

Course Readings

English 100 – Strategies for University Writing

Instructor Martin Behr

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Hastings Street

& THE VANCOUVER OF THE MIND

MADELEINE THIEN

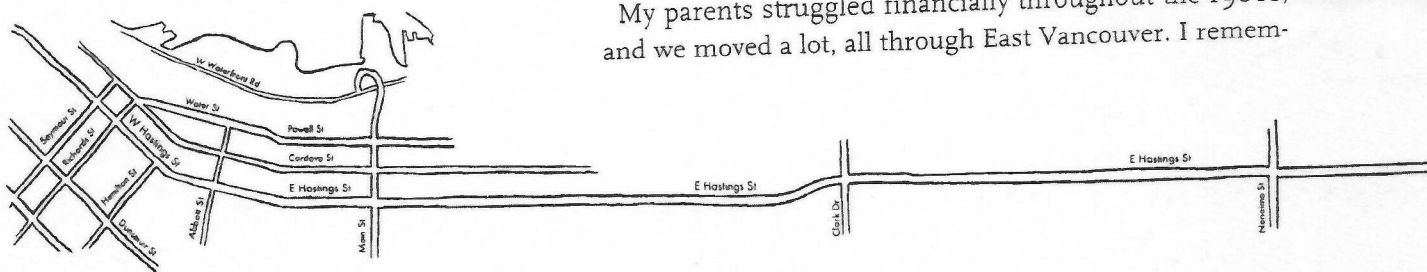
ADAPTED FROM
A TALK GIVEN AT
THE INAUGURAL
EVENT FOR THE
2013-14 WRITER-IN-
RESIDENCE, SIMON
FRASER UNIVERSITY.
DELIVERED AT SFU
WOODWARD'S ON
SEPTEMBER 27, 2013.

For the last week, I've been commuting by bus to Simon Fraser University. I take the no. 135 bus, which goes all the way along Hastings Street, beginning here at SFU Woodward's [downtown Vancouver], eventually reaching Burnaby Mountain. It's a remarkable bus ride for me because this fifteen kilometre stretch of Hastings contains the first twenty years of my life.

When my parents immigrated to Canada in 1974, my mother's first job was at Woodward's Department Store, right where we are now. She was a sales clerk in Ladies Wear. She traversed this very same stretch of Hastings Street, commuting from our apartment on Pandora Avenue, which was just at the foot of Burnaby Mountain.

On this side, the Vancouver side, is my elementary school, St. Francis Xavier. When I was a child, I stood at the bus stop on East Hastings and Campbell, on the edge of the Downtown Eastside, for so long, so often, I felt I lived half my life there. I was seven or eight years old, and it was a rough neighbourhood but I was never afraid. People were living up against a wall, they were dealing with alcohol and drug dependancies, poverty, and immense loneliness.

My parents struggled financially throughout the 1980s, and we moved a lot, all through East Vancouver. I remem-



MAP: Eric Uhlich

ber watching the Skytrain line to Metrotown being built right outside my bedroom window. It was so close, I thought I could reach my hand through the window and grab hold of the trains.

For a few years in the early 1980s, my father had a store on Hastings Street itself, in Burnaby (before Kensington). He sold used furniture. For me that store was a kind of kingdom. I used to play sick so that I could skip school and go there instead. My father would let me sleep on a folding lawn chair in the closet. My father had named the store Bargain Mart — because his first name is Martin and because Chinese people love puns. Every time someone opened the front door, you'd get this great, thundering rush of noise from the traffic on Hastings.

Later on, when I wrote about my father's furniture store, a classmate who read the story at UBC said to me, "I don't think you should use East Hastings the way you do. I think it's unethical to take advantage of such an impoverished street."

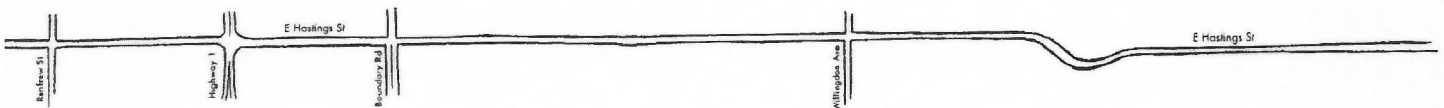
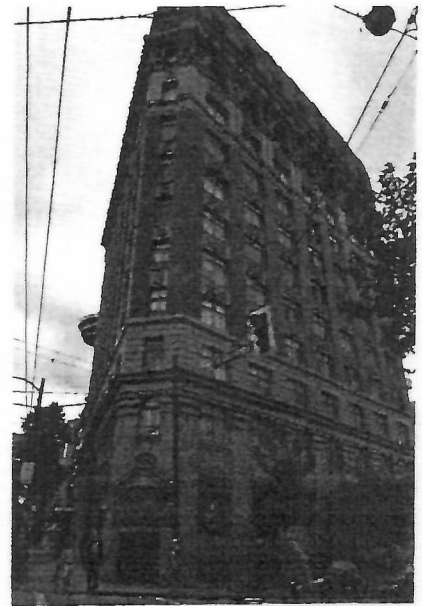
For the first time, I realized my East Hastings stretches not four blocks or five infamous blocks, but ten or fifteen kilometres, and it encompasses entire worlds. Other people have called this street "a novel in stories." I've always felt at home, and welcomed, in every single one of its pockets.

In 1992, I was able to go to university because I won a full scholarship to SFU. Try to imagine me at nineteen: I had spent all my youth around Hastings Street and in East Vancouver. I had studied at a Catholic high school where we attended Mass twice each week and went to Confession every Friday. I was sheltered in my own way. I'd also been working since I was fourteen. My first job was at the McDonald's at Main and Terminal; I was the shy kid with the dorky glasses, who made French Fries for seven hours at a time.

Coming to SFU was truly a kind of liberation. I was free of my background, my class, and my ethnicity, which at the time, I couldn't separate from a feeling of poverty and shame. Education promised a new beginning. I was very hungry. Every idea was new. Every class was revelatory.

In fact, I was so hungry for knowledge that I loaded up my coursework, and ended up taking fourth year philosophy courses in my first semester. I literally had *never heard of Socrates*. I'd had no access to the world of film, books and popular culture that seemed at everyone else's fingertips. And yet I had grown up in the same city. We had all inhabited it differently.

Needless to say, my desire — my hunger — far exceeded my capacity, and I was unable to maintain the grade point average necessary to keep my scholarship. I left school and, for awhile, I worked in the Faculty Club at SFU Burnaby Mountain, making the worst cappuccinos a professor has ever had the misfortune to drink, and corking every bottle of wine that I



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opened. Luckily for everyone, I was accepted to Creative Writing at UBC and given a small scholarship. I left Burnaby and SFU, and I devoted myself to stories.

I really love this city. It permeates all my work, no matter how far away I go. I live partly in Montreal now, partly in Berlin, and I teach part-time in Hong Kong. But for the most part, I support myself through fiction.

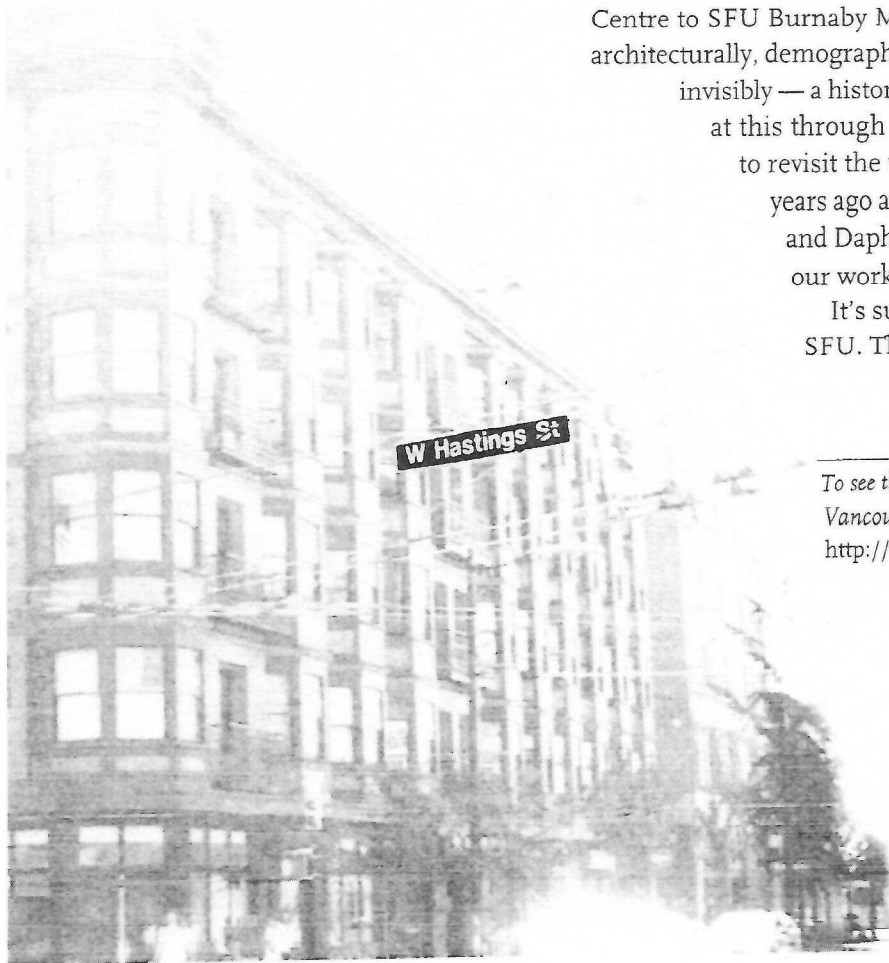
Living away from Vancouver has taught me that people in Canada don't see this city the same way that I do. They see a postcard version of Vancouver, a Vancouver whose frame is very small. What I think is extraordinary about this place is the density of newcomers, from East Asia and South Asia, yes, but also from across Canada and elsewhere. I don't think I'm the only person who has tried to find a kind of liberation here. I think it's part of the fabric of this place. To simultaneously dream big — in the tradition of Gold Mountain, in the tradition of prospectors and speculators — and also to be humbled by the scale of the mountains, by the persistence of rain, by the constancy of nature.

It's actually hard to come home to Vancouver. It's hard to confront just how much I've changed; what once felt so natural and inevitable about being here no longer feels that way to me now.

SFU seems to inspire great ambition and hunger in me. I have a lot of things I want to do. I don't know when I'll get the chance to spend eight uninterrupted months here again. So in addition to finishing the novel I'm working on now, which is a 600-page baggy monster of a book about China, I want to begin some projects that look at this Vancouver of the mind. This Vancouver of East Hastings that stretches from SFU Harbour Centre to SFU Burnaby Mountain, that spans decades, that contains — architecturally, demographically, culturally, gastronomically, ephemerally, invisibly — a historical map of Vancouver. I'm interested in looking at this through sound, images, video, text, interviews. I want to revisit the writers and thinkers I first encountered twenty years ago as a student here, people like Fred Wah, Roy Miki and Daphne Marlatt, and look at the continuities between our work, and also the ruptures.

It's such a great pleasure to be Writer-in-Residence at SFU. Thank you for welcoming me home. ♡

To see the ongoing work of Madeleine Thien's
Vancouver of East Hastings project, please visit
<http://vancouver-of-the-mind.tumblr.com/>.



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TWO

"HER POINT IS"

The Art of Summarizing



IF IT IS TRUE, as we claim in this book, that to argue persuasively you need to be in dialogue with others, then summarizing others' arguments is central to your arsenal of basic moves. Because writers who make strong claims need to map their claims relative to those of other people, it is important to know how to summarize effectively what those other people say. (We're using the word "summarizing" here to refer to any information from others that you present in your own words, including that which you paraphrase.)

Many writers shy away from summarizing—perhaps because they don't want to take the trouble to go back to the text in question and wrestle with what it says, or because they fear that devoting too much time to other people's ideas will take away from their own. When assigned to write a response to an article, such writers might offer their own views on the article's *topic* while hardly mentioning what the article itself argues or says. At the opposite extreme are those who do nothing *but* summarize. Lacking confidence, perhaps, in their own ideas, these writers so overload their texts with summaries of others' ideas that their own voice gets lost. And since these summaries are not

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animated by the writers' own interests, they often read like mere lists of things that X thinks or Y says—with no clear focus.

As a general rule, a good summary requires balancing what the original author is saying with the writer's own focus. Generally speaking, a summary must at once be true to what the original author says while at the same time emphasizing those aspects of what the author says that interest you, the writer. Striking this delicate balance can be tricky, since it means facing two ways at once: both outward (toward the author being summarized) and inward (toward yourself). Ultimately, it means being respectful of others while simultaneously structuring how you summarize them in light of your own text's central claim.

See how Barack Obama summarizes part of the U.S. Constitution in a speech about race, p. 361, 14.

ON THE ONE HAND, PUT YOURSELF IN *THEIR* SHOES

To write a really good summary, you must be able to suspend your own beliefs for a time and put yourself in the shoes of someone else. This means playing what the writing theorist Peter Elbow calls the "believing game," in which you try to inhabit the worldview of those whose conversation you are joining—and whom you are perhaps even disagreeing with—and try to see their argument from their perspective. This ability to temporarily suspend one's own convictions is a hallmark of good actors, who must convincingly "become" characters who in real life they may actually detest. As a writer, when you play the believing game really well, readers should not be able to tell whether you agree or disagree with the ideas you are summarizing.

If, as a writer, you cannot or will not suspend your own beliefs in this way, you are likely to produce summaries that are so

obviously biased that they undermine your credibility with readers. Consider the following summary.

In his article "Don't Blame the Eater," David Zinczenko accuses the fast-food companies of an evil conspiracy to make people fat. I disagree because these companies have to make money.

If you review what Zinczenko actually says (pp. 153–55), you should immediately see that this summary amounts to an unfair distortion. While Zinczenko does argue that the practices of the fast-food industry have the *effect* of making people fat, he never goes so far as to suggest that the fast-food industry conspires to do so with deliberately evil intent.

Another tell-tale sign of this writer's failure to give Zinczenko a fair hearing is the hasty way he abandons the summary after only one sentence and rushes on to his own response. So eager is this writer to disagree that he not only caricatures what Zinczenko says but also gives the article a hasty, superficial reading. Granted, there are many writing situations in which, because of matters of proportion, a one- or two-sentence summary is precisely what you want. Indeed, as writing professor Karen Lunsford (whose own research focuses on argument theory) points out, it is standard in the natural and social sciences to summarize the work of others quickly, in one pithy sentence or phrase, as in the following example.

Several studies (Crackle, 1992; Pop, 2001; Snap, 1987) suggest that these policies are harmless; moreover, other studies (Dick, 2002; Harry, 2003; Tom, 1987) argue that they even have benefits.

But if your assignment is to respond in writing to a single author like Zinczenko, then you will need to tell your readers enough

about his or her own, independent

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The Art of Summarizing

about his or her argument so they can assess its merits on their own, independent of you.

When a writer fails to play the believing game, he or she often falls prey to what we call "the closest cliché syndrome," in which what gets summarized is not the view the author in question has actually expressed, but a familiar cliché that the writer *mistakes* for the author's view (sometimes because the writer believes it and mistakenly assumes the author must too). So, for example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s passionate defense of civil disobedience in "Letter from Birmingham Jail" gets summarized not as the defense of political protest that it actually is, but as a plea for everyone to "just get along." Similarly, Zinzchenko's critique of the fast-food industry might get summarized as a call for overweight people to take responsibility for their weight.

Whenever you enter into a conversation with others in your writing, then, it is extremely important that you go back to what those others have said, that you study it very closely, and that you not collapse it to something you already have heard or know. Writers who fail to do this end up essentially conversing with themselves—with imaginary others who are really only the products of their own biases and preconceptions.

ON THE OTHER HAND, KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING

Even as writing an effective summary requires you to temporarily adopt the worldviews of others, it does not mean ignoring your own views altogether. Paradoxically, at the same time that summarizing another text requires you to represent fairly what it says, it also requires that your own response exert a quiet influence. A good summary, in other words, has a focus

or spin that allows the summary to fit with your own overall agenda while still being true to the text you are summarizing.

If you read the essay by David Zinczenko (pp. 153–55), you should be able to see that an essay on the fast-food industry in general will call for a very different summary than will an essay on parenting, corporate regulation, or warning labels. If you want to include all three, fine; but in that case you'll need to subordinate these three issues to one of Zinczenko's general claims and then make sure this general claim directly sets up your own argument.

For example, suppose you want to argue that it is parents, not fast-food companies, who are to blame for children's obesity. To set up this argument, you will probably want to compose a summary that highlights what Zinczenko says about the fast-food industry and parents. Consider this sample.

In his article "Don't Blame the Eater," David Zinczenko argues that today's fast-food chains fill the nutritional void in children's lives left by their overtaxed working parents. With many parents working long hours and unable to supervise what their children eat, Zinczenko claims, children today regularly turn to low-cost, calorie-laden foods that the fast-food chains are all too eager to supply. When he himself was a young boy, for instance, and his single mother was away at work, he ate at Taco Bell, McDonald's, and other chains on a regular basis, and ended up overweight. Zinczenko's hope is that with the new spate of lawsuits against the food industry, other children with working parents will have healthier choices available to them, and that they will not, like him, become obese.

In my view, however, it is the parents, and not the food chains, who are responsible for their children's obesity. While it is true that many of today's parents work long hours, there are still several things that parents can do to guarantee that their children eat healthy foods.

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The Art of Summarizing

This summary succeeds not only because it provides one big claim under which several of Zinczenko's points neatly fit ("today's fast-food chains fill the nutritional void in children's lives left by their overtaxed working parents"), but also because this big claim points toward the second paragraph: the writer's own thesis about parental responsibility. A less astute, less focused summary would merely include Zinczenko's indictment of the fast-food industry and ignore what he says about parents.

This advice—to summarize each author in terms of the specific issue your own argument focuses on—may seem painfully obvious. But writers who aren't attuned to these issues often summarize a given author on one issue even though their text actually focuses on another. To avoid this problem, you need to make sure that your "they say" and "I say" are well matched. In fact, aligning what they say with what you say is a good thing to work on when revising what you've written.

Often writers who summarize without regard to their own interests fall prey to what might be called "list summaries," summaries that simply inventory the original author's various points but fail to focus those points around any larger overall claim. If you've ever heard a talk in which the points were connected only by words like "and then," "also," and "in addition," you know how such lists can put listeners to sleep—as shown in Figure 3. A typical list summary sounds like this.

The author says many different things about his subject. *First* he says. . . . *Then* he makes the point that. . . . *In addition* he says. . . . *And then* he writes. . . . *Also* he shows that. . . . *And then* he says. . . .

It may be boring list summaries like this that give summaries in general a bad name and even prompt some instructors to discourage their students from summarizing at all.



