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thinking about the self

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Thinking About the Self

Mark Bennion

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We live in a culture that bombards us with information. Whether we are driving down the freeway passing billboards or simply checking our email at the local library, we find that the world wants to tell us what political figure to follow, what car to buy, and perhaps even what meal to cook for dinner tomorrow night. Rarely can we go anywhere without encountering an advertisement or sign that seeks our attention, time, or money. We cannot even attend a high school basketball game anymore without something always happening on the court. Due to the barrage of information, at times we may feel like the guy attempting to drink water from a fire hydrant. It is easy to get knocked over by the abundance of information in our society. This observation is not made to decry our cultural condition, only to note that more often than not we find ourselves surrounded by an impersonal cacophony of voices: memos, coupons, TV ads, cancer statistics, bank statements, etc.; if we wax lazy we can begin to doubt the validity of our own voices because others seem to have already anticipated our wants and needs. In a cultural climate brimming with invitations and enticements it becomes imperative that we do not let our personal reflections go adrift in this proverbial sea of information. Our stories, anecdotes, and thinking still have a valid place in the academic community and the world.

Writing a Self Essay, also known as a personal essay, then, is a chance for us to assert our experience, to show how we have come to better understand the world, to articulate the stories that shape our personal paradigms amidst the deluge of data. Writing about the self allows us to discover what we believe and how we have come to believe it. We share our experiences not so much that others will agree with us, but with the hope that they will at least listen and respect our points of view. We tell stories to call forth our humanity, to bind ourselves to a greater community, to declare that an individual's values and perceptions still matter.

There is no one right way to tell a story. Just as there are many great basketball players who each exhibit different styles of play—consider LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal, and Dirk Nowitzki, for instance—there are a variety of ways to convey a compelling story. This is unfortunate and fortunate. Unfortunate, because we cannot follow a basic formula that will end in success every time. Fortunate, because we do not have a formula that reduces our prose to the prosaic and predictable. There are, however, a variety of writing principles that most personal essayists know when and how to employ. While time and space will not allow for a detailed discussion of all these principles, let us consider carefully the nuances of four elements at the personal essayist's disposal: form, tension, description, and point.

Form

Many writers choose to use a straight-forward, chronological method when rendering an experience. This is the most common way to tell a story. Other authors prefer to plop readers into the middle of an event. These writers seek the audience's immediate attention, without giving them too much time to get their bearings. These essayists know there will be time for bearing gathering later on. Still other storytellers prefer to begin a story employing the chronological mode and then flashback to an earlier time in life. Initially, this past moment may not seem to have anything to do with the initial vignette, yet as the author deftly transitions from past to present, the audience begins to see a connection emerge between the two stories. There are yet a handful of writers who flash-forward in time and space, while others prefer to string multiple anecdotes together. Indeed the methods for telling a story are numerous and far-reaching. As nascent writers we can glean much from assessing each mode and how it presents an experience.

Regardless of the way in which an experience is told, the form of a story should complement the content. We have all probably had the experience of wearing clothes that did not quite fit. As we posed in the mirror wondering about the color of a tie or the fabric of a dress, or perhaps as we witnessed others' reactions to our new pair of pants, we could tell that our outward apparel did not complement our specific body type and personality. Usually, to avoid embarrassment, we change clothes and wear something that better suits our build and mood. Likewise, when it comes to writing we should try to find a form that matches up well with the content. When we pay attention to arranging structure and story, a simple event, say, about mowing the lawn or eating out at TGI Friday's can begin to take on greater significance for an audience.

Tension

To further develop this significance, fine storytellers find ways to explore and maintain narrative tension. This tension often becomes palpable in the essay's opening paragraphs. A good author knows she has only a few moments to pique our interest in her piece. As a result, she will use various strategies to keep us reading. Notice the tension in the opening line from Langston Hughes's essay "Salvation": "I was saved from sin when I was going on 13. But not really saved" (qtd. in McWhorter 122). Immediately, Hughes plants a question or two in our minds. We wonder, "How could he be saved but not actually saved? What does he mean?" This conflict invites us into his world where Hughes continues to explore this contradiction. He does not provide us with immediate answers. He whets our curiosity and keeps us wondering before showing us what he means by not being saved.

Great storytellers push our curiosity from beginning to end, often building up towards a climactic scene, a turning point where the narrator or other characters encounter a change. Occasionally this change is physical. Sometimes this moment shows the narrator stumbling upon ideas that clash with his own predisposed thoughts. The climactic scene can relay an epiphany for the writer, a time when his paradigm shifts to reveal new enlightenment or understanding. Appropriately building up to this point requires that a writer not give away too much information too early in the story. A writer can kill an

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experience early on by saying something like, "This was the worst time of my life." In this way, the author undermines the story's tension by giving it away. As the audience, we know that tragedy is imminent, and its power to upend our own worldview is frustrated. We already know how the story ends.

In our self-writing pursuits, we have other choices that will develop suspense. For instance, the choice to write in the present tense allows an author to provide her audience with greater immediacy. The tension may be higher using the present tense because the experience seems to be happening while the audience reads. This kind of tension can work well to give the reader a vicarious experience. If we want to heighten the drama or energy in a piece, the present tense may be the right vehicle to use. On the other hand, if we want the tension to work in a subtler fashion, the past tense may be an appropriate choice. The decision to this use tense offers the advantage of distance. We can approach the telling with a more objective eye, concentrating on what occurred then and how we feel about the experience now. Writing in the past tense, we have more time to consider the multiple meanings that flow from a story; we also are not bound by the constraints of time, unlike someone writing in the present tense. On the whole, we have time to share with the audience our experience *and* our reflections.

