

INTRODUCTION

At first I thought about likening this writing class and the journey it took me on to a bike race. As I tried to develop the metaphor, I realized that the main similarity I felt to a race had to do with fighting the rat race of traffic every Tuesday in my feeble, weekly attempt to make it to class on time. I finally chose a metaphor much closer to home.

I am a working visual artist. As such, I accept “assignments” or commissioned work. This broadly entails translating the creative vision of a non-visual customer. A few years ago, I agreed to paint a “tromp l’oeil” wall mural comprised of three “windows” depicting my client’s perennial garden. Commonly known as a triptych, this type of work requires that all three paintings stand on their own as separate works, but relate to each other as a unified whole with an overarching theme. Obviously, the theme for this project was the garden. Now I needed three ancillary topics, or focal points for each of the windows. A bench, already present in the view would do nicely for the first one, and an existing hammock for one of the other two portrayals was viable as well. I still needed one more idea. I thought of focusing on just the flowers for the third and knew that would relate well to the other compositions. I did not think just the flowers would enable the window to stand on its own, however. Maybe a birdbath would work. What about birds as well? That was it – the birds could appear in all three paintings and unify the whole!

What was the overarching theme for the three plus essays I produced for this class? I knew all of my topics already stood on their own. Certain quotes and phrases have stayed with me from each of them. My ethos essay based on “Nickle and Dimed” contains this partial quote by Barbara Ehrenreich: “...people who are, in most cases, far too smart and

funny and caring for the work they do and the wages they're paid." I often contemplated how and why such talented people had found themselves in dead end work. I came to the conclusion that perhaps these individuals merely believed, due to abusive treatment or other outside factors, that that was all they deserved out of life.

My second essay comparing two accounts of the bombing of Hiroshima, had the George Santayana truism "Those who can't learn from history are doomed to repeat it," at the center of the controversy. This famous quote seems especially apt to me now as the Iraq war rages on with no clear end in sight.

As I was finishing my last essay, part of a quote I chose to use stood out. Sally Ride and her colleagues wrote in response to the controversy fomented by Harvard President Summers in a letter to *The New York Times*: "...If society and individuals anticipate that women will not perform as well as men, there is a good chance those expectations will be met." I thought to myself about how familiar this sounded. A light bulb above brightened as I recalled last fall's Merton exercises and essay. I marveled that Merton's "Self Fulfilling Prophecy" appeared to be the overarching theme I was looking for to unite the writing I have produced this semester.

I entered this class believing I would finish the work on time, and to the best of my abilities. I've learned so much these past months that I wish I could go back and re-write a bit here and there—for a higher grade of course! For the most part though, I'm satisfied to have succeeded in fulfilling *my* prophecy.

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