Summarizing and Responding: *Where Reading Meets Writing*

3

Summarizing a text helps us to see and understand its main points and to think about what it says. Responding to that text then prompts us to think about—and say—what we think. Together, summarizing and responding to texts is one way that we engage with the ideas of others. In a history course, you might summarize and respond to an essay arguing that Civil War photographers did not accurately capture the realities of the battlefield. In a philosophy course, you might summarize Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" and respond to its portrayal of knowledge as shadows on a wall.

And in much of the writing that you do, you'll need to cite the ideas of others, both as context for your own thinking and as evidence to support your arguments. In fact, unless you're Adam, there's probably no topic you'll write about that someone else hasn't already written about—and one way of introducing what you have to say is as a response to something others have said about your topic. A good way of doing that is by summarizing what they've said, using the summary as a launching pad for what you say. This chapter offers advice for summarizing and responding, writing tasks you'll have occasion to do in many of your college classes—and provides a short guide to writing a summary/response essay, a common assignment in composition classes.

SUMMARIZING

In many of your college courses, you'll likely be asked to summarize what someone else has said. Boiling down a text to its basic ideas helps you focus on the text, figure out what the writer has said, and understand (and remember) what you're reading. In fact, summarizing is an essential

academic skill, a way to incorporate the ideas of others into your own writing. Following are some guidelines for summarizing effectively:

Read the text carefully. To write a good summary, you need to read the original text carefully to capture the writer's intended meaning as clearly and evenhandedly as you can. Start by **SKIMMING** the text to get a general sense of what it's saying. If some parts don't make sense, don't worry; at this point, you're reading just to get the gist. Then reread the text more slowly, **ANNOTATING** it paragraph by paragraph. If there's an explicit **THESIS** stating the main point, highlight it in some way. Then try to capture the main idea of each paragraph in a single sentence.

State the main points concisely and accurately. Summaries of a complete text are generally between 100 and 250 words in length, so you need to choose your words carefully and to focus only on the text's main ideas. Leave out supporting evidence, anecdotes, and counterarguments unless they're crucial to understanding the text. For instance, in summarizing "A Brief History of the Modern-Day Straw, the World's Most Wasteful Commodity" (see p. 233), Ernie Smith's essay explaining why drinking straws are wasteful, you would omit its description of the invention of the rye straw in the nineteenth century.

Describe the text accurately and fairly—and using neutral language. Present the author's ideas evenhandedly and fairly; a summary isn't the place to share your opinion of what the text says. Use neutral verbs such as *states*, *asserts*, or *concludes*, not verbs that imply praise or criticism like *proves* or *complains*.

Use SIGNAL PHRASES to distinguish what the author says from what you say. Introducing a statement with phrases such as "he says" or "the essay concludes" indicates explicitly that you're summarizing what the author said. When first introducing an author, you may need to say something about their credentials. For example:

In "Our Declaration," political philosopher Danielle Allen analyzes the language of the Declaration of Independence.

12-13

16-17

387-89

535-38

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Daniel Felsenfeld, a music composer who also writes about music, describes how he developed a passion for twentieth-century classical music in "Rebel Music."

Later in the text, you may need to refer to the author again as you summarize specific parts of the text. These signal phrases are typically briefer: *In Felsenfeld's view . . . , Allen then argues . . .*

Use quotations sparingly, if at all. You may need to **QUOTE** keywords or memorable phrases, but most or all of a summary should be written in your own words, using your own sentence structures.

DOCUMENT any text you summarize in a works-cited or references list. A summary of a lengthy work should include **IN-TEXT DOCUMENTATION** noting the pages summarized; they aren't needed with a brief text like the one summarized below (see p. 143).

528-31

544-47

MLA 551-57

APA 600-604

An Example Summary

In "The Reason College Costs More than You Think," Jon Marcus, a higher-education editor at the *Hechinger Report*, reports that a major reason why college educations are so expensive is the amount of time students stay in college. Although almost all first-year students and their families assume that earning a bachelor's degree will take four years, the reality is that more than half of all students take longer, with many taking six years or more. This delay happens for many reasons, including students changing majors, having to take developmental courses, taking fewer courses per term than they could have, and being unable to register for required courses. As a result, their expenses are much greater—financial aid seldom covers a fifth or sixth year, so students must borrow money to finish—and the additional time they spend in college is time they aren't working, leading to significant losses in wages.

This summary begins with a signal phrase stating the author's name and credentials and the title of the text being summarized. The summary includes only the main ideas, in the summary writer's own words.

RESPONDING

When you summarize a text, you show that you understand its main ideas; responding to a text pushes you to engage with those ideas—and gives you the opportunity to contribute your ideas to a larger conversation. You can respond in various ways, for instance, by taking a **POSITION** on the text's argument, by **ANALYZING THE TEXT** in some way, or by **REFLECTING** on what it says.

Deciding How to Respond

You may be assigned to write a specific kind of response—an argument or analysis, for instance—but more often than not, the nature of your response is left largely up to you. If so, you'll need to read closely and critically to understand what the text says, to get a sense of how—and how well—it does so, and to think about your own reaction to it. Only then can you decide how to respond. You can respond to what the text says (its ideas), to how it says it (the way it's written), or to where it leads your own thinking (your own personal reaction). Or you might write a response that mixes those ways of responding. You might, for example, combine a personal reaction with an examination of how the writing caused that reaction.

If you're responding to what a text says, you might agree or disagree with the author's argument, supporting your position with good reasons and evidence for your response. You might agree with parts of the argument and disagree with others. You might find that the author has ignored or downplayed some important aspect of the topic that needs to be discussed or at least acknowledged. Here are some questions to consider that can help you think about what a text says:

- What does the writer claim?
- What **REASONS** and **EVIDENCE** does the writer provide to support that claim?

157–84 ▲

98–130

256–63

400–401 ◆

401–8

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- What parts of the text do you agree with? Is there anything you disagree with—and if so, why?
- Does the writer represent any views other than their own? If not, what other perspectives should be considered?
- Are there any aspects of the topic that the writer overlooks or ignores?
- If you're responding to a visual text, how do the design and any images contribute to your understanding of what the text "says"?

Here is a brief response to Jon Marcus's "The Reason College Costs More than You Think," one that responds to his argument:

It's true that one reason college costs so much more is that students take longer than four years to finish their degrees, but Jon Marcus's argument in "The Reason College Costs More than You Think" is flawed in several ways. He ignores the fact that over the past years state governments have reduced their subsidies to state-supported colleges and universities, forcing higher tuition, and that federal scholarship aid has declined as well, forcing students to pay a greater share of the costs. He doesn't mention the increased number of administrators or the costs of fancy athletic facilities and dormitories. Ultimately, his argument places most of the blame for higher college costs on students, who, he asserts, make poor choices by changing majors and "taking fewer courses per term than they could." College is supposed to present opportunities to explore many possible career paths, so changing majors should be considered a form of growth and education. Furthermore, many of us are working full-time to pay the high costs of college, leaving us with little extra time to study for four or five courses at once and sometimes forcing us to take fewer classes per term because that's all we can afford. Marcus is partly right—but he gets much of the problem wrong.

If you're focusing on the way a text is written, you'll consider what elements the writer uses to convey their message—facts, stories, images, and so on. You'll likely pay attention to the writer's word choices and look for any patterns that lead you to understand the text in a particular way. To think about the way a text is written, you might find some of these questions helpful:

- What is the writer's message? Is there an explicit statement of that message?
- How well has the writer communicated the message?
- How does the writer support what they say: by citing facts or statistics? by quoting experts? by noting personal experiences? Are you persuaded?
- Are there any words, phrases, or sentences that you find notable and that contribute to the text's overall effect?
- How does the text's design affect your response to it? If it's a **VISUAL TEXT**—a photo or ad, for example—how do the various parts of the text contribute to its message?

119–25 ▲

Here is a brief response to Marcus's essay that analyzes the various ways it makes its argument:

In "The Reason College Costs More than You Think," *Time* magazine writer Jon Marcus argues that although several factors contribute to high college costs, the main one is how long it takes students to graduate. Marcus introduces this topic by briefly profiling a student who is in his fifth year of school and has run out of financial aid because he "changed majors and took courses he ended up not needing." This profile gives a human face to the topic, which Marcus then develops with statistics about college costs and the numbers of students who take more than four years to finish. Marcus's purpose is twofold: to inform readers that the assumption that most students finish college in four years is wrong and to persuade them that poor choices like those this student made are the primary reason college takes so long and costs so much. He acknowledges that the extra costs are "hidden" and "not entirely the student's fault" and suggests that poor high school preparation and unavailable required courses play a role, as do limits on financial aid. However, his final paragraph quotes the student as saying of the extra years, "That's time you're wasting that you could be out making money." As the essay's final statement, this assertion that spending more time in school is time wasted and that the implicit goal of college is career preparation reinforces Marcus's argument that college *should* take only four years and that students who take longer are financially irresponsible.

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If you're reflecting on your own reaction to a text, you might focus on how your personal experiences or beliefs influenced the way you understood the text or on how it reinforced or prompted you to reassess some of those beliefs. You could also focus on how it led you to see the topic in new ways—or note questions that it's led you to wonder about. Some questions that may help you reflect on your own reaction to a text include:

- How did the text affect you personally?
- Is there anything in the text that really got your attention? If so, what?
- Do any parts of the text provoke an emotional reaction—make you laugh or cry, make you uneasy? What prompted that response?
- Does the text bring to mind any memories or past experiences? Can you see anything related to you and your life in the text?
- Does the text remind you of any other texts?
- Does the text support (or challenge) any of your beliefs? How?
- Has reading this text given you any new ideas or insight?

Here is a brief response to Jon Marcus's essay that reflects on an important personal issue:

Jon Marcus's "Why College Costs More than You Think" made me think hard about my own educational plans. Because I'm working to pay for as much of my education as I can, I'm taking a full load of courses so I can graduate in four years, but truth be told I'm starting to question the major I've chosen. That's one aspect of going to college that Marcus fails to discuss: how your major affects your future career choices and earnings—and whether or not some majors that don't lead immediately to a career are another way of "wasting" your time. After taking several courses in English and philosophy, I find myself fascinated by the study of literature and ideas. If I decide to major in one or both of those subjects, am I being impractical? Or am I "following my heart," as Steve Jobs said in his Stanford commencement speech? Jobs did as he told those graduates to do, and it worked out well for him, so maybe majoring in something "practical" is less practical than it seems. If I graduate in four years and am "out making money" but doing something I don't enjoy, I might be worse off than if I take longer in college but find a path that is satisfying and enriching.

In North Carolina alone, 200,000 people still live without indoor plumbing. People who haul their drinking water home from a neighbor's house or catch rain-water in barrels. People who can't wash their hands before handling food, the way restaurant employees are required by state law to do. People who sneak into public restrooms every day to wash, shave, and brush their teeth before going to work or to school. People who sacrifice their dignity and self-respect when forced to choose between going homeless and going to an outhouse. People whose children think they deserve the conditions in which they live and hold their heads low to hide the shame. But they're not the ones who should feel ashamed. No, they're not the ones who should feel ashamed.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

What do you think of Scheller's experiences growing up in poverty? Can you sympathize with her? Have you ever been so poor that you felt helpless and vulnerable? Do you recall a particular period or occasion in your life when you felt a similar sense of shame or acute awareness of yourself in relation to others?

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS OR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Summarize in your own words the effects of poverty on Scheller, and then discuss your own reactions to what she describes.
2. Scheller says that people wonder why she "make[s] such a fuss about plumbing." Indeed, she writes about a subject that people seldom discuss in either conversation or writing. How well do you think she has handled her subject? Does she convince you of her reasons for making the fuss?
3. Scheller concludes by repeating "they're not the ones who should feel ashamed." Who does she imply should feel ashamed? Do you agree with her on this point? Why?
4. Compare Scheller's description of her environment with Canadian neighbourhoods that you consider to be poor.

ON DUMPSTER DIVING

LARS EIGHNER

*Lars Eighner, born in 1948, in Corpus Christi, Texas, is known for his best-selling memoir, *Travels with Lizbeth*, in which he recounts his three years of living homeless on the streets with his dog.*

Long before I began Dumpster diving I was impressed with Dumpsters, enough so that I wrote the Merriam-Webster¹ research service to discover what I could about the word *Dumpster*. I learned from them that it is a proprietary word belonging to the Dempster Dumpster company. Since then I have dutifully capitalized the word,



One man's garbage is another man's survival.

Photo Source: © Stephen McSweeney/Shutterstock

although it was lowercased in almost all the citations Merriam-Webster photocopied for me. Dempster's word is too apt. I have never heard these things called anything but Dumpsters. I do not know anyone who knows the generic name for these objects. From time to time I have heard a wino or hobo give some corrupted credit to the original and call them Dipsy Dumpsters.

I began Dumpster diving about a year before I became homeless.

I prefer the word *scavenging* and use the word *scrounging* when I mean to be obscure. I have heard people, evidently meaning to be polite, use the word *foraging*, but I prefer to reserve that word for gathering nuts and berries and such, which I do also according to the season and the opportunity. *Dumpster diving* seems to me to be a little too cute and, in my case, inaccurate because I lack the athletic ability to lower myself into the Dumpsters as the true divers do, much to their increased profit.

I like the frankness of the word *scavenging*, which I can hardly think of without picturing a big black snail on an aquarium wall. I live from the refuse of others. I am a scavenger. I think it a sound and honorable niche, although if I could I would naturally prefer to live the comfortable consumer life, perhaps—and only perhaps—as a slightly less wasteful consumer, owing to what I have learned as a scavenger.

While Lizbeth² and I were still living in the shack on Avenue B as my savings ran out, I put almost all my sporadic income into rent. The necessities of daily life I began to extract from Dumpsters. Yes, we ate from them. Except for jeans, all my clothes came from Dumpsters. Boom boxes, candles, bedding, toilet paper, a virgin

male love doll, medicine, books, a typewriter, dishes, furnishings, and change, sometimes amounting to many dollars—I acquired many things from the Dumpsters. I have learned much as scavenger. I mean to put some of what I have learned down here, beginning with the practical art of Dumpster diving and proceeding to the abstract.

What is safe to eat?

After all, the finding of objects is becoming something of an urban art. Even respectable employed people will sometimes find something tempting sticking out of a Dumpster or standing beside one. Quite a number of people, not all of them of the bohemian type, are willing to brag that they found this or that piece in the trash. But eating from Dumpsters is what separates the dilettanti from the professionals. Eating safely from the Dumpsters involves three principles: using the senses and common sense to evaluate the condition of the found materials, knowing the Dumpsters of a given area and checking them regularly, and seeking always to answer the question, "Why was this discarded?"

Perhaps everyone who has a kitchen and a regular supply of groceries has, at one time or another, made a sandwich and eaten half of it before discovering mold on the bread or got a mouthful of milk before realizing the milk had turned. Nothing of the sort is likely to happen to a Dumpster diver because he is constantly reminded that most food is discarded for a reason. Yet a lot of perfectly good food can be found in Dumpsters.

Canned goods, for example, turn up fairly often in the Dumpsters I frequent. All except the most phobic people would be willing to eat from a can, even if it came from a Dumpster. Canned goods are among the safest of foods to be found in Dumpsters but are not utterly foolproof.

Although very rare with modern canning methods, botulism is a possibility. Most other forms of food poisoning seldom do lasting harm to a healthy person, but botulism is almost certainly fatal and often the first symptom is death. Except for carbonated beverages, all canned goods should contain a slight vacuum and suck air when first punctured. Bulging, rusty, and dented cans and cans that spew when punctured should be avoided, especially when the contents are not very acidic or syrupy.

Heat can break down the botulin, but this requires much more cooking than most people do to canned goods. To the extent that botulism occurs at all, of course, it can occur in cans on pantry shelves as well as in cans from Dumpsters. Need I say that home-canned goods are simply too risky to be recommended.

From time to time one of my companions, aware of the source of my provisions, will ask, "Do you think these crackers are really safe to eat?" For some reason it is most often the crackers they ask about.

This question has always made me angry. Of course I would not offer my companion anything I had doubts about. But more than that, I wonder why he cannot evaluate the condition of the crackers for himself. I have no special knowledge and I have been wrong before. Since he knows where the food comes from, it seems to me he ought to assume some of the responsibility for deciding what he will put in his mouth. For myself I have few qualms about dry foods such as crackers, cookies,

cereal, chips, and pasta if they are free of visible contaminants and still dry and crisp. Most often such things are found in the original packaging, which is not so much a positive sign as it is the absence of a negative one.

Raw fruits and vegetables with intact skins seem perfectly safe to me, excluding of course the obviously rotten. Many are discarded for minor imperfections that can be pared away. Leafy vegetables, grapes, cauliflower, broccoli, and similar things may be contaminated by liquids and may be impractical to wash.

Candy, especially hard candy, is usually safe if it has not drawn ants. Chocolate is often discarded only because it has become discolored as the cocoa butter de-emulsified. Candying, after all, is one method of food preservation because pathogens do not like very sugary substances.

All of these foods might be found in any Dumpster and can be evaluated with some confidence largely on the basis of appearance. Beyond these are foods that cannot be correctly evaluated without additional information.

I began scavenging by pulling pizzas out of the Dumpster behind a pizza delivery shop. In general, prepared food requires caution, but in this case I knew when the shop closed and went to the Dumpster as soon as the last of the help left.

Such shops often get prank orders; both the orders and the products made to fill them are called *bogus*. Because help seldom stays long at these places, pizzas are often made with the wrong topping, refused on delivery for being cold, or baked incorrectly. The products to be discarded are boxed up because inventory is kept by counting boxes. A boxed pizza can be written off; an unboxed pizza does not exist.

I never placed a bogus order to increase the supply of pizzas and I believe no one else was scavenging in this Dumpster. But the people in the shop became suspicious and began to retain their garbage in the shop overnight. While it lasted I had a steady supply of fresh, sometimes warm pizza. Because I knew the Dumpster I knew the source of the pizza, and because I visited the Dumpster regularly I knew what was fresh and what was yesterday's.

The area I frequent is inhabited by many affluent college students. I am not here by chance; the Dumpsters in this area are very rich. Students throw out many good things, including food. In particular they tend to throw everything out when they move at the end of a semester, before and after breaks, and around midterm, when many of them despair of college. So I find it advantageous to keep an eye on the academic calendar.

Students throw food away around breaks because they do not know whether it has spoiled or will spoil before they return. A typical discard is a half jar of peanut butter. In fact, nonorganic peanut butter does not require refrigeration and is unlikely to spoil in any reasonable time. The student does not know that, and since it is Daddy's money, the student decides not to take a chance. Opened containers require caution and some attention to the question, "Why was this discarded?" But in the case of discards from student apartments, the answer may be that the item was thrown out through carelessness, ignorance, or wastefulness. This can sometimes be deduced when the item is found with many others, including some that are obviously perfectly good.