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Description

Perhaps the reflective essayist's most compelling tool is description. Stories thrive off of vivid images and details. Most composition theorists agree that description begins *and* ends with the senses. Sound, sight, touch, taste, and smell are the *sine qua non* to unlocking a reader's imagination.

Our challenge, though, is that we can underestimate the world of the senses. We may wonder, "Who will care whether the carpet in my house is red or blue? Why should I take time to tell others about the Beethoven Sonata that lilts across my living room? Shouldn't I just hop to the point of the essay?" These questions are well worth asking. After all, in the classroom and on the job, when efficiency is privileged above the ornate and specificity is sacrificed in the name of brevity it seems more logical to make a quick case. And yet, whether they admit it or not, readers want to be transported out of their mundane world and into another place, into a space that differs markedly from the trivialities of their daily existence; people want to envision the Alaskan wilderness or downtown Chicago. They don't want to guess about location or people or objects. Carol Burke and Molly Best Tinsley encourage us to reclaim the senses, "Writers have to fight against the tendency of the senses to take the familiar world for granted, and teach them instead to be *un*natural, to risk indulging an obsessive appetite for all the world's details" (27). How do we fight against this tendency and welcome the details? For starters, carrying a notebook and pencil around can help us to capture our memories and observations. This strategy can be especially helpful whether we are taking our first trip to Hawaii or changing the oil in the car for the 25th time.

We can also write down the speech rhythms of those we know and love best. When an author shows two people speaking to each other, the reader immediately catapults into the experience and eavesdrops on the scene without feeling guilty. We learn much from an individual by the way he speaks. We can tell if someone is giddy, scared, or understanding. Usually, we can also infer that person's level of education and wisdom. Dialogue creates authenticity. It collapses the distance between the reader's imagination and the writer's experience.

Another strategy for developing our power of description is to simply name people, places, and things. Instead of noting, "My wife and I went out to eat," I may choose to add some details that will make the sentence clearer for my audience. For instance, "My wife, Kristine, and I dined on apple sauce cake at Gary's Good Eats." While my audience may not know this restaurant, they will at least start to envision a scene. They will begin to care because I have taken the time to name my wife, the dessert, and the restaurant. This choice to name specific locales and people is not earth shattering, yet over the course of an essay it grounds the audience in a place where their imaginations can freely wander.

We can further indulge the senses by taking our descriptive cues from children. Unlike children we adults tend to live in the world of abstraction. We grow accustomed to reducing our feelings to summaries and blanket statements. "How are you?" someone asks, and nine times out of ten we say, "Fine," "Good," or "Well." When we ask a four-year-old the same question, more often than not we hear about something like his game of hide-n-seek in the backyard. We get an earful about how he ran through the sprinklers and wolfed down snicker doodles next to the shed. In the middle of telling us about his day, we easily infer that it was grand, lousy, or boring. Children cause us to stop and pay attention. They mesmerize us one moment and frighten us the next because they live in the world of the senses. The same holds true when we incorporate these sensory elements in our writing. Readers start concentrating, paying attention, and wanting to know more about our experiences. Why should we mention the carpet's color and the volume of the Beethoven Sonata? Because we will usher our audience back into their childhood, back into the world of their senses.

Moreover, description gives our prose verve. And most importantly, it transfers that energy to the reader. Many students ask, "How can I help my reader to *feel* my experience?" These students lament when their classmates barely shrug their shoulders at the rendering of a personal story. C.S. Lewis claims we can fix this problem if we are willing to rely more on concrete images than on abstract explanations. He declares,

> This, which is eminently true of poetry, is true of all imaginative writing. One of the first things we have to say to a beginner who has brought us this manuscript is, "Avoid all epithets which are merely emotional. It is no use telling us that something was 'mysterious' or 'loathsome' or 'Awe-inspiring' or 'voluptuous.' Do you think your readers will believe you just because you say so? You must go quite a different way to work. By direct description, by metaphor and simile, by secretly evoking power associations, by offering the right stimuli to our nerves (in the right degree and in the right order), and by the very beat and vowel melody and length and brevity of your sentences, you

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> must bring it about that we, we readers, not you, exclaim 'how mysterious' or 'how loathsome' or whatever it is. Let me taste for myself, and you'll have no need to tell me how I should react to the flavor." (317-18)

The implication of Lewis' comment is that we have to watch out for our abstractions. It is not enough for us to directly name feelings or emotional states of being, such as, "I was so nervous when speaking with Kristine." This statement does little to put the audience in my shoes. Instead, I need to show that nervousness by saying, "As I rattled the keys in my pocket I asked, "Kristine, would you, would . . . you like to, maybe, uh, read . . . some poetry together?" This indirect view, this description of nervousness—instead of directly naming it—gets the audience into the narrator's shoes. As our writing incorporates imagery, dialogue, and details, we will help our audience to *feel* our laughter, tears, or joy.

Point

Of course all of the aforementioned elements should work together to answer the questions, "So what? How does this story relate to a larger audience and why should they care?" If these questions go unanswered, then the story usually will not contain any communal relevance. To be effective, a Self essay relays a point that makes a connection with a larger audience. Professor Bruce Ballenger relates, "Like a picture, a good personal essay tells the truth, or it tells *a* truth about the writer/subject" (92).

When it comes to expressing a theme, a writer has a few options available. The vast majority of personal experience essays transmit an implied theme. In this case, the writer seeks to show us the point rather than simply tell us about it. According to Mormon poet Emma Lou Thayne, the assumption for a well wrought self essay is much like that of a joke. "A joke isn't any good if the person telling it has to explain the point." By paying close attention to form, tension, and description, the author will show loyalty instead of saying, "I learned to be more loyal." When the writer deftly relates a theme, she avoids editorializing or moralizing. The sensitive author trusts her audience. She also knows that sharing an experience is not a forum for preaching. No matter how passionate she is about becoming politically involved, her story will show us that message. She will not turn to the audience and state, "You all need to get out there and vote." As readers, we feel empowered and respected when the author allows us to infer a point.

