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## Midterm Portfolio

### **Rhetorical Rationale**

In each of my pieces, my target audience might reflect a somewhat narcissistic streak. I've chosen *every* word and *every* phrase as tediously as possible in order to entertain and delight one or more people who might share my own personality and/or writing sensibilities. It's not necessarily a choice per se, though. To some, the following statement might sound like something the stereotypical passionate artist would say but, again, I hope that someone out there will associate with it. I cannot define my writing style or process, nor can I cage it in someone else's defined limitations. So my diction and syntax come to define me and my writing style.

In terms of accomplishments, I hope to entertain someone out there in the world while simultaneously informing them of something that they're not completely familiar with. This last element can be anything as large as an entire world issue or global concept, i.e. the birth control issue addressed in the visual analysis essay. But I'm equally thrilled if it's something as small as introducing the person to a new word, such as "osmotic" (because that teaching isn't actually a small victory to me).

In my Reflection Essay, I changed a sentence in the first paragraph to better reflect my final sentence. I was hoping for more emotional impact by the end of the essay, so I felt it was necessary to clarify the parallel I was originally trying to draw between my very young self and

the man I am today. I hope that my readers are able to pick up on this. My most genuine hope in this piece (possibly appealing to my vanity once more) is that I can elicit a variety of emotions with that simple change of wording. I also added more information in some areas to clarify different personal concepts that might have been less pellucid to another person. In addition to this, I added translations for the French phrases I used, plus I added and changed words in order to increase the elasticity of the reading, relieving the reader of most of the rigid contours the piece originally inflicted.

In my Visual Analysis Essay, I again changed wording in order to clarify concepts. I also added a few small bits here and there to re-shape the piece a bit. As well as that, I felt that it was important to place the picture in the essay in addition to the internet link so as to give the reader a better idea of the cartoon I was referencing.

In my Rhetorical Analysis, I performed the same language alterations as I had done to the previous two essays; word changes, re-phrasing, and the like. But these changes were very subtle as I didn't want to undo all the work I had put into crafting the underlying theme I had designed for the piece. When I originally wrote it, I wanted to convey the difficulty with which a reader might approach reading the text I was referencing. It was for this reason that I intentionally made some of the passages in my own piece purposefully obtuse. I hate to bluntly describe my intentions in that respect because I like to imagine my readers coming to that realization on their own and being very impressed with me, but I think it's obvious by now that I need to stop beguiling my own egotism and move on with life. So I'd like the reader to know that the level of difficulty in the last essay was *intentionally* raised so as to create the same effect one might experience while reading through *The God Delusion*.

During the peer review process, I did my best to inform others of the elements in their

pieces that I was particularly fond of. As we were composing rough drafts, I knew that different bits would be left on the cutting room floor, so to speak. But certain things in their writings really appealed to me and I feel like they added depth and color to their pieces. In regards to the things my peers said of my pieces, all of the changes and clarifications made in my first essay were either in the back of my mind while I was writing it, or they were suggested by one of my reviewers. I made sure to think really hard about how I could apply them without damaging the construction that I had grown attached to. But I also realized that concessions needed to be made and that my own attachments might not be universal. So I knew that elements had to change. But I made sure not to change too much in order to preserve my own voice.

In essence, this rationale provides a more honest introduction into my writing personality than I ever could have provided verbally. I wouldn't refrain from saying *aloud* these things about myself, but in sitting alone at my computer and responding to somewhat of a questionnaire regarding my styles, I feel like I've been able to unlock things that I couldn't express in the vocal world. And I am sincere in saying that my only hope is for readers to enjoy my work and possibly learn something new. As you will see in my first essay, learning is one of the most important things in my world, and I would be deeply honored if I was able to bestow that same grail unto someone else.

### **Reflection Essay: Old Memories and New Beginnings**

When I first began learning French, I was a toddler. My mother was attending Salt Lake Community College at the time and taught me verbs, nouns, songs, and various guidebook

phrases. Should I have ever toddled over to Paris, I would have more than likely been confused with a native child, as I could easily order lunch, ask for the restroom key, and entertain bored Parisians in need of a good nursery number. Of course, I only have a vague recollection of these times as grainy as the home video footage that compliments the memories themselves, but I feel that it was a good era. Shortly after that, my mom went on to other classes. With her workload so heavy, and her free time mostly dedicated to re-readings of Victorian novels, I didn't get many chances to practice mon langue francaise – or “my French tongue”. I forgot it all by the time I reached first grade.