Some students, and others, approach defrosting a freezer by chucking out the whole lot. Not only do the circumstances of such a find tell the story, but also the

mass of frozen goods stays cold for a long time and items may be found still frozen or freshly thawed.

Yogurt, cheese, and sour cream are items that are often thrown out while they are still good. Occasionally I find a cheese with a spot of mold, which of course I just pare off, and because it is obvious why such a cheese was discarded, I treat it with less suspicion than an apparently perfect cheese found in similar circumstances. Yogurt is often discarded, still sealed, only because the expiration date on the carton had passed. This is one of my favourite finds because yogurt will keep for several days, even in warm weather.

Students throw out canned goods and staples at the end of semesters and when they give up college at midterm. Drugs, pornography, spirits, and the like are often discarded when parents are expected—Dad's Day, for example. And spirits also turn up after big party weekends, presumably discarded by the newly reformed. Wine and spirits, of course, keep perfectly well even once opened, but the same cannot be said of beer.

My test for carbonated soft drinks is whether they still fizz vigorously. Many juices or other beverages are too acidic or too syrupy to cause much concern, provided they are not visibly contaminated. I have discovered nasty molds in vegetable juices, even when the product was found under its original seal; I recommend that such products be decanted slowly into a clear glass. Liquids always require some care. One hot day I found a large jug of Pat O'Brien's Hurricane mix. The jug had been opened but was still ice cold. I drank three large glasses before it became apparent to me that someone had added the rum to the mix, and not a little rum. I never tasted the rum, and by the time I began to feel the effects I had already ingested a very large quantity of the beverage. Some divers would have considered this a boon, but being suddenly intoxicated in a public place in the early afternoon is not my idea of a good time.

I have heard of people maliciously contaminating discarded food and even handouts, but mostly I have heard of this from people with vivid imaginations who have had no experience with the Dumpsters themselves. Just before the pizza shop stopped discarding its garbage at night, jalapeños began showing up on most of the thrown-out pizzas. If indeed this was meant to discourage me, it was a wasted effort because I am a native Texan.

For myself, I avoid game, poultry, pork, and egg-based foods, whether I find them raw or cooked. I seldom have the means to cook what I find, but when I do I avail myself of plentiful supplies of beef, which is often in very good condition. I suppose fish becomes disagreeable before it becomes dangerous. Lizbeth is happy to have any such thing that is past its prime and, in fact, does not recognize fish as food until it is quite strong.

Home leftovers, as opposed to surpluses from restaurants, are very often bad. Evidently, especially among students, there is a common type of personality that carefully wraps up even the smallest leftover and shoves it into the back of the refrigerator for six months or so before discarding it. Characteristic of this type are the reused jars and margarine tubs to which the remains are committed. I avoid ethnic foods I am unfamiliar with. If I do not know what it is supposed to look like when it is good, I cannot be certain I will be able to tell if it is bad.

No matter how careful I am I still get dysentery at least once a month, oftener in warm weather. I do not want to paint too romantic a picture. Dumpster diving has serious drawbacks as a way of life.

I learned to scavenge gradually, on my own. Since then I have initiated several companions into the trade. I have learned that there is a predictable series of stages a person goes through in learning to scavenge.

At first the new scavenger is filled with disgust and self-loathing. He is ashamed of being seen and may lurk around, trying to duck behind things, or he may try to dive at night. (In fact, most people instinctively look away from a scavenger. By skulking around, the novice calls attention to himself and arouses suspicion. Diving at night is ineffective and needlessly messy.)

Every grain of rice seems to be a maggot. Everything seems to stink. He can wipe the egg yolk off the found can, but he cannot erase from his mind the stigma of eating garbage.

That stage passes with experience. The scavenger finds a pair of running shoes that fit and look and smell brand-new. He finds a pocket calculator in perfect working order. He finds pristine ice cream, still frozen, more than he can eat or keep. He begins to understand: People throw away perfectly good stuff, a lot of perfectly good stuff.

At this stage, Dumpster shyness begins to dissipate. The diver, after all, has the last laugh. He is finding all manner of good things that are his for the taking. Those who disparage his profession are the fools, not he.

He may begin to hang on to some perfectly good things for which he has neither a use nor a market. Then he begins to take note of the things that are not perfectly good but are nearly so. He mates a Walkman with broken earphones and one that is missing a battery cover. He picks up things that he can repair.

At this stage he may become lost and never recover. Dumpsters are full of things of some potential value to someone and also of things that never have much intrinsic value but are interesting. All the Dumpster divers I have known come to the point of trying to acquire everything they touch. Why not take it, they reason, since it is all free? This is, of course, hopeless. Most divers come to realize that they must restrict themselves to items of relatively immediate utility. But in some cases the diver simply cannot control himself. I have met several of these pack-rat types. Their ideas of the values of various pieces of junk verge on the psychotic. Every bit of glass may be a diamond, they think, and all that glistens, gold.

I tend to gain weight when I am scavenging. Partly this is because I always find far more pizza and doughnuts than water-packed tuna, nonfat yogurt, and fresh vegetables. Also I have not developed much faith in the reliability of Dumpsters as a food source, although it has been proven to me many times. I tend to eat as if I have no idea where my next meal is coming from. But mostly I just hate to see food go to waste and so I eat much more than I should. Something like this drives the obsession to collect junk.

As for collecting objects, I usually restrict myself to collecting one kind of small object at a time, such as pocket calculators, sunglasses, or campaign buttons. To live on

the street I must anticipate my needs to a certain extent: I must pick up and save warm bedding I find in August because it will not be found in Dumpsters in November. As I have no access to health care, I often hoard essential drugs, such as antibiotics and antihistamines. (This course can be recommended only to those with some grounding in pharmacology. Antibiotics, for example, even when indicated are worse than useless if taken in insufficient amounts.) But even if I had a home with extensive storage space, I could not save everything that might be valuable in some contingency.

I have proprietary feelings about my Dumpsters. As I have mentioned, it is no accident that I scavenge from ones where good finds are common. But my limited experience with Dumpsters in other areas suggests to me that even in poorer areas, Dumpsters, if attended with sufficient diligence, can be made to yield a livelihood. The rich students discard perfectly good kiwifruit; poorer people discard perfectly good apples. Slacks and Polo shirts are found in the one place; jeans and T-shirts in the other. The population of competitors rather than the affluence of the dumpers most affects the feasibility of survival by scavenging. The large number of competitors is what puts me off the idea of trying to scavenge in places like Los Angeles.

Curiously, I do not mind my direct competition, other scavengers, so much as I hate the can scroungers.

People scrounge cans because they have to have a little cash. I have tried scrounging cans with an able-bodied companion. Afoot a can scrounger simply cannot make more than a few dollars a day. One can extract the necessities of life from the Dumpsters directly with far less effort than would be required to accumulate the equivalent value in cans. (These observations may not hold in places with container redemption laws.)

Can scroungers, then, are people who must have small amounts of cash. These are drug addicts and winos, mostly the latter because the amounts of cash are so small. Spirits and drugs do, like all other commodities, turn up in Dumpsters and the scavenger will from time to time have a half bottle of a rather good wine with his dinner. But the wino cannot survive on these occasional finds; he must have his daily dose to stave off the DTs. All the cans he can carry will buy about three bottles of Wild Irish Rose.

I do not begrudge them the cans, but can scroungers tend to tear up the Dumpsters, mixing the contents and littering the area. They become so specialized that they can see only cans. They earn my contempt by passing up change, canned goods, and readily hockable items.

There are precious few courtesies among scavengers. But it is common practice to set aside surplus items: pairs of shoes, clothing, canned goods, and such. A true scavenger hates to see good stuff go to waste, and what he cannot use he leaves in good condition in plain sight.

Can scroungers lay waste to everything in their path and will stir one of a pair of good shoes to the bottom of a Dumpster, to be lost or ruined in the muck. Can scroungers will even go through individual garbage cans, something I have never seen a scavenger do.

Individual garbage cans are set out on the public easement only on garbage days. On other days going through them requires trespassing close to a dwelling. Going through individual garbage cans without scattering litter is almost impossible. Litter

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is likely to reduce the public's tolerance of scavenging. Individual cans are simply not as productive as Dumpsters; people in houses and duplexes do not move so often and for some reason do not tend to discard as much useful material. Moreover, the time required to go through one garbage can that serves one household is not much less than the time required to go through a Dumpster that contains the refuse of twenty apartments.

But my strongest reservation about going through individual garbage cans is that this seems to me a very personal kind of invasion to which I would object if I were a householder. Although many things in Dumpsters are obviously meant never to come to light, a Dumpster is somehow less personal.

I avoid trying to draw conclusions about the people who dump in the Dumpsters I frequent. I think it would be unethical to do so, although I know many people will find the idea of scavenger ethics too funny for words.

Dumpsters contain bank statements, correspondence, and other documents, just as anyone might expect. But there are also less obvious sources of information. Pill bottles, for example. The labels bear the name of the patient, the name of the doctor, and the name of the drug. AIDS drugs and anti-psychotic medicines, to name but two groups, are specific and are seldom prescribed for any other disorders. The plastic compacts for birth-control pills usually have complete label information.

Despite all of this sensitive information, I have had only one apartment resident object to my going through the Dumpster. In that case it turned out the resident was a university athlete who was taking bets and who was afraid I would turn up his wager slips.

Occasionally a find tells a story. I once found a small paper bag containing some unused condoms, several partial tubes of flavored sexual lubricants, a partially used compact of birth-control pills, and the torn pieces of a picture of a young man. Clearly she was through with him and planning to give up sex altogether.

Dumpster things are often sad—abandoned teddy bears, shredded wedding books, despaired-of sales kits. I find many pets lying in state in Dumpsters. Although I hope to get off the streets so that Lizbeth can have a long and comfortable old age, I know this hope is not very realistic. So I suppose when her time comes she too will go into a Dumpster. I will have no better place for her. And after all, it is fitting, since for most of her life her livelihood has come from the Dumpster. When she finds something I think is safe that has been spilled from a Dumpster, I let her have it. She already knows the route around the best ones. I like to think that if she survives me she will have a chance of evading the dog catcher and of finding her sustenance on the route.

Silly vanities also come to rest in the Dumpsters. I am a rather accomplished needleworker. I get a lot of material from the Dumpsters. Evidently sorority girls, hoping to impress someone, perhaps themselves, with their mastery of a womanly art, buy a lot of embroider-by-number kits, work a few stitches horribly, and eventually discard the whole mess. I pull out their stitches, turn the canvas over, and work an original design. Do not think I refrain from chuckling as I make gifts from these kits.

I find diaries and journals. I have often thought of compiling a book of literary found objects. And perhaps I will one day. But what I find is hopelessly commonplace and bad without being, even unconsciously, camp. College students also

discard their papers. I am horrified to discover the kind of paper that now merits an A in an undergraduate course. I am grateful, however, for the number of good books and magazines the students throw out.

In the area I know best I have never discovered vermin in the Dumpsters, but there are two kinds of kitty surprise. One is alley cats whom I meet as they leap, claws first, out of Dumpsters. This is especially thrilling when I have Lizbeth in tow. The other kind of kitty surprise is a plastic garbage bag filled with some ponderous, amorphous mass. This always proves to be used cat litter.

City bees harvest doughnut glaze and this makes the Dumpster at the doughnut shop more interesting. My faith in the instinctive wisdom of animals is always shaken whenever I see Lizbeth attempt to catch a bee in her mouth, which she does whenever bees are present. Evidently some birds find Dumpsters profitable, for birdie surprise is almost as common as kitty surprise of the first kind. In hunting season all kinds of small game turn up in Dumpsters, some of it, sadly, not entirely dead. Curiously, summer and winter, maggots are uncommon.

The worst of the living and near-living hazards of the Dumpsters are the fire ants. The food they claim is not much of a loss, but they are vicious and aggressive. It is very easy to brush some surface of the Dumpster and pick up half a dozen or more fire ants, usually in some sensitive area such as the underarm. One advantage of bringing Lizbeth along as I make Dumpster rounds is that, for obvious reasons, she is very alert to ground-based fire ants. When Lizbeth recognizes a fire-ant infestation around her feet, she does the Dance of the Zillion Fire Ants. I have learned not to ignore this warning from Lizbeth, whether I perceive the tiny ants or not, but to remove ourselves at Lizbeth's first pas de bourée. All the more so because the ants are the worst in the summer months when I wear flip-flops if I have them. (Perhaps someone will misunderstand this. Lizbeth does the Dance of the Zillion Fire Ants when she recognizes more fire ants than she cares to eat, not when she is being bitten. Since I have learned to react promptly, she does not get bitten at all. It is the isolated patrol of fire ants that falls in Lizbeth's range that deserves pity. She finds them quite tasty.)

By far the best way to go through a Dumpster is to lower yourself into it. Most of the good stuff tends to settle at the bottom because it is usually weightier than the rubbish. My more athletic companions have often demonstrated to me that they can extract much good material from a Dumpster I have already been over.

To those psychologically or physically unprepared to enter a Dumpster, I recommend a stout stick, preferably with some barb or hook at one end. The hook can be used to grab plastic garbage bags. When I find canned goods or other objects loose at the bottom of a Dumpster, I lower a bag into it, roll the desired object into the bag, and then hoist the bag out—a procedure more easily described than executed. Much Dumpster diving is a matter of experience for which nothing will do except practice.

Dumpster diving is outdoor work, often surprisingly pleasant. It is not entirely predictable; things of interest turn up every day and some days there are finds of great value. I am always very pleased when I can turn up exactly the thing I most wanted to find. Yet in spite of the element of chance, scavenging more than most

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other pursuits tends to yield returns in some proportion to the effort and intelligence brought to bear. It is very sweet to turn up a few dollars in change from a Dumpster that has just been gone over by a wino.

The land is now covered with cities. The cities are full of Dumpsters. If a member of the canine race is ever able to know what it is doing, then Lizbeth knows that when we go around to the Dumpsters, we are hunting. I think of scavenging as a modern form of self-reliance. In any event, after having survived nearly ten years of government service, where everything is geared to the lowest common denominator, I find it refreshing to have work that rewards initiative and effort. Certainly I would be happy to have a sinecure again, but I am no longer heartbroken that I left one.

I find from the experience of scavenging two rather deep lessons. The first is to take what you can use and let the rest go. I have come to think that there is no value in the abstract. A thing I cannot use or make useful, perhaps by trading, has no value however rare or fine it may be. I mean useful in a broad sense—some art I would find useful and some otherwise.

I was shocked to realize that some things are not worth acquiring, but now I think it is so. Some material things are white elephants that eat up the possessor's substance. The second lesson is the transience of material being. This has not quite converted me to a dualist, but it has made some headway in that direction. I do not suppose that ideas are immortal, but certainly mental things are longer lived than other material things.

Once I was the sort of person who invests objects with sentimental value. Now I no longer have those objects, but I have the sentiments yet.

Many times in our travels I have lost everything but the clothes I was wearing and Lizbeth. The things I find in Dumpsters, the love letters and rag dolls of so many lives, remind me of this lesson. Now I hardly pick up a thing without envisioning the time I will cast it aside. This I think is a healthy state of mind. Almost everything I have now has already been cast out at least once, proving that what I own is valueless to someone.

Anyway, I find my desire to grab for the gaudy bauble has been largely sated. I think this is an attitude I share with the very wealthy—we both know there is plenty more where what we have came from. Between us are the rat-race millions who nightly scavenge the cable channels looking for they know not what.

I am sorry for them.

NOTES

1. A large publisher of dictionaries.
2. The author's dog.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Have you ever "dived" in a dumpster for food or anything else, either out of necessity or just because you were curious? Check out your local dumpster on any given day—what are some of the things you find besides food? When you walk past a

destitute street person, what feelings or reactions surface? Do you find it easy or hard to make eye contact?

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS OR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. "Dumpster diving" is part of the language of Freeganism, a movement dedicated to the minimal consumption of resources. "Freegans" avoid buying anything (<http://freegan.info>). Why do you think this movement does or does not make sense?
2. Why does Eighner feel sorry for the "rat-race millions" who scavenge for unknown things on the cable channels?
3. What does garbage tell you about a culture?
4. Ask a friend if you can go through his or her garbage. What can you find out about your friend from looking through the garbage? What conclusions can you make about your culture by examining this garbage? Were there things in the garbage that could have been recycled or even eaten?

FOR FURTHER VIEWING: POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS

The Grapes of Wrath (1940); *Born into Brothels: Calcutta's Red Light Kids* (2004); *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995); *Titicut Follies* (1967); *Mother Theresa* (1986); *Of Mice and Men* (1939); *City of Joy* (1992); *Les Misérables* (1998); *Angela's Ashes* (1999); *Seven Samurai* (1954).

Still, the little community of Arua gives a glimpse of what might be. I believe to the depths of my being that Africa will one day rejoice in a time when families are whole and funerals are rare. It's just so bitter that such multitudes of lives are being lost along the way. It's hard not to be in a near stupor of anger. And yet I'm sustained, as so many Africans are, by the memories of what the continent used to be, and the conviction that the present will one day reunite with the best of the past.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Do you think it is the responsibility of developed, or richer, nations to help poorer nations? Why? What do you think are the results of such assistance or lack of assistance?

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS OR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What speaking and writing strategies does Lewis use to convey his message? Do these strategies affect your opinions and sympathies?
2. What reasons does Lewis give for Africa's current situation regarding HIV/AIDS?
3. Given what Lewis says in the piece, discuss the usefulness of the United Nations in making positive changes. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund?
4. The world that Lewis moves around in is populated by many confusing non-governmental organizations, governments, policy makers, politicians, and bureaucrats. Select two or three of these organizations or individuals, and try to understand their roles and the source of their power. Discuss their functions and Lewis's attitude toward them.
5. Lewis does not hide his emotions. Point out some of the sentences where his strong emotions leak out. How do these "leakages" affect his credibility? How do they affect your response to the issues? Do they help or hinder his argument?
6. Elsewhere Lewis says, "History will not judge our government kindly." Has Canada met the standard of support that it sets for the rest of the world? Discuss.

EXCERPT: A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR

DANIEL DEFOE

Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) is probably best known for his novels Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders. Much of A Journal of the Plague Year is a description of the 1665 plague that devastated London and parts of the English nation when Defoe was just a child.

A journalist and novelist, he researched his account thoroughly. Defoe published the Journal in 1722, when he was 62. In 1720, two years earlier, about 50,000 people had died of the Plague in France, and Londoners feared another full-scale outbreak. The bubonic plague claimed about fifty million lives in Europe between 1345 and 1720.

