation ... mourning ancient pain, who all cry out for death to come once more” (Alighieri 9) and yet, it is the only route of escape from his sin. Despite this, Dante begs Virgil to lead him and there they begin the journey into hell, for the only way to master the evil is to see the never-ending world in which sin lives.

From this, we can take the sage words of Dante and use Canto I as a lens in which to examine our own lives. There was a time in my life—not so long ago—that much like Dante, I found myself lost and struggling desperately to find my way. In 2008, I was working three jobs; one was medical transcription from home, and the other two were with local churches as their secretary and book-keeper. While none were high-paying, they allowed me time with my family and a small salary which I used to pay my bills; ironically, it never occurred to me to ask for anything better. As Vamos explains, “that is true suffering; ultimate stuckness in one’s own pain” and much like the sinners in Dante’s Inferno, “their torment is their inability to imagine any other way of being.” Luckily for me, God had a much bigger plan for my life—one that I had been avoiding for many years—and much like Dante, I too, had my own beasts to face and until I recognized them, I could never begin my new journey.

While Dante’s sins and greatest fears were presented in the form of terrible beasts, mine were represented by pride and fortune in the form of occupations. I rationalized that my happiness was secondary to providing for my family. Therefore, I stepped down from one church position to free up more time to work in the medical transcription field; however, by the end of 2008, I learned my contract had been bought out by another company; thus my medical transcription career ended. Just as Dante tried to climb his way out of the sin and darkness that surrounded him, my answer was to simply find another job—to find my own way out of the darkness. When the New Year rang in, I sent out resumes, made calls, and heard nothing in return—each one, taunting me like the beasts that Dante encountered. My own intimidating beast, named Fear, began to overtake my senses, while another beast, much like the she-wolf Dante encountered lingered nearby. With each rejection, my mind began running over every decision I
had ever made. I stopped believing in my own importance, and like the protagonist in Dante’s *Inferno*, I became my own worst enemy.

Robin Kirkpatrick explains that “all the sinners in Dante’s Hell ... have all in some way denied themselves a full realization of their human potentiality and fall into an alliance with dullness and death” (Kirkpatrick lxxv); this is what we, as humans, do when we settle for something “less” than our worth. In my own struggle with the darkness surrounding me, I continued to push simply for a job — any job; however, none came and I finally realized that my journey lay straight into the face of my fear; granted, this route was not the literal path to hell, but still terrifying in and of itself.

As Kirkpatrick points out, “The remedy is to be found in the rediscovery of resources that lie beyond its own limits” (Kirkpatrick 317) and my personal salvation from this valley of darkness rested in education; I made the call to Indiana University East in Richmond, Indiana and began classes ten days later. This small time frame afforded me no opportunity to look back or second-guess my decision, and instead forced me onward. Unlike Dante, who had but one guide, I had many; they came in the form of teachers like Virgil, filled with knowledge, guidance, and the ability to inspire greater thinking. As the protagonist, Dante explains that Virgil “made to move; and I came close behind” (Alighieri 9). I too, imitated this narrative and made my way closer to my guides; I mimic the professors – their language, their writing, and their thinking, and in this manner, I have grown closer to them and found a greater understanding of academia, life, and myself. They are also my beacons through this sometimes treacherous landscape of undergraduate studies and as Dante was told he would encounter “shrill cries of desperation ... who all cry out for death to come” (Alighieri 9), I too, have come across students who were desperate, wailing, and generally distraught – especially during finals week.

In the introduction to Dante’s *Inferno*, Kirkpatrick points out that “Dante’s first meeting with Virgil is an account of both a spiritual and a literary re-awakening” (xlvii) and like a moth to a flame, I felt drawn to each class no matter the topic. I was thirsty for knowledge and felt my soul reignite like a fresh-struck match. In the twenty years between high school and college, I had forgotten the joy of reading, the experience of pushing myself to do more, and the thrill of my own academic success. Not every moment has been pleasant, and like Dante, I have been exposed to hardship, desperation, and failure all of which has impacted me; this process has changed me, much like Dante was changed as he journeyed through hell. Yet every step, no matter the location of the path, can be a learning experience and an awakening of the mind.

Indiana University East is similar to Dante’s version of hell; Kirkpatrick explains that “Dante’s Hell is a region – immensely attractive to many later generations – in which we become
the victims of our own best ambitions, paralysed by the image we see in our self-regarding mir-
rors” (Kirkpatrick lvi). Similarly, as I finish up my undergraduate study and set my eyes on gradu-
ate school, I am once again terrified by the path before me. However, Vamos reminds us that the
“only way to be found is by being lost. Finding oneself means the willingness to embrace
lostness, not to wallow in it, but to be present to it, to be willing to learn from it.” Recognizing
this journey for what it is – a path to greater things – allows me to transform my fear into a will-
ingness to walk where God wants me to and right now, I know that is on the path of the awaken-
ing of my mind in higher education. And while Dante’s Inferno is broken into Hell, Purgatory, and
Paradise, I too, could look at it in the terms of undergraduate study (Hell,) graduate school
(Purgatory,) and well-paying, rewarding job (Paradise.) The journey, the narrative, and the life of
the awakening mind can be found on each path we take, and by looking at the allegorical lessons
found in Canto I of Dante’s Inferno, one can be more prepared to meet the challenges found
within instead of simply fearing the darkness.
Works Cited