And yet it would be unfair to say that all personal essays rely on an implied thesis. There are well crafted self essays that use an explicit thesis too. In the initial stages of writing, some storytellers may have three or four points that are struggling to win out. In these situations, a thesis statement can sometimes help a writer clarify the direction of the essay. Providing some background information about an unknown subject, much like George Orwell does in his essay "Shooting an Elephant," can help set up a thesis that is unusual.

Regardless of the tack used to express a point, a good writer walks the difficult line between being too heavy handed and too obscure. If the moral of the story is expressly stated, the audience will feel robbed of the opportunity to draw the conclusion on their own. If by the story's end the point remains unclear, the audience will walk away in frustration, thinking they have better things to do than to read a garbled essay.

Finally a writer understands that his point will move beyond the usual or clichéd. The temptation can exist to write about winning the big playoff football game or overcoming great odds to land a leading role in the school's production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. Now, please don't misunderstand. These stories may have great significance for us, and my intention is not to undermine anyone's experience. These experiences also may be great to write about. Unfortunately, the Rocky story, the story of overcoming is so pervasive that it can be easy to predict the end just as the story begins. Therefore, if we desire to tell a story that is familiar and common, a good way to approach the experience is to find an element or idea that takes the story one step beyond the hackneyed. For example, a student writes about his final high school football game where his team wins the state championship (sounds familiar, doesn't it?). Yet, rather than experiencing elation at winning the game, he feels frustrated that he did not get to play. The essay's theme then works in a new direction. Instead of showing us Rocky once again down on his luck and overcoming impossible odds, the author depicts the narrator working through the struggle of two powerful emotions. We start feeling sympathy for the narrator and perhaps even think of those times when we experienced a similar dilemma. In short, the theme becomes unexpected and surprising, helping the audience think about life in a new way.

Questions & Implications

The student and professional essays that follow model well the aforementioned ideas. As we read these essays let us consider carefully the following questions:

1. How does each author use form to present the story in an engaging manner?
2. What kinds of tension does the writer include to maintain audience interest throughout the essay?
3. Where does the tension ebb and flow?
4. How does the writer develop the climactic scene?
5. How does the writer appeal to the senses? Where is the essay concrete?
6. How does the writer effectively use dialogue? If the writer chooses not to use dialogue, why do you think this is the case?
7. How does the essay's point contain communal relevance?
8. Is the theme directly stated or implied? Why do you think the author chose to communicate the point in this way?

We have touched here briefly on a few important elements in the personal essay. To be sure there are other principles to gather in studying the works that follow, bantering around ideas with classmates and colleagues, and sitting down to scrawl out those stories

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that contain significant personal meaning. We can be sure that even as we try to make sense of our experiences that impersonal information will continue to fly towards us with ever increasing speed. This onslaught will not deter the persistent writer from sharing her stories. Her voice and her experiences are her own and she does not fear them. And eventually when she runs up against the question, "Why write personal essays?" she will look at the questioner with firm, yet compassionate eyes, and respond in the words of Stephen Dunn, "Because finally the personal / is all that matters" (1-2).

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Essence of Life

Emily Homan

STUDENT ESSAY

My eyes cower away from the bright lights as my body is slowly being dragged out of a narrow tube. I lay supine and still on a narrow table, the sounds of the machine I lie under play a monotonous tune of clanging and clicking and banging. The doctor comes in,

"All right Miss Holman, you're finished, you may schedule next month's MRI on your way out. Good evening."

I grimace as I roll my stiff body off a table that is as about as comfortable as a diving board. I wrap my hospital gown tighter around me and shuffle out the door. In my mind I am imagining the same phone call that I've heard at least half a dozen times already. "*Good news, there is no sign of recurrence, don't forget your next appointment!*" A voice would ring out over the phone. This time shouldn't be any different.

The first chapter in my life as a thirteen year old was my diagnosis of cancer. The doctors classified it as a Sanovial Cell sarcoma. The tumor was the size of a tennis ball and it was projecting from my right calf muscle. It was a rare form of cancer that had a tendency of developing within one of the extremities and then quickly traveling to the lungs. That luckily was not the case for me. X-rays showed that a significant amount was embedded in the gastroicnemius, to get clean margins they had to remove a fair amount of the muscle along with the tumor. The beginning of my eighth grade year was spent at the San Diego Hospital recovering from surgeries and undergoing radiation treatments. The treatments alone took me out of school for at least three months. It was an hour and a half trip to the hospital and back for a fifteen-minute treatment. The exhaustion I felt from the radiation, however, was like I'd been running a marathon and would never see the end of it. It was amazing to me how a force I couldn't even see, hear or touch, could cause sores to open on my skin and bleed freely. After my treatments, I had one last minor surgery to remove a portocath, or permanent IV, from my chest and then I was free to return to school. All I had to do now was show up for an MRI every month.

"Mom, it's been ten months, and there haven't been any signs," I noted, tipping my chair back to examine a spot on the ceiling, "*Here we go again!*" I thought to myself.

"I know, I just don't think you should push yourself, that's all," my mother said with a sigh.

"Well pole vaulting is kind of all about pushing yourself! Over a bar, that is!" I did my best to suppress the frustration that was beginning to boil up inside of me.

"Emily, I know ten months seems like a long time, but I really believe that it would be safer if..."