I must confess my self to have been very much dejected just before this happen'd; for the prodigious Number that were taken sick the Week or two before, besides those that died, was such, and the Lamentations were so great every where that a Man must have seemed to have acted even against his Reason, if he had so much as expected to escape; and as there was hardly a House, but mine, in all my Neighbourhood, but what was infected; so had it gone on, it would not have been long, that there would have been any more Neighbours to be infected; indeed it is hardly credible, what dreadful Havoc the last three Weeks had made, for if I might believe the Person, whose Calculations I always found very well grounded, there were not less than 30000 People dead, and near 100 thousand fallen sick in the three Weeks I speak of; for the Number that sickened was surprising, indeed it was astonishing, and those whose Courage upheld them all the time before, sunk under it now.

In the Middle of their Distress, when the Condition of the City of London was so truly calamitous, just then it pleased God, as it were, by his immediate Hand to disarm this Enemy; the Poyson was taken out of the Sting, it was wonderful, even the Physicians themselves were surprized at it; wherever they visited, the found their Patients better, either they had sweated kindly, or the Tumours were broke, or the Carbuncles went down, and the Inflammations round them chang'd Colour, or the Fever was gone, or the violent Headach was asswag'd, or some good Symptom was in the Case; so that in a few Days, every Body was recovering, whole Families that were infected and down, that had Ministers praying with them, and expected Death every Hour, were revived and healed, and none died at all out of them.

Nor was this by any new Medicine found out, or new Method of Cure discovered, or by any Experience in the Operation, which the Physicians or Surgeons had attain'd to; but it was evidently from the secret invisible hand of him, that had at first sent this Disease as a Judgment upon us; and let the Atheistic part of Mankind call my Saying this what they please, it is no Enthusiasm; it was acknowledg'd at that time by all Mankind; the Disease was enervated, and its Malignity spent, and let it proceed from whencesoever it will, let the Philosophers search for Reasons in nature to account for it by, and labour as much as they will to lessen the Debt they owe to their Maker; those Physicians, who had the least Share of Religion in them, were oblig'd to acknowledge that it was all supernatural, that it was extraordinary, and that no Account could be given of it.

If I should say, that this is a visible Summons to us all to Thankfulness, especially we that were under the Terror of its Increase, perhaps it may be thought by some, after the Sense of the thing was over, an officious canting of religious things, preaching a Sermon instead of writing a History, making my self a Teacher instead of giving my Observations of things, and this restrains me very much from going on

here, as I might otherwise do: But if ten Leapers were healed, and but one return'd to give Thanks, I desire to be as that one,¹ and to be thankful for my self.

Nor will I deny, but there were Abundance of People who to all Appearance were very thankful at that time; for their Mouths were stop'd even the Mouths of those, whose Hearts were not extraordinary long affected with it: But the Impression was so strong at that time, that it could not be resisted, no not by the worst of the People.

It was a common thing to meet People in the Street, that were Strangers, and that we knew nothing at all of, expressing their Surprize. Going one Day thro' *Aldgate*, and a pretty many People being passing and repassing, there comes a Man out of the End of the *Minories*, and looking a little up the Street and down, he throws his Hands abroad, *Lord, what an Alteration is here!* Why, last Week I came along here, and hardly any Body was to be seen; another Man, I heard him, adds to his Words, 'tis all wonderful, 'tis all a Dream: Blessed be God, says a third Man, and let us give Thanks to him, for 'tis all his own doing: Human Help and human Skill was at an End. These were all Strangers to one another: But such Salutations as these were frequent in the Street every Day; and in Spight of a loose Behaviour, the very common People went along the Streets, giving God Thanks for their Deliverance.

It was now, as I said before, the People had cast off all Apprehensions, and that too fast; indeed we were no more afraid now to pass by a Man with a white Cap upon his Head, or with a Cloth wrapt round his Neck, or with his Leg limping, occasion'd by the Sores in his Groyn, all which were frightful to the last Degree, but the Week before; but now the Street was full of them, and these poor recovering Creatures, give them their Due, appear'd very sensible of their unexpected Deliverance, and I should wrong them very much, if I should not acknowledge, that I believe many of them were really thankful; but I must own, that for the Generality of the People it might too justly be said of them, as was said of the Children of *Israel*, after their being delivered from the Host of *Pharaoh*, when they passed the *Red-Sea*, and look'd back, and saw the *Egyptians* overwhelmed in the Water, viz. That *they sang his Praise, but they soon forgot his Works.*²

I can go no farther here. I should be counted censorious, and perhaps unjust, if I should enter into the unpleasant Work of reflecting, whatever Cause there was for it, upon the Unthankfulness and Return of all manner of Wickedness among us, which I was so much an Eye-Witness of my self; I shall conclude the Account of this calamitous Year therefore with a coarse but sincere Stanza of my own, which I plac'd at the End of my ordinary Memorandums, the same Year they were written:

A dreadful Plague in London was,
In the Year of Sixty Five,
Which swept an Hundred Thousand Souls
Away: yet I alive!

H.F.

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NOTES

1. Luke 17.12–17; this passage is one of Defoe's favourites, and he compared himself to that one leper several times in his nonfiction prose and in his letters to benefactors.
2. Psalms 106.12–13. Defoe is probably quoting from memory. This psalm would have seemed appropriate to him because it includes a review of Israel's history, deliverance, and repeated lapses into sin and forgetfulness, and it concludes with thanks for God's repeated mercy and forgiveness.

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Does the idea of a plague or epidemic frighten you? In your history classes, have you studied the worldwide flu epidemic at the start of the 20th century that affected Canada? What about contemporary news reports that warn of an impending avian flu epidemic and the economic toll it would take? Do you feel that news reports, such as the reports about the 2003 SARS outbreaks in Toronto and Vancouver, create unnecessary fear?

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS OR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Give an example from this excerpt that demonstrates the belief that the Plague was a visitation or punishment from a divine being.
2. Draw some parallels between the Plague and the AIDS epidemic today, especially in terms of morality. For example, can you find examples of contemporary religious leaders, preachers, or fundamentalists who believe that AIDS is a chastisement or a holy plague from God?
3. It was not until 1894 that the bubonic plague was identified as *Yersinia pestis*, an internal parasite of rodents, especially rats, which is carried by fleas from the dying animals. What were some of the hypotheses as to the origin of the Plague?
4. Is there anything in our time that is like the Plague, and that may have the same impact? Describe what it is and the nature of the impact.

"THIS IS THE END OF THE WORLD": THE BLACK DEATH

BARBARA TUCHMAN

Barbara Tuchman (1912–1989) was a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian who provided insight into the origins of wars and plagues, and who brought the past to life with her popular books.

In October 1347, two months after the fall of Calais,¹ Genoese trading ships put into the harbor of Messina in Sicily with dead and dying men at the oars. The ships had come from the Black Sea port of Caffa (now Feodosiya) in the Crimea, where the Genoese maintained a trading post. The diseased sailors showed strange black swellings about the size of an egg or an apple in the armpits and groin. The swellings oozed blood and pus and were followed by spreading boils and black blotches on the skin from internal bleeding. The sick suffered severe pain and died quickly within five days of the first symptoms. As the disease spread, other symptoms of continuous fever and spitting of blood appeared instead of the swellings or buboes. These victims coughed and sweated heavily and died even more quickly, within three days or less, sometimes in 24 hours. In both types everything that issued from the body—breath, sweat, blood from the buboes and lungs, bloody urine, and blood-blackened excrement—smelled foul. Depression and despair accompanied the physical symptoms, and before the end “death is seen seated on the face.”

The disease was bubonic plague, present in two forms: one that infected the bloodstream, causing the buboes and internal bleeding, and was spread by contact; and a second, more virulent pneumonic type that infected the lungs and was spread by respiratory infection. The presence of both at once caused the high mortality and speed of contagion. So lethal was the disease that cases were known of persons going to bed well and dying before they woke, of doctors catching the illness at a bedside and dying before the patient. So rapidly did it spread from one to another that to a French physician, Simon de Covino, it seemed as if one sick person “could infect the whole world.” The malignity of the pestilence appeared more terrible because its victims knew no prevention and no remedy.

The physical suffering of the disease and its aspect of evil mystery were expressed in a strange Welsh lament which saw “death coming into our midst like black smoke, a plague which cuts off the young, a rootless phantom which has no mercy for fair countenance. Woe is me of the shilling in the armpit! It is seething, terrible . . . a head that gives pain and causes a loud cry . . . a painful angry knob. . . . Great is its seething like a burning cinder . . . a grievous thing of ashy color.” Its eruption is ugly like the “seeds of black peas, broken fragments of brittle sea-coal . . . the early ornaments of black death, cinders of the peelings of the cockle weed, a mixed multitude, a black plague like halfpence, like berries. . . .”

Rumors of a terrible plague supposedly arising in China and spreading through Tartary (Central Asia) to India and Persia, Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, and all of Asia Minor had reached Europe in 1346. They told of a death toll so devastating that all of India was said to be depopulated, whole territories covered by dead bodies, other areas with no one left alive. As added up by Pope Clement VI at Avignon, the total of reported dead reached 23,840,000. In the absence of a concept of contagion, no serious alarm was felt in Europe until the trading ships brought their black burden of pestilence into Messina while other infected ships from the Levant carried it to Genoa and Venice.

By January 1348 it penetrated France via Marseille, and North Africa via Tunis. Shipborne along coasts and navigable rivers, it spread westward from Marseille through the ports of Languedoc to Spain and northward up the Rhône to Avignon,

where it arrived in Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Florence, Lyons, and Normandy, and the Alps in

In a given year, then faded. In addition, it also lasted for six months.

In 1348, in many countries, the ghost ship appeared near Bergen, and as far as Russia. Although the nine tenths of the population died, the same figure, estimate, the St. John's figures of the affairs of the

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where it arrived in March. It reached Narbonne, Montpellier, Carcassonne, and Toulouse between February and May, and at the same time in Italy spread to Rome and Florence and their hinterlands. Between June and August it reached Bordeaux, Lyon, and Paris, spread to Burgundy and Normandy, and crossed the Channel from Normandy into southern England. From Italy during the same summer it crossed the Alps into Switzerland and reached eastward to Hungary.

In a given area the plague accomplished its kill within four to six months and then faded, except in the larger cities, where, rooting into the close-quartered population, it abated during the winter, only to reappear in spring and rage for another six months.

In 1349 it resumed in Paris, spread to Picardy, Flanders, and the new Low Countries, and from England to Scotland and Ireland as well as to Norway, where a ghost ship with a cargo of wool and a dead crew drifted offshore until it ran aground near Bergen. From there the plague passed into Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Iceland, and as far as Greenland. Leaving a strange pocket of immunity in Bohemia, and Russia unattacked until 1351, it had passed from most of Europe by mid-1350. Although the mortality rate was erratic, ranging from one fifth in some places to nine tenths or almost total elimination in others, the overall estimate of modern demographers has settled—for the area extending from India to Iceland—around the same figure expressed in Froissart's casual words: "a third of the world died." His estimate, the common one at the time, was not an inspired guess but a borrowing of St. John's figure for mortality from plague in Revelation, the favorite guide to human affairs of the Middle Ages.

A third of Europe would have meant about 20 million deaths. No one knows in truth how many died. Contemporary reports were an awed impression, not an accurate count. In crowded Avignon, it was said, 400 died daily; 7,000 houses emptied by death were shut up; a single graveyard received 11,000 corpses in six weeks; half the city's inhabitants reportedly died, including 9 cardinals or one third of the total, and 70 lesser prelates. Watching the endlessly passing death carts, chroniclers let normal exaggeration take wings and put the Avignon death toll at 62,000 and even at 120,000, although the city's total population was probably less than 50,000.

When graveyards filled up, bodies at Avignon were thrown into the Rhône until mass burial pits were dug for dumping the corpses. In London in such pits corpses piled up in layers until they overflowed. Everywhere reports speak of the sick dying too fast for the living to bury. Corpses were dragged out of homes and left in front of doorways. Morning light revealed new piles of bodies. In Florence the dead were gathered up by the Compagnia della Misericordia—founded in 1244 to care for the sick—whose members wore red robes and hoods masking the face except for the eyes. When their efforts failed, the dead lay putrid in the streets for days at a time. When no coffins were to be had, the bodies were laid on boards, two or three at once, to be carried to graveyards or common pits. Families dumped their own relatives into the pits, or buried them so hastily and thinly "that dogs dragged them forth and devoured their bodies."

Amid accumulating death and fear of contagion, people died without last rites and were buried without prayers, a prospect that terrified the last hours of

the stricken. A bishop in England gave permission to laymen to make confession to each other as was done by the Apostles, "or if no man is present then even to a woman," and if no priest could be found to administer extreme unction, "then faith must suffice." Clement VI found it necessary to grant remissions of sin to all who died of the plague because so many were unattended by priests. "And no bells tolled," wrote a chronicler of Siena, "and nobody wept no matter what his loss because almost everyone expected death. . . . And people said and believed, 'This is the end of the world.'"

In Paris, where the plague lasted through 1349, the reported death rate was 800 a day, in Pisa 500, in Vienna 500 to 600. The total dead in Paris numbered 50,000 or half the population. Florence, weakened by the famine of 1347, lost three to four fifths of its citizens, Venice two thirds, Hamburg and Bremen, though smaller in size, about the same proportion. Cities, as centers of transportation, were more likely to be affected than villages, although once a village was infected, its death rate was equally high. At Givry, a prosperous village in Burgundy of 1,200 to 1,500 people, the parish register records 615 deaths in the space of fourteen weeks, compared to an average of thirty deaths a year in the previous decade. In three villages of Cambridgeshire, manorial records show a death rate of 47 percent, 57 percent, and in one case 70 percent. When the last survivors, too few to carry on, moved away, a deserted village sank back into the wilderness and disappeared from the map altogether, leaving only a grass-covered ghostly outline to show where mortals once had lived.

In enclosed places such as monasteries and prisons, the infection of one person usually meant that of all, as happened in the Franciscan convents of Carcassonne and Marseille, where every inmate without exception died. Of the 140 Dominicans at Montpellier only seven survived. Petrarch's² brother Gherardo, member of a Carthusian monastery, buried the prior and 34 fellow monks one by one, sometimes three a day, until he was left alone with his dog and fled to look for a place that would take him in. Watching every comrade die, men in such places could not but wonder whether the strange peril that filled the air had not been sent to exterminate the human race. In Kilkenny, Ireland, Brother John Clyn of the Friars Minor, another monk left alone among dead men, kept a record of what had happened lest "things which should be remembered perish with time and vanish from the memory of those who come after us." Sensing "the whole world, as it were, placed within the grasp of the Evil One," and waiting for death to visit him too, he wrote, "I leave parchment to continue this work, if perchance any man survive and any of the race of Adam escape this pestilence and carry on the work which I have begun." Brother John, as noted by another hand, died of the pestilence, but he foiled oblivion.

The largest cities of Europe, with populations of about 100,000, were Paris and Florence, Venice and Genoa. At the next level, with more than 50,000, were Ghent and Bruges in Flanders, Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples, and Palermo, and Cologne. London hovered below 50,000, the only city in England except York with more than 10,000. At the level of 20,000 to 50,000 were Bordeaux, Toulouse, Montpellier, Marseille, and Lyon in France, Barcelona, Seville, and Toledo in Spain, Siena, Pisa, and other secondary cities in Italy, and the Hanseatic trading cities of the Empire.

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The plague raged through them all, killing anywhere from one third to two thirds of their inhabitants. Italy, with a total population of 10 to 11 million, probably suffered the heaviest toll. Following the Florentine bankruptcies, the crop failures and workers' riots of 1346-47, the revolt of Cola di Rienzi that plunged Rome into anarchy, the plague came as the peak of successive calamities. As if the world were indeed in the grasp of the Evil One, its first appearance on the European mainland in January 1348 coincided with a fearsome earthquake that carved a path of wreckage from Naples up to Venice. Houses collapsed, church towers toppled, villages were crushed, and the destruction reached as far as Germany and Greece. Emotional response, dulled by horrors, underwent a kind of atrophy epitomized by the chronicler who wrote, "And in these days was burying without sorrowe and wedding without friendschippe."

In Siena, where more than half the inhabitants died of the plague, work was abandoned on the great cathedral, planned to be the largest in the world, and never resumed, owing to loss of workers and master masons and "the melancholy and grief" of the survivors. The cathedral's truncated transept still stands in permanent witness to the sweep of death's scythe. Agnolo di Tura, a chronicler of Siena, recorded the fear of contagion that froze every other instinct. "Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another," he wrote, "for this plague seemed to strike through the breath and sight. And so they died. And no one could be found to bury the dead for money or friendship. . . . And I, Agnolo di Tura, called the Fat, buried my five children with my own hands, and so did many others likewise."

There were many to echo his account of inhumanity and few to balance it, for the plague was not the kind of calamity that inspired mutual help. Its loathsomeness and deadliness did not herd people together in mutual distress, but only prompted their desire to escape each other. "Magistrates and notaries refused to come and make the wills of the dying," reported a Franciscan friar of Piazza in Sicily; what was worse, "even the priests did not come to hear their confessions." A clerk of the Archbishop of Canterbury reported the same of English priests who "turned away from the care of their benefices from fear of death." Cases of parents deserting children and children their parents were reported across Europe from Scotland to Russia. The calamity chilled the hearts of men, wrote Boccaccio³ in his famous account of the plague in Florence that serves as introduction to the *Decameron*. "One man shunned another . . . kinsfolk held aloof, brother was forsaken by brother, oftentimes husband by wife; nay, what is more, and scarcely to be believed, fathers and mothers were found to abandon their own children to their fate, untended, unvisited as if they had been strangers." Exaggeration and literary pessimism were common in the 14th century, but the Pope's physician, Guy de Chauliac, was a sober, careful observer who reported the same phenomenon: "A father did not visit his son, nor the son his father. Charity was dead."

Yet not entirely. In Paris, according to the chronicler Jean de Venette, the nuns of the Hôtel Dieu or municipal hospital, "having no fear of death, tended the sick with all sweetness and humility." New nuns repeatedly took the places of those who died, until the majority "many times renewed by death now rest in peace with Christ as we may piously believe."

When the plague entered northern France in July 1348, it settled first in Normandy and, checked by winter, gave Picardy a deceptive interim until the next summer. Either in mourning or warning, black flags were flown from church towers of the worst-stricken villages of Normandy. "And in that time," wrote a monk of the abbey of Fourcarment, "the mortality was so great among the people of Normandy that those of Picardy mocked them." The same unneighborly reaction was reported of the Scots, separated by a winter's immunity from the English. Delighted to hear of the disease that was scouring the "southrons," they gathered forces for an invasion, "laughing at their enemies." Before they could move, the savage mortality fell upon them too, scattering some in death and the rest in panic to spread the infection as they fled.

