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Beauty, knowledge, and terror: A phenomenological-syllogistic exploration of the aesthetics of the educative moment

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Abstract: In this text, I outline the relationship between beauty, knowledge, and terror through a syllogism and an exploration of each term individually. Before undertaking a full analysis of the interrelationships between beauty, knowledge, and terror, I would provide two illustrations: a visual representation of the proposed syllogism, and a description of a moment that seems to recur in more or less the same form year after year in my classroom; it is not illustrative in itself, but through careful analysis of the different phenomena which add up to create the moment, and which further extend from the moment, I explore the interaction of the three major elements at work here. The movement from beauty to knowledge to terror is explored in the context of the educative moment, which is important as this is largely a meditation on teaching. I conclude with the idea that the postmodern instructor needs to be consistently aware of the relationship between these to educate effectively, because the terror that arises with the possibility of new knowledge can prevent students from opening themselves to that knowledge, maintaining a ground for developing terror.

1. Introduction: A syllogism and its foundation

To *educ*ate, if we are to analyze the word through its roots, is to *lead out* of a particular state of being, which is to simultaneously lead *toward* another, regardless of whether one understands toward

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James Grant is a doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University, where his primary interests are cultural and media studies within the context of curriculum. The work presented here is an extension of this interest, particularly in regard to aesthetics, with a tie-in to how beauty has an inexplicable yet inescapable link to terror and how the aesthetics involved therein translate to the twenty-first century classroom. He has been an educator since 2009, and has worked at the middle and high school levels in private and public institutions. He currently teaches 9th grade composition, debate, and AP language at Grovetown High School in Grovetown, Georgia.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Every educative moment is pregnant with possibility, and every moment can be educative. This education, however, can be a terrifying thing, because it restructures our worldview. Herein, I explore the connections between beauty, truth (knowledge), and terror, to better understand what human tools the twenty-first century educator needs to keep students open to the possibility of new knowledge.

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what, precisely, one is leading. In its simplest form, a proper education should lead one out of a state of ignorance and toward understanding, toward discerning what is true. A difficulty arises here that can be opened up by making a syllogism of two ideas from Michel Serres. The first is that "often beauty is the light of truth, often its test" (Serres & Latour, 1990/1995, p. 26). The second is that knowledge is "first of all, terrifying. It is rushing at us" (1982/1995, p. 64). Considering these two statements together, we can posit the following syllogism: beauty illuminates truth; truth is equal to, or at least manifests, terror; so beauty illuminates and leads to terror. If we equate knowledge with truth, that is (and we must, since we cannot know what is untrue because it has no substance—it cannot be experienced, understood, judged, or acted upon in any way except to be named untrue; its foundation is in absence), then we must conclude that beauty illuminates terror—through its revelation of and accompaniment with truth, beauty can create for us a world of terror in which we realize that the constructions that we have assembled for the sake of order are little more than illusions; we are ultimately alone in a world of chaos, groping in the dark for a sense of a metaphysical whole that consistently transcends our attempts to totalize it.

As bleak as this may sound, we must keep in mind the first element of our syllogism: beauty. If beauty ultimately reveals this terror, then it is through beauty that a whole may be perceived, however protean and peripheral that whole may be. If we are to educate toward truth or beauty, then it must be through an understanding of the relationship between the three elements of our syllogism.

To make a case for teaching toward truth and beauty, I would like to pose the question: How much more terrifying is it to consider that, when we do not seek further truths and knowledge, we live in little more than a fantasy world of marionettes, waiting to pull their strings and imagining that we have control? With this in mind, though, there is a converse to the possibility of bleakness: when one can embrace, through beauty, the chaos that is human existence, every moment becomes not fixed, but pregnant with possibility, part of that metaphysical whole that cannot be complete until the completion of our own lives. Here, then, we can understand that chaos is an element of that same beauty which illuminates truth because chaos, when examined metaphysically, is the potency that lends itself to every final act, the foundation of infinity. Again, then, if one is to effectively educate, one must be consistently sensitive to the complexities and interdependence of the tripartite relationship of beauty, knowledge, and terror; to desensitize oneself to any element of the syllogism is to abandon one's students to the infinity of chaos or the simplicity of ignorance.

2. The tripartite relationship: Beauty, knowledge, terror

Before undertaking a full analysis of the interrelationships between beauty, knowledge, and terror, I would like to provide two illustrations. The first, Figure 1, is a visual representation of the proposed syllogism. The second is a description of a moment, a moment that seems to recur in more or less the same form year after year in my classroom; it is not illustrative in itself, but through careful analysis of the different phenomena which add up to create the moment, and which further extend from the moment, we can see the interaction of our three elements at work. Finally, although beauty is the first element of the syllogism, I will proceed by first coming to a general understanding of terror backwards to an understanding of beauty, then use the understanding of each of the terms to more fully explore the terror of the educative moment. Because it is in the interaction of the elements that this moment will be of most use, it will only be in the discussion of the interaction of elements that this moment will be addressed.

While there is a spatial limitation to the illustration, it should still make clear the relationships between each of the component parts for the purposes of this discussion. Here we see the candle—beauty—casting its light on a standing book—knowledge, truths—and casting the shadow, terror. I would like to call the reader's attention to the fact that the shadow is not a completely filled-in black space, but instead a space darkened-in by a continuous line that spirals round and round itself, intersecting randomly but consistently. An underlying idea here is that beauty is a constant, illuminating myriad truths at once, so while beauty may cast shadows through shining light on an isolated

Figure 1. Terror as a shadow cast by beauty's illumination of truth.