"Mom! I'm fine! Please stop treating me like I'm made of lace! I really can't stand to just be sitting around here anymore! I've got to *do* something!" The aggravation finally exploded from me with a force that was unfamiliar, and alien-like. I stormed up to my room, hot tears streaming down my cheeks. I don't know how much longer I could take all of this coddling! I was literally suffocating from the borders that my mother was building up around me. My battle with cancer was far behind now! Why can't she see that? I threw myself onto my bed, my head still racing with spiteful thoughts when I heard a knock at the door.

"Leave me alone!" I cried, "I don't want to talk to you anymore!"

I could here the door creaking behind me and a small voice say, "Emily dear I only meant..." I never heard the end of her sentence; I had stuffed a pillow over my ears plainly indicating that I did not want to hear another word. After a silent moment I finally heard the soft click of the lock.

As I sat there in my own tortured little world, thoughts of penitence slowly found their way through the mists. I knew that was no way to treat my mother. I know better, what is happening to me? A chill ran through my body that had nothing to do with the perfect 74-degree weather. I reached down and grabbed the quilt that was folded neatly at the end of my bed. The colors canary yellow, sky blue and ruby red looked so warm and inviting. I ran my fingers along the patchwork, marveling at the hand-stitched detail. My hand subconsciously stops on a plain white patch of fabric with the words "*All of my love!- Mom"* written on it. My vision starts to blur as I trace with my finger all the other names on the quilt: "*Claire-bear, Sara Marie, Camille, Greta, Mahana...*" I turned back one of the corners with trembling fingers, it read, "*So you'll be forever wrapped in our love, Emily, we love you! – Your YW Leaders."* I curled up in a ball, no longer being able to hold it back; I surrendered myself to the sobs.

Like a cold, unfeeling rock I sat there watching her tears flow wondering when the last time she had ever cried for herself.

I sit cross-legged at my mother's feet, gazing up at her; the silence so heavy I felt that moving, even just from breathing, would only add to its intensity.

"What is it Mommy?" I ask. She had called me downstairs to her bedroom, the one room in the house where you go to "talk." I gaze at her solemn outline as she holds her face in her hands.

"I just got off the phone with your doctor," she says, as she slides her hands down her face and clasps them tightly together in front of her. "They seem to have found something on your last MRI, a white spot much like the one before. Emily, they think the cancer may be recurring." At that, she doubled over and began to cry as I just sat there, speechless, watching my mother. Like a cold, unfeeling rock I sat there watching her tears flow wondering when the last time she had ever cried for herself. I've seen my mother cry lots of times, but never really knowing until that moment, why she did. My eyes remained strained on my mother as I watched her shed tears for her insensitive daughter. My mind

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was racing as I fought to find something I could say to relieve even a fraction of the pain she was feeling.

"It's going to be okay Mommy," was all I had.

We walked out of the exam room, the relief spread wide across our faces. The doctor had just informed us that the PET scan showed "no sign of cancerous cells, it was all just a misunderstanding." As we walked out to our car, I couldn't help but stare at my mother's face. She had the face of relief, like I had, but I could see that she was feeling so much more. Under the surface were emotions she was feeling that I knew my selfish being could never possess right now. A mother's love for her children, so powerful, so contagious, so unselfish. I do believe that love is the reason for my existence today; the power of love and humility has saved my life in more ways than one. My mother was suddenly conscious of my stare; she smiled, and then reached down to hold my hand in hers. I held it tightly, making a silent vow to myself never to let go.

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STUDENT ESSAY

Stronger Bonds

Joe Anderson

The crowd was so overbearing in a way that made me feel like a child that wanted nothing more than the attention of the world. My heart beat madly. I felt like my screams could not adequately portray the excitement I felt in times like this, especially when the crowd applauded like they did, laughed like they did, and danced in their various ways like they were today. I turned to my left with my guitar hanging on my side, holding the microphone in my hands. I turned to see Ray and Wade holding their horns while looking at me anxiously, waiting for me to play the first note of the next song. I turned the other way to look at Josh, jumping and running in his intoxicating way with his bass guitar hanging low to the ground. I continued turning. With my back to the crowd I closed my eyes, trying to stop the tears that were coagulating. I opened them with a smile that broadened across my face just to see my little brother sitting at the drum set. That is my brother, mine. I smiled and strummed the chord thoughtfully, almost as if I were the only one listening.

Music had been a building factor in my life ever since my mother bought me an electric guitar for Christmas, my freshman year. I remember that I had no clue as to what lay ahead of me that bitter-cold morning. Money was a burden on my family, so I expected nothing more at the end of the day than to be happy with whatever I got. The first gift handed to me by my stepfather was a book on how to play the guitar. I thought happily to myself that my mother was going to teach me to play. Patiently, I waited as gifts were handed out to my brothers, excited to see their surprise at what I had thoughtfully picked out for them this year. Eventually it was my turn again, this time it was a speaker inside a black box with lots of knobs on it for volume. Man, my parents were great for getting me parts for my stereo. The next item handed to me was a large flat box. I guessed it was a sled, or some sort of object that I could enjoy the weather more thorough with. I was wrong. It was black with a white pick guard. I could tell it was used, but that did not matter to me. It was an electric guitar, and that made everything perfect. That stereo speaker that I had been handed a few minutes before, was not for a stereo, but for the instrument that I held in my hands. Over the next few moments I had to think about the very act of breathing. I ran off to another room and started to learn how to play my newly acquired guitar that very moment. I begged my mother to show me everything she knew in the day that loomed ahead. I practiced hour upon hour every day. My time was consumed with the thought of what song I could learn next. My thirst overwhelmed me. I surpassed the playing skills of friends that had been playing for years in a few months. By the end of freshman year I had replaced the guitarist in the high school jazz band. Music was my thought, my voice, my weapon, and my heart. Music made me an individual in my family, and I like that.