In Picardy in the summer of 1349 the pestilence penetrated the castle of Coucy to kill Enguerrand's⁴ mother, Catherine, and her new husband. Whether her nine-year-old son escaped by chance or was perhaps living elsewhere with one of his guardians is unrecorded. In nearby Amiens, tannery workers, responding quickly to losses in the labor force, combined to bargain for higher wages. In another place villagers were seen dancing to drums and trumpets, and on being asked the reason, answered that, seeing their neighbors die day by day while their village remained immune, they believed they could keep the plague from entering "by the jollity that is in us. That is why we dance." Further north in Tournai on the border of Flanders, Gilles le Muisis, Abbot of St. Martin's, kept one of the epidemic's most vivid accounts. The passing bells rang all day and all night, he recorded, because sextons were anxious to obtain their fees while they could. Filled with the sound of mourning, the city became oppressed by fear, so that the authorities forbade the tolling of bells and the wearing of black and restricted funeral services to two mourners. The silencing of funeral bells and of criers' announcements of deaths was ordained by most cities. Siena imposed a fine on the wearing of mourning clothes by all except widows.

Flight was the chief recourse of those who could afford it or arrange it. The rich fled to their country places like Boccaccio's young patricians of Florence, who settled in a pastoral palace "removed on every side from the roads" with "wells of cool water and vaults of rare wines." The urban poor died in their burrows, "and only the stench of their bodies informed neighbors of their death." That the poor were more heavily afflicted than the rich was clearly remarked at the time, in the north as in the south. A Scottish chronicler, John of Fordun, stated flatly that the pest "attacked especially the meaner sort and common people—seldom the magnates." Simon de Covino of Montpellier made the same observation. He ascribed it to the misery and want and hard lives that made the poor more susceptible, which was half the truth. Close contact and lack of sanitation was the unrecognized other half. It was noticed too that the young died in greater proportion than the old; Simon de Corvino compared the disappearance of youth to the withering of flowers in the field.

In the countryside peasants dropped dead on the roads, in the fields, in their houses. Survivors in growing helplessness fell into apathy, leaving ripe wheat uncut and livestock untended. Oxen and asses, sheep and goats, pigs and chickens ran wild and they too, according to local reports, succumbed to the pest. English sheep, bearers of the precious wool, died throughout the country. The chronicler Henry

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Knighton, canon of Leicester Abbey, reported 5,000 dead in one field alone, "their bodies so corrupted by the plague that neither beast nor bird would touch them," and spreading an appalling stench. In the Austrian Alps wolves came down to prey upon sheep and then, "as if alarmed by some invisible warning, turned and fled back into the wilderness." In remote Dalmatia bolder wolves descended upon a plague-stricken city and attacked human survivors. For want of herdsmen, cattle strayed from place to place and died in hedgerows and ditches. Dogs and cats fell like the rest.

The dearth of labor held a fearful prospect because the 14th century lived close to the annual harvest both for food and for next year's seed. "So few servants and laborers were left," wrote Knighton, "that no one knew where to turn for help." The sense of a vanishing future created a kind of dementia of despair. A Bavarian chronicler of Neuberg on the Danube recorded that "Men and women . . . wandered around as if mad" and let their cattle stray "because no one had any inclination to concern themselves about the future." Fields went uncultivated, spring seed unsown. Second growth with nature's awful energy crept back over cleared land, dikes crumbled, salt water reinvaded and soured the lowlands. With so few hands remaining to restore the work of centuries, people felt, in Walsingham's words, that "the world could never again regain its former prosperity."

Though the death rate was higher among the anonymous poor, the known and the great died too. King Alfonso XI of Castile was the only reigning monarch killed by the pest, but his neighbour King Pedro of Aragon lost his wife, Queen Leonora, his daughter Marie, and a niece in the space of six months. John Cantacuzene, Emperor of Byzantium, lost his son. In France the lame Queen Jeanne and her daughter-in-law Bonne de Luxemburg, wife of the Dauphin, both died in 1349 in the same phase that took the life of Enguerrand's mother. Jeanne, Queen of Navarre, daughter of Louis X, was another victim. Edward III's second daughter, Joanna, who was on her way to marry Pedro, the heir of Castile, died in Bordeaux. Women appear to have been more vulnerable than men, perhaps because, being more housebound, they were more exposed to fleas. Boccaccio's mistress Fiammetta, illegitimate daughter of the King of Naples, died, as did Laura, the beloved—whether real or fictional—of Petrarch. Reaching out to us in the future, Petrarch cried, "Oh happy posterity who will not experience such abysmal woe and will look upon our testimony as a fable."

In Florence Giovanni Villani, the great historian of his time, died at 68 in the midst of an unfinished sentence: ". . . e dure questo pestolenza fino a . . ." (in the midst of this pestilence there came to an end . . .). Siena's master painters, the brothers Ambrogio and Pietro Lorenzetti, whose names never appear after 1348, presumably perished in the plague, as did Andrea Pisano, architect and sculptor of Florence. William of Ockham and the English mystic Richard Rolle of Hampole both disappear from mention after 1349. Francisco Datini, merchant of Prato, lost both his parents and two siblings. Curious sweeps of mortality afflicted certain bodies of merchants in London. All eight wardens of the Company of Cutters, all six wardens of the Hatters, and four wardens of the Goldsmiths died before July 1350. Sir John Pulteney, master draper and four times Mayor of London, was a victim, likewise Sir John Montgomery, Governor of Calais.

Among the clergy and doctors the mortality was naturally high because of the nature of their professions. Out of 24 physicians in Venice, 20 were said to have lost their lives in the plague, although, according to another account, some were believed to have fled or to have shut themselves up in their houses. At Montpellier, site of the leading medieval medical school, the physician Simon de Corvino reported that, despite the great number of doctors, "hardly one of them escaped." In Avignon, Guy de Chauliac confessed that he performed his medical visits only because he dared not stay away for fear of infamy, but "I was in continual fear." He claimed to have contracted the disease but to have cured himself by his own treatment; if so, he was one of the few who recovered.

Clerical mortality varied with rank. Although the one-third toll of cardinals reflects the same proportion as the whole, this was probably due to their concentration in Avignon. In England, in strange and almost sinister procession, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Stratford, died in August 1348, his appointed successor died in May 1349, and the next appointee three months later, all three within a year. Despite such weird vagaries, prelates in general managed to sustain a higher survival rate than the lesser clergy. Among bishops the deaths have been estimated at about one in twenty. The loss of priests, even if many avoided their fearful duty of attending the dying, was about the same as among the population as a whole.

Government officials, whose loss contributed to the general chaos, found, on the whole, no special shelter. In Siena four of the nine members of the governing oligarchy died, in France one third of the royal notaries, in Bristol 15 out of the 52 members of the Town Council or almost one third. Tax-collecting obviously suffered, with the result that Philip VI was unable to collect more than a fraction of the subsidy granted him by the Estates in the winter of 1347–48.

Lawlessness and debauchery accompanied the plague as they had during the great plague of Athens of 430 B.C., when according to Thucydides, men grew bold in the indulgence of pleasure: "For seeing how the rich died in a moment and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property, they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could." Human behaviour is timeless. When St. John had his vision of plague in Revelation, he knew from some experience or race memory that those who survived "repented not of the work of their hands. . . . Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts."

Ignorance of the cause augmented the sense of horror. Of the real carriers, rats and fleas, the 14th century had no suspicion, perhaps because they were so familiar. Fleas, though a common household nuisance, are not once mentioned in contemporary plague writings, and rats only incidentally, although folklore commonly associated them with pestilence. The legend of the Pied Piper arose from an outbreak of 1284. The actual plague bacillus, *Pasturella pestis*, remained undiscovered for another 500 years. Living alternately in the stomach of the flea and the bloodstream of the rat who was the flea's host, the bacillus in its bubonic form was transferred to humans and animals by the bite of either rat or flea. It traveled by virtue of *Rattus rattus*, the small medieval black rat that lived on ships, as well as by the heavier

brown or sewer rat. What precipitated the turn of the bacillus from innocuous to virulent form is unknown, but the occurrence is now believed to have taken place not in China but somewhere in central Asia and to have spread along the caravan routes. Chinese origin was a mistaken notion of the 14th century based on real but belated reports of huge death tolls in China from drought, famine, and pestilence which have since been traced to the 1330s, too soon to be responsible for the plague that appeared in India in 1346.

The phantom enemy had no name. Called the Black Death only in later recurrences, it was known during the first epidemic simply as the Pestilence or Great Mortality. Reports from the East, swollen by fearful imaginings, told of strange tempests and "sheets of fire" mingled with huge hailstones that "slew almost all," or a "vast rain of fire" that burned up men, beasts, stones, trees, villages, and cities. In another version, "foul blasts of wind" from the fires carried the infection to Europe "and now as some suspect it cometh round the seacoast." Accurate observation in this case could not make the mental jump to ships and rats because no idea of animal- or insect-borne contagion existed.

The earthquake was blamed for releasing sulphurous and foul fumes from the earth's interior, or as evidence of a titanic struggle of planets and oceans causing waters to rise and vaporize until fish died in masses and corrupted the air. All these explanations had in common a factor of poisoned air, of miasmas and thick, stinking mists traced to every kind of natural or imagined agency from stagnant lakes to malign conjunction of the planets, from the hand of the Evil One to the wrath of God. Medical thinking, trapped in the theory of astral influences, stressed air as the communicator of disease, ignoring sanitation or visible carriers. The existence of two carriers confused the trail, the more so because the flea could live and travel independently of the rat for as long as a month and, if infected by the particularly virulent septicemic form of the bacillus, could infect humans without reinfesting itself from the rat. The simultaneous presence of the pneumonic form of the disease, which was indeed communicated through the air, blurred the problem further.

The mystery of the contagion was "the most terrible of all the terrors," as an anonymous Flemish cleric in Avignon wrote to a correspondent in Bruges. Plagues had been known before, from the plague of Athens (believed to have been typhus) to the prolonged epidemic of the 6th century A.D., to the recurrence of sporadic outbreaks in the 12th and 13th centuries, but they had left no accumulated store of understanding. That the infection came from contact with the sick or with their houses, clothes, or corpses was quickly observed but not comprehended. Gentile da Foligno, renowned physician of Perugia and doctor of medicine at the universities of Bologna and Padua, came close to respiratory infection when he surmised that poisonous material was "communicated by means of air breathed out and in." Having no idea of microscopic carriers, he had to assume that the air was corrupted by planetary influences. Planets, however, could not explain the ongoing contagion. The agonized search for an answer gave rise to such theories as transference by sight. People fell ill, wrote Guy de Chauliac, not only by remaining with the sick but "even by looking at them." Three hundred years later Joshua Barnes, the 17th century

biographer of Edward III, could write that the power of infection had entered into beams of light and “darted death from the eyes.”

Doctors struggling with evidence could not break away from the terms of astrology, to which they believed all human physiology was subject. Medicine was the one aspect of medieval life, perhaps because of its links with the Arabs, not shaped by Christian doctrine. Clerics detested astrology, but could not dislodge its influence. Guy de Chauliac, physician to three popes in succession, practiced in obedience to the zodiac. While his *Cirurgia* was the major treatise on surgery of its time, while he understood the use of anesthesia made from the juice of opium, mandrake, or hemlock, he nevertheless prescribed bleeding and purgatives by the planets and divided chronic from acute diseases on the basis of one being under the rule of the sun and the other of the moon.

In October 1348 Philip VI asked the medical faculty of the University of Paris for a report on the affliction that seemed to threaten human survival. With careful thesis, antithesis, and proofs, the doctors ascribed it to a triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in the 40th degree of Aquarius said to have occurred on March 20, 1345. They acknowledged, however, effects “whose cause is hidden from even the most highly trained intellects.” The verdict of the masters of Paris became the official version. Borrowed, copied by scribes, carried abroad, translated from Latin into various vernaculars, it was everywhere accepted, even by the Arab physicians of Cordova and Granada, as the scientific if not the popular answer. Because of the terrible interest of the subject, the translations of the plague tracts stimulated use of national languages. In that one respect, life came from death.

To the people at large there could be but one explanation—the wrath of God. Planets might satisfy the learned doctors, but God was closer to the average man. A scourge so sweeping and unsparing without any visible cause could only be seen as Divine punishment upon mankind for its sins. It might even be God’s terminal disappointment in his creature. Matteo Villani compared the plague to the Flood in ultimate purpose and believed he was recording “the extermination of mankind.” Efforts to appease Divine wrath took many forms, as when the city of Rouen ordered that everything that could anger God, such as gambling, cursing, and drinking, must be stopped. More general were the penitent processions authorized at first by the Pope, some lasting as long as three days, some attended by as many as 2,000, which everywhere accompanied the plague and helped to spread it.

Barefoot in sackcloth, sprinkled with ashes, weeping, praying, tearing their hair, carrying candles and relics, sometimes with ropes around their necks or beating themselves with whips, the penitents wound through the streets, imploring the mercy of the Virgin and saints at their shrines. In a vivid illustration for the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry, the Pope is shown in a penitent procession attended by four cardinals in scarlet from hat to hem. He raises both arms in supplication to the angel on top of the Castel Sant’Angelo, while white-robed priests bearing banners and relics in golden cases turn to look as one of their number, stricken by the plague, falls to the ground, his face contorted with anxiety. In the rear, a gray-clad monk falls beside another victim already on the ground as the townspeople gaze in

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horror. (Nominally the illustration represents a 6th century plague in the time of Pope Gregory the Great, but as medieval artists made no distinction between past and present, the scene is shown as the artist would have seen it in the 14th century.) When it became evident that these processions were sources of infection, Clement VI had to prohibit them.

In Messina, where the plague first appeared, the people begged the Archbishop of neighboring Catania to lend them the relics of St. Agatha. When the Catanians refused to let the relics go, the Archbishop dipped them in holy water and took the water himself to Messina, where he carried it in a procession with prayers and litanies through the streets. The demonic, which shared the medieval cosmos with God, appeared as "demons in the shape of dogs" to terrify the people. "A black dog with a drawn sword in his paws appeared among them, gnashing his teeth and rushing upon them and breaking all the silver vessels and lamps and candlesticks on the altars and casting them hither and thither. . . . So the people of Messina, terrified by this prodigious vision, were all strangely overcome by fear."

The apparent absence of earthly cause gave the plague a supernatural and sinister quality. Scandinavians believed that a Pest Maiden emerged from the mouth of the dead in the form of a blue flame and flew through the air to infect the next house. In Lithuania the Maiden was said to wave a red scarf through the door or window to let in the pest. One brave man, according to legend, deliberately waited at his open window with drawn sword and, at the fluttering of the scarf, chopped off the hand. He died of his deed, but his village was spared and the scarf long preserved as a relic in the local church.

Beyond demons and superstition the final hand was God's. The Pope acknowledged it in a Bull of September 1348, speaking of the "pestilence with which God is afflicting the Christian people." To the Emperor John Cantacuzene it was manifest that a malady of such horrors, stench, and agonies, and especially one bringing the dismal despair that settled upon its victims before they died, was not a plague "natural" to mankind but "a chastisement from Heaven." To Piers Plowman⁵ "these pestilences were for pure sin."

The general acceptance of this view created an expanded sense of guilt, for if the plague were punishment there had to be terrible sin to have occasioned it. What sins were on the 14th century conscience? Primarily greed, the sin of avarice, followed by usury, worldliness, adultery, blasphemy, falsehood, luxury, irreligion. Giovanni Villani, attempting to account for the cascade of calamity that had fallen upon Florence, concluded that it was retribution for the sins of avarice and usury that oppressed the poor. Pity and anger about the condition of the poor, especially victimization of the peasantry in war, was often expressed by writers of the time and was certainly on the conscience of the century. Beneath it all was the daily condition of medieval life, in which hardly an act or thought, sexual, mercantile, or military, did not contravene the dictates of the Church. Mere failure to fast or attend mass was sin. The result was an underground lake of guilt in the soul that the plague now tapped.

That the mortality was accepted as God's punishment may explain in part the vacuum of comment that followed the Black Death. An investigator has noticed that in the archives of Périgord references to the war are innumerable, to the plague

few. Froissart mentions the great death but once, Chaucer gives it barely a glance. Divine anger so great that it contemplated the extermination of man did not bear close examination.

NOTES

1. After a year-long siege, the French citizens of Calais surrendered to Edward III, king of England and self-declared king of France.
2. Francesco Petrarch (1303–1374), Italian writer whose sonnets to “my lady Laura” influenced a tradition of European love poetry for centuries.
3. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), Italian writer best known for his collection of stories, *The Decameron*, in which seven young ladies and three young men flee from Florence to escape the Black Death and tell stories to while away the time.
4. Enguerrand de Coucy, a French nobleman, is the historical figure around whom Tuchman constructs her account of the fourteenth century.
5. The main character (and title) of a fourteenth-century poem by the English poet William Langland (c. 1330–c. 1386).

PERSONAL RESPONSE

Are you frightened by the prospect of a pandemic? List three specific parallels between AIDS and the 14th-century plague, drawing on information from the Tuchman piece or an Internet source. Describe three other modern epidemics, pandemics, or plagues.

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS OR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Plagues have been attributed to the wrath of a divine power. Explain why some people today attribute diseases such as AIDS to God’s anger or disappointment. Do you agree or disagree with the view that victims pay for their sins by becoming ill? Discuss.
2. No one surmised in the 14th century that the Black Death could be attributed to fleas or rats. What, today, do we know about the origins of modern diseases?
3. Is there a belief that science or government will take care of us in the event of a plague or pandemic (e.g., avian flu)? Discuss.

FOR FURTHER VIEWING: GLOBAL HEALTH

Twelve Monkeys (1995); *28 Days Later* (2002); *State of Denial* (2003); *A Closer Walk* (2005); *It’s My Life* (2001); *The Plague Dogs* (1992); *And the Band Played On* (1993); *ABC Africa* (2001); *3 Needles* (2005); *One Week* (2000); *Absolutely Positive* (2006); *Panic in the Streets* (1959); *Children of Men* (2006); *The Andromeda Strain* (1971).

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"AS HE HIMSELF PUTS IT"

The Art of Quoting



A KEY PREMISE of this book is that to launch an effective argument you need to write the arguments of others into your text. One of the best ways to do this is by not only summarizing what "they say," as suggested in Chapter 2, but by quoting their exact words. Quoting someone else's words gives a tremendous amount of credibility to your summary and helps ensure that it is fair and accurate. In a sense, then, quotations function as a kind of evidence, saying to readers: "Look, I'm not just making this up. She makes this claim and here it is in her exact words."

Yet many writers make a host of mistakes when it comes to quoting, not the least of which is the failure to quote enough in the first place, if at all. Some writers quote too little—perhaps because they don't want to bother going back to the original text and looking up the author's exact words, or because they think they can reconstruct the author's ideas from memory. At the opposite extreme are writers who so overquote that they end up with texts that are short on commentary of their own—maybe because they lack confidence in their ability to comment on the quotations, or because they don't fully under-

stand them and therefore have trouble explaining what they mean.