Note: This illustration displays the interrelationship of the terms of the beauty-knowledge-terror syllogism.
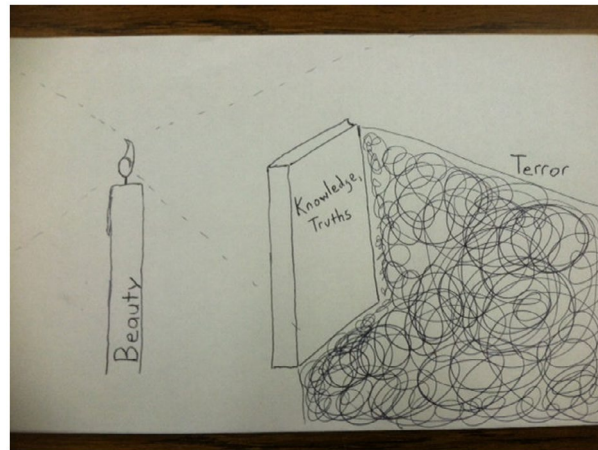
truth, it is consistently and simultaneously upholding others. In this way, if beauty is the source of illumination, any experience of terror and shadow cannot be completely dark, but will be nonetheless (and perhaps in an enhanced way because of this) chaotic.

Next, the moment in a nutshell. The moment begins, for an expansive variety of reasons, with me telling my students that I am a pacifist. There is always a mixed initial reaction: fascination, confusion, and anger. It is the angry students who speak up first. The response is always some variation of "you mean if somebody came and punched you in the face, you wouldn't punch them back?" My "no, because I refuse to give over my principals for the sake of someone else's violence" tends to escalate each element. At this point, those who are fascinated and confused chime in as well, and a hypothetical is introduced. This hypothetical, again, has historically been a variation of the same theme: what if someone broke into your house and was threatening to hurt your family, you wouldn't shoot them? My initial response is that I do not have a gun, only four swords, two spears, and a bow. There is laughter, then students press me on the issue. The further answer that I give now—and the reader should be aware that this is analyzed thoroughly below, and the term "now" is important—is that I would do everything in my power to stop someone attempting to harm my family, and follow this up by doing everything in my power to ameliorate any damage done. Further escalation. End of discussion. This moment begins with beauty, an impassioned attempt at being known, of expressing through an experience of beauty, which leads to the *possibility* of knowledge, of experiencing a new truth. This potential knowledge, because it stands in opposition to the world that my students have constructed, lends itself to terror, terror which is often expressed through a verbal violence.

2.1. The spirit of terror

Before proceeding, I would like to draw the reader's attention to the title of this heading. I am not seeking to create a concrete, textbook, definition of terror. To do so would be to strip terror of its value and make it a cold, dead, manipulable thing. If I am to treat terror as an active force, then I must address its spirit, and note that terror itself, just like truth and beauty below, cannot be pinned down by a single series of words. Foucault (1975/1995) writes of a soul that is

> born out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint. [… that] is not a substance; rather it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power. (p. 29)

While Foucault's notion of soul is general, there is no reason why this notion cannot be applied to any form; that is, truth, beauty, terror, what have you, each of these articulate very specific power relationships and the various vocabularies that exist amidst these relationships, as well as the

methods by which they give rise to knowledge which further supports their being. Each has a spirit, a soul, of its own, something that transcends the substantial.

The spirit of terror, then, can only be understood in reference to commonalities in moments of terror with the understanding that despite the fact that terror is realized in them, terror itself transcends these instances, is always beyond them, informing them. Let us begin with the notion of limitation as the first commonality. Thacker (2011) points out that

> the non-human remains, by definition, a limit; it designates both that which we stand in relation to and that which remains forever inaccessible to us. This limit is the unknown, and the unknown […] is often a source of fear or dread. (p. 26)

Humans can (to a limited degree, of course) understand what it is to be human, understand other humans, understand humanity. What we cannot understand, for Thacker, is the world in-itself or for-itself. The minute we attempt to do so, we are already interpreting the world on human terms again, thus nullifying our attempts. Humanity is its own limit, and because of this limitation, we are opened to a world of unknowns, a world of possible terror. To add to this, there is the limit of knowledge we have about humanity and ourselves; the unknowns here can be just as terrifying without the worry of the non-human. While Thacker intends non-human quite literally, we can apply this term quite liberally when we consider group mindsets and the maintenance of outsiders as non- or sub-humans. While there is no need to make this distinction as of yet, it will prove fruitful in the discussion to follow.

Let us now add complacency as the second commonality. By complacency I do not intend a sense of laziness or necessary satisfaction with one's actions, but rather a satisfaction in understanding the world, of having created, however unwittingly, a system of being-in-the-world and knowing-the-world that has reduced the world to a series of predictabilities. This is ultimately inescapable, at least to a degree, because this is what humans do: we construct the world based on assumed or experienced truths. I know that when I punch the letter "e," on my keyboard, the letter "e" will appear on my screen. I should not have to question this. I know, just as well, that when I take a sip of soda from my glass, it will end up in my stomach soon after. I do not know, at least to the same degree, that a hideous creature will not find its way into my house overnight and devour me. I have no reason to believe that this would happen, but this is always the case with world-construction: we never have reason to believe that anything is the case *until it is the case*. Terror works two ways here, then: I can be terrified *that* a hideous creature will devour me, maintaining this possibility as an element of my world; or I can be terrified *when* a hideous creature makes its way into my home to devour me, having kept the possibility removed from the limits of my constructed world.