My younger brother Daniel and I were always close. When he decided to move in with my father and I, my mind raced with the endless possibilities of havoc we could wreck on the small community of St. Anthony, Idaho. Eagerly, I introduced him to my group of friends. To my relief they welcomed him with open arms. I drug him around to the various concerts that the band I was in performed. I had him critique our practices, trusting his judgment of our music, pleased with what he had to say. I pulled him so far into my own world that he actually invaded it.

We had one class together in high school, band. I was happy to share a class with my own brother, but not my individuality, my music. Dan started out playing basic percussion. He would ask for my help on rhythms and beats at first, but soon found my disregard for his playing a troubling issue. He eventually turned to my drummer, Steve, for assistance. Steve readily gave him advice, helping Dan progress faster than I wanted. I soon found myself spending more time than usual on my guitar and less time with my friends. Friends I felt betrayed by in course of their willingness to help Dan. I could not complain; I helped him do this in the first place.

The constant rhythm of Dan's playing was getting me nerve racking. I felt as if the beats were being pounded into my head with the very sticks he was using to play with on the drum-set he had borrowed from Steve. The inconsistency of his playing was irritable beyond repute. Frustrated by his mistakes more so than he was, I opened the door to his room and quietly snatched the drumsticks from him. He stood to confront me. I asked him to move out of my way. Confusion overwhelmed his countenance as he realized that I was there to help. I sat down behind the drum-set, moving things into positions I was comfortable with. I then started to explain, with irritation smothering my words, what he was doing and what he was trying to do. He learned quickly, to my dismay. A few months later I taught him all I could. He reminded me of myself just a few years before, the annoyance of my friends had with me when I had learned in five minutes what had taken them days or even weeks. My little brother had the same thirst I gained. The thirst I have yet to quench.

I felt as if the beats were being pounded into my head with the very sticks he was using to play with on the drum-set he had borrowed from Steve.

When I could teach him no more, I would take CD's that I listened to with rhythms that were fairly complicated. I would tell him that he could not play them, fully aware of the fact that he would despise me for saying so and try all day long to prove me wrong. It was a game I had to play. It would make him better, but make him hate me and hopefully music at the same time.

One day Steve called and said that he did not want to play in the band anymore. I had no drummer and my little brother was the only one that I could use to replace what I had lost. Perturbed at the thought of having to use someone with little or no experience in performing, I asked him to "stand in" one day at practice. I was aware that Steve would not show up that day. I knew this and I also knew that I could tell Daniel whatever I wanted, in any tone I felt necessary and he would do exactly what I

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wanted. I liked this. Daniel excelled faster than he had before with the experience of live performance behind him. I thought about him playing with me a lot. I also thought about his abilities and how they had rocketed in just a short time. I felt closer to him. I was glad that I had chose to have him as my drummer before someone else had.

My thoughts of the past abruptly ended and I stopped playing. "That is my brother, behind the drum-set." I announced to the crowd before me.

"That is my brother," holding back the tears of happiness. "Mine—and mine forever." I paused before the next words, knowing that I may not be able to hold back the tears that were coming so quickly.

"I love that kid!" I shouted.

The crowd went wild at such a display of affection. I continued on into the next song. The last song we would play together for what could be three or more years. I was heading on a mission in the next few days, and Daniel was planning on doing the same in the next year. He arrives home in September of this year. I have a drummer now—and he is good—but times change. I may have need for one soon, such as in September.

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Of My Friend Hector And My Achilles Heel

Michael T. Kaufman

Michael T. Kaufman, a reporter for The New York Times*, has over 40 years' experience as a foreign correspondent, columnist, and editor. This essay about his personal prejudice was first published in 1992.*

This story is about prejudice and stupidity. My own.

It begins in 1945 when I was a 7-year-old living on the fifth floor of a tenement walkup on 107th Street between Columbus and Manhattan Avenues in New York City. The block was almost entirely Irish and Italian, and I believe my family was the only Jewish one around.

One day a Spanish-speaking family moved into one of the four apartments on our landing. They were the first Puerto Ricans I had met. They had a son who was about my age named Hector, and the two of us became friends. We played with toy soldiers and I particularly remember how, using rubber bands and wood from orange crates, we made toy pistols that shot off little squares we cut from old linoleum.

We visited each other's home and I know that at the time I liked Hector and I think he liked me. I may even have eaten my first avocado at his house.

About a year after we met, my family moved to another part of Manhattan's West Side and I did not see Hector again until I entered Booker T. Washington Junior High School as an 11-year-old. The Special Class

The class I was in was called 7SP-1; the SP was for special. Earlier, I recall, I had been in the IGC class, for "intellectually gifted children." The SP class was to complete the seventh, eighth and ninth grades in two years and almost all of us would then go to schools like Bronx Science, Stuyvesant or Music and Art, where admission was based on competitive exams. I knew I was in the SP class and the IGC class. I guess I also knew that other people were not.

Hector was not. He was in some other class, maybe even 7-2, the class that was held to be the next-brightest, or maybe 7-8. I remember I was happy to see him whenever we would meet, and sometimes we played punchball during lunch period. Mostly, of course, I stayed with my own classmates, with other Intellectually Gifted Children.

Sometimes children from other classes, those presumably not so intellectually gifted, would tease and taunt us. At such times I was particularly proud to have Hector as a friend. I assumed that he was tougher than I and my classmates and I guess I thought that if necessary he would come to my defense. Different High Schools

For high school, I went uptown to Bronx Science. Hector, I think, went downtown to Commerce. Sometimes I would see him in Riverside Park, where I played basketball and he worked out on the parallel bars. We would acknowledge each other, but by this time the conversations we held were perfunctory -- sports, families, weather.

After I finished college, I would see him around the neighborhood pushing a baby carriage. He was the first of my contemporaries to marry and to have a child.