But the main problem with quotation arises when writers assume that quotations speak for themselves. Because the meaning of a quotation is obvious to *them*, many writers assume that this meaning will also be obvious to their readers, when often it is not. Writers who make this mistake think that their job is done when they've chosen a quotation and inserted it into their text. They draft an essay, slap in a few quotations, and whammo, they're done.

Such writers fail to see that quoting means more than simply enclosing what "they say" in quotation marks. In a way, quotations are orphans: words that have been taken from their

See how one author connects what "they say" to what she wants to say, pp. 236-37,

¶1-4.

original contexts and that need to be integrated into their new textual surroundings. This chapter offers two key ways to produce this sort of integration: (1) by choosing quotations wisely, with an eye to how well they support a particular part of your text, and (2) by surrounding every major quotation with a frame explaining whose words they are, what the quotation means, and how the quotation relates to your text. The

point we want to emphasize is that quoting what "they say" must always be connected with what *you* say.

QUOTE RELEVANT PASSAGES

Before you can select appropriate quotations, you need to have a sense of what you want to do with them—that is, how they will support your text at the particular point where you insert them. Be careful not to select quotations just for the sake of demonstrating that you've read the author's work; you need to make sure they are relevant to your work.

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The Art of Quoting

However, finding relevant quotations is not always easy. In fact, sometimes quotations that were initially relevant to your overall argument, or to a key point in it, become less so as your text changes during the process of writing and revising. Given the evolving and messy nature of writing, you may sometimes think that you've found the perfect quotation to support your argument, only to discover later on, as your text develops, that your focus has changed and the quotation no longer works. It can be somewhat misleading, then, to speak of finding your thesis and finding relevant quotations as two separate steps, one coming after the other. When you're deeply engaged in the writing and revising process, there is usually a great deal of back-and-forth between your argument and any quotations you select.

FRAME EVERY QUOTATION

Finding relevant quotations is only part of your job; you also need to present them in a way that makes their relevance and meaning clear to your readers. Since quotations do not speak for themselves, you need to build a frame around them in which you do that speaking for them.

Quotations that are inserted into a text without such a frame are sometimes called "dangling" quotations for the way they're left dangling without any explanation. One graduate teaching assistant we work with, Steve Benton, calls these "hit-and-run" quotations, likening them to car accidents in which the driver speeds away and avoids taking responsibility for the dent in your fender or the smashed taillights as in Figure 4.

On the following page is a typical hit-and-run quotation by a writer responding to an essay by the feminist philosopher Susan Bordo.

DON'T BE A HIT-AND-RUN QUOTER.

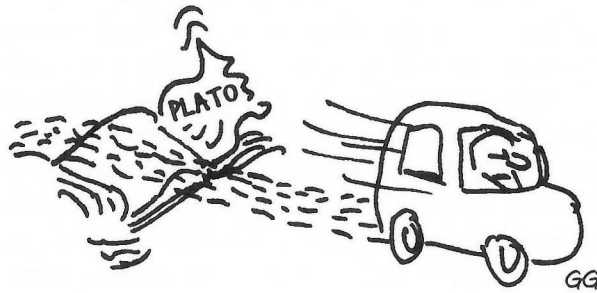


FIGURE 4

Susan Bordo writes about women and dieting. "Fiji is just one example. Until television was introduced in 1995, the islands had no reported cases of eating disorders. In 1998, three years after programs from the United States and Britain began broadcasting there, 62 percent of the girls surveyed reported dieting."

I think Bordo is right. Another point Bordo makes is that. . .

This writer fails to introduce the quotation adequately or explain why he finds it worth quoting. Besides neglecting to say who Bordo is or even that the quoted words are hers, the writer does not explain how her words connect with anything he is saying. He simply drops the quotation in his haste to zoom on to another point.

To adequately frame a quotation, you need to insert it into what we like to call a "quotation sandwich," with the statement introducing it serving as the top slice of bread and the explanation following it serving as the bottom slice. The introductory or lead-in claims should explain who is speaking and

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The Art of Quoting

set up what the quotation says; the follow-up statements should explain why you consider the quotation to be important and what you take it to say.

TEMPLATES FOR INTRODUCING QUOTATIONS

- ▶ X states, "_____."
- ▶ As the prominent philosopher X puts it, "_____."
- ▶ According to X, "_____."
- ▶ X himself writes, "_____."
- ▶ In her book, _____, X maintains that "_____."
- ▶ Writing in the journal *Commentary*, X complains that "_____."
- ▶ In X's view, "_____."
- ▶ X agrees when she writes, "_____."
- ▶ X disagrees when he writes, "_____."
- ▶ X complicates matters further when she writes, "_____."

When adding such introductory phrases, be sure to use language that accurately reflects the spirit of the quoted passage.

It is quite serviceable to write "Bordo states" or "asserts" in introducing the quotation about Fiji. But given the fact that Bordo is clearly alarmed by the effect of the extension of the media's reach to Fiji, it is far more accurate to use language that reflects her alarm: "Bordo is alarmed that" or "is disturbed by" or "complains." (See Chapter 2 for a list of verbs for introducing what others say.)

Note the verbs
Alan Dowd
uses, pp.
404-05,
¶1-5.

TEMPLATES FOR EXPLAINING QUOTATIONS

- ▶ Basically, X is saying _____.
- ▶ In other words, X believes _____.
- ▶ In making this comment, X argues that _____.
- ▶ X is insisting that _____.
- ▶ X's point is that _____.
- ▶ The essence of X's argument is that _____.

We suggest getting in the habit of following every major quotation with explanatory sentences structured by templates like these. Consider, for example, how the passage on Bordo might be revised using some of these moves.

The feminist philosopher Susan Bordo deplores the hold that the Western obsession with dieting has on women. Her basic argument is that increasing numbers of women across the globe are being led to see themselves as fat and in need of a diet. Citing the island of Fiji as a case in point, Bordo notes that "until television was introduced in 1995, the islands had no reported cases of eating disorders. In 1998, three years after programs from the United States and Britain began broadcasting there, 62 percent of the girls surveyed reported dieting" (149–50). Bordo's point is that the West's obsession with dieting is spreading even to remote places across the globe. Ultimately, Bordo complains, the culture of dieting will find you, regardless of where you live.

Bordo's observations ring true to me because a friend of mine from a remote area in China speaks of the cult of dieting among young women there. . . .

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The Art of Quoting

This framing of the quotation not only helps to better integrate Bordo's words into the writer's text, but also serves to demonstrate the writer's interpretation of what Bordo is saying. While "the feminist philosopher" and "Bordo notes" provide basic information that readers need to know, the sentences that follow the quotation build a bridge between Bordo's words and those of the writer. Just as important, these sentences explain what Bordo is saying in the writer's own words—and thereby make clear that the quotation is being used purposefully to set up the writer's own argument and has not been stuck in just for padding or merely to have a citation.

BLEND THE AUTHOR'S WORDS WITH YOUR OWN

The above framing material works well because it accurately represents Bordo's words while at the same time giving those words the writer's own spin. Instead of simply repeating Bordo word for word, the follow-up sentences echo just enough of her text while still moving the discussion in the writer's own direction.

Notice how the passage refers several times to the key concept of dieting, and how it echoes Bordo's references to "television" and to U.S. and British "broadcasting" by referring to "culture," which is further specified as that of "the West."

Despite some repetition, this passage avoids merely restating what Bordo says. Her reference to 62 percent of Fijian girls dieting is no longer an inert statistic (as it was in the flawed passage presented earlier), but a quantitative example of how "the West's obsession with dieting is spreading . . . across the globe." In effect, the framing creates a kind of hybrid text, a mix of Bordo's words and those of the writer.

But is it possible to overexplain a quotation? And how do you know when you've explained a quotation thoroughly enough? After all, not all quotations require the same amount of explanatory framing, and there are no hard-and-fast rules for knowing how much explanation any quotation needs. As a general rule, the most explanatory framing is needed for quotations that may be hard for readers to process: quotations that are long and complex, that are filled with details or jargon, or that contain hidden complexities.

And yet, though the particular situation usually dictates when and how much to explain a quotation, we will still offer one piece of advice: when in doubt, go for it. It is better to risk being overly explicit about what you take a quotation to mean than to leave the quotation dangling and your readers in doubt. Indeed, we encourage you to provide such explanatory framing even when writing to an audience that you know to be familiar with the author being quoted and able to interpret your quotations on their own. Even in such cases readers need to see how *you* interpret the quotation, since words—especially those of controversial figures—can be interpreted in various ways and used to support different, sometimes opposing, agendas. Your readers need to see what you make of the material you've quoted, if only to be sure that your reading of the material and theirs is on the same page.

HOW NOT TO INTRODUCE QUOTATIONS

We want to conclude this chapter by surveying some ways *not* to introduce quotations. Although some writers do so, you should not introduce quotations by saying something like "X asserts an idea that" or "A quote by X says." Introductory

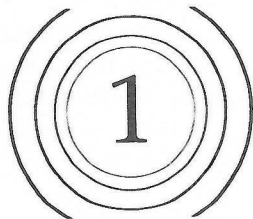
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Exercises

1. Find a quotation from one of some of the authors in the quotation introduction. Explain how you've revised it. Suggest a better way to introduce it.
2. Look at the quotation in your copy of the book. You introduced it in the way it relates to the rest of the book. Revise your introduction to the quotation (p. 44). Revise your introduction to the quotation.

CHAPTER



Names

"Every word is a prejudice."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

"What's in a name?" wonders Juliet on her balcony, as she pines for Romeo. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Words, after all, are mere conveniences; they do not alter the reality of the things they name.

Or do they?

As memorable as Juliet's line is, it doesn't tell the whole story about language, for words have tremendous power. They can modify our perceptions, change our desires, alter our actions, bring us to the altar, or to war. From a linguistic point of view, words can influence us along two different channels of meaning: denotation and connotation.

Denotation refers to the dictionary meaning of a word, the physical object, action, or idea. For example, the denotation of the word "green" refers to a colour that falls between blue and yellow on the spectrum, or to get more scientifically precise, a colour whose wavelengths lie between 490 and 570 nanometres. Denotation is the literal meaning of a word, the person, place, act, concept, or thing explicitly named.

However, language also contains another level of significance, a level both exciting and troublesome. Connotation refers to the implied meaning, the associations, feelings, overtones, and semantic baggage carried by a word, in addition to the thing explicitly named. In our previous example, the word "green" carries a number of connotations—including jealousy, inexperience, greed, nature, and decay—none having anything to do with wavelength of light. Profanity and racial slurs give a stinging illustration of connotative language. The

denotation of a word like “nigger” is simple and declarative: a person of African-American heritage. However, the connotation of that word is charged with centuries of racial antagonism, injustice, slavery, discrimination, and pain, making the term unusable except as a verbal weapon. In swearing and racial epithets, the connotative level of meaning—the feelings attached to a word—becomes more important than the literal meaning, so important that we ignore connotation at great risk.

Dictionaries, encyclopedias, professions, and courts of law all work to clarify the denotative meanings of words. Such attempts at definition are not without problems (as we shall see in Chapter 2), but they help standardize a word’s denotative meaning, making it easier for us to communicate precisely and unambiguously. The same can’t be said for connotation, which is unregulated and erratic.

A writer ignorant of the connotative register of language can make serious gaffes, such as referring to a group of adult women with the diminutive “girls,” or a group of black men as “boys.” A poorly chosen word can even create international problems. When U.S. President George Bush Jr. described his pursuit of the 9/11 terrorists as a *crusade*, he probably meant it as a passionate and zealous endeavour, a heartfelt battle. However, the president overlooked the fact that the historic Crusades were an unprovoked Christian assault against Muslims. In short, the president missed the connotations of hypocrisy and violence that the word Crusade suggests, especially to a Muslim audience. The choice of the word “crusade” alienated Bush’s Arab audience, and constituted a major public relations blunder. In this case, the emotional impact of the word eclipsed the president’s intended literal meaning.

In contrast, an author wary of connotative subtleties can have an enormous influence on the way a reader perceives the world. Depending on the choice of words, a writer can inflame or soothe, win friends or create enemies. Imagine you’re a reporter at a glitzy New York fashion show, and the evening’s first barely-robed model saunters down the catwalk. What words do you use to describe her? Here are but a few choices:

Skinny, Scrawny, Thin, Emaciated, Ectomorphic, Slender, and Svelte

All these words refer to a similar, if not identical body shapes, yet each carries a distinct emotional charge. The term “scrawny” or “emaciated” suggests a malnourished body; “skinny” evokes an undeveloped but healthy one; “thin” lacks strong positive or negative feelings; “ectomorphic” sounds bizarre and clinical; “slender” carries

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an erotic flavour; and “svelte” becomes distinctly glamorous. What impression will you create for your readers? A critical feminist one? A chic one? In part, the world you build depends on the words chosen.

A good writer manipulates connotation in order to manage the perceptions of the audience. Like a magician creating an illusion, the writer selects terms to influence the thoughts and feelings of the audience, provoking disgust or enthusiasm through diction alone. With an enormous list of English synonyms, the writer-illusionist can *spin* a story, slipping a bias into the text that subtly affects our understanding of events. Consider the list of words below. Each line contains terms that have the same denotation, but strongly different connotations.

stingy, cheap, thrifty, frugal, parsimonious, fiscally-restrained
 corpulent, fat, husky, Rubenesque
 abattoir, meatpacking plant, rendering facility, slaughterhouse
 pig-headed, stubborn, resolute, determined
 narcotic, drug, medication, treatment, remedy
 torture, interrogation, physical coercion, information recovery
 cultist, disciple, devotee, follower, adherent, faithful
 handicapped, physically challenged, disabled, differently-abled
 masturbation, manual gratification, self-abuse
 whore, hooker, prostitute, escort, sex trade worker
 pregnant, with child, expectant, knocked up
 partly cloudy, partly sunny
 muckraker, hack, reporter, investigative journalist

These synonyms present identical topics, yet the minor changes in diction mark profound changes in our attitude towards the subject. What's in a name, Juliet? As it turns out, a great amount.

An effective writer manipulates the connotative register of language in order to influence an audience, often with political purpose. Both sides of the abortion debate have made strategic use of emotionally rich language to win sympathy for their causes, starting with the names used by each. Those in favour of maintaining access to abortion refer to themselves with the affirming and uplifting name *pro-choice*, which focuses attention on the woman's control of her body; in contrast, their opponents refer to them with the unpleasant title *pro-abortion*. Those in favour of banning abortion call themselves with the heartening phrase *pro-life*, while their opponents besmirch them with the name *anti-choice*. Just as contentious are the terms used to describe the occupant of the pregnant woman's womb. The *pro-choice* camp downplays any

romance, relying on scientific jargon such as zygote, fetus, or fertilized egg. Pro-life advocates, in contrast, intensify the human dimension, employing lingo such as the unborn, pre-born person, or child. Each side uses emotional terms to lull listeners into accepting their agenda.

Although language is central to the abortion dispute, we find similar polarization in the debate around euthanasia, known as "deliverance" or "aid-in-dying" to its proponents, and as "mercy-killing" or "doctor-assisted suicide" to detractors. More examples come from the "historical revision" controversy, which Jews strip down to "Holocaust denial." Or look at government-run heroin injection centres, slandered by opponents as "shooting galleries," yet trumpeted by advocates as "harm reduction centres." Connotative language flourishes wherever we find political disagreement.

For this reason, connotative language tips us off to a writer's prejudices and allegiances. If an author refers to strip-mining and clear-cut logging as "sustainable utilization," we can be pretty sure he or she is sympathetic to business interests. If someone speaks of "transfer tubes" instead of the common "body bags," that person probably sympathizes with the military. Loaded terms subtly declare a writer's attitude, and alert us to his or her agenda. Thus, a good ear for connotative language can act as a distant early warning system, letting us know when we're being influenced, misinformed, or fed propaganda.

Connotative language has two distinct rhetorical forms: euphemisms and name-calling. Name-calling attaches an unpleasant label onto an attractive, agreeable thing. When a writer refers to the public with the terms "the masses" or "rabble," that's name-calling. When we refer to a spokesperson as a "shill," that term denigrates the profession.

The reverse of name-calling, a euphemism, gives a pleasant, attractive name to something embarrassing, ugly, disagreeable, or worse. A euphemism speaks nicely about an objectionable subject. We frequently use euphemisms to describe bodily functions, such as saying, "powder my nose" instead of urinate/defecate. Even common phrases like "restroom," "washroom," and bathroom" are euphemisms, unless we go there to rest, wash, or bathe.

Although at times funny, euphemisms can lead to misunderstanding, and even harm. At their worst, euphemisms deceive people about horrible realities. In his classic book *1984*, George Orwell showed how a totalitarian society makes use of euphemisms; in his dystopia, the government body responsible for circulating lies and disinformation is known as the Ministry of Truth; the legislative arm

that enforces (and war machine of making language powerless. Always surrounded by sordid truths.

Let's take discourses: a economic space

ADVERTISING

"Advertising is make the word"

Advertising is a message (denotation) say, a typical but low on fact the connotative consumer's trust companies are a persuasive message exaggerated infer a meaning

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that enforces obedience and order as the Ministry of Love; the army and war machine as the Ministry of Peace. Euphemisms run the risk of making language meaningless and untrustworthy, and its speakers powerless. Although Orwell's vision hasn't yet come true, we seem surrounded by lovely sounding phrases and slogans that hide grisly, sordid truths.

Let's take a close look at three of the most troublesome discourses: advertising, military, and government, corporate, and economic speech.

ADVERTISING

"Advertising is the modern substitute for argument; its function is to make the worse appear the better."

—George Santayana

Advertising takes advantage of the confusion between a literal message (denotation) and an implied message (connotation). That's to say, a typical ad ranks high on emotion, innuendo, and suggestion, but low on facts. Advertisers count on the audience paying heed to the connotative signal, not the denotative one. And here begins the consumer's troubles. Ads make unbridled hints and insinuations, for companies are legally responsible for only literal claims, not connotative messages. They consequently make gross, misleading, and exaggerated implications, knowing that the reader or viewer will infer a meaning that they don't have to satisfy.

Consider Starbucks' translation of the words "small," "medium," and "large" into their in-house lingo, "tall," "grande," and "venti." The company wishes to avoid the negative feelings associated with "small" or "medium," and hopes the new terms create a positive image for all coffee sizes. In the process, however, coffee-drinkers face a ridiculous situation where "tall" refers to "small," "high" means "low." Ad-speak robs words of their meaning.

If we can distinguish between connotation and denotation, if we winnow the connotative chaff down to the denotative seed, few ads will mislead us.

In the article "With These Words I Can Sell You Anything," William Lutz provides a summary of dishonest advertising techniques that numb us into senseless acts of purchasing. In a euphemism of his own, he refers to these deceptions as "weasel words," based on the weasel's ability to suck all nutrition from an egg, leaving only the shell. Lutz blasts advertisers use of imprecise language, misleading comparisons, relative terms, subjective claims,

and statements of potential—all of which rely on the consumer to free-associate, while the ad makes no legally binding claim. To Lutz's list we can add a few more techniques of deception.