Žižek (2008) creates a space for pitting these two elements against each other when he writes of the monstrosity of the Neighbor, who should be, above all, *human*. The Neighbor, he says, in discussing Levinas and Freud, is the

> (Evil) Thing which potentially lurks beneath every homely human face, like the hero of Stephen King's *The Shining*, […] who gradually […] goes on to slaughter his entire family. […] What resists universality is the properly *inhuman* dimension of the Neighbor. (p. 16)

The commonality that this scenario brings forth (while also incorporating the first and second) is the aporia between the multiplicity of the universe and the singular isolation of the individual. The world outside of humanity is, as has already been established, not possible to know in- or for-itself; I am necessarily removed from it. There is hope, though, in the Neighbor. My Neighbor is human, just like me, yet he is *not* just like me. He is part of the same world in which I live, and experiences it and responds to it in similar ways, except he does *not* experience it or respond to it in the same way. Only I can truly be human, then, because only I can know what it is to *be* human for myself. The commonality that this elucidates is that of solitude. Of course, Žižek moves beyond this, and my

elaboration is not necessarily his point, but it is no less worthwhile to discuss as such. The experience of solitude, of having solitude thrust upon us, of finding ourselves infinitely attempting to translate ourselves to a world that cannot understand our language, of fruitlessly attempting to translate for ourselves the indecipherable language of a world, of existential crisis, is the experience of terror.

While expressions of terror and the commonalities across them are myriad, these three should suffice for understanding the spirit of terror. With limitation, the complacency and ubiquity of world-building, and solitude understood as its building blocks, we may establish the spirit of terror thus: terror is what arises when the world-building that comes naturally to humans is met with a destruction that arises through limitations and leaves a person solitary; it is what arises when a person realizes that she has spent her days constructing a world based on a limited set of experiences and knowledge, and finds that world undermined, leaving her alone; it is what is born out of a solitary *need* to construct a world, only to find that world destroyed by the very limitations that were complicit in its construction.

2.2. The spirit of knowledge

When Serres (1991/1997) states that love "is never proven by words or by love letters. Enough said, let's have acts. [...] If not, you lie. You will lie, even if you tell the truth, supposing that you content yourself with talking" (p. 80), the point is that ideas, even when spoken in earnest, are not enough. Without action, even ideas that are aligned with what one believes is true are not *true* until they have been acted upon; through such action one can have experienced them and judged them as true. Here, then, is a further foundation for the equation of truth with knowledge: full knowledge is not achieved until one's reasonability is acted upon (Lonergan, 2005), just as truth cannot be present without action; what is true is the contents of consciousness that have been judged reasonable and acted upon, just as much as knowledge is what has been experienced, understood, judged, and acted upon. However much one has reasoned about a thing, and whatever one has judged about that same thing, until action has been taken in accordance with such judgment, there is no true knowledge, only speculation. Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2003) also touch on this in their discussion of psychic realities, which they term "[the] reality of the object, insofar as it is produced by desire" (p. 25). That is, psychic realities are those that arise from desire but are not necessarily manifest *beyond* desire. "There is no particular form of existence that can be labeled 'psychic reality'," they go on to say, though, and what is missing in such instances is "the objective being of man, for whom to desire is to produce, to produce within the realm of the real" (p. 27). Any desire that is not paired with the further desire to manifest is little more than fantasy, and not a true desire at all; because it is not *truly* desired, it cannot be realized.

Such action, though, requires a stepping out, leaving the shores of complacent contemplation, venturing the shaky ground and leaving behind what has proven steady; indeed, when one comes nearer to Serres's (1991/1997) third space, this stepping out even involves questioning the solidity of that steady space. There is no discernible halfway point in this movement; halfway is the half-second before the beginning of the movement, the impetus of the biological extroversion of the moving out from one's mind into the world of space. The third space, wherein one is neither here nor there, neither of one's homeland nor of the land to which one travels, is ever-present. In stepping away from home (even in the desire that manifests itself through this stepping away), home has already become not-home. Sikorski (1993) comments on this when he adds to Derrida's (1997/2000) notion that returning home is impossible the further idea that homes themselves are impossible. A home, Sikorski says, is "always already different from itself, from the way it was supposed to be. (And I must admit, from personal experience, that home is an elusive place, always beckoning, promising—and never what it is supposed to be)" (p. 27).

The idea that "home"—a totalizing construction of what is safe and familiar—is unstable calls into question any such construction. Home in this sense becomes a metanarrative, and Lyotard (1979/1984) makes clear that metanarratives require a narrator who "must be a metasubject in the process of formulating both the legitimacy of the discourses of the empirical sciences and that of the

direct institutions of popular cultures" (p. 38). Since we are always micro-subjects limited to our own experiences, understanding, and judgment, the construction of metanarratives is necessarily a flawed experiment. What is missing is a place for the unknown, the whole minus infinity, the constant *becoming* of the world. Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2003) speak to this when they state, in an elucidation of Bergson, that "the whole, of the world as of [a] living being, is always in the process of becoming, developing, coming into being or advancing, and inscribing itself within a temporal dimension that is irreducible and nonclosed" (p. 96). While all things are knowable, all are not knowable by a limited subjectivity, and while a true totality cannot be constructed, a mind geared toward insight still reaches perpetually toward a whole with the understanding that it cannot be grasped (Lonergan, 2005); just as much as the universe is constantly closing itself from totalities, it is also opening itself to discovery. A closed metaphysic is false metaphysic, and the only complete metaphysic is one that factors in a place for incompleteness. All I can know—or transmit to my students—is my own micro-narrative and that it is taking place within an ultimately unknowable-for-us-in-its-entirety metanarrative, which further constitutes a ground of noise, wonder, and terror; because I am foundational for the understanding of my world, but not for my world itself, my actions occur amidst the noise and chaos *of* that world—however hard I may try to be, I am not in control, and that is terrifying, a source of chaos and wonder.

