

Charlotte Byram's Introductory Reflective Essay

"There are neither beginnings nor endings But it was a beginning."
- Robert Jordan

A Beginning!

At the onset of the semester, when I was first introduced to the concept of a portfolio theme, I panicked. I could not fathom how I was going to choose one theme from the millions of literary themes available. . . No.

Humanity is defined by an essential flaw. This flaw sets us apart from animals, casts us out of Eden, characterizes us, determines what we eat for breakfast. Love and Death have flawed us and . . . no, not quite. Too . . . philosophical.

Once upon a time! . . . is too clichéd. Absolutely not.

It was a dark and stormy . . . Is "it" too vague?

Maybe I'm just not tired enough to write an essay.

To begin at the beginning is actually quite a difficult task. At the beginning is where the Reader forms His first impression of the author, where He determines the worthiness of the themes to follow, where He decides whether or not to continue reading at all. My, that's a lot of pressure on the author! So, I ask You, Reader: How may a writer dispel this pressure, yet still hand You a cup of steaming orange spice tea and say, "Enjoy!" without tripping over her own shoelaces? A long and unnecessary introduction? Flowery wording? Circus clowns? Fonts?

Welcome to My Portfolio! ♥

No? Not quite? Well, then. I guess I have to just skip all of this introduction nonsense and cut right to the chase, although I am rather afraid You will have to ignore the cartoons then. They refuse to quit the page.



So. Themes are an excellent beginning, yes? I chose Eros, Thanatos, and Dionysus to represent my portfolio because the three gods are just remarkably appropriate for (apparently) how my mind works. All three essays I wrote this year were, unintentionally, based largely on love, death, madness and some bizarre combination of the three. My two featured essays are "On a Particularly Unusual and Perverse Romantic Relationship" and "On Violets, Frosts, and a Specifically Unfortunate Character." "On a Relationship" analyzes the love affair between the Southern belle Miss Emily and the hard-working Northern Homer Barron (while living and posthumously) in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." The essay focuses specifically on Emily's erotic, necrophilic love, which exposes Faulkner's strong thematic undercurrents about

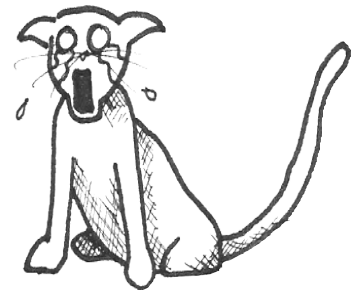
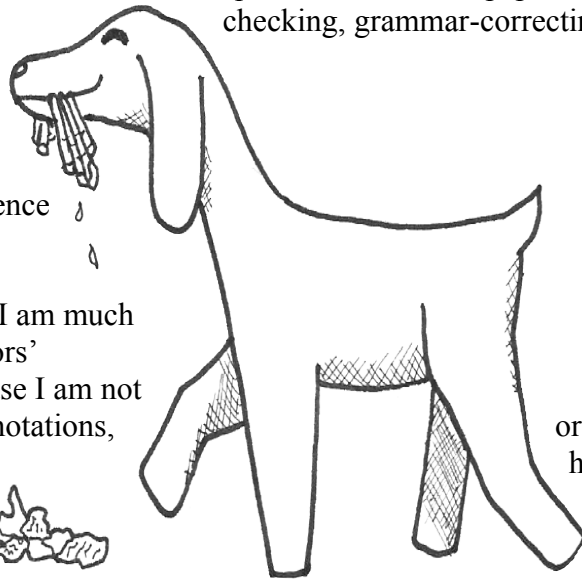
time and death while also revealing the two characters in a fashion that the narrative

alone does not. The essay “On Violets” takes a critical view of Ophelia in Shakespeare’s masterpiece, *Hamlet*. Ophelia’s tragic character is linked to the tragedy of violets: they wilt and die in the first frost of spring. Ophelia’s spring comes in the form of Hamlet’s love, and her first frost in the form of his madness. She exists to add (extra) tragedy, depth, and also to be a basis for the audience on which to judge Hamlet in the matters of love, madness, action, and death.