A few years later, in the 60's, married and with children of my own, I was once more living on the West Side, working until late at night as a reporter. Some nights as I took the train home I would see Hector in the car. A few times we exchanged nods, but more often I would pretend that I didn't see him, and maybe he also pretended he didn't see me. Usually he would be wearing a knitted watch cap, and from that I deduced that he was probably working on the docks as a longshoreman.

I remember quite distinctly how I would sit on the train and think about how strange and unfair fate had been with regard to the two of us who had once been playmates. Just because I had become an intellectually gifted adult or whatever and he had become a longshoreman or whatever, was that any reason for us to have been left with nothing to say to each other? I thought it was wrong and unfair, but I also thought that conversation would be a chore or a burden. That is pretty much what I thought about Hector, if I thought about him at all, until one Sunday in the mid-70's, when I read in the drama section of this newspaper that my childhood friend, Hector Elizondo, was replacing Peter Falk in the leading role in "The Prisoner of Second Avenue."

Since then, every time I have seen this versatile and acclaimed actor in movies or on television I have blushed for my assumptions. I have replayed the subway rides in my head and tried to fathom why my thoughts had led me where they did.

In retrospect it seems far more logical that the man I saw on the train, the man who had been my friend as a boy, was coming home from an Off Broadway theater or perhaps from a job as a waiter while taking acting classes. So why did I think he was a longshoreman? Was it just the cap? Could it be that his being Puerto Rican had something to do with it? Maybe that reinforced the stereotype I concocted, but it wasn't the root of it. When It Got Started

No, the foundation was laid when I was 11, when I was in 7SP-1 and he was not, when I was in the IGC class and he was not.

I have not seen him since I recognized how I had idiotically kept tracking him for years and decades after the school system had tracked both of us. I wonder now if my experience was that unusual, whether social categories conveyed and absorbed before puberty do not generally tend to linger beyond middle age. And I wonder, too, that if they affected the behavior of someone like myself who had been placed on the upper track, how much more damaging it must have been for someone consigned to the lower.

I have at times thought of calling him, but kept from doing it because how exactly does one apologize for thoughts that were never expressed? And there was still the problem of what to say. "What have you been up to for the last 40 years?" Or "Wow, was I wrong about you!" Or maybe just, "Want to come over and help me make a linoleum gun?"

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Shooting an Elephant

George Orwell

George Orwell (1903–1950) is one of Britain's most acclaimed political thinkers. His literary reputation rests on Animal Farm *(1945) and* 1984 *(1949), novels that explore the practices of totalitarian governments. "Shooting an Elephant" relates Orwell's experience as an English officer in 1930s Burma when such colonies resented the intrusion of British imperialists.*

In Moulmein, in lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me. I was sub-divisional police officer of the town, and in an aimless, petty kind of way anti-European feeling was very bitter. No one had the guts to raise a riot, but if a European woman went through the bazaars alone somebody would probably spit betel juice over her dress. As a police officer I was an obvious target and was baited whenever it seemed safe to do so. When a nimble Burman tripped me up on the football field and the referee (another Burman) looked the other way, the crowd yelled with hideous laughter. This happened more than once. In the end the sneering yellow faces of young men that met me everywhere, the insults hooted after me when I was at a safe distance, got badly on my nerves. The young Buddhist priests were the worst of all. There were several thousands of them in the town and none of them seemed to have anything to do except stand on street corners and jeer at Europeans.

All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the better. Theoretically – and secretly, of course – I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British. As for the job I was doing, I hated it more bitterly than I can perhaps make clear. In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters. The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been Bogged with bamboos – all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt. But I could get nothing into perspective. I was young and ill-educated and I had had to think out my problems in the utter silence that is imposed on every Englishman in the East. I did not even know that the British Empire is dying, still less did I know that it is a great deal better than the younger empires that are going to supplant it. All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible. With one part of my mind I thought of the British Raj as an unbreakable tyranny, as something clamped down, in saecula saeculorum, upon the will of prostrate peoples; with another part I thought that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts. Feelings like these are the normal by-products of imperialism; ask any Anglo-Indian official, if you can catch him off duty.

One day something happened which in a roundabout way was enlightening. It was a tiny incident in itself, but it gave me a better glimpse than I had had before of the real nature of imperialism – the real motives for which despotic governments act. Early one

morning the sub-inspector at a police station the other end of the town rang me up on the phone and said that an elephant was ravaging the bazaar. Would I please come and do something about it? I did not know what I could do, but I wanted to see what was happening and I got on to a pony and started out. I took my rifle, an old 44 Winchester and much too small to kill an elephant, but I thought the noise might be useful in terrorem. Various Burmans stopped me on the way and told me about the elephant's doings. It was not, of course, a wild elephant, but a tame one which had gone "must." It had been chained up, as tame elephants always are when their attack of "must" is due, but on the previous night it had broken its chain and escaped. Its mahout, the only person who could manage it when it was in that state, had set out in pursuit, but had taken the wrong direction and was now twelve hours' journey away, and in the morning the elephant had suddenly reappeared in the town. The Burmese population had no weapons and were quite helpless against it. It had already destroyed somebody's bamboo hut, killed a cow and raided some fruit-stalls and devoured the stock; also it had met the municipal rubbish van and, when the driver jumped out and took to his heels, had turned the van over and inflicted violences upon it.