A couple years later, my step dad left my mom and she spiraled into a severe depression. After this, I was sure to be doomed as a less-than-extraordinary monolingual child. Things picked up a bit when she began graduate school at the University of Utah. We moved out of the recently tainted home of my childhood and into the family dormitories between downtown and Red Butte Gardens. I feel it's necessary to skip a few years now as this is turning into a short autobiography. But I do find it necessary to say that the setting for that time period was beneficial to my cultural upbringing. I'll now join you, dear reader, five years later.

Mom had stopped going to classes altogether and we had moved through several duplexes. She'd always been trying to keep the family unit on its feet, though. So by the time I was thirteen, we had been in the same home for about three years or so. This was when I entered junior high school. Immediately, I signed up for French. I feel I've always been fairly level-headed, as is evident by my natural aptitude with mathematics, and the fact that I almost took Spanish instead. I knew it was the more useful of the two languages, but I was propelled into French by my own subconscious. In this, my mom must have enjoyed a glimpse of the past, and so she also pushed me in that direction. I excelled in the language during my seventh and eighth

grade years, and I enjoyed every minute of it. But by the time I entered high school in ninth grade, my close relationship with my mother had been spoiled by her various addictions at the time, particularly alcohol as it was the only one I was aware of until a few years later. I went into what were *supposed* to be the so-called "best days of my life" restless, distraught, and too young to do anything about any of it.

I dropped out of my ninth grade French class early in the year. That is to say, I stopped going to the class and received a failing grade -- and rightly so. That "F" would be the impetus for what would become my entire high school career. I didn't want to go. I don't jump through hoops like that. Two homes later, and I had finally been expelled at the beginning of my senior year. Contrastingly, my first failing grade would prove to illustrate my remaining time in school, and this final failure would build the framework for my academic success.

Just like my mother, I too fell into a somewhat self-pitying stage. I wouldn't say I was severely depressed, but maybe I fit into one of those lesser categories they sometimes talk about on TV. When I found out I couldn't re-enroll, I was set on taking my GED. When my counselor refused to provide me with a letter proving I was no longer in classes, I became incredibly angry. I was forced to wait until my class graduated until I could even *sign up* for the test. So I sat around when I wasn't at work. I saw what had happened to all four of my parents when they didn't continue their education. Aside from each of my biological parents remarrying once, there weren't any achievements to brag about. It was never something I wanted for myself. Although I was stuck, it was an enlightening period for me. I realized I enjoyed writing very much, and learning seemed very important. I was still insanely bored with the concept, though. For the third time in my life, however, I began learning my second, forgotten language. It's incredibly

frustrating to know that you are familiar with something but are unable to remember it in exact terms. It felt like there was something wrong with me. Still, I continued.

But somewhere along the way, I managed to get my GED, work my way into management (several times...don't ask), and teach myself basic piano. I felt something akin to a raw power during those times. It was small, but it was a catalyst for me and knowledge to combine harmoniously and create a new life together. I bought piles of books and read them fervently. I read the textbooks I managed to keep from high school, and studied the subjects I'd missed out on. I filled as many educational gaps as I possibly could in order to pile more education on top of it all, including le Francaise, or "The French Language". During all of this, I had managed to absorb a decent French accent and I acquired a nearly-equally decent vocabulary in the language. I placed post-it notes all over my bedroom in order to label various household items as they would be known in a loft apartment along the Seine – the names I would associate with my possessions if I were to live in my dream home. I was nowhere near conversationally fluent by that time, but it definitely felt like a breakthrough. At nineteen, I'd finally managed to gain the upper hand over bilingualism, and that raw power seemed to surge through me.

Currently, I'm still not able to comprehend French at the speed at which a natural speaker might use it, but I can pick little words out here and there. One of the most important benefits of it, though, is the way it has enhanced my understanding of my own native English. The connections that are there to be discovered are astounding, and it's really opened my eyes to this new world of erudition that I might never have jumped into had I not learned to love learning through the medium of language. Without that enlightenment, I wouldn't know the joy of struggle when more education is the reward. Nowadays, in one of life's ironic full-circles, I am

attending the junior alma mater of my estranged mother and I find myself revisiting those same grainy memories where I might have been mistaken for a happy little French boy.