The lack of a steady foundation and the fact of fluctuation make clear that the notion of truth has become dubious in the post-modern era. It should be clear by this point, then, that I am not attempting to make a case for truth as a matter of fact; as Frankfurt (2006) points out, the debate over whether there is a meaningful distinction between true and false is "unlikely to ever be finally resolved, and it is generally unrewarding" (p. 8). On that note, however, Oberst's (2005) lyric "if you swear that there's no truth, and who cares/How come you say it like you're right?" (track 2) is worth discussing. While there is a paradox between the limited subject constructing a metanarrative, there is just as much of a paradox when a limited subject determines unknowability of the truth as a truth in-itself—there is an implied metanarrative here that paradoxically belies itself in its being spoken. There is a danger in not totalizing as a matter of fact: the danger of shutting off altogether, ending the possibility of further construction. Because truth is unknowable in its entirety *for us*, leaving aside projects of building metanarratives is commendable—this is part of Lyotard's point, for his call is for the sake of imparting "a stronger sense of the unpresentable" (81). This same call, though, *acknowledges* the reality of a narrative beyond our subjectivity, but simply names it unknowable. Perhaps the need for silence on either side of this argument is most hyperbolically—yet nonetheless realistically—illustrated in the mewithoutYou lyric stating that "those who know don't talk, and those who talk don't know" (Weiss, track 4, 1999). Alas, something *must* be said if there is to be dialog. Again, with truth always comes the risk of isolation.

Ultimately, knowledge cannot exist without a sense of the unknowable. Metanarratives are a terror and a danger without the understanding that they consistently transcend our attempts to construct them. This occurs in the postmodern conversation between the necessity for scientific quantification and narrative understanding. Again, Lyotard (1979/1984) states that it is

> impossible to judge the existence or validity of narrative knowledge on the basis of scientific knowledge and vice versa: the relevant criteria are different. [...] Lamenting the "loss of meaning" in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative. (p. 26)

What Lyotard is doing here is rallying limited human subjects against paradoxical attempts at the *construction* of metanarratives. Knowledge of a reality beyond my own, however, *is* still attainable. Indeed, every experience that I did not construct beforehand which I incorporate into my own narrative is a nod toward it: I know that there are myriad narratives all participating, past, present, and future, in the universe in which I act, and it is from my experience of these narratives that exist beyond my own that I discover new truths that are woven into my narrative. The word universe itself implies oneness. While there have, of late, been posited theories of multiverses and the like, such

theories are naïve linguistically, for even the separate worlds of those multiverses would still combine to form one world that lies beyond each of their individual bounds; with this in mind, denying the possibility of the *existence* of a metanarrative is, at best, solipsistic. This is the further paradox of the postmodern human and his search for home: the universe exists beyond me and not beyond me, for I am always a part of it—the separation of the self from universe is little more than an illusion, a Cartesian duality. If knowledge is constantly in a state of flux, then the flux, the *becoming* of the universe, is a viable ground for home. Perhaps one is never really home until one realizes the impossibility of home, the acceptance of the aforementioned complete incompletion.

Here we may invoke Kierkegaard's (1846/1992) argument that truth is subjectivity and that subjectivity is truth. There can be no truth without a subject to appropriate him or herself toward it, and that truth lies in the act of understanding one's subjectivity. Let's not simply take Kierkegaard at his word, though, but consider: understanding ourselves as individual knowers of truths shapes the truths that we know and complicates them as well. Although an individual who has lived one very particular set of circumstances can feel for other individuals, the former can never fully internalize and realize the situation of the latter. Still, the former does bring their experience to the table, and there is no reason to invalidate this experience, as it *has* been experienced. At the same time, there will always be something beyond any individual's experience that shapes and *limits* their ability to understand universally. We cannot, therefore, be autonomous beings (for if we are not subjects then we are objects, and the autonomy of objects is dubious, if not impossible, aside from the confines of linguistics) unless we are consistently seeking and attempting to discover truths, to build upon our self-knowledge. The reverse is also true: when we give over our autonomy, we systematically begin denying (or at the very least begin ignoring) what is true, what we know, and giving over autonomy is no difficult task. We do it most easily through the histories we tell ourselves about ourselves, becoming slaves to the revised and edited versions of our lived experience for fear of what the truth may reveal (a further ground for relating truth with terror). Lyotard (1979/1984) declares that we should "wage a war on totality" and be "witnesses to the unpresentable," that we should "activate the differences and save the honor of the name" (p. 82). His point is that narrative truths *are* the unpresentable because they cannot be scientifically quantified, and that attempts at transcendental unification, such as that of Hegel, create a terror.