The Burmese sub-inspector and some Indian constables were waiting for me in the quarter where the elephant had been seen. It was a very poor quarter, a labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts, thatched with palmleaf, winding all over a steep hillside. I remember that it was a cloudy, stuffy morning at the beginning of the rains. We began questioning the people as to where the elephant had gone and, as usual, failed to get any definite information. That is invariably the case in the East; a story always sounds clear enough at a distance, but the nearer you get to the scene of events the vaguer it becomes. Some of the people said that the elephant had gone in one direction, some said that he had gone in another, some professed not even to have heard of any elephant. I had almost made up my mind that the whole story was a pack of lies, when we heard yells a little distance away. There was a loud, scandalized cry of "Go away, child! Go away this instant!" and an old woman with a switch in her hand came round the corner of a hut, violently shooing away a crowd of naked children. Some more women followed, clicking their tongues and exclaiming; evidently there was something that the children ought not to have seen. I rounded the hut and saw a man's dead body sprawling in the mud. He was an Indian, a black Dravidian coolie, almost naked, and he could not have been dead many minutes. The people said that the elephant had come suddenly upon him round the corner of the hut, caught him with its trunk, put its foot on his back and ground him into the earth. This was the rainy season and the ground was soft, and his face had scored a trench a foot deep and a couple of yards long. He was lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.) The friction of the great beast's foot had stripped the skin from his back as neatly as one skins a rabbit. As soon as I saw the dead man I sent an orderly to a friend's house nearby to borrow an elephant rifle. I had already sent back the pony, not wanting it to go mad with fright and throw me if it smelt the elephant.

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The orderly came back in a few minutes with a rifle and five cartridges, and meanwhile some Burmans had arrived and told us that the elephant was in the paddy fields below, only a few hundred yards away. As I started forward practically the whole population of the quarter flocked out of the houses and followed me. They had seen the rifle and were all shouting excitedly that I was going to shoot the elephant. They had not shown much interest in the elephant when he was merely ravaging their homes, but it was different now that he was going to be shot. It was a bit of fun to them, as it would be to an English crowd; besides they wanted the meat. It made me vaguely uneasy. I had no intention of shooting the elephant – I had merely sent for the rifle to defend myself if necessary – and it is always unnerving to have a crowd following you. I marched down the hill, looking and feeling a fool, with the rifle over my shoulder and an ever-growing army of people jostling at my heels. At the bottom, when you got away from the huts, there was a metalled road and beyond that a miry waste of paddy fields a thousand yards across, not yet ploughed but soggy from the first rains and dotted with coarse grass. The elephant was standing eight yards from the road, his left side towards us. He took not the slightest notice of the crowd's approach. He was tearing up bunches of grass, beating them against his knees to clean them and stuffing them into his mouth.

I had halted on the road. As soon as I saw the elephant I knew with perfect certainty that I ought not to shoot him. It is a serious matter to shoot a working elephant – it is comparable to destroying a huge and costly piece of machinery – and obviously one ought not to do it if it can possibly be avoided. And at that distance, peacefully eating, the elephant looked no more dangerous than a cow. I thought then and I think now that his attack of "must" was already passing off; in which case he would merely wander harmlessly about until the mahout came back and caught him. Moreover, I did not in the least want to shoot him. I decided that I would watch him for a little while to make sure that he did not turn savage again, and then go home.

They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching.

But at that moment I glanced round at the crowd that had followed me. It was an immense crowd, two thousand at the least and growing every minute. It blocked the road for a long distance on either side. I looked at the sea of yellow faces above the garish clothes-faces all happy and excited over this bit of fun, all certain that the elephant was going to be shot. They were watching me as they would watch a conjurer about to perform a trick. They did not like me, but with the magical rifle in my hands I was momentarily worth watching. And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd – seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He

becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the "natives," and so in every crisis he has got to do what the "natives" expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people marching at my heels, and then to trail feebly away, having done nothing – no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

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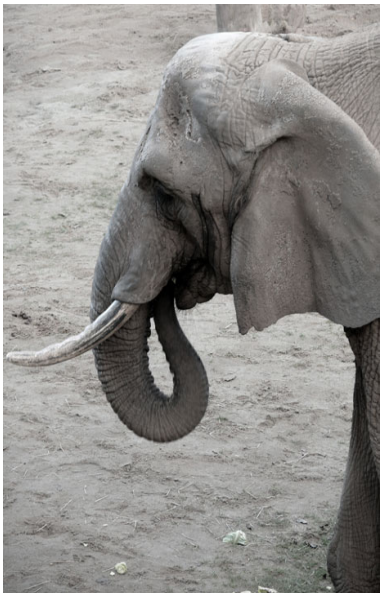
But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him. At that age I was not squeamish about killing animals, but I had never shot an elephant and never wanted to. (Somehow it always seems worse to kill a large animal.) Besides, there was the beast's owner to be considered. Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly. But I had got to act quickly. I turned to some experienced-looking Burmans who had been there when we arrived, and asked them how the elephant had been behaving. They all said the same thing: he took no notice of you if you left him alone, but he might charge if you went too close to him.



It was perfectly clear to me what I ought to do. I ought to walk up to within, say, twenty-five yards of the elephant and test his behavior. If he charged, I could shoot; if he took no notice of me, it would be safe to leave him until the mahout came back. But also I knew that I was going to do no such thing. I was a poor shot with a rifle and the ground was soft mud into which one would sink at every step. If the elephant charged and I missed him, I should have about as much chance as a toad under a steam-roller. But even then I was not thinking particularly of my own skin, only of the watchful yellow faces behind. For at that moment, with the crowd watching me, I was not afraid in the ordinary sense, as I would have been if I had been alone. A white man mustn't be frightened in front of "natives"; and so, in general, he isn't frightened. The sole thought in my mind was that if anything went wrong those two thousand Burmans would see me pursued, caught, trampled on and reduced to a grinning corpse like that Indian up the hill. And if that happened it was quite probable that some of them would laugh. That would never do.