**Visual Analysis: Birth Control + Vatican City = Touchy Conflict (or BC+VC=TC)**



In scanning the internet for images or cartoons that appealed to me without straying too far from their specific purpose, I managed to find this political cartoon about today's birth control issue:

[http://media.caglecartoons.com/media/cartoons/217/2012/02/11/106175\\_600.jpg](http://media.caglecartoons.com/media/cartoons/217/2012/02/11/106175_600.jpg)

In general, the image is designed well for its purposes. Political cartoons are most often depicted in caricature form. The artwork is great and the colors make the image pop much more than the standard black and white pencil sketch many political cartoons display.

As for the message the picture is trying to convey, it comes down to the interplay between the Catholic church and our current president's new mandates on birth control provision. The larger figure -- most likely the pope -- says to the smaller figure -- probably the president -- "I like your funny hat." That funny hat is a cone-shaped adornment on the president's head that says

"Birth Control Compromise." It's also a joke about the fact that the pope himself wears quite amusing accoutrements, hat included.

The overall design of the image is somewhat ambiguous. In thinking about it one way, you could say that the pope is the authoritative figure -- intimidating to the feeble-looking president. But it might strike another person as depicting an evil and arrogant pope taunting the meek and mild president -- not too dissimilar to the way King Herod is depicted as treating that most gentle and tender of figures. But I may be drawing parallels of my own with that one. I'm not actually sure which label to pin to it, though. It could be playing toward the credibility of the two individuals, I suppose. But in the same way, it's still ambiguous. It's fairly universal, but it assumes that a person knows what these two people look like. On the flip side of that, it also assumes that one is familiar with the issue of birth control mandates, where our president lies in that, and what the Catholic church's views are on the subject. So not as universal as one might originally think.

In trying to describe the message of the text, I am again slightly confused as to its full intended impact. But in terms of what it's *saying*, the pope's remark about the president's "funny hat" is twofold, I believe. The first jab means that "birth control compromise" is oxymoronic in essence, especially when a church is involved. The second sting comes from the fact that when the president supports this compromise, he's essentially wearing a "funny hat" or placing a silly decoration on his already shaky public image.

In considering everything I've said and analyzing the text one last time, I feel that the artist is trying to portray the arrogant church against the annoyed and feeble president Obama. The pope has a grin on his face in the image that almost makes it look like he's sniggering at poor little Barack, who is holding an expression that looks as if he's fed up with such nonsense.

This is directly mirrored in the real world issue, itself. There have been a great many debates where representatives of these two parties have played these very same roles. But in going up against such a massive world power as the Catholic church, one might imagine the president as becoming slightly annoyed by this point.

### Rhetorical Analysis: Dawkins' Achilles' Heel

Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion* is one that holds a place as one of my favorite non-fiction pieces. It's so well-written that it seems to reach points where it feels *well-spoken* to the reader – or listener, if you will. At times, it combines verbal wit, beautiful imagery, and tragically blunt confessions from a member of our global society who, in turn, provides a blissful journey that almost shades us from the true gravity of his admonitions. On October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006, Bantam Books published this work by the self-proclaimed moderate Atheist author and Oxford professor. In broad terms, when one publishes works detailing what makes Atheism so logical to them, they often state that they aren't looking to attack religion or spirituality, but that they are simply trying to reach people who share the same feelings and beliefs as the authors themselves held before coming to their rational conclusions. Many do not accomplish this task in a satisfying manner. But Richard Dawkins is probably the most likely candidate to have succeeded in blending logic, rationality, great knowledge, and his own personal brilliance with empathy and understanding. He then directs his efforts toward religion and the questions that pertain to every person's life in this world. Alongside this, he provides hope for people like myself who find that the double standard is just a bit too unfair in their home states, provinces, regions, countries, and

– ultimately – their entire home planet.

Having said this, I feel that – at times – Richard Dawkins' language is far too obtuse for his readers. In the beginning of the book, the author says that his intended audience is, essentially, an audience of people who have too many questions, not enough answers, and hold more suspicions and rational arguments against religion than any of the above definitive elements that might solidify the spirituality of somebody else. The whole book is brought together in a very adept manner, but under the close microscope of somebody *in the process* of reading it, the book falls short of retaining its target demographic. In this essay, I would like to illustrate just that. *Richard Dawkins' The God Delusion – while an interesting, provocative read that appeals to one's sense of logic – strays into the territory of being far too obtuse to hold the average reader within its intended audience.*

In context, this book plays a large role in the world of Atheism. Richard Dawkins – while being a highly educated professor of Biology – is also very well-lauded as one of the forefront pioneers in the non-believing stratosphere – disregarding the various writers, scientists, artists, and general thinkers of previous eras. In the past few years, Atheists claim to have seen an upward spike in religious favor, while scientific reasoning is increasingly threatened. It can be expected, then, that a writer in this area might want to pull out all of his best tools to take care of the issue. As Dawkins is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, he is a very intelligent person with *a lot* of important “tools”, so to speak, that we average citizens may never have even heard of. But since the issue in discussion is such a hot topic, one can also expect the text to be under a lot of fire from those that hold opposing beliefs. Consequently – with his intended audience being pulled in both directions – it's easy to see how readers can find themselves to be just as lost in his lyrical linguistics as is their desire to finish his book.