Serres's thesis about technical vocabularies and the exclusion and subsequent questionability that arises from them, when examined in the light of Kierkegaard's notion of truth being subjectivity, are worth exploring. Serres states that technical vocabulary

> seems even immoral: it prevents the majority from participating in the conversation, it eliminates rather than welcomes, and, further, *it lies* in order to express in a more complex way things that are often simple. It doesn't necessarily lie in its content but in its form, or, more precisely, in the rules of the game it imposes. You can almost always find a lucid way to express delicate or transcendent things. If not, try using a story! (Serres & Latour, 1990/1995, p. 25)

The notion that truth may be attained through a story invites the subject back into the conversation, and distinguishes truth from fact, while maintaining each as elements of knowledge. While facts are just as much the content of knowledge as truth is, the idea that truth can be expressed through a story (a story that may not even be true!) is sufficient grounds to understand that when we speak about what is true, we are speaking about "delicate" and "transcendent things" that may not be pinned down by the detached scientific language of fact. While we have equivocated truth with knowledge, then, we must further understand truth as separate from fact because these are not equivocal; facts are cold, detached, lifeless; truth, then, is fact given life, and, as such, cannot be understood outside of its relationship with beauty. Here, then, we arrive at what we may call the spirit of knowledge: the spirit of continuously constructing a completely incomplete narrative truth from a series of detached facts and reaching toward an unknown while understanding that the reaching will never be satisfied by obtaining its object.

2.3. The spirit of beauty

Bachelard (1943/2002) and Serres and Latour (1990/1995) both write of beauty as a given, as if there is no need to discuss what they intend by beauty because it is so ubiquitous and ever-present. If we understand beauty as illuminative of and foundational for truth, then this stance toward beauty warrants no question. However, since it is my attempt herein to create a case *for* beauty as a ground for knowledge and terror, we must proceed further. On this note, Dadosky (2014) points out that "[these] signifiers of beauty—integrity, clarity, proportion/harmony, and pleasure—can be applied analogously to the notion of beauty in the generic sense" (p. 132). Dadosky's signifiers are noteworthy predominantly as juxtaposed with Serres's (1982/1995) notion of noise. If all is noise, that is, then any moment of integrity, of clarity amidst the noise, of discovering harmony within the noise, or taking pleasure in or despite the noise signifies, points toward, gives a nod to the idea of beauty.

Here, then, we find the beginning of beauty in a sense of grace. The world is constantly throwing itself at us, contributing noise and nothing more, moment after chaotic moment. How, in the midst of this persistent turmoil, is one to experience these signifiers? Serres (1982/1995) states that "[grace] is nothing, it is nothing but stepping aside" (p. 47). If we further examine the metaphor of the universe throwing itself toward us as a bull does a matador, then this stepping aside is a movement away from the noise of the universe, a moment of reprieve, of understanding the complete incompletion *of* the universe. This stepping aside is to yield to the universe, to what is becoming, and "[to] yield," as Serres points out, "means to take a step. To step aside, we say. Those who step aside, those who cede their place, begin, by their cession, a process. Those who take the places stabilize them and drown them in *noise*" (p. 77). The matador, to maintain the metaphor, gives up his place; the bull takes over that place, stabilizes it, saturates it. That stabilization, however, is founded upon flux. What is unstated here is the matador's release from death in his stepping aside, his momentary realization of his own fleeting being within the universal noise. The matador is no matador without his bull, yet to conquer or be conquered by his bull is to end his role. The matador is only the matador when he steps aside, takes part in grace, and in that moment, beauty is born.

Of course, when we speak of beauty, we tend toward metaphors and the like, for capturing beauty definitively through language is hardly worthwhile. Wittgenstein (1977/1980), makes clear the difficulty of attempting to pin down the ineffable nature of beauty with language when he notes that

> If I say A has beautiful eyes someone may ask me: what do you find beautiful about his eyes, and perhaps I shall reply: the almond shape, long eye-lashes, delicate lids. What do these have in common with a gothic church that I find beautiful too? Should I say they make a similar impression on me? What if I were to say that in both cases my hand feels tempted to draw them? That at any rate would be a *narrow definition* of the beautiful. (p. 24e)

The argument here is that we cannot refer to the beauty of someone's eyes in the same way that we refer to the beauty of an architectural work; while both can be beautiful, they approach and reveal beauty quite differently. The same can apply to music, literature, dance, nature, or to anything that one calls an art (and educating may certainly be considered an art, despite the burgeoning desire to call it a science and measure its effects scientifically and quantitatively). In any case, we can still apply the term "beautiful" across arts to anything (combinations of sounds, words, landscapes, motions, a pedagogical approach) that strikes us as such. What we need, then, is to look at what *is* common among the beautiful across the arts and in nature.

On this, Lonergan (1972) writes that the "artistically differentiated consciousness is a specialist in the realm of beauty. It promptly recognizes and fully responds to beautiful objects. Its higher attainment is creating: it invents commanding forms [...]" (p. 273). Key terms here are "commanding" and "differentiated". What is beautiful, then, is differentiated from what is common and commands our attention in its differentiation. Un's (1995) Zen poem "A Shooting Star," the entirety of which is the single line "Wow! You recognized me," illustrates this pleasurable differentiation from the mundane on multiple levels. Consider: religious ceremonies are structured around this same notion. Actions

are taken, words are spoken to set specific moments apart from the everyday, to ordain them as holy and align them with the beautiful, for while beauty is the object of the artistically differentiated consciousness, holiness would be the object of the religiously differentiated consciousness. To take this further, Lonergan (1969) in a lecture on the elements of meaning, states that beauty "is self-transcendence expressed through the sensible" (p. 29) and Dadosky (2014) comments on this same idea, noting that, so far as understanding beauty goes,

> for Lonergan at the level of intelligibility is only formal and not actual—it is subject to the further criteria in the act of judgment. It should be noted, therefore, that the content that understanding grasps is not being but a principal of being. Likewise, potency, form, and act are not beings but principles of being. If beauty is a transcendental then formal intelligibility can at best be a principal of beauty. To have a true and real being, act is required. Equally, it should follow, to have an instance of beauty, act is required. (p. 132)

Again, we return to action as concretization. Beauty, while it may be latent in the poet's spoken words, the gestures of the dancer, may be forming in the mind of the observer as she hears those words, watches that dance, cannot be a true moment of beauty unless it inspires her to act, much like Wittgenstein's desire to draw. The content does not change in itself, but rather the mind which reaches toward it. If there is no call to action (conversion), beauty only exists as potential and is never fully experienced.

