

Portfolio 2 | Familiar Essay

Value: 21% of your final grade (20% Essay, 1% CR).

Due: Assign 2.3 *Draft*—for *Tutorial*, eClass Feb 16-18, Assign. 2.4, **Final—eClass, Feb 23, 11:59PM. Note that this is in Winter term Reading week.**

Length: 5-6 double-spaced pages (no more than 2000 words), excluding works cited + CR

Instructions:

- Compose a full *familiar essay* as per the requirements above. For this paper, your audience is “well-informed layperson,” Imagine writing for *The Globe and Mail* or *The New York Times* and their readership. Consult course models in matters of style.
- For this assignment, you are required to use at least two published sources (essays, novels, short stories, poems, and so on, as per 2.2), one scene (2.1), and include a *Beginning* and *Ending* for your essay. Your paper must show *movement* between sources and ample *thought-reflection*. You may include a third source and/or close off your narrative with a second (short) scene that acts as a resolution for your *Journey*.
- Essays of this type do not ordinarily call for a “Works Cited” list; citation is normally done within the text, without parenthetical documentation. For this essay, omit the parenthetical documentation within the text; write in your sources (as per Catalli). But include a “Works Cited” list at the end of your essay.
- Include an *epigraph* that helps illustrate your *Idea* or your solution.
- Bring one copy of your draft to your tutorial on the day your draft is due.
- Please review “Housekeeping” in the Syllabus for formatting requirements. Word or PDF format please!

Please Note:

- You are not locked into a final scene or source until the portfolio is due. You may change your mind about your subject or source at any time. All Portfolio assignments must be completed once and uploaded to eClass.
- Remember the structure of *the Journey* and incorporate it into your work. Do you return and reintegrate (show evidence of growth and new understanding)? Remember, *the Journey* can be physical, spiritual, or both. Show us yours! Don’t forget the *moment of change*!
- Remember, if your *Journey* has not been completed, then this is not a good experience to discuss. Avoid traumatic, personal events, in favour of positive learning experiences. Avoid literally naming your paper “How I Learned to Be Awesome!” but that is the general idea. If you got to University, you are a success story. Tell us about it!
- Overall, your purpose in this paper is to use an example, experience, or moment from your life that illustrates a moment of growth or understanding for you. **Communicate this wisdom** to your audience using your *scene*, sources and *Idea* developed in prior assignments.
 - Take into account all the feedback you have received in order to help you continue to analyze and fine-tune your *Idea/Preferred reading*.
 - In other words, do not ‘tack on,’ **integrate** and develop. Be *recursive*. Your work should show evidence of an ongoing writing process.
- You may not use a newspaper article, blog entry, print or online study guide, or any sort of encyclopaedia to fulfill the “sources” requirement for this assignment. However, if you read

any of these sources in completing your assignment, you still must list them in your works cited, and reference them in-text appropriately.

- **For each pre-assignment that is missing from your final submission (including peer-reviewed drafts), 5% may be deducted from the assessed grade of your final draft. If you turn in nothing but a final copy, 15% will be subtracted from Assignment 2.4 (Final) Your tutorial leader may also choose to apply late grades to incomplete assignments.**
- Your TA may have additional advice for success on this assignment.

Composing Reflection #2

- How did you arrive at your subject? Why did you choose it? If your scene does not make it clear, explain how your paper illustrates a *Journey (Self-reflection)*
- Why did you choose the secondary sources you did? How did they speak to you? (*Thinkers*)
- Was this easier or harder than Portfolio 1? Why? (*Reflection*)
- Has your writing process or how you think about your writing process changed since last term? If so, how? Discuss one specific element of the advice given on the course as applied to your work on this portfolio. (*Process*)
- Your TA will also assess if your work grammatically sound and readable (*Technical Soundness*)
- Your composing reflection is a separate piece of work from your familiar essay. Paragraph form is normal (i.e. 3-4 paragraphs) or you may use subheadings. Take care to answer all the questions!

The Roses Which You Bloom

“Sometimes, the hardest thing to be is the one that lives”

~ Jennifer Lynn Barnes

My first encounter with death, Death did not touch me; yet he did. I had noticed it first in the way he had swiftly traded the slate walls of my English class for a fresh open field, my memories of the blinding fluorescent lights and morning bells blurring into the distant azure horizon. Despite the dusty windows of the bus and my fatigued fifteen-year-old eyes, the scene maintained a surreal sense of pleasantness. The idle prattle of teenagers squeezing through tall and narrow hallways, congested like a highway in a rush, transformed into the screeching of cars speeding beside us as I gazed at them lethargically from afar. Their headlights were sparkling teardrops in the daylight.