Specifically, one of the biggest factors in the product of complication arises when Dawkins uses the word “meme”. It's a term I don't think I had heard before reading this book, but it seems to have now exploded onto the scene. One of the reasons it proved to be such a difficult concept to grasp is because it's a word that Dawkins himself is said to have coined. This, coupled with the professor's actual *description* of a “meme” is what makes it so hard for one to stay in touch during this crucial midpoint in the text. By now, though, I'm sure at least somebody reading this analysis has heard phrases like “social meme” or “political meme” or the like. But it's still rarely, if ever, actually defined. It's one of those terms that seems to become a part of our cultural understanding through a sort of osmosis of repetition and other contexts. But when reading an entire chapter in the middle of a book in which the term is used at a much more crucial level, it's important to understand exactly what it means. However, when it's surrounded by nearly equally ambiguous language (a side-effect of poetic writing styles, I fear), then the entire transaction becomes an osmotic process, and the absorption rate is fairly low.

In fact, the book's closest thing to a definition of “meme” is “...the meme pool is less organized and less structured than the gene pool.” and that “...particular memes might have a frequency, which can change as a consequence of competitive actions with alternative memes.” In truth, Dawkins does define the word much better than mentioned above, but only in a previous book published thirty years prior. **“an element of culture that may be considered to be passed on by non-genetic means, [especially] imitation.”** In no way does this definition become clear in the *God Delusion* chapter covering the subject. As a matter of fact, it takes multiple re-mentions of the word before one starts to understand that it could somewhat be defined as “a piece of culture that continues due to others picking up habits associated with it.” That is how I would define the word. I feel like it embodies the term just as it is used in today's vocabulary

without alienating the vast majority of one's audience.

Other than his unclear use of the word “meme”, Richard Dawkins seems all around to be somewhat separated from the rest of the world in terms of language and intellect. While one might want to possess this same knowledge of diction in order to effectively toy with words the way an Oxford professor is able to do, that same person must admit to themselves that it's a severe hindrance toward speaking to an audience that is not also composed of brilliant professors in their own right. Unaccustomed as I am to doing so, I must comply with my own orders and be a person who admits to this fault, as well. I very much believe in the infinite powers of language, especially when coupled with ability. But I cannot deny that I put a lot of effort into this practice – effort that might be spent on other worthwhile matters in another person's life.

But I suppose an additional way to look at things is that Dawkins is making assumptions. He could very well be *assuming* that everyone reading his books might be familiar with complex biological processes, or the works of Kant, Chaucer, and other great writers, or that we all are able to dissect his fantastical language style in order to better understand the tasty morsels of concept he is purveyor of. Depending on your mood, you might think that it is inconsiderate – that he should explain things a bit better. But on another day, you might think that it's incredibly generous. For such a highly esteemed Oxford professor to hold the humility to assume that the average person's intellect is the same as his own is astounding to me. It's very kind, indeed. Having strayed a tad from my intended argument, I still must say that – without proper explanation – all of this is lost on the intended audience and becomes extremely complicated and nonsensical.

Analysis of this text (that could easily be described as a rhetorical analysis in its own right), is fairly difficult to perform, due to the nature of its message and arguments. This is

something that I have learned through my own analysis process with like materials to those Dawkins works on, and through analysis of *The God Delusion*, itself. But that is all the more evidence as to why it is so important to keep your audience abreast of important information without simply providing them with the benefit of the doubt. In going back to that intended reader who is pulled by the book and their newly-rising beliefs moving in one direction, while those with opposing beliefs pull so hard in the other direction, we can see that the reader is most likely lost to the cause of Mr. Dawkins' book. Additionally, that opposing group can interpret his writings in a number of ways, whether they be honest interpretations or dishonest. Twists and turns a gorgeous poem may make, but from them, rhetorical analysis benefits not (as evidenced by this statement). It can all be picked at in order to find the meaning, yes. But with important and heated issues, plain language might just be best.

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