Here the reader may posit that what is ugly, terrible, or horrible also differentiate themselves from the common, and command our attention just as strongly, except instead of taking pleasure in the awe, we are disgusted or horrified, and just as moved to action. The reaction of Chicken Little to Un's shooting star, for example, may be to conjecture that the sky is falling, a notion that would certainly cause him to consider the sight ugly, not beautiful, and would be further moved to warn all of his friends of their imminent doom. The moment is still differentiated from the ordinary, but the response is far from pleasurable. This is quite true, and yet it only does so (i.e. we are only disgusted by the terrible, Chicken Little is only frightened of the shooting star) in a way that presents itself as *lacking* in beauty in situations where there was potential for beauty—and, to be sure, every common moment contains the possibility of beauty—but what was enacted left a void, created a negative esthetic. To return briefly to the religiously differentiated consciousness, the same is argued by Aquinas (1272/2002) when he states that "evil is the privation of a due perfection [...] the privation of the good" (p. 128). Evil, that is, has no being in itself, but exists rather as an absence of what is good—the religiously oriented can only recognize evil in the unrealized potential for good, just as the esthetically oriented sees the disgusting and horrifying as a negation of what is potentially beautiful.

Through the notion of grace, differentiation from what is common, and the further desire to invent, we may more clearly understand the spirit of beauty. This spirit is one that makes clear the noise of the universe and its ubiquity, but allows the subject to stand, momentarily, outside of that noise and simultaneously desire to reach back in toward what is sublime.

2.4. Beauty and knowledge

From the above, we can understand the movement from beauty toward knowledge as a movement inspired by a desire to create which intends a project that can never be finished, but is nonetheless worthy of constructing. When we educate, we create out of noise, create for our students opportunities to differentiate between the everyday and to do this reaching for themselves, all the while creating a new ground from which they may do so, a space outside of the noise of the everyday. Gros (2009/2014) states that

> [what] is called "silence" in walking is, in the first place, the abolishment of chatter, of that permanent noise that blanks and fogs everything, invading the vast prairies of our consciousness like couch-grass. Chatter deafens: it turns everything into nonsense, intoxicates you, makes you lose your head. It is always there on all sides, overflowing, running everywhere, in all directions. (p. 61)

The "silence" and the "walking" are important here. Walking is movement, change, a shift in positions, a refusal to give way to the deafening chatter of the everyday, an inviting-in of new landscapes. Silence is nothing more than clarity, that same clarity which beauty intends. We educate toward these silences.

The first time I ever mentioned my pacifism to my students, it was out of a personal need to provide a different horizon for them regarding violence; I simply could not accept their thoughtless acceptance of it. Before going further, I should make clear that when I first penned this piece, I taught in a school—and had done for two years beforehand—that was populated predominantly by students who were in low-income home situations and largely African-American, but those demographics are not indicative of the outrage and tendency toward violence that the students exhibited. Before that current situation, I worked in a private Christian school, populated predominantly by upper-middle to high-income, mostly Caucasian, students, and reactions were the same. I currently teach in a public high school with a more even distribution of White, African-American, Hispanic, mixed-race, Asian, and Pacific Islanders across economic levels (although the demographics are not exactly 1:1 with national statistics); doesn't matter. This violence is America.

A problem with this stance against violence, though, is that while I wanted to challenge my students and create new spaces for them, my pacifism is largely unlived, idealistic. I have not been called to war or to violence, so I cannot *know* how I would respond to these situations. Derrida (1982/1985) notes that an individual telling his story "tells *himself* this life and he is the narration's first, if not its only, addressee and destination [...] and since the 'I' of this récit only constitutes itself through the credit of the eternal return, he does not exist" (p. 13). I tell my students that if I were to simply return violence for violence when a person hit me in the face, I would have given up my autonomy to that person, and while I believe this now, and believed it then, the truth is yet to be discerned, because while the experience of violence invites an opportunity to create, a *desire* to create, the creation is as-of-yet to be realized. This is the story I tell myself about myself, in the eternal hope that I am telling a true story. Ultimately, what I do not want to end up doing is bullshitting myself, which is distinctly different from lying. Frankfurt (2005) declares that

> it is impossible for someone to lie unless he thinks he knows the truth. Producing bullshit requires no such conviction. [...] When an honest man speaks, he says only what he believes to be true; and for the liar, it is correspondingly indispensable that he considers his statements to be false. For the bullshitter, all these bets are off: he is neither on the side of the true nor on the side of the false. His eye is not on the facts at all, as the eyes of the honest man and of the liar are, insofar as they may be pertinent to his interest in getting away with what he says. (pp. 55–56)

Since I do not *know* how I would act because I do not have the sufficient experience to judge my future actions true or false, I consistently run the risk of bullshitting myself—this is no different for my students. The stories we tell ourselves about ourselves require consistent scrutiny, if for nothing else than to make sure that we have not become complacent in their telling, ambivalent about their truthfulness.