Names and Titles: Every manufacturer knows the value in a good brand name, but calling a car a "Reliant" does not necessarily make it any more or less reliable. A food line called "Healthy Meals" may still be fattening and dangerous. "Ducks Unlimited" ironically names a coalition of hunters, whose goal is to shoot ducks.

Invented Words: Companies create neologisms (new words), such as "aspartame" or "lite." They feel fair, but may be foul.

Fragments: An ad may have the words "fat free," but unless it places them in a sentence, it makes no statement at all. Words without grammatical context are empty, meaningless shells.

Commands: Ads that make commands don't literally make claims. Nike may exhort us to "Just do it," but such orders have zero information. Their psychological appeal rests in the pleasure of following orders, of becoming obedient.

Luckily, we tend to be skeptical about advertising, at least some of the time. Our level of doubt is not as high, unfortunately, in the next two examples.

MILITARY EUPHEMISMS

"War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Ignorance is strength."

—George Orwell, 1984

Because war is nasty and violent, the discourse that justifies it tends to be highly misleading and opaque. Rather than speak the plain truth about their bloody business, generals choose words to soften, confuse, and foster popular consent for military campaigns. Again, names provide telling examples. In a more honest past, the American military called itself the Department of War; it has since been renamed the Department of Defense. In World War I, soldiers suffered from the fairly descriptive condition of "shell shock"; the language gradually morphed into the more pleasant-sounding "combat fatigue" before finally settling on "post-traumatic stress disorder"—a bit of bafflegab that completely removes any hint of battle. In 2003, the Americans launched "Operation: Iraqi Freedom," a military offensive that placed Iraq under American control. No other discourse has more euphemisms than army talk. In the business of death, military jingoists concoct neologisms—new words whose connotations contrast with the physical reality named. As Orwell predicted, white becomes black, freedom becomes slavery, and

peace become atrocities as in

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Military Term

Acceptable loss
Aerial ordnance
Carpet bombing

Containment

Decapitation stri

peace becomes “pre-hostilities.” And the “war on terror” commits atrocities as inhumane as any by the “axis of evil.”

Consider the phrase “coalition of the willing,” used by the U.S. to describe the nations supporting the second invasion of Iraq in 2003. This turn of phrase described the commitment and popular support of more than 40 participating countries. However, the slogan tends to gloss over the uncomfortable reality that far more nations opposed the military action, as did the vast majority of citizens. In the context of these inconvenient truths, a phrase like “coalition of the willing” seems at best distorted, at worst, dishonest.

Point of view is critical for deciphering military rhetoric. With a gentle tweak of language, a good soldier can shape the appearance of reality, making his conduct shine, while slandering his opponent for the exact same action. The difference between “us” and “them” can be little more than a carefully chosen word. An adversary engages in espionage or spying; we conduct intelligence gathering. The enemy funds terrorists and mercenaries; we support freedom fighters and libertarians. They are ultra-nationals, partisans, and zealots; we are patriots and loyalists. They have weapons of mass destruction; we have nuclear deterrents (one of which is called—without a hint of irony—the “Peacekeeper”). They practise “censorship,” while we enforce “reporting guidelines.”

Below is a list of some sneaky military words. Alas, it’s incomplete, and unlikely to ever be finished. As citizens grow wise to phrases like “collateral damage,” the military invents new terms to “shock and awe” us into a cooperative stupor. In the end, the list is not as important as the skill of deciphering biased and deceptive language.

Military Term	Literal Meaning
Acceptable losses, Attrition	Death.
Aerial ordnance	Bombs and missiles.
Carpet bombing	Indiscriminate bombing that devastates an area.
Containment	Combat that leaves the enemy undefeated.
Decapitation strike	The assassination of a national leader. The decapitation strike against Saddam Hussein exposed this linguistic fraud when it described bombing of civilian targets.

(Continued)

Military Term	Literal Meaning
Degrading the enemy's capabilities for war	Destruction of enemy forces and civilian infrastructure: roads, sewage and water treatment plants, television and radio stations, etc. The term blurs differences between military and civilian targets, making it easier to attack the former.
Embedded reporters	A journalist assigned to a military unit, controlled and censored by the Armed Forces.
Ethnic cleansing	Genocide, the murder of people based on race or religion.
Friendly fire	Soldiers accidentally killed by their own troops.
Incursion	Invasion.
Liquidate	Killing, a depersonalization of murder.
Low intensity warfare	Combat that kills many enemy soldiers but few of your own.
Pacification/Peace-keeping forces	The use of military force.
Pre-emptive detention	Jail without a trial, legal representation or rights.
Pre-emptive strike/ Pre-emptive defence/ Anticipatory self defence	A first strike designed to cripple enemy forces before they can attack. The term transforms the aggressor into a defender.
Pre-hostility	Peace.
Protective reaction strike	Bombing.
Radiance of concussion	Bomb blast area, the term removes the human dimension of injury, and uses the glowing connotation of "radiance."
Security zone	Disputed territory occupied and policed by a military force.
Service the target	Kill, bomb, destroy, eviscerate.
Soft target	A target lacking heavy armour, making it easy to penetrate with weapons. The term may apply to anything from a truck, to a building, to a human being.

Military Term

Sorties
Spillover

Transfer of pop

Vertically deple
antipersonnel
Wet work

Can you g
of the following

Blowback
Collateral damage
Cointel
Counterinsurgency
Covert operations
Critical regions
Daisy cutter
Detain
Disinformation
Divergent truths
Enhancing
democracy

**GOVERNMENT
EUPHEMISMS**

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Military Term	Literal Meaning
Sorties	Bombing missions.
Spillover	Unintentional death and destruction, usually to civilians.
Transfer of population	The removal of indigenous people from their homelands.
Vertically deployed antipersonnel devices	Bombs.
Wet work	Assassination.

Can you guess the grim meanings behind the civilized veneer of the following military jargon?

Blowback	Final solution	Precision bombing
Collateral damage	Forward deterrence	Proactive
Cointel	Free fire zone	Preemptive
Counterinsurgency	Homicide bomber	Operation group
Covert operations	Host-nation support	Racial purification
Critical regions	Insurgency	Regime change
Daisycutter	Military solution	Smart bombs
Detain	New life hamlet	Softening
Disinformation	Paramilitary units	Surgical strikes
Divergent truths	Pockets of	Terminate
Enhancing	resistance	
democracy	Police action	

GOVERNMENT, CORPORATE, AND ECONOMIC EUPHEMISMS

"Smug, greedy well-fed white people have invented a language to conceal their sins. It's as simple as that."

—George Carlin

Like generals, politicians and CEOs often conceal nasty things in pleasant-sounding packages. Because politics and business interests don't always coincide with the public good, leaders resort to loaded language to foster support for their endeavours. At its extreme, such sloganeering conceals greed, crime, human rights violation, pollution, and misconduct. It's a perversion of language that leads to phrases such as the Clean Air Act to describe the amount of allowable pollution a factory can spew; or the Healthy Forest Initiative to describe the number of trees a lumber company

can cut; or the Family Development Initiative Act to hide reduced funding for poor families; or "Green Lawn Strategies" to conceal the heavy use of pesticides; or "flexibility" and "choice" to direct our attention from cuts to public education.

Consider the sizeable vocabulary that CEOs have to describe the firing of workers. The public quickly figured out that "downsizing" meant more than lean corporations with muscular profits; it also meant unemployed workers, hungry families, and devastated neighborhoods. "Right-sizing" removed the negative connotation of downsizing, just as "inplacement" improved upon "outplacement." From the PR flaks soon flowed a stream of baffling neologisms and misnomers to describe the same scenario: externalization, involuntary force reductions, managing down staff resources, rationalizing, re-engineering, restructuring, streamlining. The terms started to show refinement for special purposes. If a company needed to trim middle management, for example, it may "delayer." Perhaps the most euphemistic of the bunch, the word "empowered" describes a newly fired employee, who then may spend leisurely afternoons at the Career Placement Centre (previously the Unemployment Office).

The following examples of corporate and governmental double-speak help us recognize the times when a politician or CEO is hawking shoddy wares.

Corporate Term	Literal Meaning
Biosolids	Sewage.
Constructive engagement/ Quiet diplomacy	Trade with a nation that violates human rights.
Decadent lumber/Over-mature forest	Old growth forests. The term presents uncut trees as sickly and wasteful, and ignores environmental, aesthetic, spiritual, and tourist values.
Economically disadvantaged Economic production zone (EPZ)	The poor. A walled slum of sweatshops, where workers sacrifice rights, health, and safety, in exchange for slave wages.
High net worth individuals	The rich.
Industrial effluvium/ Environmental contaminant	Pollution.
Labour flexibility	Lower pay, fewer benefits, and greater instability for workers.
Managed care	"Run-for-profit" health care.

Market correct
Market forces

Merger/Synergy

Negative gain/
cash flow
Non-performing
Outsourcing

Perception or
management

Revenue enhance
Trickle-down
Wise use

Working forest

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Market correction	A sudden crash in stock prices.
Market forces	The power of money, millionaires, and monopolies to steer society. In the media, used almost always as a positive term.
Merger/Synergy	The creation of mega-corporations and monopolies that decrease consumer choice.
Negative gain/Negative cash flow	Loss.
Non-performing asset	Business failure.
Outsourcing	Closing manufacturing plants in North America in favour of cheaper plants in the third world to avoid high salaries as well as environmental and labour laws.
Perception or crisis management	The manipulation of public opinion: advertising, lobbying, propaganda, and lies.
Revenue enhancement	Tax increase.
Trickle-down economics	Massive tax breaks for the rich.
Wise use	The usual process of resource extraction that pays lip service to environmental concerns.
Working forest	A logging area.

What do you think government or industry means when using these loaded words?

Coherence	Free trade	Restatement of earnings
Competition	Intellectual property	Risk management
Demographic profiling	Theft	Solution
Deregulation	Plateauing	Structural reform
Externalization	Privatization	
	Public relations	

HOW TO COPE WITH BIASED LANGUAGE

When you spot emotionally charged language, ask a few vital questions.

- What does the word literally mean?
- Can the word be rephrased in more neutral fashion?

Isocrates' *Antidosis*

(Text from [Perseus Project](#) Archive--for educational use.)

We ought, therefore, to think of the art of discourse just as we think of the other arts, and not to form opposite judgements about similar things, nor show ourselves intolerant toward that power which, of all the faculties which belong to the nature of man, is the source of most of our blessings. For in the other powers which we possess, as I have already said on a former occasion, we are in no respect superior to other living creatures; nay, we are inferior to many in swiftness and in strength and in other resources; but, because there has been implanted in us the power to persuade each other and to make clear to each other whatever we desire, not only have we escaped the life of wild beasts, but we have come together and founded cities and made laws and invented arts; and, generally speaking, there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish.

For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust, and things honorable and base; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good. Through this we educate the ignorant and appraise the wise; for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of a sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul.

With this faculty we both contend against others on matters which are open to dispute and seek light for ourselves on things which are unknown; for the same arguments which we use in persuading others when we speak in public, we employ also when we deliberate in our own thoughts; and, while we call eloquent those who are able to speak before a crowd, we regard as sage those who most skilfully debate their problems in their own minds.

And, if there is need to speak in brief summary of this power, we shall find that none of the things which are done with intelligence take place without the help of speech, but that in all our actions as well as in all our thoughts speech is our guide, and is most employed by those who have the most wisdom. But without reflecting at all on these truths, Lysimachus has dared to attack those who aspire to an accomplishment which is the source of blessings so many and so great.

But why should we be surprised at him when even among the professors of disputation there are some who talk no less abusively of the art of speaking on general and useful themes than do the most benighted of men, not that they are ignorant of its power or of the advantage which it quickly gives to those who avail themselves of it, but because they think that by decrying this art they will enhance the standing of their own.

I could, perhaps, say much harsher things of them than they of me, but I refrain for a double reason. I want neither to descend to the level of men whom envy has made blind

nor to censure men who, although they do no actual harm to their pupils are less able to benefit them than are other teachers. I shall, however, say a few words about them, first because they also have paid their compliments to me; second, in order that you, being better informed as to their powers, may estimate us justly in relation to each other; and, furthermore, that I may show you clearly that we who are occupied with political discourse and whom they call contentious are more considerate than they; for although they are always saying disparaging things of me, I shall not answer them in kind but shall confine myself to the simple truth.

For I believe that the teachers who are skilled in disputation and those who are occupied with astronomy and geometry and studies of that sort do not injure but, on the contrary, benefit their pupils, not so much as they profess, but more than others give them credit for. Most men see in such studies nothing but empty talk and hair-splitting; for none of these disciplines has any useful application either to private or to public affairs; nay, they are not even remembered for any length of time after they are learned because they do not attend us through life nor do they lend aid in what we do, but are wholly divorced from our necessities. But I am neither of this opinion nor am I far removed from it; rather it seems to me both that those who hold that this training is of no use in practical life are right and that those who speak in praise of it have truth on their side. If there is a contradiction in this statement, it is because these disciplines are different in their nature from the other studies which make up our education; for the other branches avail us only after we have gained a knowledge of them, whereas these studies can be of no benefit to us after we have mastered them unless we have elected to make our living from this source, and only help us while we are in the process of learning. For while we are occupied with the subtlety and exactness of astronomy and geometry and are forced to apply our minds to difficult problems, and are, in addition, being habituated to speak and apply ourselves to what is said and shown to us, and not to let our wits go wool-gathering, we gain the power, after being exercised and sharpened on these disciplines, of grasping and learning more easily and more quickly those subjects which are of more importance and of greater value.

I do not, however, think it proper to apply the term "philosophy" to a training which is no help to us in the present either in our speech or in our actions, but rather I would call it a gymnastic of the mind and a preparation for philosophy. It is, to be sure, a study more advanced than that which boys in school pursue, but it is for the most part the same sort of thing; for they also when they have labored through their lessons in grammar, music, and the other branches, are not a whit advanced in their ability to speak and deliberate on affairs, but they have increased their aptitude for mastering greater and more serious studies. I would, therefore, advise young men to spend some time on these disciplines, but not to allow their minds to be dried up by these barren subtleties, nor to be stranded on the speculations of the ancient sophists, who maintain, some of them, that the sum of things is made up of infinite elements; Empedocles that it is made up of four, with strife and love operating among them; Ion, of not more than three; Alcmaeon, of only two; Parmenides and Melissus, of one; and Gorgias, of none at all. For I think that such curiosities of thought are on a par with jugglers' tricks which, though they do not profit anyone, yet attract great crowds of the empty-minded, and I hold that men who want to

do some good in the world must banish utterly from their interests all vain speculations and all activities which have no bearing on our lives.

Now I have spoken and advised you enough on these studies for the present. It remains to tell you about "wisdom" and "philosophy." It is true that if one were pleading a case on any other issue it would be out of place to discuss these words (for they are foreign to all litigation), but it is appropriate for me, since I am being tried on such an issue, and since I hold that what some people call philosophy is not entitled to that name, to define and explain to you what philosophy, properly conceived, really is.

My view of this question is, as it happens, very simple. For since it is not in the nature of man to attain a science by the possession of which we can know positively what we should do or what we should say, in the next resort I hold that man to be wise who is able by his powers of conjecture to arrive generally at the best course, and I hold that man to be a philosopher who occupies himself with the studies from which he will most quickly gain that kind of insight.

What the studies are which have this power I can tell you, although I hesitate to do so; they are so contrary to popular belief and so very far removed from the opinions of the rest of the world, that I am afraid lest when you first hear them you will fill the whole court-room with your murmurs and your cries. Nevertheless, in spite of my misgivings, I shall attempt to tell you about them; for I blush at the thought that anyone might suspect me of betraying the truth to save my old age and the little of life remaining to me.

But, I beg of you, do not, before you have heard me, judge that I could have been so mad as to choose deliberately, when my fate is in your hands, to express to you ideas which are repugnant to your opinions if I had not believed that these ideas follow logically on what I have previously said, and that I could support them with true and convincing proofs. I consider that the kind of art which can implant honesty and justice in depraved natures has never existed and does not now exist, and that people who profess that power will grow weary and cease from their vain pretensions before such an education is ever found. But I do hold that people can become better and worthier if they conceive an ambition to speak well, if they become possessed of the desire to be able to persuade their hearers, and, finally, if they set their hearts on seizing their advantage--I do not mean "advantage" in the sense given to that word by the empty-minded, but advantage in the true meaning of that term;

and that this is so I think I shall presently make clear. For, in the first place, when anyone elects to speak or write discourses which are worthy of praise and honor, it is not conceivable that he will support causes which are unjust or petty or devoted to private quarrels, and not rather those which are great and honorable, devoted to the welfare of man and our common good; for if he fails to find causes of this character, he will accomplish nothing to the purpose.

In the second place, he will select from all the actions of men which bear upon his subject those examples which are the most illustrious and the most edifying; and, habituating

himself to contemplate and appraise such examples, he will feel their influence not only in the preparation of a given discourse but in all the actions of his life. It follows, then, that the power to speak well and think right will reward the man who approaches the art of discourse with love of wisdom and love of honor.

Furthermore, mark you, the man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honorable name among his fellow-citizens; for who does not know that words carry greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? Therefore, the stronger a man's desire to persuade his hearers, the more zealously will he strive to be honorable and to have the esteem of his fellow-citizens.

And let no one of you suppose that while all other people realize how much the scales of persuasion incline in favor of one who has the approval of his judges, the devotees of philosophy alone are blind to the power of good will. In fact, they appreciate this even more thoroughly than others, and they know, furthermore, that probabilities and proofs and all forms of persuasion support only the points in a case to which they are severally applied, whereas an honorable reputation not only lends greater persuasiveness to the words of the man who possesses it, but adds greater lustre to his deeds, and is, therefore, more zealously to be sought after by men of intelligence than anything else in the world.

I come now to the question of "advantage"--the most difficult of the points I have raised. If anyone is under the impression that people who rob others or falsify accounts or do any evil thing get the advantage, he is wrong in his thinking; for none are at a greater disadvantage throughout their lives than such men; none are found in more difficult straits, none live in greater ignominy; and, in a word, none are more miserable than they.

No, you ought to believe rather that those are better off now and will receive the advantage in the future at the hands of the gods who are the most righteous and the most faithful in their devotions, and that those receive the better portion at the hands of men who are the most conscientious in their dealings with their associates, whether in their homes or in public life, and are themselves esteemed as the noblest among their fellows.

This is verily the truth, and it is well for us to adopt this way of speaking on the subject, since, as things now are, Athens has in many respects been plunged into such a state of topsy-turvy and confusion that some of our people no longer use words in their proper meaning but wrest them from the most honorable associations and apply them to the basest pursuits.