There was only one alternative. I shoved the cartridges into the magazine and lay down on the road to get a better aim. The crowd grew very still, and a deep, low, happy sigh, as of people who see the theatre curtain go up at last, breathed from innumerable throats. They were going to have their bit of fun after all. The rifle was a beautiful German thing with cross-hair sights. I did not then know that in shooting an elephant one would shoot to cut an imaginary bar running from ear-hole to ear-hole. I ought, therefore, as the elephant was

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sideways on, to have aimed straight at his ear-hole, actually I aimed several inches in front of this, thinking the brain would be further forward.

When I pulled the trigger I did not hear the bang or feel the kick – one never does when a shot goes home – but I heard the devilish roar of glee that went up from the crowd. In that instant, in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old, as though the frightful impact of the bullet had paralysed him without knocking him down. At last, after what seemed a long time – it might have been five seconds, I dare say – he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered. An enormous senility seemed to have settled upon him. One could have imagined him thousands of years old. I fired again into the same spot. At the second shot he did not collapse but climbed with desperate slowness to his feet and stood weakly upright, with legs sagging and head drooping. I fired a third time. That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skyward like a tree. He trumpeted, for the first and only time. And then down he came, his belly towards me, with a crash that seemed to shake the ground even where I lay.

It seemed dreadful to see the great beast Lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him.

I got up. The Burmans were already racing past me across the mud. It was obvious that the elephant would never rise again, but he was not dead. He was breathing very rhythmically with long rattling gasps, his great mound of a side painfully rising and falling. His mouth was wide open – I could see far down into caverns of pale pink throat. I waited a long time for him to die, but his breathing did not weaken. Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me where not even a bullet could damage him further. I felt that I had got to put an end to that dreadful noise. It seemed dreadful to see the great beast Lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die, and not even to be able to finish him. I sent back for my small rifle and poured shot after shot into his heart and down his throat. They seemed to make no impression. The tortured gasps continued as steadily as the ticking of a clock.

In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away. I heard later that it took him half an hour to die. Burmans were bringing dash and baskets even before I left, and I was told they had stripped his body almost to the bones by the afternoon.

Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad

dog, if its owner fails to control it. Among the Europeans opinion was divided. The older men said I was right, the younger men said it was a damn shame to shoot an elephant for killing a coolie, because an elephant was worth more than any damn Coringhee coolie. And afterwards I was very glad that the coolie had been killed; it put me legally in the right and it gave me a sufficient pretext for shooting the elephant. I often wondered whether any of the others grasped that I had done it solely to avoid looking a fool.

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Learning to See

Samuel Scudder

Regarded as a pioneer biologist of his day, Samuel Scudder (1837–1911) was a student of the renowned scientist Louis Agassiz (1807–1873). "Learning to See," published in 1874, recounts Scudder's first encounter with Agassiz, a teacher who compelled his students to organize disparate facts into meaningful patterns.

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the Scientific School as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and, finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that, while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

"When do you wish to begin?" he asked.

"Now," I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic Very well!" he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

"Take this fish," said he, "and look at it; we call it a haemulon; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, but in a moment returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me.

"No man is fit to be a naturalist," said he, "who does not know how to take care of specimens."

I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray, and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were not the days of ground-glass stoppers and elegantly shaped exhibition jars; all the old students will recall the huge neckless glass bottles with their leaky, wax-besmeared corks, half eaten by insects, and begrimed with cellar dust. Entomology was a cleaner science than ichthyology, but the example of the Professor, who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish, was infectious; and though this alcohol had a "very ancient and fishlike smell,"' I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts, and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water. Still I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist. My friends at home, too, were annoyed when they discovered that no amount of eau-de-Cologne would drown the perfume which haunted me like a shadow.

In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the Professor—who had, however, left the Museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate the beast from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but to return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed—an hour—another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over

and around; looked it in the face—ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarters' view—just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so, with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the Museum, but had gone, and would not return for several hours. My fellow-students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying-glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my finger down its throat to feel how sharp the teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows, until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me—I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the Professor returned.

"That is right," said he; "a pencil is one of the best of eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet, and your bottle corked."

With these encouraging words, he added:

"Well, what is it like?"

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me: the fringed gill-arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fins and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment:

"You have not looked very carefully; why," he continued more earnestly, "you haven't even seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself; look again, look again!" and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the Professor's criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly; and when, toward its close, the Professor inquired:

"Do you see it yet?'

"No," I replied, "I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before."

"That is next best," said he, earnestly, "but I won't hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish."

This was disconcerting. Not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be; but also, without reviewing my discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the Professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

"Do you perhaps mean," I asked, "that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?"

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His thoroughly pleased "Of course! of course!" repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically—as he always did—upon the importance of this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

"Oh, look at your fish!" he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned, and heard my new catalogue.

"That is good, that is good!" he repeated; "but that is not all; go on"; and so for three long days he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid. "Look, look, look," was his repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had—a lesson whose influence has extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the Professor has left to me, as he has left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part.

"Facts are stupid things," he would say, "until brought into connection with some general law."

A year afterward, some of us were amusing ourselves with chalking outlandish beasts on the Museum blackboard. We drew prancing starfishes; frogs in mortal combat; hydra-headed worms; stately crawfishes, standing on their tails, bearing aloft umbrellas; and grotesque fishes with gaping mouths and staring eyes. The Professor came in shortly after, and was as amused as any at our experiments. He looked at the fishes.

"Haemulons, every one of them," he said; "Mr. ———drew them."

True; and to this day, if I attempt a fish, I can draw nothing but haemulons.

The fourth day, a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; the odor had become a pleasant perfume; and even now, the sight of an old, six-inch, worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories.

The whole group of haemulons was thus brought in review; and, whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, the preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz's training in the method of observing facts and their orderly arrangement was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

"Facts are stupid things," he would say, "until brought into connection with some general law."

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I had gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

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