Foucault (1983) problematizes this situation even further when he discusses the parrhesiastes, the free-speaker (which can take a pejorative sense when that free-speech contributes little but noise and distraction, though Foucault does not intend the term in this sense), and states that

> the parrhesiastes says what is true because he knows that it is true; and he knows that it is true because it is really true. The parrhesiastes is not only sincere and says what is his opinion, but his opinion is also the truth. He says what he knows to be true. The second characteristic of parrhesia, then, is that there is always an exact coincidence between belief and truth. (Parrhesia and Truth, para. 2)

Based on this account of parrhesia, all I can do is hope that my account of my hypothetical actions, if it is ever called to manifest itself, will be true. Still, perhaps my ability to question my outpouring is another grace. When I speak on this issue, I speak passionately, and can say, until the question of what action I would take arises, that I do speak the truth. Such presentation, such advancement of the self runs the risk of crossing another dangerous line, though. Derrida (1991/1992) says that the avant-garde, which must always advance itself as such,

> advances and promotes itself as an advance, and it will have never ceased to make advances on the other: to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or to violate, to love to violate, to colonize, and to colonize itself. (p. 49)

Aside from being aware of the stories I am telling, I must also be aware of whether what I am trying to do is create a space for beauty, for new knowledge to be opened up, or simply to violate my students' worldviews, to colonize their being.

Ultimately, while my developing of experience is important, the personal desires that I must help my students to realize take precedent. When I challenge their worldviews, it is—and must continue to be—from a state of desiring-stillness-for-them. The one thing I hope to do is undermine what is known to create a new ground for discovery, to de-stabilize the common, to stifle the bullshit, and incite a movement beyond the everyday toward new knowledge. When I have this conversation with my students, it is a sense of beauty that drives me to lead them to new knowledge, and it is the presence of that beauty that gives rise to the ensuing discussion, a discussion that leads to the possibility of this new knowledge. When the students engage, they are engaging in another sort of beauty; the beauty that drives me to move, to speak, has now transformed and grabbed them. This is not to say, however, that they are attempting to further create the beautiful, only that it has been opened up to them in some sense. Derrida (1982/1985) states that the mother

> gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona. Everything comes back to her, beginning with life; everything addresses and destines itself to her. She survives on the condition of remaining at bottom. (p. 38)

The mother here is no different from beauty. Beauty gives rise to situations and falls into the background of conversation, maintaining it all the while. At this stage, this movement from beauty to knowledge, whether students are convinced that pacifism and the denial of violence are beautiful and worthwhile causes is irrelevant; what they learn, what they begin to *know* through the problem that I present to them (and even further, the problem that I become for them myself), is that there are other ways of being in the world. Such knowledge could not have arisen without beauty driving it.

2.5. Knowledge and terror

With the possibility of this new knowledge, however, comes the aforementioned world-shattering terror. Before worldviews are challenged, the world is known, stable, dependable. The moment a new world is presented to a student, the knowledge of that world can be terrifying. Derrida (1982/1985) writes of a "manner that inspires terror" as a point where there has been

> a crossing at the limit, a step beyond to where everything breaks down and is overthrown, where unknowing fascinates knowledge and discourse, luring them outside of the system, outside of language, into a space that we enter only if we no longer are. (p. 72)

That my students' reactions are always the same is indicative that what my students *know*, what grounds at least part of their worldview, is violence: "What do you mean you don't believe in using violence?" "What if somebody just came up and punched you in the face? You wouldn't hit them back?" These go-to questions are the students' means of understanding what I am presenting to them, the stories they need to solidify their worlds. To examine the language of these questions, we can see that they are making an attempt to understand my truth in order to demolish it, to dismiss

it, to silence it, because it, in itself, threatens to demolish their world-system and the being that they have *in* that system; a line has clearly been crossed.

Bachelard (1943/2002) speaks to this when he states that "[throughout] life, we retain [a] desire to turn a hostile world or an astonished enemy to stone" (p. 174). Our first desire, when an Other challenges the world that we know, is to silence them, to crystallize them, to make them earthen ruins. This desire, though, can bring a terror with it, the terror of the frozen enemy, of a further one-ness with that enemy and the experience of petrification. While Bachelard writes of petrifying rever-ies as ultimately creative, he concludes that the time has passed for

> those extravagant images which substitute pearl for tear, pearl for dew, diamond for shimmering morning waters [. ...] Such images close the door on dreams, never to reopen it. To put the lost dream back into words, we must return, in innocent wonder, to things themselves. (p. 261)

To be clear, there is a difference between this person who seeks to crystallize and the student who tends toward the violent *ipso facto*. Bachelard's petrifying reverant still *creates* through his crystal-lization of landscapes, despite the loss of further creation through the closing down of dreams. For the student of unreflective violence, there is no creation through reduction, no reverie, no beauty whatsoever; there is only stultifying violence. For so many students, the world has already been constructed for them, by them, in its totality; the complacency of their imaginations has paralyzed it. Those things which challenge it, which threaten to expand the horizons of their landscapes, which begin to reopen the doors to their dreams, are broken down and compartmentalized as so much sand for their pre-constructed deserts.