I have been writing since I was old enough to operate a pen and I like to think that, while my handwriting has only become more illegible, my skill in composition has improved. Every year, I embark on a new project to further myself on the road to perfection (too lofty of a goal, you say?), and this year I wanted to focus on expressing and being capable of a thorough analysis of literature. Did I succeed? Hmm . . . Well . . . I can at least say that I have improved in this regard, so I guess, I did indeed succeed in some degrees. I very much enjoyed writing “On a Relationship,” and I feel that my essay is a deserving representation of that perverse courtship. On Violets proved to be a fun challenge and I did it fair justice, but for a true, complete analysis of Ophelia, I think one should have a working knowledge of the times and culture in which Shakespeare wrote. Frankly, I know very little about British history and really, only the parts that have to do with us, as in America. So, returning from that tangent, I guess the point I am making here is that the degree to which I succeeded in improving my ability of analysis and expression is in your hands to judge. Or not. I cannot really force you, now, can I?

Speaking of others' opinions: editing! Editing is both the playtime of an author and the sword with which to stab her. Allow me to explain. I love to edit papers, my own and other writers'. I enjoy spell-checking, grammar-correcting, and critically

analyzing sentences for flow and fluency (although I have been informed that I am far too picky about the way a sentence *feels* . . . I suppose I cannot really argue against that assessment). Additionally, I am much better at editing other authors' papers than my own, because I am not clouded by my biases, connotations, my head of what I tend to leave out trains of thought, that the Reader already



or the running dialogue in had *intended* to say. (I words and even entire under the assumption understood, such as

differences between Northern and Southern personalities in the first and not-included-in-this-working of “On a Relationship.” Sorry.) On the other hand, I am not as good at dealing with people editing my own work. Of course, I realize the importance of peer editing, and indeed, am grateful for it, but still . . . peer editing recalls the fact that no matter how clever, insightful, witty, somber, concise, or impressive I believe myself to be, I am still subject to the reality of the Reader. So, it keeps me humble, when I would like to think highly of myself. Understanding this importance, experience has taught me that as a deadline approaches, my best

friend becomes the editor who leaves no letter's significance unquestioned. That is the editor who helps me improve; s/he truly forces me to mean every word I have chosen and to understand every claim I make. For this portfolio, I chose for revision a segment taken from "On Violets," because it is a good example of how I usually mess up when writing (and how I make amends, as well).

To wrap-up my portfolio, I thought it would be a nice idea to finish with my wild card: "The Bizarre and Marvelous Travels of Ioori and the Dreamer." "The Dreamer" is a short story (with potential for becoming quite long) that I began working on a month or so ago and I realized as I was choosing my themes that it fit in quite well with Thanatos and Dionysus. The story traces the tale of a woman named Ioori nashk'Guntkaoru as she travels alongside a young man who is known only as the Dreamer. At an unknown point in his past, the Dreamer experienced a death of the soul (a form of Thanatos) and has been unable to recover. Now, to rediscover true life, his unconscious mind has awoken and while he "sleeps," his unconscious takes control of his body and leads him on a journey across worlds to reach a legendary Great Tree. The only catch is that his conscious mind has no recollection of his sleepwalking travels or motives (Dionysus; that's rather a form of madness, if I do say so myself). Ioori first meets the Dreamer as he crosses the desert in which she lives, and feeling empathy for the lost conscious mind and fascination with the unconscious, decides to accompany him. Included in this portfolio is only the beginning of the story, partly since I seem to have started a theme for beginnings and partly because I have also not written much more than that. The story is an experiment for me: to try writing in a unique, distinctive style that one cannot find in any ordinary book. I also wanted to try a combination of fantasy and science fiction: Ioori and the Dreamer travel on the backs of flying whales while being pursued by their arch nemesis, a vengeful robot with the appearance of a man. This stuff sounds a lot cooler when not taken out of context . . . So, read on, my friend!