On the one hand, they speak of men who play the buffoon and have a talent for mocking and mimicking as "gifted"--an appellation which should be reserved for men endowed with the highest excellence; while, on the other hand, they think of men who indulge their depraved and criminal instincts and who for small gains acquire a base reputation as

"getting the advantage," instead of applying this term to the most righteous and the most upright, that is, to men who take advantage of the good and not the evil things of life.

They characterize men who ignore our practical needs and delight in the mental juggling of the ancient sophists as "students of philosophy," but refuse this name to those who pursue and practise those studies which will enable us to govern wisely both our own households and the commonwealth--which should be the objects of our toil, of our study, and of our every act. It is from these pursuits that you have for a long time now been driving away our youth, because you accept the words of those who denounce this kind of education.

Yes, and you have brought it about that the most promising of our young men are wasting their youth in drinking-bouts, in parties, in soft living and childish folly, to the neglect of all efforts to improve themselves; while those of grosser nature are engaged from morning until night in extremes of dissipation which in former days an honest slave would have despised. You see some of them chilling their wine at the "Nine-fountains"; others, drinking in taverns; others, tossing dice in gambling dens; and many, hanging about the training-schools of the flute-girls. And as for those who encourage them in these things, no one of those who profess to be concerned for our youth has ever haled them before you for trial, but instead they persecute me, who, whatever else I may deserve, do at any rate deserve thanks for this, that I discourage such habits in my pupils.

CHAPTER



Metaphors

"All that is, is metaphor."

—Norman O. Brown

Metaphors and figurative speech are statements that make comparisons between objects, some literally spelled out, others implied. Greater than poetry, figurative speech makes up a huge chunk of daily language. For example, the phrase "walking on thin ice" doesn't literally describe a trip across a newly frozen lake, but rather risky business in general. The present danger resembles the icy one. Such metaphors are so deeply ingrained that we often overlook them (as you might have now overlooked the metaphor "ingrained"). If we ignore metaphors, however, we neglect the profound effect they have on thought and action.

KINDS OF FIGURATIVE SPEECH

"All perception of truth is the detection of an analogy."

—Henry David Thoreau

As with any large population, figurative language has distinct types. Here follow some major tropes in this family.

Simile compares two distinct objects using "like" or "as." An overt form of figurative speech, the simile honestly declares its comparison, using the "like" or "as" to suggest a parallel between two objects, while keeping them distinct. In other words, a simile argues only for a resemblance, not a substitution. So when someone says "a smoking section in a restaurant is like a peeing section in a pool," he or she suggests that the two experiences share certain features (the even

dissipation of a liquid or a gas in a confined space), but remain, thankfully, separate.

Metaphor creates an identity between two distinct objects. It presents the first object as if were synonymous with the second, both the same thing. More drastic than a simile, the metaphor goes beyond resemblance, and creates an out-and-out substitution, as can be seen in Lana Turner's line "A gentleman is simply a patient wolf." This metaphor literally equates gentlemen with wolves, as if they were one and the same, even though they're physically different. The similarity between the two objects (their cunning, predatory nature, viciousness) becomes exaggerated until they become synonyms: the man *is* a wolf. Because a metaphor doesn't announce the comparison it makes, it can be tricky to spot, as one term of comparison may be implied or missing entirely. The line "the pigs threw me in jail," for example, is a metaphor in which the term "pigs" has completely erased the physical subject, the police.

Personification imbues inanimate objects or abstractions with human or living qualities. "Time devours us all" uses personification, because the abstract dimension of time appears as a ravenous person rather than a unit of measurement.

Synecdoche describes a figure of speech in which a part of an object stands for the whole. We refer to a car with the synecdoche "a set of wheels"; a rake refers to women as "skirts"; Brits use the "White Cliffs of Dover" as a synecdoche for all England.

Metonymy uses a closely related word, object, or attribute to substitute for the thing itself. Movie directors typically use eyeglasses to metonymically suggest a character's intelligence.

Imagery refers to statements that provide visual information, and an image becomes figurative when it stands for something else. George Bush's famous campaign slogan "I see a thousand points of light" provides a metaphorical image. The feel-good line doesn't refer to any real illumination, but represents Bush's social programs and policies. Think of imagery as picture language, and to use another metaphor, you get the picture.

Allegory describes a story in which every narrative element stands for something else in the real or spiritual world: an extended and sustained metaphor. Jesus Christ's parables of fig trees, shepherds and sheep are simple allegories; the characters and crises dramatize the tenets of Christianity. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an allegory that uses barnyard creatures to portray the failure of the Communist revolution.

Symbol is an object that represents something else in a formal and conventional manner. Canada uses the beaver as a national symbol; Great Britain, the bulldog; and the USA, the eagle. The

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meaning of a symbol depends on the culture using it. Consider another animal token, the raven. In European traditions, the raven appears as an omen of death and evil, yet the Salish Indians consider the raven a benign creator.

Archetype, coined by the psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, is a universal symbol, whose meaning remains constant in all cultures. Most societies ascribe life-giving meaning to water, and fertility to a mother figure. An archetype is a symbol that's gone global.

These tropes shouldn't be mistaken for a comprehensive taxonomy, for figurative language is constantly evolving, mutating, and adding new species.

HOW METAPHORS WORK

*"Words, like Nature, half reveal
And half conceal the Soul within."*

—Lord Tennyson

All metaphoric language encourages us to consider one thing in terms of another, to discuss "apples" in terms of "oranges." For example, we metaphorically express "knowledge" as "illumination"; understanding with an "I see"; smart people as "bright" or "visionaries." Such commonplace expressions present a mental state (intelligence) in terms of a physical sense (sight). These metaphoric dislocations are useful because the two experiences are similar, and the first informs our understanding of the second. If we're to decode metaphoric language, we begin by recognizing the likeness between the two comparatives.

Literary critic I. A. Richards introduced some helpful terms for analyzing metaphors. The subject of the metaphor, the real beastie, idea, or thing referred to, Richards terms the "tenor," and the object of comparison or substitute, he names the "vehicle." Lastly Richards suggests the term "ground" to describe the points in common between the tenor and vehicle, the similarity that energizes the metaphor. More recently, linguists have introduced the terms "target domain" (for tenor), "source domain" (for vehicle), and "mapping" for the shared terrain (the ground).

Think of a metaphor as a football field: if the vehicle and tenor mark the metaphor's perimeter (the out-of-bound lines), then the ground represents the playing field where the action occurs and meaning unfolds. The ground is the centre of any figure of speech, for it provides the similarity that justifies the comparison. We cannot properly understand or evaluate any metaphor without fully appreciating the parallels between vehicle and tenor.

Unfortunately, metaphors don't declare their ground, but leave these common points for readers to deduce. Metaphoric similarities between vehicle and tenor are embedded within a metaphor, obliquely suggested or implied, but never overtly stated. To understand a metaphor, readers must "map out" this ground, identifying the parallels between the source and target domain.

Consider Robbie Burns' famous simile "My love is like a red, red rose." To fully understand the poet's meaning, we must deduce the qualities of Burns' beloved mirrored in the rose.

GROUND	
Vehicle/Source Domain	Tenor/Target Domain
Rose	Beloved
Red colour	Passion, blush, fertility
Beauty of flower	Beauty of woman
Fragrance	Perfume
Thorns	Pain of love
Insect infestation	Syphilis
Brevity of bloom	Brevity of youth/infatuation
Folds of petals	Folds of vulva
Care needed to grow roses	Devotion needed to maintain affection

In eight words, Burns suggests a constellation of ideas, both positive and negative. His metaphor captures love's splendor, yet its hidden pricks as well; he suggests passion, pleasure, and rapture, but danger, frailty, and brevity too. Tracing the parallels between the rose and the beloved makes these ideas clear. To grasp metaphors, readers must "unpack" them, laying out the full range of similarities between the vehicle and tenor. A good metaphor resembles a children's pop-up book, constantly delighting us with unexpected possibilities that spring up.

As Burns' poem shows, metaphors are powerful tools for expressing complex information in a simple manner. They condense intricate and contradictory ideas into the space of a few words—intellectual shorthand. Parents often speak to children in metaphors, presenting new concepts in familiar terms: "skipping breakfast is like forgetting to put gas in your car." Such metaphors make new information accessible and familiar, for both child and adult.

Similarly, Apple computers made the confusing world of computer programming more manageable through a visual metaphor—the desktop. In this analogy, computer users carry out commands

with everyday standard, the worms, surface computer operation

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- Mother Earth of the planet
- A spirit (Gaia) and meaning

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with everyday objects like documents, folders, and trashcans. Now standard, the desktop has been joined by viruses, gateways, worms, surfers, and bookmarks—all metaphors that make computer operation intuitive and recognizable.

But a metaphor is more than a potent communicator; it's a necessity of thought itself, a basic tool in our cognitive processes. We use metaphors to articulate emotions and ideas, giving a concrete form to intangible thoughts and feelings ("He was shattered," "I feel like a million bucks"). Hardly a poetic frill, metaphor is a primary activity of consciousness.

A lens on the world, metaphors affect our perceptions. A figure of speech encourages us to see the world in a specific way, and discourages alternate possibilities. Consider the different metaphors describing the relationship between Earth and humanity listed below. Each suggests a different reality, and places humanity in contradictory roles.

Earth as Home—This image presents Earth as a giant house, tenanted by plants and animals, yet managed by human landlords. Of course, a house uses municipal services (such as electricity, sewage, and garbage collection) that have no parallels on a planetary scale.

Earth as Family—This feel-good image highlights the inter-related nature of all living creatures, but can't deal with such aspects as predation or reproduction.

Earth as Treasure Chest—This image focuses attention on the mineral wealth, and presents Earth as a vault that can make people rich, if they're clever enough to unlock it. Resource extraction is represented as a simple matter of picking a lock, not as something messy like strip-mining.

Earth as Person—An environmental metaphor, this personification makes the planet a sentient being, "wounded" by activities such as mining, fishing, and forestry. This personification appears in two common guises.

- **Mother Earth**—emphasizing the nurturing and feminine aspects of the planet, transforming humanity into a child.
- **A spirit (Gaia)**—presenting Nature as a source of mysticism and meaning.

Earth as Paradise—This metaphor emphasizes the pleasant aspects of the planet, yet neglects the unpleasant ones such as earthquakes

and pestilence. It also carries religious connotations, making man an interloper in a divine plan.

Earth as Spaceship—Buckminster Fuller coined the phrase “Spaceship Earth” to emphasize our small size in the cosmos, our precarious existence, and the need for cooperation. Unlike a spaceship, however, we have little control over the course.

Earth as Kingdom—The medieval mind conceived of Earth as the Kingdom of God, and Mankind as His steward. This hierarchical metaphor makes humanity *somewhat* special, ranking higher in the chain of being than plants or animals, but lower than angels. The Earth fares less well, becoming Man’s vassal to be used and exploited.

Each metaphor configures differently the relationship between man and the planet. None is right or wrong, but rather each focuses our awareness on select features of the relationship. An ecologist employs the Earth Mother image to emphasize human dependency on nature; a mineralogist uses the treasure trope to encourage mineral extraction. At the same time, each metaphor suppresses aspects of the relationship. The image of the Earth as a family evokes a sense of kinship between life forms, but only by ignoring predation. In this respect, a metaphor works like a frame over a painting, drawing our attention to a central portrait, removing the undesirables that don’t “fit the picture.” In other words, metaphors conceal as much as they reveal.

In addition to misdirection, metaphors also introduce unwanted “noise” into our thoughts, transferring qualities in the vehicle *that don’t exist in the tenor*. Indeed, distortion is inevitable, for metaphors occur only between different objects. One could not say “a Honda is like a car,” for the Honda more than resembles a car: it is one. Accordingly, comparisons only work when terms are suitably divergent. Because tenor and vehicle differ, all metaphors deform and misrepresent their subjects to a degree. This is a critical point. Metaphors purport to inform, but by presenting one thing in terms of another, by speaking of X in terms of Y, they also distort, warp, and disfigure. Linguists haven’t yet fashioned a term for this crucial difference between vehicle and tenor, so I would like to suggest one: the rift.

The rift is as critical to understanding metaphor as the ground, for the rift marks places where a metaphor breaks down, and potentially misleads.

Let’s take a simple example. A husband complains his marriage “suffocates” him. He doesn’t mean literal asphyxiation, but rather the feelings of confinement that occur in any relationship. While this

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metaphor dramatizes the husband's aggravation, it misrepresents and exacerbates his problem. First, suffocation is lethal, while marriage isn't, and so the metaphor exaggerates psychic pain until it becomes bodily death. Second, suffocation is almost always intentional, with a clear aggressor and victim. In contrast, marital discord typically lacks simple villains. The husband's metaphor conceals his contribution to the marital turmoil, and ascribes to the wife a masochistic intent *that might not exist*. Yet, with the image of suffocation fixed in mind, the husband sees his partner as brutal, and marriage as a death trap.

As the husband's pessimistic metaphor contributes to his domestic woes, our collective metaphors may determine our social realities. Unfortunately, we have many metaphors that increase suffering in the real world.

Feminists worry about metaphors that present women as "foxes," "bunnies," or "chicks," fearing that such animal imagery dehumanizes. Terms such as "babes," "playmates," or "girls" further rob women of adult status. Just as worrisome are the "Battle of the Sexes" metaphors, where good looks appear as a weapon (she's "devastatingly beautiful," a "knockout," a "bombshell"), and sex becomes aggression (he "hit on" her, she resisted his "advances," she "banged" him).

Some environmentalists feel that the "Earth as Kingdom" model encourages us to exploit the planet with the ruthless disregard of a cruel lord. Filled with a false sense of dominion, Man treats Earth as his vassal, leading to real harm such as extinction, deforestation, desertification, and pollution.

In the article "Metaphors That Kill," George Lakoff analyzes the reasons for the 1991 Gulf War (that killed an estimated 500,000 people), and finds the invasion based upon a series of metaphoric dodges, exaggerations, and distortions that exist linguistically, but not in reality. If Lakoff is right, we have an obligation to spot our society's "sick" metaphors and forge healthier ones. It's literally a matter of life and death.

HOW TO INTERPRET METAPHORS

When reading metaphor, carry out these steps.

1. Identify Tenor and Vehicle

Restate the figure of speech in the form of a simile: X is compared to Y. This identifies the target and source domains, and clarifies the comparison—a necessary step in metaphors with implied subjects. For example, the phrase "The Prime Minister

has charted a new economic course for Canada" contains an implied comparison, better understood as "The new economic policy is like the course of a ship."

2. Map the Metaphor's Ground

List similarities between vehicle and tenor. These resemblances enable the vehicle to model and explain the tenor. The more a vehicle coincides with its tenor, the more persuasive a metaphor appears. In our metaphor, many parallels appear.

GROUND	
Vehicle/Source Domain	Tenor/Target Domain
Ship's course	Economic policy
Ship	Canada
Captain	Prime Minister
Sailors	Citizens
Ocean	International trade
Journey	Economic activity
Destination	Prosperity

3. Recognize Differences Between Tenor and Vehicle

List the differences between target and source domain. Such divergences help identify the limitations of a metaphor and reduce the chances of misdirection. In our example, the metaphor of the nation-as-ship collapses when we recognize that a Captain commands his sailors, but in a democracy, the citizens command the Prime Minister. Without such analysis, we might accept the Prime Minister's plan as if it were a Captain's order.

4. Find New Metaphors

A collapsed metaphor provides opportunity to invent new figures of speech. For example, one could describe an economic policy as seeding a field, finetuning an engine, or squeezing the poor. Notice how these metaphors emphasize features suppressed in the original. With a plurality of metaphors, we get a more accurate picture of reality. As the poet Wallace Stevens suggests, truth may be 13 ways of looking at a blackbird.

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CASE STUDY: THE INVASION OF AFGHANISTAN

"What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphism."

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Shortly after September 11, 2001, the United States prepared to invade Afghanistan, which it believed was harbouring terrorists. In the battle of public opinion, one Bush administration official fostered support for the invasion with this metaphor:

We see this war as one against the virus of terrorism. If you have bone marrow cancer, it's not enough to just cut off the patient's foot. You have to do the complete course of chemotherapy. And if that means embarking on the next Hundred Years' War, that's what we're doing. (Rose and Vulliamy)

This metaphor presents war as a medical procedure, where the disease is terrorism, and the patient, the planet Earth. The metaphor gains credibility through a series of parallels between war and medicine, as summarized below.

GROUND	
Vehicle/Source Domain	Tenor/Target Domain
Medical treatment	War
Patient	Planet
Virus/Cancer	Terrorists
Visible damage	Terrorist acts
DNA	Terrorist message
Diseased limbs/organs	Terrorist states
Death of patient	Global catastrophe
Health	Absence of terrorism
Doctor	United States
Multi-staged treatment: surgery, radiation, chemotherapy	Multi-staged response to terrorism; invasion, regime change, surveillance
Surgery	Invasion of Afghanistan
Breaking skin	Crossing Afghani border
Amputation of diseased tissue	Removal of Taliban
Healthy tissue hurt during treatment	Civilian casualties
Chemotherapy/Radiation	Planet wide policing
Post-op watch for reinfection (10 years)	Global surveillance of terrorism (100 years)
Withholding medical treatment	Political inaction

Exercises

1. Identify the vehicles and tenors of these metaphors.
 - a) Primitive people are close to the earth.
 - b) Carrot-Top grates on my nerves.
 - c) You are the cream in my coffee.
 - d) Luke is feeling blue today.
 - e) Einstein was the father of relativity.
 - f) Schizophrenia is a chemical storm in the brain.
 - g) "Language is the dress of thought" (Samuel Johnson).
2. Identify the vehicles, tenors, and ground of these metaphors. How do these metaphors influence perception?
 - a) Justice is blind.
 - b) "Hope is a thing of feathers" (Emily Dickinson).
 - c) The Crown wishes its red children to follow the light of the white man.
 - d) In the Dark Ages, the chains of faith shackled the human spirit.
 - e) The Trojan virus crippled my computer.
 - f) General Leland performed a cost/benefit analysis of the war.
 - g) A university education is an investment in your future
 - h) Communism is a dead, politically bankrupt philosophy.
 - i) *Hustler* is a filthy magazine.
 - j) "As a white candle/In a holy place,/So is the beauty/Of an aged face" (Joseph Campbell).
 - k) The Liberal Party has lost its moral compass.
 - l) The poor suck at the teat of society, draining its milk until it is near death.
3. Think up at least two appropriate metaphors to explain the following items.

The mind
 A boyfriend
 A child
 Civilization
 A corporation
 The DNA chain
 The economy
 Education
 Immigrants
 The Internet
 Marriage
 Medicine
 Parenting
 Religion

What do your metaphors emphasize? Do you foresee problems or distortions?

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