To return to Bachelard's innocent wonder, to inspire a desire for knowledge, we must keep in mind that knowledge is transformative, and requires us to leave behind the constructs we thought were (and think of as) home. This departure, as Serres (1991/1997) says,

> requires a rending that rips a part of the body from the part that still adheres to the shore where it was born, to the neighborhood of its kinfolk, to the house and the village with its customary inhabitants, to the culture of its language and to the rigidity of habit. Whoever does not get moving learns nothing, Yes (*sic*), depart, divide yourself into parts. (p. 7)

Such departure again leaves one homeless, neither of one shore nor another, and *requires* a continu-ous perambulation. What could be more terrifying than facing the idea of continued multiplicity, the denial of comfort in one's being, the realization that nothing is solid? To add to this, Serres (1982/1995) also states that "[the] work of transformation is that of the multiple [...] The multiple moves around, that is all. In the beginning is the multiple: it rushes around" (p. 101). My students' vehement denial of the viability of pacifism in a world of violence is a testament to the terror that is born of the trans-formational multiplicity of knowledge. When what is known, that is, is violence, if what constitutes one's world is violence, then knowledge that threatens the sanctity of that world is knowledge that threatens to shatter the unity of the self along with that world, knowledge that threatens to shatter the very self into something multiple and unknowable, into something both terrible and terrifying.

Of course, this knowledge-terror connection does not only exist for *students* in the educative mo-ment. While a classroom may be an artificial venue (Derrida & Stiegler, 1996/2002), the instructor must be attuned to this, and still seek to be as authentic in that venue as possible. The postmodern student is nothing if not attuned to artificiality, and has little time or use for it; further, the postmod-ern instructor is fooling himself if he believes that he can walk into his classroom and not learn from his students. The first time a group of my students ever asked me "What if someone were to break in to your house and start attacking your wife and your children? You wouldn't shoot them?" the fact that my comments as to what weaponry I do have in my home were enough to stave the question for a while was good for me, a grace, because I really wasn't comfortable with the question at the time—I didn't want to tell myself a story about myself that wasn't in some way connected with a

realizable truth. The rub, though, was that it was only good for a while; they did eventually take me back to task, but thankfully only after I'd had enough time to make my peace with the situation. The fact was, as stated above, that I simply did not *know* to begin with—it was not something that had been a part of my experience, so I hardly felt comfortable telling that story about myself to myself or anyone else, and that lack of self-knowledge was just as terrifying as anything else.

I did eventually gain the peace of the parrhesiastes, however. In the case of a family-attack situation, I have reasoned to myself and to my students, if I do not act to stop the violence against my family, then I am guilty of its perpetration—the obvious choice in this case, then, is a false choice: violence or violence. The more subtle question is this: if violence is absolutely necessary to prevent greater violence, in what way could its effects be ameliorated? The answer that I could most honestly supply has been this: use the least amount of force possible to stop the attack, then see to the wounds and rehabilitation of the attacker. I would not have given over my autonomy here, and would be acting for the sake of an immediate good with the well-being of all in mind, family and attacker. This, at least, is what I *desire*, which is as truthful as one can be given a hypothetical.

Unless one has completely immersed oneself in acceptance of the world of noise and chaos, unless one has fully given over to a sense of wonder from moment-to-perpetual-moment, knowledge cannot help but inspire terror. The incorporation of new truths, new understanding, new knowledge, new realities, consistently shatters any unity that a subject may have constructed, leaving that subject alone, multiply alone, alone in multiplicity, and any moment of reflective multiplicity reinforces the unknowable nature of human being. If I cannot be home, even in myself, if nothing can be held for more than a moment without transforming before my eyes, if there is no solidity, then every educative moment contributes to the experience of terror.

3. Conclusion

There is an intended bleakness when Cooper (2013) sings: "I wish I had more nice things to say, but I was raised not to lie/I'm either honest or I'm an optimist, but never both at the same time" (track 4). Here, the character that Cooper is embodying is bemoaning that telling the truth can only reveal what is negative, destructive. Beauty, in this case, is what lies in the void; it is not, in terms of our syllogism, what illuminates truth, but rather the reverse is true: truth can only reveal beauty's absence. Rowlands (2008), on a similar note, points out that the universal human qualities of manipulation and exploitation "are based on a capacity for deception: the primary, and most effective, way of manipulating your colleagues is by deceiving them" and that group living requires "that you become smart enough to be able to tell when you are being deceived" (p. 61). While understanding when we are being deceived by others is important to group living, it is just as important to understand when we are deceiving ourselves, allowing the machinations of our own constructs to manipulate us into mindlessly upholding them. What is perhaps most important in Cooper's lines is the word "wish," the desire for the world to be other than it is, the desire for beauty. Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2003) make clear that this desire comes not from a lack of beauty, but through the presence of what already is; it is beauty that drives the character's desire for beauty, but he has allowed his bleakness to blind him from this beauty, believing the world is a closed case. When we fool ourselves into believing that the world is knowable in a manipulable form; when we create closed systems of what *is*; when we crystallize our world not for the sake of seeking beauty in it, but for the sake of *sameness*, we create a ground for terror.

It is out of and away from this ground that we must educate, but we cannot do so without being consistently aware of its sources, nor without a vision of what the other shore (Serres, 1991/1997) may entail. Bachelard (1943/2002) considers the crystallized world a lost dream, and if we have any desire to restore wonder to that dream, we must be sensitive to its foundation, its development, and the nightmare that it can at first appear. Unless our students have minds that are perpetually turned toward wonder, then through the beauty that drives us and the knowledge that is illuminated by it, we necessarily teach toward terror. In this way, the postmodern educator who is (through the presentation of materials that can open them up to new knowledge) in the process of terrifying her

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students with the deconstruction of their self-made worlds would do well to consider our syllogism in the reverse. When students are in the midst of the solitude of world-shattering terror, that is, and violently defending these crystallized worlds, it is the instructor who can keep in mind that the rushing knowledge is illuminated by beauty—and who can keep that beauty somehow present—who will, rather than allowing them to be trampled by it, provide the students the grace to step aside and reach out toward that knowledge.

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