The calendar claimed it was November 2016, but at this moment, I was not here. My mind was floating somewhere farther in the past, trying to comprehend this harrowing foreign feeling - “loss.” I closed my eyes as I searched meticulously through memories of my best friend, memories of Grace, attempting to drown out my thoughts of her death. There was a faint and distant ringing from the gently rocking bus as my empty mind was jolted to alertness by the robotic words of “Stop Requested.” Blood rushed to my head, sending a cold shiver down my body. I wished everything would stop; I still needed time to understand. But, however deep the desire, my denial would not change reality.

In truth, I didn’t belong here, not at the cemetery. The adults said I should have been in school, like any other teenager, but Death must have traded Fortune for Grace’s life. I was told it was a fatal accident with both vehicles ending up in flames and,

according to the news, there were “no survivors”. My school had given me time off to grieve, but they did not leave me with any instructions; death has no manual. I was lost, but who teaches about grieving to those who haven’t experienced it? Loss is common; that is undeniably true. I had desperately tried to convince myself of this. Gathering my courage to face reality once again, I nodded at my friend sitting quietly beside me as we hesitantly stepped off the bus. As I shivered in anticipation, the sudden frigid wind cut deep into my heart, leaving a numbing chill over its fresh wounds. Meandering down the unfamiliar path, it felt as though we were entering a foreign world - the intersection of life and death itself.

“Take every moment one step at a time,” the adults had iterated to the point I could feel their cryptic words engraved in my mind. Still, it was our first time visiting her grave and each step felt heavy. The feeling of irony began to settle as we were once again reunited in a place buried with death yet seeming so alive. Much to my chagrin, the lush viridescent greenery and vibrant flowers felt garish, leaving me dispirited and drained. The bitter autumn air brought solace as I felt my cheeks beginning to sting, turning a shade of rose. I never was one to be prepared and still here I was donning a dark, charcoal dress in a child’s clumsy attempt at funeral attire, bearing a dozen vivid sapphire roses. I hadn’t expected to confront the image of my best friend etched eternally in bronze. It read July 13, 2000, to October 10, 2016; a small place was left for flowers. Despite all the time we spent planning to leave the beautiful bouquet, attempting to place them all in this tiny spot would be futile. I could feel my anger rising as tears filled my eyes and, though the problem itself was logically a minor setback, the thought stung like a thorn, leaving me feeling as though our gift was too much. Yet, it wasn’t enough. Flowers could never replace the memories, the times, or her life. Of all the dozen roses, delicate and lovely in their wrappings, it was absurd that

I would have to choose amongst them. In my anger, all I desired was a moment of peace - a place where I could be in control of my situation. I was tired of being poked and prodded with tedious questions and condolences.

The air felt thin, my breathing nothing more than gasps, as my chest began heaving. The pavement darkened as the shadows grew and the clouds turned grey, hiding the sun and my happiness away. I silently searched through my memories again; I needed to find a *reason*. I was mad at what happened, no matter how much I convinced myself that everything has meaning, and I felt disgusted that I couldn't do anything for her. I was resentful at life for continuing without an iota of care, as if the sudden loss which so many people grieved for was insignificant. I was frustrated in a deep and desperate desire to fix this nonsensical denouement. I was bitter that she died. It didn't make sense how there could be life if it all ended in death. I listed the facts: I was at the cemetery, my best friend was involved in a fatal car accident, everyone involved had perished and life just continued. These facts, I had engraved in my mind, yet none seemed to answer why she had to die. Though maddening enough that she was gone, a lone ray of light broke through the darkness.

Death is the shadow of life. By this, humanity constantly struggles to find a deeper meaning to their lives such that once they meet their inevitable end, they can reason their death has a meaningful purpose. Standing at the foot of Grace's grave, I desperately needed to find the meaning, the predesigned purpose that would necessitate her death. The dire search led my mind in circles, like Sisyphus endlessly pushing his rock to the mountain's peak, only for it to roll back to the bottom. Existentialist author Albert Camus, once wrote in his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that

all is well...The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Assuming life is as meaningless and futile as Sisyphus' endeavour to continue pushing the rock, Camus assumes humanity's ability to exist, adapt and accept an empty world is dependent on the satisfaction of the struggle. In this, Sisyphus is the ideal absurd hero; we imagine Sisyphus happy because he accepts that his life is defined by his perseverance. Though I thought I could not feel happiness, especially happiness where some people exist for tragic fates, the act of searching through the memories gave meaning to each of those painful steps. Actions give meaning to the mundane, thus the meaning of death is found in the consequence of our choices.

But I refuse to believe this is happiness. Every question someone asked about the accident was certainly not asked out of happiness, but rather sympathy or pity. Her parents would not be happy with the constant reminder of their now quiet and empty home. The choices a person makes not only impact themselves, but the lives of others around them. Even my decision to go to the cemetery impacted my classmates getting their latest test back. The driver's decisions that day and the decision for Grace's car to be on the same road were interwoven. Dragging my feet along the pavement, grief persisted regardless of time passing and I certainly did not feel happy. Happiness is determined both internally and externally; every action and inaction is interwoven into the universe by our own hands.

If death is inevitable, how could death be an accident? Such an assumption is purely an attempt to find reason in death. Grace's death was an "accident" and accidents rarely have any predetermined meaning. But, "meaning" is not "importance." Leaving the bouquet, I wandered aimlessly along the rows of plaques and gravestones. Despite the time that had passed for everyone here at rest, all showed signs of life. Flowers, like

the sapphire roses for Grace, contrasted the cold copper and silver stones, forming bands of colour. Every person here, living and passed, is a product of their interactions. The grave markers didn't signify the end, but rather their memory; people, maybe family or maybe friends, give death importance. In turn, their lives are given meaning. Remembrance is, in essence, a consequence of sociability, and in remembrance the effect of our actions is love. Grace's memory, now etched in stone, is "Forever in our Hearts."

After death, there is an essence which remains despite the decay of the body, the departed live through remembrance. Before the accident, it was easy for me to imagine that there is life beyond death; I was raised with the notion. I understood it superficially, just as it was taught. Now, however, I finally understood; something remains. Attending Mass with Grace, I recalled a passage that I had only skimmed through before. In 2 Corinthians 4: 16-18, it states:

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Though every day we live brings us closer to our deaths, we are also being renewed in spirit. Thus, death should not discourage us because the impact of the departed has carved into ourselves their essence. Though we can no longer see them, they are alive through us.

In life, there is an aspect which is hidden from the human eye. Whether it is microscopic or intangible, visually it is imperceivable. I could see Grace's

grave marker in front of me just as I saw her casket and just as I could read the articles on the news. But oftentimes our eyes deceive us. I knew she was gone, yet the longer I searched through my memory, the more vivid she became. The sun shined brilliantly and the colours that I had previously found gaudy seemed to dance. Grace's death was sudden, and I couldn't accept that the future we imagined together was suddenly made impossible; accepting her death felt like accepting that life is cruel. I had never seen a future without her.

But life is neither cruel nor kind. It simply is. I had desperately tried to search through my memories only to satisfy that impossibility; the future was holding me back from appreciating our time together. However, in remembrance, there is an unwavering love. Though after time our memories fade, love remains. The essence of life is movement which brings forth changes so suddenly that someone can scarcely anticipate them. Thus, in life's eternal tides, the ebb and flow of fortune both leaves us drowning while also making us new. It leaves something permanent. I couldn't hate and deny that she died since that would be a denial of my love for her. Rather, in accepting the newfound absence in my life, I understood the true depth of her impact on me. Accepting Grace's death, I honoured Grace's life.

It's easy to take life for granted when life seems so incredibly short, and society is never satisfied unless you push yourself the farthest. But to whom are we comparing our lives? What is the standard? Each person has no life but their own, and each moment is worth living. My steps quickened as I ran through the intertwining roads, tears finally pouring freely from my eyes, and I didn't stop until I found myself face-to-face with her final image.

"Thank you," I whispered to her.

“Thank you for coming into my life”

Works Cited

Barnes, Jennifer Lynn. *Bad Blood*. DISNEY PR, 2017.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus, and Other Essays*. Vintage Books, 1959.

2 Corinthians 4: 16-18 NRSV - Bible Gateway, 1989,

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2%2BCorinthians%2B4%3A%2B16-18&version=NRSV>.